

Engaging with Diversity: Multiculturalism, Integration and Identity

Background

Numerous European countries of immigration are currently experiencing a 'moral panic' about immigration and ethnic and religious diversity. Throughout Europe the ideas about how we accommodate difference are being challenged. In many countries there appears to be a retreat from multiculturalism, both in policy and public discourses, and a shift towards demands for integration of immigrants into dominant values, culture and social behaviour. There is a pervasive view that pluralist or multicultural approaches to immigrant inclusion into society have failed and that a large part of the problem lies with immigrants themselves.

A number of concerns have arisen about identity and specifically concerning ethnic or religious identities versus a perceived homogenous national identity. One fear is based on the premise that western democratic values will be destroyed by too many foreigners or by immigrants whose values are perceived to be different or inferior. There is a perception among some that alleged different or inferior values may threaten national identity and have a damaging effect on social cohesion, leading to violence and to a loss of freedom. On the other hand, some contend that immigrants and ethnic minorities have not done what they were meant to do – that is, to become like 'us'. Many believe that immigrants have not met their responsibility to integrate, thus segregating themselves from the receiving society.

Methodology

This project is concerned with the ideological and policy shift in European models of immigrant inclusion, concentrating on public and policy discourses. It is an analytical project which involves analysis of public and policy discourses. Sources used include policy documents and reports, strategy papers, statistical data, NGO reports and other grey literature, public statements by politicians, media reports, academic literature and some interviews.

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

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Key Findings

- In all the models of inclusion there is a general crisis of confidence. In Sweden, despite a policy of multiculturalism and integration, ethnic segregation and high immigrant unemployment persists.
- In Denmark, for example, where versions of multiculturalism and integration existed, there is now a call for a policy of inclusion informed by homogeneity.
- Despite its attempt at tackling problems of inequality through an ideology of homogeneity, France is also facing a failed policy.
- Multiculturalism is seen as a form of tribalism. Many believe it segregates ethnic minorities and immigrants from the mainstream society.
- Multiculturalism frequently elicits a paradox between the need for *equality* and *cultural recognition* (which is an important immigrant and ethnic minorities' position) and, on the other hand, the desire for *cultural assimilation* (which increasingly has become the focus of numerous European receiving societies).
- Multiculturalism is often blamed for preaching cultural relativism, in that it provides the foundation that all cultures are to be treated as equal.
- Multiculturalism consists of two basic principles:
 - The *first key principle* is that immigrant participation is necessary in all societal institutions, including the labour market and education, in order to achieve social equality.
 - The *second key principle* is that migrants have the right to pursue their own religion and languages and to establish communities. This is about *cultural recognition*, and respect for difference.
- Rather than abandon multiculturalism, we need to expand it:
 - Mutual accommodation – engaging with each others difference, negotiating and interrogating different cultural traditions through dialogue;
 - Multiculturalism that embraces the whole society – this should not refer only to immigrants, but multiculturalism should belong to everyone;
 - Equality and full participation - introduce new structural strategies and practices that deal with long-term inequality in the labour market and education that continues into the second generation. 'Equality' means equality of access and outcomes;
 - Racism - engaging with racism/racial discrimination as a fundamental social phenomenon deeply rooted in the histories, cultures, traditions and institutions of western democracies.

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