Multiculturalism in Europe: Trends, Implications and Tasks

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Trends

Internationalisation is definitely on the rise in the developed world: this phenomenon is attributable mainly to two factors: mobility and migration. Mobility – that we are witnessing on an evergrowing scale - is usually a two-way motion. Migration – in contrast – implies mobility with a permanent stay away from the home community or country.

Motivations for mobility can be manyfold, but a very significant factor is the desire to improve quality in different senses on the word. The demand to create and offer *enhanced quality* drives orchestras, football-teams, research groups and project-managers to attract the best players, the most outstanding scholars and most talented artists from all over the world for a certain performance, for a particular project or for a given research area. One would not find any more a leading orchestra, a world champion football-team or an important university faculty which is monocultural. The imperative of *innovation* in our age of knowledge society also requires joint efforts (of mostly multicultural teams) to create and produce *new quality*, resulting again in the need to be mobile – physically or virtually – for the members involved. It is not by chance that Nobel Prize winners are awarded recently not so much for individual achievements but rather for team-work as a result of collaborative efforts. By mobility – apart from cognitive knowledge – students, professors and employees of companies gain *international and intercultural experience*, not speaking about the great opportunity to improve their foreign *language skills*. Hence, mobility has become one of the key-concepts in developing the European educational domain.

Motivations of migration are of a different nature: political refugees constitute a great portion of migrants in many parts of the world often due to local and regional wars. In Europe, political and economical motives are often interconnected in certain groups of migrants – mostly from the Middle East or Africa. This is often labeled as “forced migration” – that is people are forced to leave their country because of extreme poverty, of war or of violence.

The migration of the labor force in Europe – traditionally from the south to the north, and from the east to the west – has also been much affected by the liberalization of the labor market – particularly within the boundaries of the European Union.

Demographic motives also interplay in migration tendencies: the falling fertility rate and decreasing child-birth tendencies in Europe accompanied by the ageing of the population requires measures to be taken to replace or at least to fill in younger generations partly for demographic reasons and partly for ensuring the labor resources in certain sectors. The situation is though very different across countries– some governments (France) are successful in implementing effective family-support schemes – and as a result, birth-rate is relatively high (2.3), while others (Germany) are lagging behind in terms of demographic data: over 30% of German women do not bear any children in their lifetime.

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Implications of Mobility and Migration

Mobility and migration might be different in many aspects (duration of stay; intention of stay: temporary or permanent stay; psychological attitude, etc.) but the challenges that are triggered by them can be of a very similar nature.

- Societal and administrative issues (immigration procedures, health care, education, housing, employment for same-culture families) of incoming foreigners are to be solved in order to pave the way for them to operate effectively in the new country.
- Intercultural (mixed) marriages pose as a rule additional difficulties both administratively and psychologically.
- Identity issues – both for the host-society (national and societal level) and the immigrant/foreign communities (national and individual level) might come up – in different forms and in different ways depending on the context. (Hidasi 2008)
- Cultural issues that are rooted in differences of life-styles and in conflicting values might lead to human rights considerations and to debates not only on the level of the individual but also on the level of the whole community and society. (Avramov 2008)

All Member States of the European Union (27 member states as of 2013) are affected by the flow of international migration and they have agreed to develop a common immigration policy at EU level. The main objective is to better manage migration flows by a coordinated approach which takes into account the economic and demographic situation of the EU. The EU's common immigration policy foresees a wide range of common actions to manage migration flow, preventing and fighting illegal immigration at EU level and promoting return of illegal immigrants.

Tasks

Cultural diversity has traditionally been part of daily experiences in Europe (Hill 1997), but due to increased mobility and migration Europe is facing new challenges in the way of experiencing and handling multiculturalism. Diversity (ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, etc.) and coexistence with diversity, furthermore, cooperation between culturally differing groups has had a long history in Europe not only on the level of communities but also on the level of nation-states: suffice to think of the Austro-Hungarian empire that had been successfully operating for a good many decades preceding military defeat of the First World War. Hence, multiculturalism itself is not new to Europe: the handling and successful managing of multicultural communities is not a novum either. What is new, however, is *the new make-up of multiculturalism*. Whereas for hundreds of years multiculturalism was made up of peoples of “European origin”, the recent decades saw an influx of people of “non-European background”. (Herm 2008) This kind of multiculturalism is much more difficult to handle – because differences in terms of religion, in terms of values and in terms of world-view are significantly greater than before. Europe has to learn to live together by now with people not from 30 or 35 nations (as earlier) but from about 100. And this makes a significant difference in terms of tolerance, human rights, and cultural awareness.

Researchers (Breisky 2009) point out that the people of Europe are willing to accept and contribute to integration processes only if they are able to maintain and keep their cultural and linguistic identity. This requires the respect of the European heritage from the immigrants’ side. At the same time, immigrants also insist to keep and practice their own heritage culture – which in many cases leads to conflicts in local communities. The need to discuss what should be and could be done is an imperative in order to prevent that unity strangles diversity.

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