

Intercultural Dialogue and the European Higher Education Area

The People's Friendship
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Some definitions: multiculturalism

- A belief that a society should be capable of embracing diverse cultural groups of equal cultural and political status
- ⇒ issue of ethnic and cultural identity

Some definitions culture versus civilization

- Culture: from Latin: *cultivare* (verb): to cultivate
 - To work the soil
 - To take pride in well accomplished work
 - Noun: the heritage in terms of arts, architecture, literature, folk traditions of a community
- Civilization: from Latin *civis* (noun): town or *civilis* (adj)
 - Citizens willingly bring themselves together in a social, political, economic, religious organizations
 - A shared way of thinking about the world as well as a reflection on that world in art, literature, and a host of other cultural happenings

Some definitions: dialogue

- Dialogue implies “I” and “you”: speaker and receiver in exchanging roles, a narrative process with a concern for relationship
- Dialogue implies language: knowledge of different languages is a way of grasping the immense differences between cultures and a start to explore ways of building bridges
- Lingua franca ≠ cultura franca
 - ⇒ the creation of a world with a proliferating intersection of histories

Definition: intercultural dialogue

“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*)

Prerequisite for intercultural dialogue

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

⇒ standards set by universal human rights and the rule of law

ICD and European Higher Education

- A set of implicit values:
 - Participation of all stakeholders
 - Academic freedom
- The principle of equitable access into and successful completion of higher education
- The principle of student and staff mobility
- The principle of diversity

Focus: equity and equal opportunities

- The social dimension as defined by the Bologna Process: the diversity of the populations should be reflected in the student body in the institutions
- ⇒ social cohesion led policy which very often aims at supporting the socio-cultural integration of groups or individuals with a migrant background

Focus on mobility:

- Student mobility: internationalization of campus emphasizing intercultural encounters through artistic events, special media programmes, etc,
 - and for the individual student: immersion into and exchange with new cultural perspectives
- ⇒ student skills: identification of the boundaries that define individuals and then relating across these boundaries and even calling them into question

Focus on mobility

- Staff mobility: the universal community of scholars + international cooperation and competition in science
- Yet: numerous Muslims study and work at European and American universities, but hardly any Western scholars find their way to universities in Islamic countries

ICD and science

- Max Weber's postulate of a "value-free science" + scientific rationality which as a procedure is transculturally valid
- However:
 - social sciences for example: space must be left for genuinely ethical, religious and ideological perspectives or
 - The contribution that Islam made to the development of European philosophy is being ignored and likewise the influence of Greek philosophy on Islamic thinking has often been denied

So: ICD and Higher Education

“In an increasingly globalised and interdependent 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. In this context, higher education institutions have an important role to play. Disciplines, teaching methods, student skills, and knowledge itself can be deepened and strengthened through an intercultural dialogue approach.” *(International Association of Universities)*

Stronger plea: the inevitability of ICD

- In the view of dramatic problems facing humanity (climate change, water shortage) cooperation across national and cultural boundaries is necessary, so there is no acceptable alternative to dialogue.
- “Unequal” access to or sharing of resources leads to exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, social background,.....,in other words based on cultural differences which are in turn the perceived result of indoctrination and/or ignorance.

Finally

- For *Intercultural Dialogue* to take place we need windows and mirrors.