



Building a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-National Cyprus

Introduction to Multiculturalism

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This booklet was prepared in the context of the project '**Building a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-National Cyprus to promote European Values and Regional and International Peace**'.

The main objective of the project is to promote awareness and increase the sensitivity of the Cypriot Society on how a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Cyprus serves European values and promotes regional and international peace.

To meet the main objective, the project engaged students, teachers and parents in workshops and activities to create a vision map for a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Cyprus. Participants were encouraged to visualize and implement specific activities, which contribute towards materializing the vision for a multi-cultural society.

The coordinating organization of this project is the Future Worlds Center (legal reg.: Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute), based in Nicosia. The project's partner organizations are: the Cyprus Adult Education Association, the Human Rights and Education Network, the University of Cyprus (Department for Political Sciences), and the Young Cypriot Scientists Network.

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Introduction to Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a concept that we encounter more and more, in our everyday life. It is being discussed in various contexts and has reached a paramount importance especially when it comes to the question of how schools in Cyprus can deal with the raising influx of immigrants, and, more specifically, of pupils with a language other than Greek as their mother tongue.

The question is: what exactly do we mean when we talk about multiculturalism? What are the implications for our lives? How do we understand the term in the context of education? What can educators, students but also parents do in order to promote multiculturalism in the school communities? What can we do as society to ensure that our world moves forward with fairness, stability and respect?

This booklet attempts to answer this question and put some light on how to tackle the challenges, insecurities and difficulties associated with multiculturalism.

What is Multiculturalism?

The term multiculturalism emerged in the 1960s in Anglophone countries in relation to the cultural needs of non-European migrants. It can be referred to as a plurality or multiplicity of cultures. According to the Anthropologist Franz Boas, culture defines a 'system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning'. In this sense, multiculturalism refers to a diversity of cultures within one society.

The term **liberal multiculturalism** focuses on cultural diversity, celebrating ethnic variety, and teaching tolerance. It assumes the existence of pre-existing cultures, which relate to, and interact with, each other, whereas **critical multiculturalism** refers to multiculturalism as concerning 'majorities' as much as 'minorities'. It is concerned with the institutions and practices forming the whole society. It sees inequalities of power, and racism, as

central, emphasizing recognition and rights, and advocates the 'multiculturalization' of society.

In the case of Cyprus, the term multiculturalism refers to the cultural diversity within Cypriot society, including Greek and Turkish Cypriots, but also Armenians, Latins, and Maronites, as well as the growing diversity of ethnic migrant (legal or 'illegal') groups coming to the island. Multiculturalism as a concept recognizes the diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, and promotes mutual tolerance and acceptance among these groups.

Multiculturalism and the European Union

The European Union is built on the concept of cultural diversity. It is based on the notion of peaceful and harmonic interaction between different countries and cultures that stand for peace and democracy. The European Union is probably the best example of a multicultural construct that promotes peace, fairness, equality, respect of the difference, and active and democratic participation of all its citizens.

The EU does not only serve as the best example in personal and social realms of life, but reinforces multicultural values through its regulations, directives, treaties, the *aquis*, and through its jurisdiction in all member states.

In order to achieve a multicultural society, it is necessary to develop provisions and policies. A multicultural policy gives specific claims and status to different cultural groups within the society, in order to ensure that they continue as distinct cultural groups rather than being assimilated into a dominant culture. This respect given to diversity can express itself through the granting of special rights or the creation of multicultural policies. However, those rights and policies are tools of multiculturalism, rather than multiculturalism itself. The distinguishing feature of multiculturalism is that the recognition of diverse cultures is seen as good in and of itself, because of the inherent value of those cultures and their existence,





and because respect for human dignity requires an understanding of the fact that belonging to a culture is an important part of being human.

It should be observed that equality is not equivalent to sameness. In the EU's Charter of Rights, Article 22 is found in the section entitled 'Equality', meaning that respect for diversity is an essential part of equality. Article 13 EC gives explicit competence to the Community to legislate against racial discrimination (inter alia), Similarly, Article 6 and 14 emphasis rights to liberty and education.

The 1993 Copenhagen criteria explicitly require that candidate countries should achieve 'stability of institutions ... guaranteeing respect for and protection of minorities'. The Charter of Rights, the Maastricht Treaty and Copenhagen Criteria, along with other provisions and directives that all make up the *acquis*, suggests that the EU places a significant value on human rights and minority rights, and considers them to be an essential part of the standards of democracy required of Member States of the EU. The recognition of and respect for diversity can be the source of unity of a multicultural polity. The idea of unity through diversity, which has become the slogan for the EU symbolizing its very existence is the only way forward.

Challenges

Multiculturalism has become something of a political battleground that encounters opposition in some member states. In the most extreme case, this involves the assertion that multicultural societies are inherently wrong because they lead to the 'dilution' of the majority 'race'. More subtle versions of this argument present multiculturalism, not as bad, but rather as impossible. They argue that attempting to achieve this impossible goal leads to a fragmented society, lacking in patriotism and cohesion, and ultimately giving rise to conflict. Even though it may not be possible to propose an ultimate solution to the challenges which a multicultural society creates, it is very important to assert the inherent value in such a society.

The **ethnic assertiveness** associated with multiculturalism has been part of a wider wave of 'identity' politics, which has transformed the idea of 'equality through diversity' to 'equality as sameness'. Grounding their choices on such arguments, allegedly 'neutral' liberal democracies become vehicles of hegemonic cultures that systematically de-ethnicize or marginalize minorities. Hence, it is very important to appreciate that minorities have the same rights as their hegemonic counterparts to use their norms and symbols for their cultural development and to be 'recognized' as groups and not just as culturally non-aligned individuals. The term multiculturalism should therefore be used to describe the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographics of a particular social space.

Some countries have official, or *de jure*, multiculturalism policies aimed at preserving different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society. In this context, multiculturalism advocates a society that extends equitable status to distinct cultural and religious groups. In other states, nations, or communities, the *de facto* conditions of cultural heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism exist without official recognition.

Advocates for the adoption (or maintenance) of official policies of multiculturalism often argue that cultural diversity is a positive force for a society's nationhood or cultural identity. **Official multiculturalism** contrasts with forms of officially **sanctioned monoculturalism** (though such a term has only been used retrospectively). Monoculturalism implies a normative cultural unity or cultural homogeneity. Where a nation has accepted high levels of immigration, monoculturalism has been accompanied by assimilation policies and practices to encourage forms of acculturation to (and protection of) the norms of the dominant culture.

Multicultural Cyprus

Cyprus is an island of many distinctions. It was the birthplace of Aphrodite, a gift to Cleopatra from Marc Anthony, the home of Othello and Desdemona... it is also widely acknowledged as the repository of splendid relics since the dawn of civilization left by Mycenaean Greeks, Medieval Venetians, the crusading Richard Coeur de Lion and the Ottoman Suleiman the Magnificent.

People with different backgrounds and cultures are drawn to Cyprus, for its Mediterranean breeze, weather and beaches to seek serenity. Cyprus has been hosting many different cultures historically, from Armenians to Maronites. In recent years and especially increasingly after the EU accession, more people are drawn to the island pursuing different quests. Apart from Europeans who can benefit from free movement of people within the EU, people from different countries are moving to Cyprus for various reasons like job prospects, higher life standards or because of conflicts in their own countries, i.e. Iraq, Lebanon. Unfortunately, many feel excluded or face hardships in their attempt to integrate within the Cypriot society. This exclusion is not only felt on personal or social levels, but at times it is inflicted by laws as well. Cypriot societal and institutional structures lack the tools to support healthy interactions between the different ethnic groups in order to espouse integration.

The people in Cyprus could greatly benefit from awareness programs that put light on the interdependencies in today's globalizing world and the emerging EU norms.



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IMPLEMENTED BY:



Young
Cypriot
Scientists
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