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Social Diversity in European cities: developing multiculturalism
Keynote Address
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I would like to thank the Mayor of Milano, Letizia Moratti, for inviting us to this important conference that brings together the Vice-President of the European Commission, Franco Frattini, representatives of national governments and local authorities from European member states, civil society, employers and migrant associations. It is a great honour for me to address this distinguished meeting. I congratulate the organisers for preparing such a relevant and interesting programme for this extremely important topic.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration policy is made at the national level, but multi-ethnic communities develop at the local level – and it is cities and local government who have often taken the lead in working for good community relations. With the ongoing flow of immigrants into Europe, be they asylum seekers, economic migrants, workers with permits, or family members of existing immigrants, the majority end up in cities. The concern in many European countries is to develop policies and programmes of immigrant inclusion. In order to help immigrants settle into the receiving country or city, some have opted to adopt models of inclusion based on multiculturalism, while others have adopted the notion of ‘integration’ as the preferred model of inclusion. The European Union uses both concepts.

Nevertheless, in numerous European countries there has been a retreat from multiculturalism, with much greater emphasis on ‘immigrant integration’ and ‘social cohesion’. Many people seem to have a desire for homogeneity, for conformity, for boundaries and for lists of core national values. There is a pervasive view that pluralist or multicultural approaches to immigrant inclusion into society have failed and that a large part of the problem lies with immigrants themselves.

INTEGRATION

There are three dimensions to integration. First is the idea that immigrants should make the effort to participate by learning the main language and necessary social and work skills, while conforming to basic social expectations by fitting into the dominant culture and way of life. The second dimension is that the receiving society should help immigrants integrate, by providing programmes and services that will facilitate participation in the labour market, in education etc. The third dimension refers to the openness to change in the culture and institutions of the dominant society, involving shifts in values, norms and behaviour for members of the existing society.

In my view all three dimensions are extremely important. But in some places the emphasis is just on the first dimension: immigrants are expected to do all the work needed for integration. This can be seen as a conservative or assimilationist model of integration.

In other countries, both the first two dimensions have been emphasised: the immigrants are expected to adapt, but it is seen as the task of the state to provide the necessary legal framework and services for them to do so.

This can be seen as a social democratic or welfare state model of integration where integration is often referred to as a two-way process.

Where all three dimensions receive equal priority, we can speak of a multicultural policy: here both immigrants and receiving communities have to share the work of accommodation, while the state provides multi-faceted support.

In the 1970s and 1980s, European governments moved away from their earlier assimilationist stances, and introduced a range of anti-discrimination laws and services to improve migrant access to education, the labour market and so on. Some countries (especially the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands) even called for institutional and attitudinal change in the broader society – in other words they moved towards multiculturalism.

But in recent years there has been an increasing perception of an ‘integration crisis’ throughout Europe. In some places demonstrations by immigrants or even terrorist attacks have led to the notion of immigrants as a threat. In other places, the maintenance of immigrants’ cultures, language and religions is seen as divisive: it can lead to ‘parallel lives’ as one British report put it.

In this backlash against multiculturalism it appears that the first dimension has become the dominant discourse: integration is again seen as purely the responsibility of the immigrants and they are blamed for their supposed failure to meet this obligation.

This backlash against immigrants and multiculturalism has a number of

underlying causes. One is the enduring social disadvantage and marginalisation of many immigrant groups – especially those of non-European origin. Many immigrants have been in receiving countries for thirty years or more – indeed a second and even third generation have grown up in Europe. Yet immigrants and their children still show high levels of unemployment, and of concentration in lower-skilled jobs. Moreover, immigrants tend to be concentrated in poor neighbourhoods, with low-quality housing and poor educational and social facilities. Instead of attributing this to discrimination, the dominant approach is to blame minorities for clustering together and refusing to integrate.

In addition, many second or third generation descendants of immigrants reject the concept of integration on the justified grounds that they have grown up in a city and helped to make its culture, so it is absurd to ask them to integrate – and into what anyway? – some idealised and romanticised notion of a pre-existing intact culture?

So, the second dimension of integration – provision of relevant programmes and services – requires more attention. In fact, in an analysis of the policies of inclusion adopted in the Netherlands and in Britain, one outstanding problem is that the implementation of multicultural or integration and anti-racist programmes has been symbolic, inadequate and inefficient. Often the content of programmes varies from their stated goals.

Finally, the third dimension is largely neglected. Public institutions need to be more reflective of cities' ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Most importantly, more effort needs to go into providing established communities with the knowledge and opportunities that will help them

engage with diversity. In other words, how can all the citizens (whatever their background) participate fully in their ethnically and culturally diverse societies and cities? What do societal institutions, local government and established communities need to do to be appropriate for a culturally diverse city? How can this process be facilitated for the established communities?

When one looks at the numerous policies of integration throughout Europe, there is some rhetoric about this, but on the whole integration usually means ‘immigrant integration’. Thus, the two-way process is about how we can help immigrants integrate, often ignoring the third important aspect. In fact, in European cities, at the everyday level, in the neighbourhoods, people are building inclusive ways of living based on diversity and respect for difference. Local government agencies have often played a leading part in this. But all too often this goes against prevailing ideologies, and happens without official recognition and support. I’m pleased to report that the Cities Local Integration Project, in which some of my colleagues are involved, found that cities can learn from each other because, despite different migration histories, they are facing the same challenges. Therefore, these conferences are extremely important.

Nevertheless, in my view, the current ‘integration crisis’ actually reflects the unwillingness of host societies to deal with two issues:

1. The first issue relates to the deep-seated cultures of ethnocentrism and racism that are a legacy of the construction of nation-states in Europe on the basis of a single ethno-national identity, as well as

European colonialism and imperialism. In times of stress, such as economic restructuring or international conflict, ethnocentrism, xenophobia can lead to social exclusion, discrimination and violence against immigrants and minorities

2. The second issue concerns the trend to greater inequality resulting from globalisation and economic restructuring. Increased international competition puts pressure on employment, working conditions and welfare systems.

MULTICULTURALISM

That is why I advocate ‘multiculturalism’ (or Interculturalism as it is called in some countries) as a policy model adopted by cities for inclusion and change. In my view multiculturalism has five key principles:

- The *first key principle* is that **immigrant participation is necessary in all societal institutions**, including in the labour market and in education to achieve social equality and equal participation. This requires policies that ensure that immigrants have full rights in the labour market and other areas of society. Concretely, for cities this means labour training programmes and appropriate cultural services that include anti-discrimination and equal opportunity measures. Instead of citizenship tests, why not inform immigrants about the country’s traditions and cultures through free language courses?
- The *second key principle* is that **immigrants have the right to pursue their own religion and languages and to establish communities**. This is about cultural recognition, and respect for difference. Immigrants and ethnic minorities require social and

institutional cultural recognition in order to provide continuity with their past, as a source of group solidarity and as a means of protection against discrimination and exclusion. Ultimately, it is necessary for successful settlement.

- The *third key principle* is **mutual accommodation**. According to Austrian political scientist Rainer Bauböck, mutual accommodation ‘involves the adaptation of the inserted group to existing conditions, as well as a change in the structure of the larger society and a redefinition of its criteria of cohesion. Accommodation involves an *internalization of difference*.’ (Bauböck 1996). Cities can do much to facilitate mutual accommodation by developing multi-ethnic and multi-faith ‘dialogues’ in order to arrive at a shared world based on respect for plurality and difference.
- The *fourth key principle* is that **multiculturalism should belong to everyone**, not just immigrants. Multiculturalism is not about pluralism as in separatism or tribalism. Rather, it is a philosophy that promotes the acceptance of immigration and of cultural diversity by encouraging the recognition of immigrants and their children as legitimate citizens by whole of society. Cities need to promote this principle – that cultural diversity is an accepted value of the city’s identity and that multiculturalism belongs to everyone.
- Finally, any model of inclusion needs to come to terms with the existence of *ethnocentrism, xenophobia and racism* and needs to acknowledge the destructive effects this has both on immigrants and on society as a whole. Ultimately, systemic ethnocentrism, xenophobia and racism create ongoing alienation and undermine the

possibility of community solidarity. Therefore, cities need to develop programmes to combat institutional and everyday racism/xenophobia.

To conclude, multiculturalism or interculturalism refers to the process of accommodating diversity. Yet, even in the European Union, there appears to be a trend away from multiculturalism. I argue strongly for its retention as a policy of inclusion because it is important to understand that virtually all societies today have multi-ethnic identities that are not based on a single ethno-national identity.

Reference

Bauböck, R. 1996 'Social and cultural integration in a civil society', in R. Bauböck, A. Heller and A. R. Zolberg (eds) *The Challenge of Diversity: Integration and Pluralism in Societies of Immigration*, Aldershot: Avebury.