



ENGIME

Economic Growth and Innovation in Multicultural Environments

D18- Policy Brief

Social Dynamics and Conflicts in Multicultural Cities

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Breaking taboos about conflicts

The current wave of political concern focuses on integrating minorities and controlling migration. This wave is unique in scope and derives from a fear of ethnic conflicts, urban violence, and terrorism.

However, diversity is not a choice. Diversity is here to stay. With diversity comes the need to understand the origins of conflicts and their consequences.

During the workshop a number of points were clarified and a number of worries concerning conflict, diversity and inequality were demystified:

- ? Conflict can be inter-cultural as well as intra-cultural. Culture is important, but not the only determinant. Conflicts increase as more tension-provoking situations accumulate: extreme tensions or conflicts of catastrophic proportion arise when prejudice and discrimination are combined with economic hardship, spatial pressure and competition for resources. The case of Baroda provides a good illustration (Patel, 2003).
- ? Conflicts can have positive effects on innovation and creation when favourable conditions such as high trust and good level of communication are present.
- ? Conflicts and migration do not always go together. The types of migration (economic migration vs. family reunification migration, for example) are important in explaining whether a dialogue with the resident population can be established.
- ? Managing conflict at work, at school, and in the neighbourhood is not only necessary to create a peaceful environment and avoid further forms of violence but can create non-linear and positive effect on creativity, innovation, and productivity.
- ? Inequality is to be interpreted not only as income inequality but also as a lack of political power, of social recognition, and respect. It describes a certain ranking between different groups implying that some are better than others.
- ? Diversity not necessarily implies inequality. Yet, when there is heterogeneity it is more difficult to find solidarity or the willingness to find a common goal.

Characterising conflicts

Conflicts are complex phenomena, spanning over a multiplicity of arenas, levels and spheres of society. Firstly, conflicts can develop from and interact with one or more of the following *arenas*:

- ? the economic arena (inequality, different access to resources);
- ? the political arena (political power of one group, political unbalances);
- ? the cultural and ideological arena (traditions imposing hierarchy on values and ideas).

The case of Baroda (Patel, 2003) illustrates how conflicts are more likely to arise (and they are more violent) when tensions accumulate across a multiplicity of arenas, i.e. when economic inequalities are reinforced by racial and ethnic prejudice.

Secondly, conflicts can develop and interfere with one or more of the following *levels* of society:

- ? the local level (the team, the neighbourhood);
- ? the urban and regional level (the city, the region);
- ? the national level;
- ? the international level.

The re-designing of municipalities in the 1990s in Montreal provides a good example of the importance of the level of institution at which cultural interactions happen (Arcan *et al*, 2003).

Finally, conflicts can develop from and interfere with either the public or private *spheres*. Not necessarily conflicts exploding in the public sphere are reproduced in the private sphere, when dialogue at the individual level restores personal trust and confidence.

The multiplicity of arenas, levels, and spheres affecting and being affected by the processes of conflicts characterises them as specific and complex phenomena. The design of policies and institutions for managing diversity should take into account this specificity and complexity.

The challenge

Conflicts can have positive and negative effects. Conflicts may bring ethnicisation, segregation, racism and violence; break the well functioning of society and the economy. The costs of conflicts are then very high.

However, when there is *uncertainty*, *complexity* and *variety*, diversity is the only option to problem-solving, innovation and growth. Conflicts might then turn out to be positive and bring a greater selection and a higher variety of products, ideas, rules, etc. Mixed with competition it can also yield more innovation (for example, by migrants who, by adapting to the new country and keeping their tradition, create new artistic forms, i.e. fusion music).

Negative effects		Positive effects
Ethnicisation	<i>conflicts</i>	Selection
Costs of conflict very high	Diversity	Variety
	<i>competition</i>	Innovation

The challenge is:

to find a way to deal with meaningful differences at a meaningful level in order to establish a “meaningful dialogue”,

able to transform conflict into a “task centred” conflict and channel diversity into innovation and growth.

Creating a “meaningful dialogue”

Creating a meaningful dialogue means to create an environment where *differences can express themselves on an equal level* (see Policy Brief I). Efforts must span over the multiplicity of arenas, levels, and spheres of society involved in the processes of conflict. Hierarchical organisation of differences in different arenas and sphere of society tend to reinforce each other. When this is the case, (bad) conflicts are more likely to explode.

The Workshop highlighted in particular the following points:

- ? Create *public* spaces or events where hierarchy existing between groups can fall down (sports, culture, arts events) – see Policy Brief I;
- ? *Education* is of the utmost importance. Specific support should be given to schools at the lower educational level in order to improve inter-ethnic relations;

- ? *Local* administration is well advised to channel extra attention and care into areas with a sizeable minority population;
- ? *Political rights* must have integrative value. The concept of “civic citizenship”, as proposed by the European Economic and Social Committee, includes voting rights at the local level as well as equal access to education and jobs¹ for long-term foreign residents;
- ? Implement *active policies* to facilitate *communication* at the individual level (see Policy Brief II);
- ? Institutions should address the role of *language* as a marker for ethnic belongings.

Future research

Important research gaps still exist:

- ? The relationships between diversity, creativity and growth are multi-faceted and not linear. More interdisciplinary efforts are required to explore those complex causality relationships. Does an optimal level of diversity exist?
- ? There exist some theoretical and empirical evidence that “good” diversity exists. However, we need to further qualify what “good” diversity means (for example, in terms of hierarchical vs. non hierarchical organisation of differences and the institutions and policies characterising them);
- ? There is a lack of statistics at the European level on issues related to cultural diversity, stress, conflict, innovation, and creativity that hampers the possibility of serious statistical analysis;
- ? Statistics are not sufficient. Research should explore, design and qualify an appropriate framework of indicators (along the lines, for example, of the DPSIR framework used in the Sustainable Development literature).

¹ The Economist, May 10th 2003, Special Report on Europe Minorities, “Forget asylum-seekers: it’s the people inside who count”.

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