

# 1. Intercultural learning and values in Europe



## 1.1 What is Europe and where it is going

### 1.1.1 Europe: a concept of diversity

Europe has always played an important role in global economy, politics and history. Today Europe is not only a geographical or political term, it is also a series of concepts of the different European institutions, of everybody who is living in it, and of the rest of the world. These concepts have various and many interpretations, but always with the same core – that Europe is our common house.

As a matter of fact, Europe has been always a motor for the evolution of civilisation, but also for revolutions and, unfortunately, of global wars.

Today the so-called “old continent” has a very new face. That is a face of growing and changing diversity. A diversity, which has its roots in history. Colonialism is one part of this. From the Middle Ages until recently many European countries (United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, France etc.) had colonies on different continents. In the late 1950s and 1960s, migrant workers from these colonies were invited to European countries. Nowadays, many people move between the continents, partly as tourists, but many more involuntarily as migrants, forced by unsupportable circumstances in their own countries. Today it is quite normal for North Africans to live next door to French, Indians with the English, etc. When we add a Chinese, Roma and a Black immigrant or a refugee from the Balkans the picture is nearly complete. This diversity has made Europe throughout the centuries closely inter-related to other continents. Europe, as it is today, cannot be thought about without the richness caused by the variety of people and cultures dwelling together here.

For over a decade now there has been no more Cold War and the iron curtain between Eastern and Western Europe no longer exists in its old form. But still people do not know much about each other, about the neighbour in the next house or flat, about the colleague at work or about the person at the next cafe table. We need and have to learn a lot about each other, and to work on our prejudices and illusions for us to have a common future.

It is a normal reaction of every human being to defend their own culture and the values of the group. That is why it is easy to give labels to the rest of the world. But the reality today is clearly telling to every one that no matter if we accept or not the differences /the different cultures/ of the other people around us, we should find a way to live together in one society. Otherwise the dilemma is:

#### To be or not to be

Looking back at the history of Europe it is clear that it has never been, and still is not, easy to find ways to accept those differences and to live with them peacefully. Interests and politics divide people according to their ethnic, religious, or other background in order to provoke conflicts and to be able to redistribute political and social power or geographical territories.

That has been the case with the First and the Second World Wars, the so-called Cold War, the permanent conflicts in Europe (look at Ireland, Spain, Cyprus...) and the recent conflicts in the Balkans and in the Caucasus.

In 1947 at a political rally, Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill posed the question: “What is Europe now?” He answered: “A rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground for pestilence and hate”. His uncomfortable vision was not exaggerated. Europe was in ashes after World War II, but have we learned from the lessons of history? Why is Churchill's vision of the continent still relevant in some parts of Europe today?

Millions of people died in those wars. Many are still suffering and living in conditions not very different from those after World War II. Others are afraid to go back to their homes, because they might be killed there. It is a global problem when humans do not learn from their own tragic experience, when they use the same methods from which they themselves have suffered on others – often those who have not even been part of the conflict.

In such situations the European citizen believes and hopes that the international institutions





can react immediately and bring solutions for all problems. However, most European citizens do not draw any distinction between the Council of Europe and the European Union and from those who do, very little know about the history, the policy and the values of these institutions. Working to construct a peaceful Europe we find the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union. It is important to take a look at the history and the values of these institutions and also to be aware of their opportunities and limits. This helps to see how better to use and transfer the experience and the tools which these institutions have developed for supporting different organisations and institutions at national and local level.

People are often not aware that they have more power themselves to solve their own problems. And very often with their concrete actions they can help much better their societies. NGOs and young people have particular roles to play here.

### ***1.1.2 A few words about the history and the values of the European institutions***

On 5 May 1949, in St. James Palace, London, the treaty constituting the Statute of the **Council of Europe** was signed by ten countries: Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Today (June 2000) the Council of Europe has 41 member states and its aims are to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law, to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity, to seek solutions to problems facing European society, to help consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional support.

The fact that this European institution is working also across the whole continent demonstrates how broad and diverse Europe is, and also how important the political role of this institution is in the enlarged Europe of today.

In 1950, Jean Monnet's programme for uniting the European coal and steel industries was

proposed by Robert Schuman, foreign minister of France. "It is no longer a moment for vain words" announced the Schuman Plan "For peace to have a real chance there must first be a Europe." The next year six nations joined the European Coal and Steel Community (or ECSC): France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Britain had been expected to take the lead but balked at the diminution of sovereignty that joining the ECSC entailed.

In 1955 representatives of the six member nations of the ECSC, met in Sicily to discuss a more comprehensive economic union. As a result in 1957, the European Economic Community, or Common Market as it became popularly known, was duly authorised with the signing of the Treaty of Rome.

In the mind of its founding fathers – Monnet, Spaak, Schuman and others – however, the **European Union** also held out a long term promise of political union. Today (June 2000) EU has 15 member states, 5 more are negotiating and 6 others are invited to negotiate for membership.

The **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe** (OSCE) is a pan European security organisation whose 55 participating States span the geographical area from Vancouver to Vladivostok. As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, the OSCE has been established as a primary instrument in its region for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in Europe.

The OSCE was founded in 1975 under the name of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) to serve as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West. The Paris Summit in 1990 set the CSCE on a new course. In the Charter of Paris for a new Europe the CSCE was called upon to contribute to managing the historic change in Europe and to respond to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period. The 1994 Budapest Summit, recognising that the CSCE was no longer simply a Conference, changed its name to the OSCE.

Today the OSCE is taking a leading role in fostering security through co-operation in Europe.



---

It works to achieve this goal by co-operating closely with other international and regional organisations and maintaining close links with numerous non-governmental organisations.

### **1.1.3 The challenges for Europe:**

Now Europe is challenged by economic, political and geographical reconstruction. But the biggest challenge is how to keep the peace and to promote stability in Europe. Political systems are also challenged – how to find mid-term and long-term strategies for that, how to find the best way for the various institutions to co-operate for implementation of their policies towards the construction of a peaceful Europe.

Last but not least, Europe has to define a new role in the world, as a constructive and responsible actor in global politics and economy, sensitive to the worldwide dimension of challenges, pleading for values for the benefit of all people in the world. The fact is that the different institutions have established various tools for the achievement of goals like this:

the European Convention on Human Rights, different framework conventions, integrating programmes, measures to build Common market etc.

The work of the European institutions is based on values which are playing an important role towards the construction of a peaceful Europe, for bridging the gap between East and West, for promoting participation of minority groups, encouraging the construction of an intercultural society. All people should be able to participate fully and on an equal footing in the construction of Europe. Therefore, it is not only important for European policy, it is also about a concrete reality at national and local levels for the people to learn to live together.

With this publication we will be examining the relationships between intercultural learning and the respect of human rights, respect of minority rights, solidarity, equality of opportunities, participation and democracy. These are the values of intercultural learning, but these are also the stated values of the European institutions, the basis for European co-operation and integration. How to make these values, the values of the European citizens also?



## 1.2 New departure points

In this challenging situation, some developments mark the current reality of Europe, this culturally so diverse Europe, constantly related to the other continents. Even more when considered in the framework of a global – and increasingly globalised – world, these developments seem to especially involve the intercultural perspective. They are challenging new departure points and can be essential catalysts for cultural dialogue within Europe and with other parts of the world.

### One Europe: Integrating diversity?

After the fall of the iron curtain, the European countries are now in a new process of getting closer again. The political, religious and economic divisions of the past have provoked different, sometimes contrary developments especially between East and West. It is a complex and difficult exercise to talk about these experiences - cultural and political understanding often faces limits. It is a challenge for these efforts to tackle all implications carefully, cultural, religious, social, economic and political. Coming closer in Europe could be a chance to develop dialogue among citizens of different countries, to learn from and enrich each other, and finally, on a larger scale, to newly define our relations to other parts of the world.

Will an open dialogue on past and present developments (including the unpleasant ones), ideological tensions and different experiences be possible? Will we strive towards integration on an equal footing? How can we create spaces of encounter to express our fears and hopes, to get to know each other? How can we, citizens, participate and engage in a dialogue, in this construction of Europe? Will a “united” Europe still be a diverse Europe, where difference is valued? Will a “united” Europe finally be an open Europe, receptive to cultures from all over the world?

### Globalisation: united or unified?

The growing globalisation on an economic scale brings changes in all spheres of human life, personally, socially, culturally. Individual responsibility seems to grow and disappear at once. The gap between rich and poor grows,

but the effects on each other are less visible. A broker in New York might decide unconsciously upon the survival of a child in the slums of Kuala Lumpur, but the opposite is less probable. Causes are more difficult to pursue. The world seems to develop in a closely interrelated way, celebrating common cultural events, such as the football World Cup. The significance of time and space vanishes. Increasing communication technology brings us closer together, lets our knowledge grow – but not necessarily our ability to integrate it. The way we deal with these complex dynamics has different consequences.

Will more media access imply more solidarity? Will a world connected by Internet promote democracy and Human Rights? Can more awareness change history? Will we be able to take advantage of all this knowledge as a departure point for real encounter and new solutions? Are the cultural artefacts of the near future Coca-Cola, Satellite TV and MacDonald's? What are the preconditions in a globalised world to encourage pluralism and the co-existence of cultural patterns? Is there a chance to develop a “world community”, offering a decent life with a worthy place for everybody? Who dominates economy and the net? Does a change in time and space perception change culture?

### New societies: multi- or intercultural?

Nowadays, people from different cultural backgrounds often live together in one society. More information and mobility on the one hand, unjust political and economic circumstances on the other contribute to migration flows between many countries. Still, migration into Europe is little in comparison to other continents. The more borders we tear down, the stronger we protect others (for example, some would claim this for the Schengen treaty). “No more foreigners” becomes a policy. We start dividing into “good” and “bad” foreigners, into “valid reasons” and “not valid reasons” to migrate. Many of our societies find new – or not so new – ways to deal with the facts: suburban ghettos, segregation, racism, exclusion. Possible forms of living together are debated. We try to answer the questions whether people from different cultures can merely live beside each other in multicultural societies, or if a kind of “intercultural society” with deep interaction and all its implications is possible.



How does the encounter of cultural difference impact on us personally? Will we be able to cope with the day-to-day diversity around us? Can we develop appreciation for these differences? Are there chances to develop pluralistic forms of living together, in neighbourhoods, cities and countries? Can different cultures co-exist, based on curiosity, mutual acceptance and respect? Which processes will be necessary to reach this? What difficulties are to be met?

### **Identities: nationalist or global citizen?**

These new societies, pluralist and multi-cultural, give rise to uncertainty. Traditional cultural reference points vanish; the increasing diversity can be perceived as a threat to what we call our identity. Main elements and references are rapidly changing or losing meaning: nation, territory, religious belonging, political ideology, profession, family. Traditional patterns of belonging break up and come together to form new expressions of culture. So, we are again like “nomads” searching for new references, more and more individually based. Ideologically closed groups such as sects grow, nationalism is revived, responsibility shifted to “strong leaders”. Economic uncertainty, growing social injustice and polarisation contribute to insecurity. A global understanding with unclear consequences often competes with the interest of belonging to a particular, clearly defined group.

Through what will we define our identity in this changing world? Which kind of references and orientation can we find? How will the understanding of identity shift? Will we be able to develop an open concept for our lives, in constant dialogue and change through others? Will it be possible to regain confidence in our cultural references and at the same time feel a global responsibility and sense of belonging, as citizens of Europe, of the world?

### **Power: minorities and majorities**

In a diverse world, where we insist on our differences, the question of power plays a large role. It matters if we belong to the stronger or the weaker part, if our cultural patterns are of a majority or minority. In line with this, new conflicts arise or old ones break out again, religious or ethnic belonging become fearful reasons for war and violence, between as well as within countries and regions. The “clash of

civilisations”, the “war of cultures” have been announced. Much hurt has been caused in the past, human rights are being permanently violated, because diversity on an equal basis has not been respected, because the majorities have always used their power over minorities. Today, we try to “protect” the “rights” of minorities.

Will these rights ever be taken as normal, the recognition of cultural diversity lead us to peaceful and enriching lives together? Can we find ourselves through meeting difference without hurting and threatening each other? Will we understand that the globe is large enough for all kinds of cultural expressions? Will we be able to negotiate a common definition of human rights? Finally, will Europe be able to learn critically from our historical and present relations with other continents, and from the blood shed because of the inability to deal with diversity?

All these brief remarks and questions are bound into a common framework of interdependencies, creating a complexity which is going far beyond these few lines. Politics meets Culture, Culture meets Economy, and vice versa. All these issues are raising questions, for everyone of us. And maybe there are not always answers.

How can we contribute to the Europe, the world we want to live in?

### **Intercultural learning as one possible contribution**

Obviously, the view on the tendencies as presented here is not a neutral one, nor are the questions raised. They are based on the values the European institutions stand for and aim at, and transmit therefore a political vision, in the sense that we – as single persons encountering others – are as well citizens, living together in community, in constant interaction. Therefore, we carry common responsibilities for the way our societies look like.

The absence of peace means war. Does the absence of war automatically mean peace? How do we define peace? Is it just “don’t hurt me, then I won’t hurt you”? Or are we longing for more, do we have another vision of living together? If we admit that the interdependencies of today’s world touch and involve all



---

of us, then we have maybe to search for new ways of living together, to understand the other as somebody to be respected deeply in all his/her differences.

“Intercultural learning” can be one tool in our efforts to understand the complexity of today’s world, by understanding others and ourselves a bit better. Moreover, it can be one of the keys to open the doors into a new society. “Intercultural learning” may enable us to better face the challenges of current realities. We can understand it as empowerment not just to cope personally with current developments, but to deal with the potential of change, which can have a positive and constructive impact in our societies. Our “intercultural learning capacities” are needed now more than ever.

In this context, intercultural learning is a personal growing process with collective implications. It always invites us to reflect why we want to deal with it, which visions we have, what we want to achieve through it. Not just taken as a personal acquisition or a luxury for a few people working in an international environment, intercultural learning is relevant for how we live together in our societies.

Intercultural learning – and this publication – will hopefully contribute to daring to find at least some responses to the questions raised here. It can help to meet the challenges encountered, it might invite you to dream of another society and, it will definitely bring you new questions.



## 1.3 Youth and intercultural learning: challenges

Young people live experiences in general very intensively and are open to all kind of changes. They are often economically and socially dependent and vulnerable to the circumstances they are exposed to. Often, they are the first losers and the first winners in developments. Look at rising unemployment rates in Germany or economic miracles/disasters in Russia, youth benefits and suffers all at once.

Young people are the ones to celebrate global culture in blue jeans and with rave parties, they are the ones who have climbed the Berlin Wall first. They study abroad or emigrate, they trespass borders, with valid passports or illegally on adventurous small boats. Consequently, young people are most open to intercultural learning processes, to get in touch with each other and discover and explore diversity.

But the way many different young people in many different circumstances live – does not always provide the appropriate framework for the rich yet difficult processes of intercultural learning. When we talk about intercultural learning and youth work, we talk about young people dealing with their complex and diverse backgrounds, and this means having to confront things that can appear contradictory.

In the following, we present some general trends based on our experience in youth work and the results of sociological and youth research. Remember – they are guidelines and will not fit every person. They show on the one hand the different developments in society that young people have to deal with, and on the other hand how these relate to – and often contradict with – main elements of intercultural learning (which will be further illustrated and understood in later chapters, when reading about theories and educational principles of intercultural learning).

- Modern culture emphasises accelerated speed, strong feelings and immediate results, presenting the world rather as a series of intensive events without continuity. This emotional overdose contrasts with the need for rational explanations. Intercultural learning is about a constant and slow learning

process, full of ruptures. It involves both reason and feelings and their relevance for life.

- Most of the education young people receive favours answers and provides ready concepts, simple patterns of explanation. Media and ads work with simplifications and deepen stereotypes and pre-conceptions. Intercultural learning is about diversity and difference, about pluralism, complexity and open questions, finally about reflection and change.
- When youth is addressed as consumer, the satisfaction of individual – mainly materialist – desires is top priority. A very particular type of freedom is promoted: “survival of the fittest”. Professional and economic insecurity reinforce competition. Intercultural learning is about you and me, about relationships and solidarity and about taking the other seriously.
- Youth finds fewer reference points throughout adolescence; life experiences and the perception of reality are more fragmented. People long for harmony and stability. Intercultural learning is about dealing with the forming and alteration of personal identity, about discerning changes of meaning, it is about accepting tensions and contradictions.
- Society gives young people few examples and leaves them few spaces to express and encourage diversity, to insist on the right to be or act differently, to learn about equal chances instead of dominance. Intercultural learning is a lot about difference, about diverse life contexts and cultural relativism.
- Youth feels rather powerless as it regards public life. It is difficult to identify political responsibilities and personal participation possibilities in today's complex network of reality. Intercultural learning is about democracy and citizenship, it implies taking a stand against oppression, exclusion and their supporting mechanisms.
- Political and public discussions tend to simplify facts, they rarely search for causes. The historic memory transmitted to young people is short and one-sided. Both factors do not prepare young people for a complex reality. Intercultural learning is about dealing with memory, remembering and overcoming memories towards a new future. Intercultural learning in a European context means as well a profound reflection on the relation of East and West and the readiness to enter into a real dialogue on our common and different history.





---

Much more could be said. The presented trends may look and feel different in different countries and social realities, they are neither complete nor exclusive. Still, they invite us to reflect further on the state of our societies and how intercultural learning relates to them, especially in the eyes of young people.

Intercultural learning processes with young people should be based on their reality. A

planned intercultural learning situation will have therefore to deal with and integrate contradictory tendencies. When they are discussed openly, they can be potential departure points towards an honest intercultural dialogue.

Today's context is challenging for young people, for Europe, and for intercultural learning. But it is exactly this that makes working on it so necessary.