DIALOGUE AND ACTIONS IN MULTICULTURAL RUSSIA

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Abstract: The ALLMEET project promotes actions of intercultural education in Russia through the development of six Intercultural Education Platforms in five different regions. This paper is aimed to disseminate the results gained in the first half (18 months) of the project, focusing on the research findings on the intercultural relationships in five different Russian regions (Krasnoyarsk-Siberia, Moscow, Republic of Tatarstan, Republic of Mari El, Arkhangelsk) and on the theoretical background of the ALLMEET actions, planned through a synthesis of Russian and Western theories on intercultural education.

Keywords: intercultural education, tolerance, Russian Federation, dialogue, capacity building, lifelong learning, intercultural centres, interfaith education, cultural diversity, migration

Introduction

In the global world, that is characterised by constant movement of people, goods and information, contamination between cultures has become a daily practice. The meeting and coexistence of different ethnic groups in living environments are always complex and often connoted by problems, conflicts, misunderstandings and closures. In such environments, the issues of the intercultural education are becoming more urgent and necessary. Reflections and actions of intercultural education must take place also outside of schools to involve the older generations and reach people. The ALLMEET project (Actions of the Lifelong Learning addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia) pursues this perspective.

Intercultural education, dialogue and tolerance

At the basis of each modern discourses on education we can quote the Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

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Tolerance and friendships among nations, racial and religious groups are personal attitudes, but also competences that can be taught and trained. Education processes should dynamically reflect the reality, in order to face the changeable challenges with adequate, modern and effective actions and tools.

In a globalised context, characterized by the compression of space and time, increasing communication and mobility flows (Craig 6), culture is subject to renewed challenges. Immigrant communities are multi-layered and multidimensional, they have many viewpoints and within them there is often a conflict between those arguing for assimilation and those demanding an independent identity for the group (Epstein & Gang 12). On the other side, the migration policies of the host countries follow different models, due to different traditions, political systems, economic and social possibilities. The common challenge for all of them is to assure the conditions for a peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups in the same space.

The first article of the *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity* (UNESCO 4) recognises cultural diversity as a common heritage of humanity, while the second article expresses the need to move from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism. Cultures interrelate with societies and are constantly formulated and reformulated by people – members of a cultural group – in their interactive and communicative processes. The concept of culture is strictly linked with the concepts of language, religion, cultural heritage and, firstly, education:

Concepts of culture and education are, in essence, intertwined. Culture forges educational content, operational modes and contexts because it shapes our frames of reference, our ways of thinking and acting, our beliefs and even our feelings. All actors involved in education – teachers and learners, curriculum developers, policy makers and community members – invest their cultural perspectives and cultural aspirations into what is taught, and how it is conveyed. Yet education is also vital to the survival of culture. As a collective and historical phenomenon, culture cannot exist without continual transmission and enrichment through education, and organized education often aims to achieve this very purpose (UNESCO, *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* 12).

Language is one of the most essential forms of expression of culture and has a very strong impact on identity, memory and transmission of knowledge. Since multilingualism is a manifestation of cultural diversity, linguistic competencies are fundamental for the empowerment of the individual in democratic and plural societies, as they condition school achievements, promote access to other cultures and encourage openness to cultural exchange. Also religious pluralism is a direct effect of cultural pluralism and the issue of interfaith education is in the educational agendas of many countries throughout the world, focusing on the complex dimensions of values, spiritual life and searching for meaning, but also managing the coexistence of different symbolisms, normative behaviors and daily
practices. Finally, considering the cultural heritage as the combination of the tangible and intangible expressions of a culture (languages, rites, beliefs, historic places and monuments, literature, art, archives and libraries), its survival and enhancement are key issue all over the globalised world.

Nowadays the demographic, social and cultural composition of urban and rural population is very complex and the boundaries between majorities and minorities are becoming increasingly fluid and indefinite. The continuous interactions among representatives of different groups are building cultural *metissage* and new form of sociality. This process can't be stopped but at the same time need to be managed and monitored, in order to find positive solutions to the many conflicts on small, medium and large scales. In this direction, education plays a key role.

In order to strengthen democracy, education systems need to take into account the multicultural character of society, and aim at actively contributing to peaceful coexistence and positive interaction between different cultural groups. There have traditionally been two approaches: multicultural education and Intercultural Education. Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures. Intercultural Education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups (UNESCO, *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* 18).

Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be are the “four pillars of education” identified by the International Commission of Education for the Twenty-First Century. They can be efficaciously considered to determine the perimeter of the intercultural education and intertwined with the three recurrent principles that may guide the international actions in the field:

*Principle 1:* Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.

*Principle II:* Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.

*Principle III:* Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (UNESCO, *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* 32).
Intercultural education is a need for all the inhabitants of the globalised world, because interactions and exchanges among people with different origins, ethnicities, religions and languages are happening in real and virtual life all over the world and involve people of different ages and generations. Intercultural competence is based on specific attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery) that through education can be improved and enriched with new knowledge and skills. Intercultural competence should be trained - and the training should continue for the whole cycle of life - because it is “a continual process of improvement, and as such, one may never achieve ultimate intercultural competence” (Deardorff 257). In contemporary society, learning is more than ever important and valuable and should concern all citizens, including the underrepresented groups and the non-traditional learners, regardless of their background (Duvekot & Schuur 3); it should be addressed to professional and cultural competences, and should offer new keys to understand the world and to improve the interpersonal relationship between people with different cultures and languages. Intercultural education needs lifelong learning approaches, as far as lifelong learning actions need to consider the basic principles of intercultural education even when they are addressed to different topics and aims.

One of the main aims of intercultural educations is to promote the respect of cultural diversity. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was accompanied by an Action Plan for implementing the twelve principles adopted by the 188 Member States at the thirty-first session of the General Conference in November 2001. This plan consists of twenty sets of long-term objectives to be achieved in order to maintain, reinforce and enrich cultural diversity in society at the local, national and international levels. Four of these objectives are the following:

- Deepening the international debate on questions relating to cultural diversity, particularly in respect of its links with development and its impact on policy-making, at both national and international level; taking forward notably consideration of the opportunity of an international legal instrument on cultural diversity.
- Advancing in the definition of principles, standards and practices, at both the national and the international levels, as well as of awareness-raising modalities and patterns of cooperation, that are most conducive to the safeguarding and promotion of cultural diversity.
- Fostering the exchange of knowledge and best practices in regard to cultural pluralism with a view to facilitating, in diversified societies, the inclusion and participation of persons and groups from varied cultural backgrounds.
- Involving all sectors of civil society in framing of public policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity” (17-57).
The international dimension, the cooperation with policy makers and stakeholders, the involvement of all sectors of civil society and the exchange of knowledge and best practices between European and Russian Higher Education Institutions, IGOs and NGOs are some of the main features of ALLMEET (Actions of Lifelong Learning addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia) project. An overview on the social and cultural context of the contemporary multicultural Russia is necessary to achieve a better understanding of the criteria that lie behind the activities of the project.

The intercultural need in Russia

According to the National Census 2010, although 80% of the population is ethnic Russian, more than 100 ethnic minorities live in Russia. Russian is the national language, but there are 27 other recognised official languages and more than 100 that do not have official recognition. In correspondence with a decrease of the native Russian population, since 2000 the inflow of migrants is progressively growing. Nowadays 1.7 million labor migrants work in Russia on legal basis, and the number of illegal migrants has been estimated from 2.1 million people to 3-5 million people. Most of the legal labor immigrants come from Central Asia, most of them planning a permanent migration. In the recent years the traditional unskilled labor force is flanked by the massive arrivals of high school and university graduates, and also the percentage of females is increasing (Mukomel, Labour Migration And The Host Country: Russian case 15-17).

Several Federal Migration Programs were approved during the 1990s and reproduced in normative legislative acts during the 2000s, but they were not implemented till 2012, when the Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation through to 2025 was approved, stating that the “successful social and cultural adaptation and integration of migrants” should be one of the main objectives of national policy. In 2011 a survey by NRU HSE CEPRS has shown that the relations with the local population are positively evaluated by migrants: 72,2% answered that they are treated nicely by Russians and 91,6% feel in good relation with the neighbours. The migrants who tie their future to Russia are the most optimistic are, but probably they underestimate the difficulties and the increasing diffusion of xenophobic ideas in Russian society.

Since the beginning of 2000s the slogan “Russia for Russians!” and restrictive migration policies have been supported by the majority of the ethnic Russian population. According to the results of a research led by Trufanov and Fen’vesh in 2014 in the upper secondary schools in the city of Krasnoyarsk, only 23,3 % of students are happy of living in a multicultural environment, 32,6 % expressed their dissatisfaction, while 44,1 % were indifferent. The negative attitude towards foreign labor migration is relatively high among the Krasnoyarsk’s

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students: up to 42% of them believe that the new migrants - mostly from China and from the former Soviet Union’s countries - are likely to be harmful for quality of people’s life in the Krasnoyarsk Region. Xenophobia and nationalism are intensely present in the attitudes and believes of a considerable part of the Russian population:

Inflow of migrants is viewed by Russians as destabilization of customary social order, and opposition against migrants is viewed by the host population as an attempt to reestablish status quo. Lack of trust results in lack of solidarity and loyalty. People only trust those who are close to them - family, relatives, friends. Non acceptance of migrants in this light is seen as a logical and natural reaction of the host population. Confrontation shifts more and more to the socio-cultural sphere: many Russians are convinced that inflow of foreign ethnic migrants shall dissolve the cultural core of local communities (Mukomel, Integration of Migrants: Russian Federation 7).

The ethnic belonging and the physical appearance are determinant factors. Russians are relatively tolerant towards immigrants from Moldova, who are not visually different from the dominating majority, while other groups, especially the ones originating from the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, are often victims of irritation, dislike, distrust, discrimination and racism.

The restrictions, obstacles and problems in many spheres of the daily life that migrants have to face become risk factors for social exclusion: most of them are employed in low skilled jobs, rent houses in the cheapest areas, speak a poor Russian language, can’t receive full medical assistance and social protection, are limited in the political rights, and nobody is protected by any antidiscrimination legislation. The success or the failure of the integration processes are determined by various factors, linked to the social contexts of the sending and host societies and to the personal characteristic of the migrants: integration is easier for migrants that are permanent, young, well educated and settled down.

The issue of the peaceful coexistence between natives and migrants in the Russian multicultural environments is flanked and intertwined with additional issues related to the historical rooted presence of many native ethnic and religious groups in the same regions. The situation in the Republic of Tatarstan can be considered emblematic. In this region, that is one of the most developed in the Volga Federal district and in the Russian Federation, Tatars and Russians are the main ethnic groups: Tatars are traditional Sunni Muslims, while Russians are traditional Orthodox Christian. The relationships between Tatars and Russians have been consolidated by a coexistence that has been lasting for centuries, but latent conflicts, misunderstandings in everyday life, stereotypes, prejudices and recriminations linked to religion, way of living, bilingualism and to the teaching of Tatar language at school are increasingly growing. While Russian and Tatar ethno-nationalist organizations - although still small and marginal – are assuming radical
positions, the diffusion of radical Islam has been generating serious interfaith tensions in the society and striking events of terrorism. Similar phenomena are developing in many areas of the Russian Federation, especially in the 21 ethnic republics, where bilingualism is officially recognised, religious and cultural pluralism is considered a distinctive feature and the promotion of the multicultural traditional heritage is on the political and cultural agenda, but latent conflicts are increasingly present.

The Intercultural Education Platforms

The Tempus programme is the longest-standing EU programme in the sector of cooperation with the neighboring countries. Since its inception in 1990, it has promoted the cooperation between higher education institutions to enhance mutual understanding between the academic worlds of the European Union and the Partner Countries and to face the major social and educative challenges of the post Cold War societies. The Tempus financed project ALLMEET (Actions of Lifelong Learning addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia) involves European and Russian institutions facing together the challenges of the multicultural Russian society, particularly focusing on education. The main aim of the project is to promote actions of lifelong learning on topics not usually debated such as migration, intercultural education and interreligious dialogue, in order to increase the level of tolerance toward people with migrant background and minority groups. After a first phase of theoretical and empirical research on the existing knowledge, practices and policies regarding migration and conflict resolution at local, regional and national level, the project has moved to its core: the implementation of six Intercultural Education Platforms in six cities located in five regions of the Russian Federation.

The Intercultural Education Platforms have been thought and planned adapting to the local contexts the model of the Intercultural Centres that has been developed in Europe since 1980s. This model is based on the assumption that interculturality must be deliberately pursued by local authorities and civil society creating adequate tools, spaces and places. According to Jude Bloomfield and Phil Wood (1) there is no standard model of what an intercultural space should be:

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4 The project partners are: University of Bologna (Department of Education Studies), University of Glasgow (College of Social Sciences), Universidade Nova de Lisboa (CESNOVA Centro de Estudos de Sociologia), Moscow City Pedagogical University (Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology), Russian Academy of Education (Kazan), Kazan (Volga region) Federal University (Branch of Naberezhnye Chelny), Mari State University (Institute of Pedagogical Sciences & Psychology), Northern (Arctic) Federal University (Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology), Siberian Federal University (Institute of Education, Psychology and Sociology), Charitable organisation Volunteers (Elabuga, Russia) and Foundation European Centre for Valuation of Prior Learning (The Netherlands).
An intercultural centre is any space where there is an underlying philosophy that cultural mixing is more desirable than separation, and a deliberate and sustained practice designed to bring this about by various means, and a determination to make cultural mixing and co-operation a higher priority than the integration of the minority into the systems and norms of the majority.

Intercultural centres are dynamic and fluid entities, that can be roughly classified is several typologies according to the presence of some specific features:
- core-funded, professional centres with a large permanent staff with research, documentation and training functions which may engage with the academic world and serve national and international representational roles;
- statutory services for inclusion which work as meeting places across ethnicities and provide social and advice services;
- arts and resource centres;
- municipally-funded centres, that promotes economic, social and civic inclusion across the city;
- sectoral think-tanks which promote an intercultural rethinking of existing practices;
- autonomous, project-financed centres that seeks democratic participation and partnerships with migrant and other civic associations.

Although their structural diversities, the intercultural centres share the common ethos to be inclusive, open to everyone, and to promote non-ethnic and multi-perspective concepts of culture and history, rooting on the democratic practices of the dialogue in (and with) the public space. They aim to achieve positive integration processes, avoiding exclusions and radicalizations.

The network of the ALLMEET Intercultural Education Platforms have been implemented in Moscow, Arkhangelsk, Yoshkar-Ola, Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, and Krasnoyarsk. Each Platform, led by researchers and staff from the local partner universities, is developing its activities and tasks through physical, virtual and outreach educational interactive spaces, obviously interlinked through a unique Platform Agenda, with common goals and coordinative criteria.

The physical spaces consist of Research, Training and Learning Centers, in which a wide spectrum of activities have been planned and progressively implemented connecting academic findings with the needs of policy makers and civil society: research, monitoring and creation of databases on multicultural topics; joint meetings with the leadership of the Federal Migration Services, Youth Committees and regional volunteer organizations; seminars, workshops and symposia on practice and methods of cultural mediation, negotiating, cross-cultural communication and conflict managements; free counseling for migrants on legal, linguistic, social, psychological and cultural issues. The virtual space is represented by the Intercultural Education web Platforms, which provides on-line courses and offers free access to materials and educational resources. Finally, the outreach
approach is developed through *actions in community spaces*, to reach the target groups in their social and cultural environments, in many cases supported by local “community ambassadors” that are involved in the planning and implementation of the activities, serve as role models, share and interpret useful information for integration and settling. The activities include regular door-to-door visits, counseling services, cultural and social events.

The work of the Intercultural Education Platforms is thus characterized by a synergy of languages, strategies, contexts, topics and actors, strictly intertwining the theoretical reflection with the operative actions. The goals are well established and clear, but they are constantly re-defined according to an attentive evaluation of the intermediate results.

**Conclusions**

Capacity-building is an approach to development not something separate from it. It is a response to the multi-dimensional processes of change, not a set of discrete or prepackaged technical interventions intended to bring about a pre-defined outcome. In supporting organizations working for social justice, it is also necessary to support the various capacities they require to do this: intellectual, organizational, social, political, cultural, material, practical, or financial (Eade 23).

The ALLMEET project and the actions of the Intercultural Education Platforms pursue the most innovative and dynamic meanings of the concept of capacity building. At all stages, the transmission of knowledge and contents has never been one-way: from the European universities to the Russian universities; from the Russian universities to the involved associations and institutions; from the trainers to the participants. On the contrary, the process of building and sharing purposes, concepts and knowledge is based on the continuous dialogue and exchange of points of view and skills. The intention is to find an open and complex synthesis, that can be a starting point for the building of new approaches and effective synergies to promote intercultural education in Russia, especially in contexts where divisions, racism and xenophobia are noticeably increasing.

During the first 18 months, the dialogue between experts, researchers and practitioners from European countries and Russian regions with very different cultural and social backgrounds has led to the development of approaches and activities whose content and potential exceed the content and the potential of the single traditional approaches that still exist in the respective countries and regions. Now, entering the second phase of the project, all this heritage is translated into concrete proposals for activities addressed to specific target groups. These activities take place in Russia, but certainly the produced materials and the results will become part of the experiential, professional and intellectual baggage of the European project members, and then will be re-proposed and adapted in different contexts than those in which they have been designed.
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