Discussion paper: achieving equality and diversity in services ...

Reading Hector's words (from the 8th of this month) I find myself nodding in agreement. It is indeed difficult to disagree. At the same time many questions arise. The more I think about it the more unclear it becomes what these lines mean in terms of everyday life and what they signify on the more abstract level of human values. It is with this background of uncertainty that these remarks are made.

Hector writes that we (STEPS) aim to ensure that "...any differences are regarded as positive and contribute towards a culturally richer..." etc. Again, it is not difficult to agree with this general statement.
Are we (STEPS) saying that there is, in principal, no difference between good and bad. That all cultures are equal or, at the most, differ gradually but not basically. If discrimination is bad (*if, not when, yet)* than is it not obvious that some cultures are not as good as others, since they do not discourage discrimination, and actively encourage it at times? All are equal but some are just more equal than others? Both on a Macro level as with individuals I have experienced "differences" that are not positive at all nor contribute to a better society. I am sure there is no need for examples here.

We, on the meso level of organisations, more often than not fail to meet that challenge. We, as organisations, are not capable to deal with bad (in my mind there are bad individuals and not-so-good-cultures based on my humanistic values) people or cultures. Most organisations and most workers are pretty naive and seem to choose to remain so. We (STEPS) must address this topic.
Not to socialise everything into one grey unity but to give space for individuals to grow and flourish and perceive their local network as basis of their life instead of everything there is. A foundation is necessary, a prison is not. What is good and what bad and what not so good is NOT a matter of taste or fashion.

Another thing is the issue of ..."the needs of disabled people within these communities". Where I say above that the difference between good and bad can be made in absolute terms (and should be will we ever make our STEPS aims work in practice) needs of disabled people can only be defined in local communities and never in absolute terms (above the needs of food, shelter and such). Social references drift just as much as references of individuals do.
Values should be absolute, not being the subject of discussion (after some serious discussion) but local actions remain flexible and subject to change. Therefor I like to see us

(STEPS) coordinate interventions with Social Action Programmes when taking place in our local settings.

In Rotterdam we have a social action programme named Opzomeren. A word impossible to translate, meaning something like: clearing up our own neighbourhood. It has nothing to do with persons with intellectual disabilities but they do take part in the few days every year that is Opzomer-season and with extremely good results in terms of integration and (self)esteem.

We are building dikes and dams to keep the waters of evil out. We do so without any guarantee that our labour bears fruit, or has any meaning at all. But our work certainly has no meaning when we have not decided what the water is and where it comes from.
The dikes and dams we can replace or change, upon the water as such our activities have no influence whatsoever.

Speaking of evil and needs of disabled people. Solitude is an example of something bad, friendship an example of a human need. In a world that puts more emphasis on contracts than on contacts (as in the whole European care sector this seems to be the case) this is a problem (in anglo-american a challenge) we have to come to terms with. I like to learn what my STEPS colleagues think about the social outcasts that a number of our people are. This is discrimination for sure. Still friendship can not be organised, can it?
What I mean is, even when we (STEPS) succeed in removing all discrimination from our sector, from our planet even, what would we have accomplished. We removed all dissatisfiers, fine, but how do we get the satisfiers in our (these) lives?

Appreciating your lively comments to come,

Bart Branderhorst