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Managing Complex Cultural Diversity in Europe: The Idea of Diversity Partnerships

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Highlights

At the wake of the European election of 25 May 2014, one main result is striking across Europe: the rise of populist and far right political parties. These parties tend to capitalise on citizens' economic insecurity and political discontent with national and European elites. Their campaigning strategies have been largely based on cultivating a climate of threat and a 'patriotic' desire for regaining 'control' over 'our country' against alien forces such as the European Union or indeed migrant populations and ethnic minorities. Such populations are suitable scapegoats whom to blame for rising unemployment, welfare cuts and urban decay in European metropolises. The response by progressive political forces or civil society is often defensive, seeking to prove that they are not 'favouring' minorities or migrants or that they are effectively tackling domestic unemployment or urban tensions through retraining or gentrification programmes.

This policy brief proposes an analysis of the challenge, and an alternative strategy to make the most of cultural diversity as a positive factor for democracy and growth, through a participatory approach.

In the brief the authors put forward the idea of developing local Diversity Partnerships and present some examples of what has been done or could be done with such initiatives, in particular in relation to the two groups that mostly attract negative attention in the public debate because of their presumed inability to integrate into mainstream European secular, modern, and democratic societies: the Muslims and the Roma.

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The Challenge

The challenge of integrating native minorities² or migrants is shared by nearly all EU member states, albeit each member state develops its own policies and practices for dealing with cultural diversity issues. Such practices are informed by historical experiences as well as current concerns. Europe has a well-developed international and European legal framework for the protection of native minorities (the FCNM most notably but also the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and related legal texts and guidelines), an extensive anti-discrimination legislation (the RED directives of 2000), and a set of Common Guiding Principles for Migrant Integration as well as the EU long term resident status directive.

Actually the EU provides for a common legal and policy framework, within which member states address the specific challenges of minority and migrant integration as they arise. Migrant integration and minority issues are, at the end of the day, a question of national competence and are most efficiently addressed at the local level. **Addressing migrant and minority challenges in a concerted effort through Diversity Partnerships is in line with the EU existing policy and legal framework** and is inspired by both the **principle of subsidiarity** (leaving to the regional and local, or also the national level what pertains to them) and the **principle of equality and unity in diversity** by highlighting the common challenges of diversity and inequality issues that migrants and minorities face in different countries.

The *Muslims* and the *Roma* are the two groups that mostly attract negative attention in the public debate because of their presumed inability to integrate into mainstream European societies. Interestingly, while Muslims are for their most part a post-immigration minority, the Roma are natives of Europe (or indeed are supposed to have immigrated to Europe from India about a thousand years ago). During the past decade, the fact that Muslims in Europe should largely be seen as European Muslims and particularly also as (for example) French, British, German, Dutch, Swedish, Italian or Spanish natives has gained recognition. As the second generations have been growing in various European countries,

Muslims have come to be accepted as an ethnic minority, as citizens that demand certain rights or raise certain claims. The Roma, who have suffered discrimination and exclusion as a native minority, have attracted negative attention during the last years mainly because of their status as intra-EU migrants. Their EU citizenship has been overshadowed by the questioning of their right to freely move and establish themselves in other EU member states. Thus we note that what matters probably is not the migrant or native minority quality of each group but rather the ways in which it is perceived to be culturally, ethnically or religiously diverse and thus put to the test social cohesion and society's dominant norms and practices.

Migrant integration approaches at the European level seem to have reached their limits: compiling and comparing good practices for integration has been important but there is a need for an alternative strategy that emphasises a **participatory approach** of making the most of cultural diversity as a positive factor for democracy and growth. Indeed migration brings to the aging labour force of Europe a much needed younger cohort and cultural diversity overall opens up society and the economy to new avenues for trade, entrepreneurship, exchange, innovation. Indeed the challenge today is not on how to fence off ethnic and cultural diversity and mitigate its consequences, but rather to put diversity management centre stage to reap the benefits for all, developing local Diversity Partnership.

² We use the term *historical or native minorities* to refer to minorities that are recognized as having been present at the territory of a state when that state was formed or soon after its creation, or for minority groups that have been present at given territory for three generations or more. We use the term *migrant populations* for immigrants of first or second generation, that have not acquired the citizenship of the destination country, while we use the term *post-migration (ethnic) minorities* for those immigrants who have naturalized and have thus become ethnic minorities within their country of settlement. Naturally we realise that the term ethnic minorities is loaded with political significance and mainstream political actors in many countries may be uncomfortable with it or consider that ethnic minorities can only be native ones (e.g. in Romania, Hungary, Greece, Italy). But for the purposes of this Policy Brief we feel that such a distinction in terminology helps clarity and can be provisionally adopted.



Diversity Partnerships as a Way Forward

Diversity Partnerships are voluntary and represent a new approach to address socio-economic inequality and cultural or religious discrimination. Recent research³ has shown that integration challenges are most effectively addressed at the local and regional rather than the national level, and that **countries of origin for migrants and kin states for native minorities (where they exist) may have a positive role to play** by contributing to the integration of the minority and migrant populations at their country of residence.

Diversity Partnerships:

- are based on a sense of ownership from local and regional actors
- are institutional forums where state and non-state actors meet, exchange views on the issue at hand, and develop common solutions, which involve the mobilisation of material, human and social capital resources, creating synergies and pooling the forces of different actors together (local authorities, civil society, trade unions, cultural associations, but even also countries of origin of migrants)
- focus on diversity and the best way to accommodate it, taking into account both minority and majority populations, paying less attention to the source of the diversity (whether 'native' or migration related) and putting equal emphasis on cultural and socio-economic aspects/implications.

At the city level, for example, they bring together local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, professional associations and relevant authorities at state or regional level from the countries of origin and the kin state to jointly tackle the specific challenges that native and post-migration minorities and migrant populations face.

Collaboration between countries of residence and countries of origin (or kin states of native minorities) can take the form of:

- training teachers and educators
- providing textbooks and education materials, elaborating common curricula
- organising cultural activities that increase the cultural capital at both ends
- enhancing international trade and business opportunities,
- forming partnerships among trade unions, professional associations, employers and thus providing for a better match of labour supply and demand.

Diversity Partnerships can help in decisive ways to configure cultural diversity as a positive and creative feature in a society rather than as a cultural threat or economic liability.

³ See INTERACT project, www.interact.eu



Box 1: Dialogue between National and Linguistic Minorities in Sweden⁴

Sweden is an eloquent example about the type of advantages and synergies that can be brought about by a Diversity Partnership approach.

Sweden is home to five recognised minority groups, each with its own language. The official minority languages in Sweden are Finnish, Saami, Yiddish, Tornedal Finnish and Romani. Being recognised as a national minority has certain advantages. For example, it means that the groups have the right to communicate with public authorities and courts of law in their own languages.

In 2000, Sweden ratified the Council of Europe's minority instruments (the FCNM and the ECRML). Since then, various conferences have taken place at local, regional and national levels to discuss common minority problems and strategies. Some of these conferences have been initiated by the Swedish government – e.g. the conference 'Allaharrätt' (everyone has rights). In other cases they were organised by regional authorities, concerning for example the support of minority languages in schools.

These conferences offered members of the various minority groups the opportunity to meet and discuss in a systematic way, for example, what kind of interests and circumstances were shared among the national minorities, and what kind of problems were more group specific. Such conferences were particularly beneficial to the Roma of Sweden as they highlighted the particular education challenges that Roma children faced in schools. The participation of government representatives in some of the conferences proved fundamental in providing minorities the opportunity to voice serious political demands. Nowadays, the dialogue process continues to stimulate different minority groups to engage in broader political activities.

⁴ The ACCEPT PLURALISM Handbook on Cultural Diversity and Tolerance in Europe, available at http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/20975/ACCEPT_Handbook_Tolerance_2012_rev2.pdf?sequence=1, p. 20.

A policy area where Diversity Partnerships would be particularly appropriate and useful is education. For instance, expanding a minority language teaching provision available for native minority children to newly arrived immigrant children or children of new minorities may well entail significant organisational and financial costs, but setting up a Diversity Partnership can work towards mitigating such costs: for example by volunteer teaching assistance by parents can be offered, premises for the classes can be made available by local actors, and funds can be raised.

Diversity Partnerships are, in fact, conceived as **start-up schemes aiming at mobilising not only financial**

but also human and social capital resources among both minority and majority populations, thus contributing to a more inclusive society for all.

They can involve a wider range of topics or a more restricted scope, depending on the challenges that migrants or minority populations pose and the means available to address the issues. They can have a very ambitious set of goals or a more restricted one and they can develop along different time frameworks. The key aspect of Diversity Partnerships remains that they bring together different stakeholders and engage both majority and minority actors into dialogue and cooperation.



Box 2: Intercultural Dialogue in Denmark. Respecting the Difference of Minority Parents⁵

In 2007 the city of Copenhagen created an 'Integration Taskforce' to act as a contact unit between the city's central administration and its street-level professionals. These professionals included social workers, teachers, childcare workers and employees of housing associations and sports clubs (collectively 'practitioners'). In its initial meetings with the practitioners, the Task Force found that they faced a common problem when it came to communicating with the parents of minority children.

The solution was to develop training courses for these practitioners. A complete handbook was developed with chapters on theory, concrete exercises and management tools for implementing and developing good parent dialogue. Emphasis was placed on creating common solutions to concrete problems and setting clear and achievable objectives such as getting minority pupils to participate in school excursions or gym classes, an issue that was often seen as problematic by Muslim parents that did not welcome mixed swimming lessons or were hesitant to allow their children to participate in extracurricular activities. The initiative sought to provide alternatives to the situation in which the practitioner informed or 'told' parents what was expected of them and which solution was the 'right' one. The pragmatic, goal-oriented approach offered ways of 'bracketing out' discussions about fundamental principles or values (e.g. about gender relations or about 'proper' education or behaviour for girls and boys) in order to be able to deal with the concrete issue at hand.

In addition, an initiative promoted by the city education authorities was to invite minority parents to get involved in the organisation of school events that might be culturally unknown to them (e.g. the Danish Carnival celebrations) so that they took 'ownership' of such events too.

⁵ The ACCEPT PLURALISM Handbook on Cultural Diversity and Tolerance in Europe, available at http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/20975/ACCEPT_Handbook_Tolerance_2012_rev2.pdf?sequence=1, p. 44.

Diversity Partnerships are organised along **Thematic Working Groups**, which concentrate each on a specific issue, proposing solutions, monitoring progress and mobilising resources.

A thematic working group on **education, language and culture** for example, would create a framework of cooperation between schools, teachers, parents and organised religions with a view to providing for classes not only on the majority religion - as it happens now in many countries - but in a variety of religions and in different languages according to the needs of the children. Universities could also be involved providing for textbooks and teaching materials, as well as professors that could volunteer to teach for free. At the same time, migrants and minority people could take the lead in organising laboratories for traditional crafts or arts to promote a positive cultural identity but also to open up avenues for new artistic careers and for turning minority and majority cultural heritage into a factor for growth and education.

A thematic working group for **business and trade**, would instead bring together ethnic entrepreneurs with native entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce, professional associations, ministries of trade in both country of residence and country of origin, to mobilise human capital resources in the form of language interpreters among the migrant community, as well as inter-mediators (that can be people of immigrant or native origin that know well both countries involved) to explore business opportunities. Such business and trade cooperation actually exists already but what Diversity Partnerships and thematic working groups could add to such cooperation is an institutional forum where small employers, firms or individuals with interesting ideas and skills could turn to, for support to implement their ideas. They would also provide for an institutional forum for managing disputes and developing legal frameworks for cooperation.



Box 3: The Case of Milan: How the City could benefit from a Diversity Partnership

The municipality of Milan, the second largest Italian city and a buzzing southern European metropole, has 1.2 million inhabitants, of whom 217,000 are foreigners (16% of the total population, 2010 data). The wider Milan metropolitan area hosts 0.4 million of foreigners. This immigrant population is highly diversified in terms of country and continent of origin: the largest groups come from the Philippines, Egypt, China, Peru, Ecuador, Sri Lanka, Romania, Morocco, Ukraine, Albania, Bangladesh. Interestingly the three largest groups at national level (Romanians, Moroccans and Albanians) are in the 7th, 8th and 10th position respectively. Milan is thus characterised by complex diversity that is further complicated by the presence of native Roma populations living in camps in the outskirts of the city.

At the national level, migrant integration has been a thorny issue where local societies are not particularly welcoming. Some northern Italian cities have adopted local policies of exclusion seeking to prevent foreigners from taking up residence, receiving social benefits, operating shops or indeed even going out after a certain hour in the evening. At the same time, citizenship acquisition policy is very restrictive for second generation migrants, while even children born in Italy of foreign parents can acquire Italian citizenship only at age 18.

Milan has been a stronghold of centre-right political forces, particularly the Northern League party with an openly anti-immigrant and racist programme. Nonetheless, it is also the first Italian city to have its own small 'Chinatown', and it is the only city that has experimented with a Muslim faith school organised by the Egyptian community, closed down in 2010.

Areas that a Diversity Partnership can address in Milan include:

- promoting and facilitating ethnic entrepreneurship (e.g. Chinese imports and exports, ethnic restaurants and shops as part of the tourist attraction of the city)
- fostering synergies between the ethnic entrepreneurship of the city and commercial and cultural events of international calibre (e.g. Expo 2015)
- combatting irregular trade and counterfeit goods
- ensuring labour standards are implemented in both small and large companies, among both native and immigrant workers
- promoting educational achievement of migrant children
- promoting proficiency of parents in Italian to better integrate them in school and neighbourhood life
- addressing complaints by native residents in neighbourhoods with high immigrants' concentration about the changing character of the urban landscape and/or declining services
- facing requests for providing religious education for non-Catholic children
- providing for non-Christian faith areas of worship

This list is indicative and not exhaustive. The municipality of Milan could create an institutional forum to bring together different state actors, civil society actors, professional associations and the chamber of commerce, trade unions, banks, schools, parents' associations, citizen groups, and of course native minorities like the Roma and native majority people who may feel their city is being 'colonised' by foreigners and vote for extremist parties.



The examples of partnership practices adopted in Sweden and Denmark show the added value of a participatory approach where the interested population(s) and stakeholders take ownership of the initiative together with the authorities. The case of Milan highlights how a Diversity Partnership approach can develop in a wider context of a metropolitan city that faces complex diversity challenges with a view to mobilising human, social and material capital from the community on the ground and putting to work together minority and majority actors to find common pathways for both economic growth and socio-cultural development.

Policy Recommendations

- Diversity Partnerships should be developed as a way for managing complex cultural diversity in European societies today addressing the rising tide of xenophobia, racism and populism.
- Diversity Partnerships should be established at the city level to make the most of local community ties, labour markets and business contexts.
- Within Diversity Partnerships, thematic working groups should be established to address specific issues (education and culture; business and trade, etc.),
 - ◆ proposing solutions,
 - ◆ monitoring progress and
 - ◆ mobilising resources.

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