



Pierre Cardin, Ambassador of UNESCO & Dr. Prinia of the Enotis NGO, at the "Casanova" event at the Opera house, for the Children of Africa afflicted with HIV

"Love Costs"

Cultural Diplomacy & Social Solidarity in the Age of Crisis

By Dr. Despina Prinia

It's almost noon at the French Institute of Athens and there is this happy buzz amongst the French community, despite the 30 o C in this hot May day.

The welcome committee are getting ready for the "Ambassador's arrival, while journalists, already tanned from the sun, are whispering: "Almost an hour late...he's going to be fashionably late as always".

The official Press Conference for the "Casanova" opera at the Athens Opera House, with Pierre Cardin costumes and production makes the front pages in all the newspapers, although coinciding with a huge solidarity protest at Syntagma square. I can distinguish reporters from all the mainstream media, waiting for the Ambassador of Love to arrive and then get right to Syntagma for the next assignment of the day, and I keep wondering: is it the Ambassador of French Fashion that they're waiting for or the Ambassador of Unesco, who makes a generous contribution to the International Community & the children of Africa, afflicted with HIV?

Being raised in South East Africa and considering those people compatriots of the heart I couldn't stop asking myself the million dollar questions:

Is this a social event or a social solidarity event? Is the International Community still espousing the Hollistic "Zen" approach of social coherence and diversity in days of crisis? Is Community Relations and "giving back to society" still the mandra of the 21th century, in days of economic crisis, where the "nouveaux pauvres" syndrome signals an obvious shift to individualism?

In the old days -1960s, 70s, 80s- corporations prided themselves on "social responsibility". With the great opportunities they were afforded, companies needed to "give back to society", through participation in and contributions to non-profit organizations, committed to confront society's most pressing problems. Then came the 1990s, and corporate social responsibility took a back seat to making money. The go-go 90s and the early years of the 21th century, ended in the bursting of stock market bubble, top executives from leading companies being escorted away in handcuffs, and a general re-evaluation of the companies obligations to their communities and the larger society.

In the first decade of the 21st century, social responsibility was back with a vengeance. And no one is more responsible, than Paul David Hewson, also known as Bono, and a lead singer of the Irish rock band U2. Bono, became an iconic symbol of social responsibility, as he met with the world leaders & spoke before world bodies, to convince governments & institutions to help the world poor. His efforts were rewarded in countries around the world: many governments & institutions responded, by reducing the debt owed to them by third world nations. The lesson? In the 21st century, serving one's community makes good business sense as well & has in fact become a front-burner business mandate.

Being into Cultural Diplomacy for the last years and organizing community relations events like this, I was told that as the arbiters of communications in their organizations, communicators must be sensitive to society's new realities. This is a particular challenge to an increasingly diverse & multicultural & global community. Dealing in an enlightened manner with diversity, and being sensitive to nuances in language & style, are also considered as extensions of social responsibility and have been an accepted part of Strategic Communication as well.

But is social coherence and sense of the international community still present in the age of economic crisis? The answer came within the same day. The Opera House was full, although there was a ticket of 150 Euros, a price that hurts ...and the event was a smash. And although love costs, and hurts too, it seems that social solidarity is still there, when needed, to remind us that the global dialogue between societies can still take a human face, even in days of crisis.

The UNESCO cultural diplomacy event was organized under the kind aegis of the Consulate of Cote d'Ivoire, Enotis NGO, the French Chamber of Commerce

ENOTIS NGO (www.enotis.org)

ENOTIS has always been sensitive to society's new realities and the world most pressing issues. This is a particular challenge to an increasingly diverse, multicultural & global world. Dealing in an enlightened manner with diversity & cross cultural relations and being sensitive to the less privileged groups, ENOTIS runs social entrepreneurship programs against social exclusion of the so called "sensitive" groups: addicts, diverse communities in developing countries, communities afflicted by diseases that lead to social exclusion. ENOTIS informs, assists, becomes the mediator in resolving social issues. In the age of information and interactivity, where managing information equals assuming social responsibility, ENOTIS focus on information by sponsoring & initiating numerous research programs in different parts of the world, that inform, save lives and spread the word against social exclusion, while building social coherence in the local communities.