

## **Who is afraid of mobility?**

### **- Cultural consequences of migration and mobility.**

Report from the conference on the 23rd of January 2008 at the EESC.

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The question of migration and mobility is becoming ever more relevant in an expanding Europe, and ever faster moving globalization. Is Europe becoming a multicultural immigration society, and a playground for the mobile, or is it becoming a fear society closing its mindset around a European constructed identity? Who is afraid of mobility? And what are the cultural consequences of migration and mobility?

These were the questions asked, but what were the answers given?

In order to attempt a meaningful discussion of such complex questions, related both to the European Year of Intercultural dialogue, and The European Unions enlargement and possible opening of borders for new immigration, the conference called for experts on all sides. Immigration managers, cultural researchers, sociologists, cultural workers, law professionals, policy officers, educational organizations and cultural networks were present.

This report focuses on the conclusions of the conference. However, being a hard to solve issue, in a complex time and day, the report focuses on bringing out the key-discussions of the conference; points that may lead up to further discussion, rather than searching for final answers.

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**The opening statement** framed the conference, by claiming the free movement of workers and students in Europe, as a natural way to encourage competition, in a globalized world. However Europe is faced with significant cultural barriers that diminish the potential internal European mobility. Thus culture is to be understood, not only as what binds people together, but also as that which separates them. Consequently in order to encourage mobility, it was suggested that we look at the cultural angle. Furthermore it was suggested that the creation of a European identity is necessary to encourage internal European mobility, and that the best place to start is with the youth of Europe, as with Erasmus programs.

Not undermining the complexity of mobility and migration, the keynotes of the conference, took each their viewpoint to the theme:

**1st keynote** was Mr. Lukas Gehrke, who started off the discussion with the words; 'migration and mobility are not new phenomena'. Today an increasing number of third country migrants are coming to Europe, but for the same reason that 6 million people left Europe after 1945; Money, work and social security. Following the economic boom in the Europe of 1950 guest work approaches began. Mistakenly Europe saw the workers as guests, that would leave quietly when their stay was due, - but the guests settled down. Thus the family reunification migration began between the 1970's and 1990's. It was around this period integration discourses began in the

political sphere, and first attempts to restrict reunification were implemented. A further challenge for Europe was when the iron curtain fell, and Germany was reunified, opening up to the east. These historical events, globalization, alongside with developments in communication and transportation, combined with the freedom of movement within the European Union, makes the picture of today's migration and mobility flows extremely complex.

The challenges for mobility are that the restrictive migration policies in the EU create an enormous market for smuggling of people. Furthermore EU has very high rejection rates of refugees that apply for asylum, but returning home for the refugees is difficult, and this creates a major imbalance. Furthermore the EU has a falling fertility rate, and the old age dependency ratio is thus rising.

Europe needs to react, but how? One fear is that more immigration will create marginalization amongst the newcomers, so how should we cope with the issues that the newer mobility and migration faces us with? Should we go towards a model of assimilation, integration or multiculturalism? Mobility and migration are sensitive issues charged emotionally with questions touching the nerve of identity and nationalism, and this often leads to exclusion, fear, resentment and right wing extremist feeling.

Migration and mobility thus challenges national and European identity, leaving us with a state of affairs, which forces us to ponder over the cultural angle as important in relation to these issues.

**2nd keynote** was Mr. Andreas Wiesand. He introduced the conclusions of a soon to be finished ERICarts study on intercultural dialogue. Europe, he claimed, is faced with new intercultural realities, and complex forms of migration and mobility, and multiculturalism is predominant. People have difficulties dealing with different value systems, and these somewhat complex interrelations between people may therefore create tensions, discrimination and unpeaceful co-existence, thus blocking intercultural dialogue. The media reproduces the image of 'the others' as stereotyped villains, and hereby reinforces resentment amongst the EU born citizens.

Appeasing the difficulties, was suggested to happen in a shared space, between the private and the public sphere; a space of shared concerns; mixed identities; and mutual enrichment.

Public responsibility for intercultural dialogue is in none of the EU countries concentrated in one single ministry or government body, and furthermore it is rarely a main feature of cultural policy. Attempts to encourage intercultural dialogue is kept in policies where approaches to foster "social cohesion" prevails, or in local organizations, or as undercurrents in anti-racism programs or sports organizations and youth initiatives.

The ERICarts study proposes specific recommendations;

- To (re)consider cultural differences in value priorities and the present "common values" approach in the EU: Values or worldviews should not be seen as a prerequisite for and rather as an important component of ICD; they should also not be mixed up with universal rights.

- Create new institutional and political strategies, which take account of the changing demography and also of increased trans-border movements from in- and outside of the EU.
- To encourage a more pro-active role of the media/culture industry to avoid reproducing negative imagery of "visible minorities"
- That Europe remembers its neighbours and makes "EU Neighbourhood" policies, where intercultural dialogue could receive greater priority
- Finally, to research for improved methods and resources for intercultural research and evaluation.

The following part is a brief summary of the key debates that took place, following the keynotes;

- **Intercultural dialogue;** we need intercultural dialogue to get different groups into dialogue. This cannot solve everything, but without it, we cannot solve anything. People mostly engage in attempts to promote intercultural dialogue on local levels, thus there is a need for engagement on national levels.
- **Parallel societies/groups;** International dialogue has got the momentum, but often the processes run too fast to be accepted. Groups of common denominators tend to organize themselves in closed groups, this increases closed ness and fundamentalism. The groups do not always see the point in communicating, which makes the walls around the groups grow instead of being dismantled, - and this creates a mistrust society
- **The media** disturbs the image of mobility and migration immensely. We must promote correct news making. We need to develop a policy on media representation, - and we need to see the positive examples. Monitoring systems should be developed, so that freedom of expression is used to create harmony and discussion.
- **Language discourse;** Mobility is very different depending on who it involves, e.g. Students and refugees. We need to be nuanced when using these terms. Furthermore we need to nuance the use of the term mobility, and discuss whether it is useful or harmful? It might be useful economically for some and problematic for others. Furthermore we keep speaking in terms of 'us' and 'them', this creates gaps instead of building bridges
- **Shared spaces;** are spaces of common grounds, shared concerns; mixed identities; and mutual enrichment. In shared spaces cohesive diversity can take place, and different concepts can be integrated in one creative open social contract. Cultural festivals are examples, of shared spaces; they create togetherness, and make communities come together. We need more local based projects like this, and they need to be supported by the governments. As such the arts can contribute to the making of shared spaces.

- **Student mobility** does not receive enough subsidies to make a difference. Also many do not get their equivalence points granted. The student mobility thus tends to reproduce elite, and does not necessarily promote cultural exchange. There are significant language barriers, not enough information from the host university, and the pedagogical content is not taken into consideration. As such assimilation happens, not exchange.
- **Islam and Muslims** are topics of discussion in the media, but are they really a threat – or is the 'problem' a question of clash of civilization? Islamophobia reminds about the Nazism in the 30's. We need to show respect, create sense of belonging, and to create a common ground, and remember that Islam is not a nationality. Guidelines against islamophobia should be implemented, via a strong legislation, and Islam should be in the school curriculum, alongside the other religions. Bridges should be built by the politicians.
- **Identity**; Mobility and migration raise the question of identity, as we are met with different cultures and values. We must be careful that the multicultural does not create fear of the unknown. And that the identity of groups is not created negatively.
- **Mobility and conflicts**; EU is an immigration society, - but are we ready for it? How can we live in the multicultural? Multicultural societies are conflictual and it's a question of basic values. But what are the common values of EU, are there any, and how do we use them? We must be careful not using them in a marginalising or excluding way. A consequence of a negative use of common values may be that mobility won't create competences and development, but fear and social exclusion of immigrant groups.
- **Common values**; We need to discuss how we can create political common values, so that we can share, whilst allowing ourselves to be different. Conflict and critique are sensible issues, but we have to get out of the tension what is fruitful, in order to discuss openly diversity as well as common values.
- **Policy problems**; We need to identify and avoid a new colonial attitude in our integration policies. But cultural policy has very little influence, and integration policy has all the influence. We need to discuss mobility killing factors, as laws, social relations, and taxes; and integration policies must include cultural elements, - or even cultural policies needs to be developed to facilitate positive migration and mobility. We need more state intervention, and to discuss how the politicians can be educated on these questions. Integration consultants in local communities, for instance, do not have any legal right which is a problem; - this issue needs to be addressed.
- **Modes of dialogue and representation**. The European Unions's perspective for acting in the legal sense is very limited, and demands that all member states are on the same line, according to the rule of unanimity. As such the EU is faced with great difficulties in trying to stimulate intercultural dialogue. The EU can speak with great authority but there is no community - in order to come to some common understanding and ensure common ground on which

to build trust and understanding. The situation at the national is fairly similar because the national government acts with the authority given by the electorate but who represents the migrant and mobile communities? Governments or the EU cannot easily have dialogue with these communities because they are so diverse and do not have a system of representation. - Is intercultural dialogue only possible at a very local level? We should develop “empowerment” bodies’ for ‘the others’, so that we hear the whole story. However this is a difficult task, that should be handled cautiously, seeing as the migrant and mobile viewpoint is so varied.

Report by Sofie Sauzet.