NEW KNOWLEDGE about

Denmark

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about Denmark.
We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN DENMARK

Denmark has a relatively recent migration history. It first experienced significant waves of immigration in the 1960s, when economic growth centred in manufacturing sectors brought labour migrants as temporary workers, most notably from Turkey and Pakistan. The inflow of these migrants and all quota-based immigration was halted in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis, but then throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Denmark received significant numbers of asylum seekers from conflict hotspots around the world. Denmark's approach to immigration and integration policies was mainly defined by humanitarian ideals and a belief that the welfare state's social mobility initiatives through education and welfare would be effective among the immigrant population as well as Danish society more broadly. Denmark never really entertained multicultural policies.

In Denmark, tolerance has been contrasted with free-mindedness and liberality. Tolerance has been seen as a form of indifference and an inability to form moral judgments. In contrast, free-mindedness implies a strong emphasis on the ability to form (and pass) judgment on thoughts and actions one disagrees with while however insisting that all should be guaranteed equal rights that safeguarde private autonomy-- including freedom of conscience and speech. Tolerance, (often mis)understood as indifference, has been regarded by many as something negative. Moreover, tolerance has been discredited in connection with the debate over immigration and integration debate during the past twenty years. **Too much tolerance or indifference towards societal non-participation or non-liberal practices of certain immigrant groups has been regarded as responsible for the lack of integration among immigrant minorities and the emergence of parallel societies**. In a political turn to 'integration', tolerance has been pushed to the back. The turn to integration came with a strong emphasis on the duty of new comers to acquire the fundamental values of Danish society and to participate as 'active citizens' in the various spheres of society, not least in the labour market and in education. Indeed, the turn to integration has been accompanied by a certain measure of 'liberal intolerance'. **Liberal intolerance is intolerance against religious and cultural differences which are perceived to be in conflict with the constitutive values of liberal society**, including the divide between public and private and the notion of a responsible, reflexive-autonomous and economically self-reliant individual and citizen.

In recent years, the concept of tolerance has made a small comeback in Danish politics and policy. First, this has come in connection with concerns about the alienation of immigrant youth from mainstream society. Too much discrimination against minorities in different social spheres has been recognised as a possible cause for the emergence of radicalisation and extremism

among immigrant minorities. It has increasingly been argued in the public sphere that minority differences should be respected and accommodated more, in order to ensure the safety of the majority. Second, the centre-left government that came to power in 2011 sought to change the overall framing of immigration and integration policies. It has attempted to strike a new key in this area by talking more about respect of differences and the rights of individuals; in short, in this new approach integration is prioritized over exclusion. So far, the most tangible result of this new policy emphasis is a loosening of the rules on family reunification and the conditions for obtaining permanent residency.

Our research in the context of the ACCEPT Pluralism project **did not find many supporters of multiculturalism in the Danish public sphere.** There have not been many multiculturalist policies either. Rather, **Denmark represents a case of general anti-multiculturalism**. Across the political board, multiculturalism connotes parallel societies, marginalisation of immigrant minorities and societal disintegration. This does not entirely exclude the possibility of acknowledging differences, calling for the defence of rights and respect of individuals, the exploration of the positive aspects of cultural and religious multiplicity, and the endorsement of attempts to reach better understanding across differences. But it does not amount to 'positive recognition' of particular cultural or religious groups, nor to the creation of multiculturalist policies catering to their specific needs or demands.

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project, we investigated how ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: **education** and **political life**.

- o In **education,** we examined how diversity is accommodated in public schools;
- o As well as the place of Islamic religious schools in the Danish education system;
- o In **politics**, we studied the participation of radical Muslims in Danish political life.

In our analysis, we considered discourses and practices of dealing with diversity in Denmark on several levels. We looked at the institutional and legal framework and the position of state actors; public opinion tendencies and predispositions; as well as the actual situation on the ground.

Evaluation of discourses and practices in our case studies:

	Institutional and legal framework	**Practical situation**	**Public discourses**
Accommodation of diversity in public schools	School autonomy facilitates toleration, respect and accommodation	Varies, but tends towards toleration and accommodation	Liberal intolerance vs pragmatic arguments for toleration/ accommodation
Religious/Islamic private schools	Toleration and respect with elements of control (civic education requirement)	Toleration and respect with uncertainly reducing diversity and rights utilization	National and Liberal intolerance vs tradition based arguments for toleration and respect of choices of minority parents
Participation of Radical Muslims in informal political life	Free speech legislation and public venue autonomy facilitates toleration (but also the expression of marked opposition and intolerance)	Varies between toleration and intolerance, depending on the particular issue, venue and target-group in question	Security-based and liberal intolerance vs. tradition based arguments of toleration

TOLERANCE IN SCHOOL LIFE

The Danish school sector has been among the targets of 'low tolerance' politics. In Danish political debate and in much of the legislation relating to the education system, much emphasis has been placed on the need for schools, public and private, to transmit fundamental values to students and their parents, in particular those of immigrant background. The best example of this is the introduction of a clause to ensure 'civic education' in the otherwise liberal law on private schools.

Danish law on private schools grants these schools a high degree of autonomy and a generous state subsidy. The concern has been that religious private schools, including those with an Islamic basis, do not prepare students for life in a Danish society based on (individual) 'freedom and democracy'. The **monitoring of private schools has thus been reinforced as has the (perceived) costs of maintaining private schools which do not teach the standard public school subjects in the standard manner** and which do not submit their students to the standard public school leaving exams. Similarly, attempts by individual public schools to accommodate cultural and religious differences among students and parents have been criticised for **compromising fundamental Danish values, and in particular gender equality**.

In practice, beneath the sometimes heated national debates on 'fundamental values', a partly competing paradigm has emerged: professionals, i.e. school staff, are encouraged and trained to establish an '**appreciative dialogue**' with students and parents who do not have a mainstream view on education and participation in school activities. This appreciative dialogue is based on the notion that all participating parties are equal partners and that the choices of parents should be respected. Dialogue is characterised by respect for the dialogue partner and with the aim to explore the practical possibilities of ensuring the participation of individual students in educational activities.

It combines a respect based notion of tolerance with a principled curiosity towards differences, but does not rely on a notion of multiculturalism by which different people are seen as being part of or representing various religious and cultural groups. Also, issues of 'fundamental values' and 'identities' are played down. As far as possible, the cultural and religious differences of minorities are accommodated within the overall framework of the purposes and goals of the Danish educational system. The model works on the background notion that accommodation takes place to ensure participation and inclusion of individual students and groups, including parents, who might not otherwise participate in school life. It does not aim to provide 'recognition' of specific cultural and religious groups as such. The model is reported to work well.

TOLERANCE IN DANISH POLITICAL LIFE

Our research regarding the toleration of ethno-national, cultural and religious differences in public and political life in Denmark also provides a number of new insights.

 We explored two questions:
1) **What kind of issues raise concerns and debates regarding limits of tolerance of immigration-related differences in political life in Denmark?;** and
2) **What types of tolerance/intolerance arguments are most often put to use in public debates in Denmark, and by whom?**

With regards to the first question, our research suggests that in recent years the most significant challenge to tolerance of ethnic and religious differences in political life has come from the **non-institutionalized political participation of 'radical Muslim' actors**. Through public meetings, they have pushed controversial views and practices into the public sphere.

The debates have revolved around the norms and values displayed by some Muslim actors in political life, and questions of how much difference could be tolerated in politics without compromising social cohesion and allowing intolerance to flourish. Our research provides an important nuance to the existing literature on Denmark: **Whereas institutionalized political participation (voting, eligibility etc.) of (Muslim) immigrants is widely accepted in the Danish context, the non-institutionalized political participation of a few select, controversial Muslim actors repeatedly raises public controversy.**

With regards to the second question, our research shows that in public controversies concerning the non-institutionalized political participation of 'radical Muslim' actors, the predominant positions on tolerance **stress the importance of the Danish tradition of free speech** (in law and political culture) and emphasise the need to challenge and mark one's opposition towards those positions with which one disapproves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In relation to public schools our research suggests that it is advisable to continue to spread the ideas of the **appreciative dialogue between the schools, the parents and the students**. This ought to be the task of the Ministry of Education as well as the municipal school administrations. One risk pertaining to the local school autonomy in Denmark is that it can be random whether schools adopt best practices or even seek out information and learn about new methods. At the same time, it should be remembered that the appreciative dialogue itself presupposes local autonomy since solutions found through appreciative dialogue require local decision makers to act in a flexible manner. It is procedural and not a one-size-fits-all approach.

In relation to private schools, it is worth considering to what extent a diverse private school sector is dependent on the fact that the costs of establishing and maintaining private schools with alternative philosophies and pedagogies are not too high. Having to document and monitor academic standards as well as civic education efforts may incur very high costs on some schools. Moreover, the uncertainty that some schools feel about what it takes to live up to requirements and their reluctance to risk being seen as falling short of them may lead to an under-utilization of the degree of freedom that the current law actually allows them. Naturally, there is a dilemma in enforcing a limited definition on how schools ought to teach civic education, because it invariably will reduce the flexibility with which it can be done. However, a **more simple and transparent evaluation model would increase legal certainty**.

Moreover, it would be fairer to schools if the model was mainly based on the **knowledge** that needs to be transmitted to students and not whether the school is successful in instilling a democratic ethos in students. In effect, it is difficult to measure the success of a particular school in creating a democratic ethos among its students. The emphasis on knowledge rather than on ethos is also more in line with the monitoring experience of the Ministry of Education. Experience shows that when schools fall short of the civil education requirements it is due to insufficient knowledge, not attitudes towards democracy and freedom. Moreover, increased certainty among schools may also lessen the potential alienating effects of monitoring. Monitoring in some instance gives the sensation of being placed under general suspicion by the authorities for not being sufficiently integrated and loyal democratic citizens.

Finally, through our research, we conclude that at present, there are two dominant positions as regards intolerance in Danish political life. The first is based on arguments stressing **that certain practices and views in public life constitute a serious security risk, as opposed to a political or moral challenge, and therefore cannot be tolerated**. These arguments function to push the drawing of the boundary of tolerance out of the political arena and into the realm of the extra-political. It thus becomes a question of defending the political and social

order per se. The second position refers to **the illiberal identities and ways of life that certain practices and views exemplify which negate the liberal and democratic norms and principles of Danish society**. In this type of argument, the drawing of the boundary of tolerance becomes entangled with the prescription of particular liberal virtues and identities which must be shared. Here, the research clearly shows – somewhat at odds with the existing literature – that **such arguments of intolerance are not the preserve of the political right in Denmark, but are shared by political actors across the ideological spectrum.**

FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

Conceptions of Tolerance and Intolerance in Denmark: From Liberality to Liberal Intolerance?
By Tore Vincents Olsen and Lasse Lindekilde (Aarhus University)

Download your copy from:
http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23255

Other relevant publications include:

2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe
Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)

Download your copy from:
http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx

PROJECT IDENTITY

Acronym	**ACCEPT PLURALISM**
Title	**Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe**
Short Description	ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.
	Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.
	In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.
	The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.
Author	Tore Vincents Olsen and Lasse Lindekilde, Aarhus University
Web site	**www.accept-pluralism.eu**
Duration	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
Funding scheme	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
EU contribution	2,600,230 Euro
Consortium	17 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator	European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Scientific Coordinator	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission