

Universities as actors of intercultural dialogue in wider society

The role of public authorities in promoting intercultural dialogue

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Definition

Open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world. (CoE White paper on intercultural dialogue)

What does ICD mean to people in the EU 27?

• Communication among different communities	23%
• Cooperation, exchange, transnational mobility	13%
• Living together, knowing and understanding different cultures	11%
• Cultural events and access to culture	10%
• Coexistence and cultural diversity	9%
• Shared European culture	8%
• Dealing with linguistic diversity	5%
• Tolerance, equal rights	4%
• Education, exchange of information and ideas	3%
• Dialogue in the sphere of politics and economics	3%
• Immigration/minorities	3%
• Preserving traditions	1%
• Other opinions	8%

(Flash Eurobarometer 2007)

Trigger issues

- Population diversity: New immigrants, refugees/asylum seekers, traditional minorities such as the Roma as well as the public perception towards migrants. etc
- International political and economic developments: economic globalisation, terrorism, in the EU: debate about Turkey becoming a member, etc
- Domestic societal developments: demographic trends, internal security issues, cultural and religious differences, etc

Four contexts

- the **civic contexts**: the cultural rights and entitlements awarded to different cultural streams in the population;
- the **social contexts** or objectives that these policies are connected to;
- the **administrative contexts**: how cultural communities are dealt with or given agency;
- the **economic contexts** and most notably the cultural industries sector.

Legal frameworks

- Intercultural dialogue (ICD) is not a specific legal category that is regulated by international, European or national law in the strict sense.
 - ICD can only take place in an environment where a person is guaranteed safety and dignity, equality of opportunity and participation, where different views can be voiced openly without fear, where there are shared spaces for exchanges between cultures to take place.
- ⇒ standards set by universal human rights and the rule of law

Legal frameworks

- International, European conventions, EU directives and national legal frameworks outlining basic human, civic, economic and social rights upon which ICD depends
- Cultural rights: instruments which recognise and enable support for maintaining cultural difference, providing special rights to ethnic or linguistic minorities such as promoting their cultures and the use of their languages in education and the media

Legal frameworks

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000)

Articles addressing:

- Equality (e.g. non-discrimination and cultural, religious and linguistic diversity)
- Freedoms (e.g. freedom of expression, of thought, conscience and religion)
- Citizens rights (e.g. of movement and residence, to vote)

EU directives:

- the Racial Equality Directive (2000),
- the Employment Equality Directive (2000)

National approaches

- **Social cohesion** aims at a more unified society with political stability, internal security, economic growth and equal opportunities for all individuals and groups, regardless of their origin to participate in both the work environment and social spheres.
- ⇒ ICD related programmes aim at supporting the socio-cultural integration of groups or individuals with a migrant background. However with reference to refugees and asylum seekers or social fringe groups priority is placed on improving socio-economic conditions rather than on ICD.

Approaches

- **Cultural diversity** approach : legal or political recognition of defined minority cultures and identities
 - ⇒ affirmative or positive action for cultural diversity and equality such as quota regulations, strong legal action against racist or hate crimes, empowering or protecting marginalised groups + rights based strategies officially recognising minority groups

Approaches

- **Dialogue approach:** it emphasises intercultural encounters through artistic events, special media programs.

Approaches

The need for a coordinated, national strategy:

Example: Ireland's *National Action Plan against Racism* (NPAR), 'Planning for Diversity' 2005-2008

- *Protection*, including a focus on measures to prevent discrimination;
- *Inclusion*, including a focus on economic and social inclusion;
- *Provision* (key public services, e.g. education, housing);
- *Recognition*: of ethnic and cultural diversity, including a focus on the media ,arts and sport;
- *Participation*: including a focus on citizenship, and the role of civil society.

Approaches

- Integration is the main goal of both the social cohesion and diversity approach
- Mix of approaches: Integration as a policy goal can vary between sectors: it could be cohesion led in the field of education or internal security and diversity led in the field of culture.
- Need to distinguish between a “cultural” perspective and other policy fields, e.g. housing, labour market or social welfare. Arts cannot solve social conflicts.

Actors

Strategic efforts to facilitate and/or coordinate ICD:

- national level: ministries, « quango » agencies, regional and local authorities
- Non-governmental civil society actors
 - Local NGOs and national professional organisations
 - Service providers with a wide scope: protections of minorities' rights, fight against xenophobia. Advocacy for better legislation, organisation of ICD events
 - Transnational NGOs
 - Opportunities for direct encounters between professionals, independent spaces for confrontation and dialogue

A sectorial view: education

Trigger issues:

- PISA study: In most European countries the share of migrant students in secondary schools is below average and is smaller at university level.
- IAU: « In an increasingly global and independent world, where encountering cultural difference can scarcely be avoided, the ability to enter into a tolerant and respectful dialogue is a vital skill for nations, communities and individuals. Disciplines, teaching methods, student skills and knowledge itself can be strengthened through an intercultural dialogue approach. »

A sectorial view: education

Responsibilities and strategies:

- **Provision:** avoid segregated schools and kindergartens, encourage the participation of parents, mentors and friends
- **Staff:** diversify professional staff, diversity training courses, training of trainers in intercultural literacy
- **Curriculum:** intercultural perspective in educational and science textbooks, produce special resources for teachers, develop a deeper and more differentiated knowledge of major world religions;
- **Language provision:** supplementary classes to improve students' native language capacity; view multilingualism as an asset

A sectorial view: education

Role of public authorities:

- Guarantee academic freedom
- Create a framework for the internationalisation of universities
 - ⇒ international student body + international staff: immigration, recruitment and employment conditions
 - ⇒ part of the quality assurance system
- Create conditions for equitable access and completion
 - ⇒ outreach policies as part of the financing of the institutions
- Create conditions for a better understanding of cultural diversity:
 - ⇒ definitions and financing of research programmes, acknowledging and favouring interdisciplinary approaches

Conclusions I

Public authorities' main roles: create an environment which

- is an environment of legal certainty with full implementation of binding international anti-discrimination standards and based on the concept of human rights as individual rights, recognising multiple as well as specific cultural identities

Conclusions II

- is an environment which fosters civic responsibility and thus the participation of civil society organisations;
- is an environment which values intercultural dialogue as a means of coming to terms with different world views, traditions and lifestyles through empathy, non-violence and creativity.

Afterthought I

The main idea should be to free the « dialogue » from its conceptual bipolarity and to expand it to an open « polylogue », in which people are not, from the outset perceived merely as representatives of some predefined cultures and religions, but instead, have the opportunity to challenge and change existing cultural patterns as well as to cross historical boundaries.

Afterthought II

*The piano keys are black and white,
But they sound like a million colours in your mind.
(Katie Melua, Spider's Web, 2005)*