

**White Paper on
Culture and Art in the candy floss economy**

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Introduction

The art intervention put forward by SUCH Intervention on the 23 September at the World Summit on Arts and Culture 2009 was designed to demonstrate the ‘candy floss’ nature of the world economy and the role of art and culture in challenging some of the effects of the current world order.

Delegates of the world summit were channeled into three passageways created from bags of candy floss, based on where they came from – the ‘East’, ‘West’ ‘and the Rest.’ The term ‘East’ refers to emerging economies such as China and India. The ‘West’ are those economies that have been dominant in global economics since the turn of the 20th Century and ‘and the Rest’ refers to those countries that are commonly known as developing countries or the Third World. Participants from each of these ‘regions’ were able to buy the candy floss at different rates.

Region	Price
East	R105
West	R5
And the Rest	R1005

Table 1: Indication of prices charged to different regions for one standard packet of candy floss.

This White Paper presents an overview of why the candy floss was priced so differently, reflects on the current economic global world order and reports on the delegates’ responses to the candy floss intervention.

Setting the cost of candy floss

In the global economy, although there are a range of costs associated with product development, in fact the purchase price of an item very rarely captures the actual costs of extraction and production. As such, the consumer culture that drives our world economy is based on “candy-floss” economics. The price setting of the candy floss was an exercise in taking into account a range of costs that are usually externalized. If we were to pay the real costs for the candy floss on display all of the costs associated with its production should be taken into account as demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

However, we know that most of the costs demonstrated below are in fact not taken into account – they are externalised. As such; the environment, the communities that depend on the environment, the workers, and ourselves as human beings; absorb a range of costs related to the production of a certain item and these costs are never accounted for. Rather the value added by these costs is absorbed in the form of profit by the elite of the world economy.

For the most part, the countries worst affected by this are those in the developing or third world – those where cheaper labour, more relaxed labour and environmental laws and a history of extraction and domination are taken advantage of. As a result third world populations pay the real cost of products. That is why in the intervention, ‘and the Rest’ were required to pay R1005 for a packet of candy floss. In effect, they were subsidising the price that the ‘East’ and ‘West’ paid – as they do in the world economy.

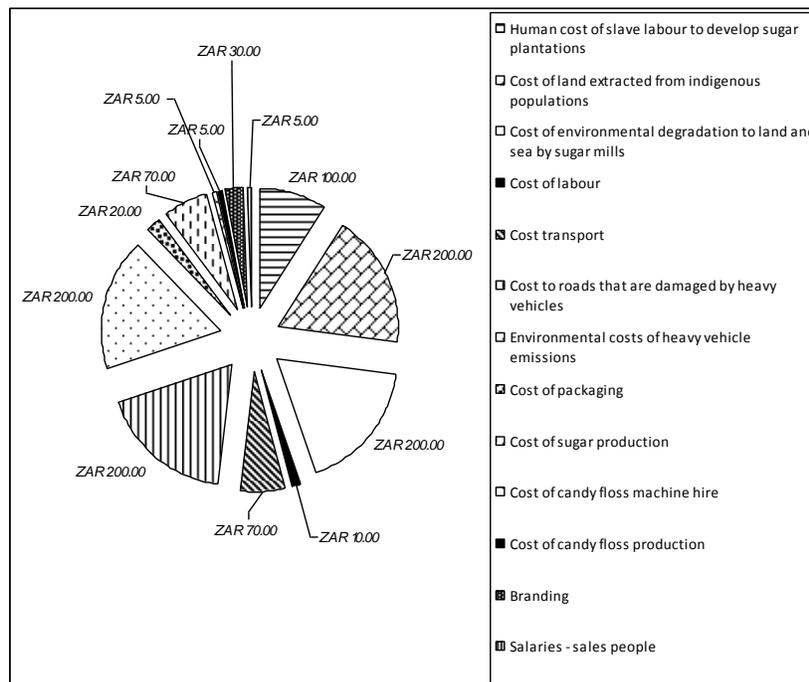


Figure 1: Representation of some of the costs of making candy floss that should be taken into account

In observing the interaction of delegates with the sales people and the artwork itself a number of issues emerged. The bar graph in Figure 2 below demonstrates how many sales were made in each aisle. As can be expected, since the candy floss was most affordable for the 'West' this was where almost all of the sales occurred. Nobody bought anything in the 'and the Rest' aisle. This was probably due to the fact that the perceived value of the candy floss is much lower than the price set, as well as the fact that they could least afford to pay such a price. Some of the comments recorded during the interaction were "You're trying to steal my money" and "I'll come back and buy later" – even though it was clear that they would not be coming back.

In the 'West' aisle, some potential customers were heard to say "I don't eat sugar," "it's unhealthy" and "it's bad for my teeth." This could be seen to demonstrate the fact that consumers in the West are most likely to be able to make healthier choices because of the affordability of products available to them.

When the candy floss was available to delegates for free at the refreshments centre, they "sold" like hotcakes – 31 delegates took candy floss when it was for free, no doubt without a thought as to the real cost of the candy floss.

Interestingly, many delegates, despite being at a World Summit on art and culture, did not interact with the artwork as an artwork. Most slipped into traditional consumer roles and behaved as they would in a mall. The carnival nature of candy floss was juxtaposed with the business of the summit – something that seemingly caught delegates a little off-guard and perhaps even made some a little uncomfortable. One delegate did interact with the artwork and asked about the aisles. When the differential pricing was revealed to her, her comment was "That shouldn't be the case – it's a tragedy" – summing up precisely what the artwork was intended to reveal.

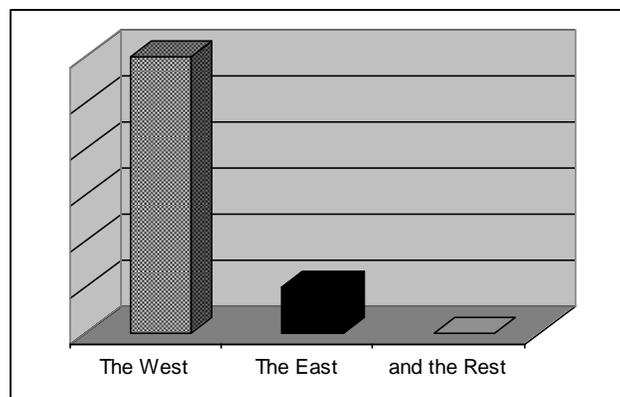


Figure 2: Representation of number of sales per aisle

The cultural cost of economics

The naming of the passageways was also a comment on the cultural cost of global economics. The terms 'East,' 'West' 'and the Rest' are reductive terms that fail to acknowledge (a) the fact that many of the countries that are termed the 'West' are in fact in the 'East,' (b) that many countries in the 'East' could just as easily fall into 'and the Rest,' and (c) that within these categories there are a range of diverse cultures and rich histories that are undermined.

What global economics has done, in the pursuit of a culture of consumerism, is that it has reduced a range of other cultures to side-shows – wonderful displays to look at for tourists, but not much else. In the process it has made voices of the West, and particularly of the United States, dominant, while by and large silencing the voices of other cultures.

The Art economy is not dissimilar to the World Economy

In fact the art market functions very much like the rest of the World Economy. It is a reflection rather than a criticism thereof. The West (and increasingly the East) dominates the art market, sets the trends, defines the contemporary, rates the quality....at the expense of "the rest".

Within this context, how then, does one attach value to something that is temporary? Can an edible consumerist item function as an object for mere visual consumption? Can planned obsolescence in art decrease value thereby increase profit in the economy?

So why is the candy floss more than just candy floss?

The candy floss that was for sale was packaged with a note saying "This is not just candy floss." And in fact it wasn't just candy floss. Each bag of candy floss is an editioned and signed artwork with a public intervention that functioned as a critique to the way the world is currently structured, economically and culturally.

This points to the fact that art and culture have a powerful role to play in speaking out against inequality and injustice and in critiquing the status quo. They also present powerful platforms for silenced voices to be heard.

This intervention was possible through:

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Rajash Seejarim, official volunteer

Ratish Manikchand, official runner

Mohammed Sabre (Barbara) , sales person representing the “East”

Marta Garrich, sales person representing the “West”

Ikenna Madubuagu , sales person representing “and the Rest”

Renee Warrington, interim website builder and organizer

17,5kg sugar, packaged in Pinetown, grown in KZN

Compostable, Bio plastic bags, made from corn starch, produced in South Africa

Elastic bands, purchased in Fordsburg, made in China

Bamboo (non-indigenous and invasive) grown outside Diepsloot

Editioned candy floss tags printed with chromalin ink on Epson Double-sided A4 matt paper, purchased in Rosebank, Johannesburg made in Japan

Cin Chai Green Nylon tape, purchased in Booyens, made in Taiwan

Candy Floss machine rented from Weltevreden Park, distributed from Kwa-Zulu Natal, made from Fibreglass and steel.

White paper published on Tripple Green Sappi paper

Eskom Electricity

Artist’s breath

- Facts:
- 1 cup of sugar produces 5 medium sized candy flosses
 - 50 candy flosses can be produced and packaged in 1hour, with 4 workers
 - A 4m length of bamboo can hold 50 packets of candy floss easily carried by 2 people
 - 300 candy floss bags mounted on 6 X 4m lengths of bamboo can easily be transported on a Fiat Strada 1100, with wind capacity of 15knots

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