

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR EDUCATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Teodora Kiryakova-Dineva, Mariya Hadzhipetrova-Lachova, Yana Chankova

South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad (BULGARIA)

Abstract

International relations and intercultural contacts have long been recognized as an important issue not only in trade, tourism and education but in politics as well [1], [2]. Blending the features of thinking intercultural and being international has a bearing not only on the opportunity of meeting people from different cultural backgrounds but also offers specific insights relating to the debate on multiculturalism. Nowadays, intercultural dialogue affects almost all spheres of social life, hence taking an active part in the social, economic and geopolitical processes depends more than ever on the ability to (re)act intercultural. As globalization spreads around the world, there is much to be researched concerning international relations in view of the sustainability of regions and the stability of local communities on the one hand [3], and intercultural tolerance on the other. Both promoting and creating intercultural policies in Europe and in the Mediterranean, can be considered a successful way of optimizing and making relations friendly. The aim of the present study is to evaluate the intercultural dialogue in the light of the international relations between EU and the Mediterranean area. The paper strives to explore the dialogue between cultures in the light of cooperation and socio-cultural willingness.

Keywords: intercultural dialogue, international relations, intercultural education, Mediterranean area, tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is a time of massive social, technological, economic and geopolitical processes that affect almost all spheres of public life and international relations. In recent times, one of the most promising trends in international affairs comes within the area of researching relations at the crossroads of cultures and this fact does not pass unnoticed in the field of education. When it comes to education the effect of intercultural processes can be defined in terms of the effect of intercultural dialogue. The present study ponders on some aspects of intercultural dialogue in education while focusing on various good practices in the Mediterranean region. The choice of such topic is motivated by the increased need of being aware of a large number of communicative and behavioral peculiarities that are made manifest in multinational environment, on the one hand, and by the contribution of intercultural dialogue evidenced in intercultural education, on the other. Specifically, by limiting its research area to the Mediterranean region, the present paper addresses the role of interregional partnership as an intensifier of relations in education. Further motivation to this research comes from the increasing demands for developing students' personalities today so that they will become globally-minded personalities tomorrow. It is well-known that a global personality should acquire not only good education and training but also skills for communication with people from different cultures, nationalities and ethnic groups. Along these lines, the appreciation of the principles of intercultural dialogue can be recognized not only as a necessity but also as an imperative. Last but not least, the majorities of the large-scale processes which mark the history of Europe of yesterday, today and tomorrow arise from or are related to the Mediterranean. The exploration of this complex geopolitical area excites interest in historical terms; however, the Mediterranean also comes in the highlights due to the overlap and overlay of the cultures, characteristic for this unique geopolitical region.

2 METHODOLOGY

The present research sides with basic descriptive approaches to data analysis. Acknowledging that other approaches (e.g. the comparative analysis of educational policies in the studied region) are more scientifically grounded, we opted for an exploratory analysis in order to reveal and discuss the most pertinent manifestations of intercultural dialogue in social life on the community level as well as its manifestation as a message realized on the political and institutional levels. Due to the complex make-up of the Mediterranean region in terms of ethnic, linguistic and religious peculiarities, many areas are

open for positive reception and evaluation of intercultural dialogue. Specifically, the day-to-day interaction processes and interrelations in intercultural environments start with the first visits to the educational institutions. The enormous challenges which young people face every day require that they be familiar with the necessary linguistic apparatus, achieved by means of real foreign language communication, and that they be aware of the intercultural dialogue apparatus, provided by the tools of the intercultural dialogue.

3 THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The development of intercultural dialogue is one of the pending challenges of the 21st century. The intercultural dialogue mitigates the negative aspects arising when different cultures meet (e.g., as a result of powerful economic and political migratory waves) and while taking advantage of the principles of dialogue it lays the foundations of fruitful cooperation, mutual understanding and good will. The intercultural dialogue also helps in overcoming misunderstandings that have stemmed from the misinterpretation of culturally encoded messages and non-verbal signs. The intercultural dialogue proves to be beneficial in specific situations requiring intercultural competence.

In view of the policies and legal action on European and global scale, it can be concluded that the intercultural dialogue as a type of discourse dates back to the 1980s and that its presence as a fundamental concept in international relations is marked by a steady increase in importance. The intercultural dialogue approach has established itself as a dominant paradigm in the cultural policies of a number of European cooperation and education programmes and it lays the basis for the development of intercultural understanding and tolerance. In particular, in May 2007, the European Commission proposed a European Strategy for Culture, based on three principles: 1. Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; 2. Culture as a catalyst for creativity; 3. Culture as a key component of international relations [4]. The above strategic directions along with other possible but not explicitly stated mechanisms for achieving intercultural competences should be perceived and regarded as corner-stones in the development of international and interregional relations. The assumption that underlies this belief derives from the fact that each and every relation between different peoples is a form of dialogue, aimed at ensuring equal rights for all the members of society, regardless of their ethnic, religious or linguistic backgrounds.

Notably, paying respect to the principles of intercultural dialogue in practice means paying homage to the existence of cultural diversity. At present, we who live as global citizens in a multinational and multicultural environment have to demonstrate such type of intercultural skills as well as to build-in similar intuitive skills.

4 ADDED VALUE OF THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR THE RELATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Nowadays, each geopolitical region is characterized by its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of distinguishing features, threats and internal relations. The representative of any demographic area is exposed to the influence of large-scale processes, such as changes in the ecosystems, changes in different social systems, including global international migration flows for which we are totally unprepared and for which we lack adequate behavioral practices. The tangible globalization in socio-economic life calls for intercultural contacts and intercultural dialogue with representatives of other cultures. Much in this vein, the Mediterranean region has a long-lasting history as a region witnessing peoples' movements.

The Mediterranean region comprises an area where a great variety of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences come together. This region encompasses 26 coastal states that share specific geographic location and turbulent historical past and that can be subdivided into a rich and democratic North and a poor and politically unstable South. Unfortunately, the EU's Mediterranean policy in its new regional form is not developing at the projected pace. Since the EU's enlargement in 2004, its Mediterranean policy was complemented by the Neighborhood Policy, covering not only the Mediterranean region countries (Malta and Cyprus excluding, as their accession to the EU took place in the same year, and excluding Turkey, as the European Neighborhood Policy offers privileged relations rather than full membership) but also some East European countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The South-Eastern part of the Mediterranean area includes countries that do not match in size, population, military and economic power, deposits of natural resources, etc., and that make up an unstable and unpredictable region which has forever captured the interest of the Great Powers. This interest has various political, economic, commercial and cultural dimensions. At present, the EU relations with the Mediterranean countries are governed by three interlinked initiatives: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighborhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean. These initiatives combine two approaches of cooperation – multilateral and bilateral, and owing to them a gradual change in the relations between the two regions is observed, i.e. the former relations of cooperation are moving in the direction of relations of integration.

Regardless of the diverse forms of international and intergovernmental interaction [5], it is necessary to point out that, for the purpose of a fruitful and successful cooperation among these substantially different countries, the intercultural dialogue has always been present as an integral element in the exchange of socio-cultural practices dating back to millennia ago. On account of the new challenges in recent years, such as political instability in some of the South-Eastern Mediterranean states, terrorism and radicalization of the region, the third dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, i.e. the rapprochement of the peoples through cooperation in the social, cultural and humanitarian spheres, seems to lag behind. Much in this vein, it is necessary to invest much more in human capital by means of the upgrading of qualifications (e.g. by means of the implementation of the common qualifications framework and the Euro-Mediterranean network for vocational training, the recognition of skills and diplomas, as well as by increasing the exchanges of vocational training between Northern and Southern enterprises, and fixing the number of students receiving grants by European universities). It is also necessary to confirm the commitments made since the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area is of paramount importance to the European Union. From the economic perspective, the region offers opportunities to strengthen the EU's competitiveness. And from the demographic perspective, its young population adds in to aging Europe, hence the availability of already existing human relationships counts as a dynamic factor that needs to be better appreciated. In this vein, the intercultural dialogue skills should be regulated and monitored. Last but not least, "intercultural dialogue" is not a legal concept and is not regulated by EU law, neither by national law, nor by international law, but still it exists as a concept in education. That is why we prefer to approach the question of intercultural dialogue in terms of its added value in education processes.

5 ADDED VALUE OF THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR THE INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

The promotion and development of intercultural education is among the most widely discussed issues concerning the multicultural society of the 21st century [6]. The implementation of intercultural education is an attainable educational goal which is becoming more and more widespread in the curricula of pupils and university students in keeping with the EU policies. Furthermore, the achievement of skills in intercultural education should also be an end in itself for any individual working and living in a multinational and multicultural environment. In the field of pedagogical sciences, teaching skills for and providing knowledge on behavioral practices in a multicultural environment gain in momentum. Remarkably, intercultural education takes in both the lower and the higher levels of education and elaborates on a wide range of learning tools and techniques in different fields of knowledge and training courses [6]. Consequently, the efforts to achieve intercultural literacy are amongst the mainstream goals set for primary education in a number of European countries [7]. For the purpose of obtaining positive results in intercultural education, pedagogical sciences make use of well established classical methods as well as "psychological dimensions" and "interpersonal relations" techniques in their "educational actions" [8]. Compare, for example, one of the earliest definitions of intercultural education: "the collection of purposeful pedagogical processes oriented toward the formation of individuals able to comprehend reality from different cultural lenses and to intervene in the processes of transformation that respect and benefit from cultural diversity" [9]. On the other hand, it is the perspective that matters enormously (or the global view over the view of and context of different national educational systems) since it is only in the context of multicultural education and only in the light of "the common topos in the discourse between continents and disciplines" that we can apply "a diversity driven pedagogical strategy" to its full benefit [10].

5.1 Intercultural Dialogue in the Competition for the Intercultural Innovation Award

The Intercultural Innovation Award is realized through the partnership between the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the BMW Group. Projects which encourage intercultural dialogue and cooperation around the world on the grounds of the most innovative grassroots are awarded a one-year support (<https://interculturalinnovation.org/the-award/>). In terms of educational initiatives, the Intercultural Innovation Award has arts, faith and belief, intercultural awareness, media and art, migration and integration, women and youth in its scope of action. The most essential criterion for receiving a nomination for the Intercultural Innovation Award relates to the intercultural aspects of the submitted proposal. Teaching and learning as well as the foundations of the game (e.g. board games, role-play games, simulation games) serve as main competitive advantages for the Intercultural Innovation Award applicants. A case in point is the 2011's winner from Spain – *Irenia Peace Games*. This project specifically draws upon the idea of responsible citizenship carried out in effect on the basis of the knowledge of different cultures, on the one hand, and on the basis of opposition to destructive practices, on the other, in particular within the Mediterranean region. The project *Bakers without Borders* (Bulgaria) (<http://thegame.bakerswithoutborders.net/>) represents a further case in point of the game being used both as a successive tool and a practicable educational resource. The main goal of the activity group under the project is the development of the Bread Houses Network. The innovative character of the Bulgarian applicant is multifarious: it combines the game approach with cultural anthropology and uses intercultural dialogue as a means of achieving community cohesion. Another awardee, also coming from the Mediterranean region, is the project *Chi Rom e ... Chi No*, which builds upon the innovative idea that “cooking is a common language and a powerful ‘space’ of encounter” and that it provides the chance for the members of a community to improve their lives in multiple aspects.

5.2 Intercultural Dialogue in the Competition for the Intercultural Achievement Award

The Intercultural Achievement Award can be described as the leading intercultural dialogue project of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, which is aimed at identifying and awarding innovative and solution-oriented projects operating under the auspices of intercultural dialogue. In view of contributing to global trust-building and peaceful co-existence through intercultural and interreligious dialogue initiatives, the Intercultural Achievement Award promotes successful and innovative intercultural projects within the categories of Media/ Journalism, Art/ Culture, Youth, Women and Global Citizenship Education. The eligible Intercultural Achievement Award nominees are all those who successfully explore innovative pathways within the realm of intercultural dialogue and intercultural interaction and who avail of the opportunities that positively shape intercultural co-existence through the dialogue of cultures and religions.

The 2016's Intercultural Achievement Award for Innovation is awarded to the project *Educators for a Shared Society* (Israel) for establishing a practice in instigating divided communities to work together in order to attain common goals while engaging in mutual support and interaction to the effect of developing a common regional identity which can serve as an alternative beyond ethnic and religious identities. By pairing classes of students across the ethnic and religious divide and engaging them in joint learning and communicating, this project presents students with the opportunity to establish contact with others across cultural differences, to overcome racial and religious prejudices, to embrace common values and to develop a shared vision for the future of their shared society based on a shared identity.

The Intercultural Achievement Award Recent Events 2016 is won by the International Orthodox Christian Charities (Lebanon) for their *Community Cooking* project which brings together women with different religious and social backgrounds, both from Syrian refugee and host communities, to prepare traditional Syrian and Lebanese dishes. Since July 2015, hot meals for 650 Lebanese and Syrian families are served, whereby the beneficiaries are selected on humanitarian grounds. This particular project is focused on Lebanese women and women refugees, and by making them the agents of intercultural dialogue, it strives for nurturing their confidence, fostering interreligious dialogue, forging intercultural resilience, and expanding humanitarian solidarity, by means of engaging the project participants in shared duties and activities.

A number of Recognition Awards are also assigned each year. The 2016's Recognition Awards winners are the following: Asociacion Socioeducativa Llere (Spain) for their project *Kelibe Sports Club*;

The Depths of Art (Ukraine) for a project, entitled *DonKult*; Shalom Alaikum (Austria) for the project *Shalom Alaikum – Jewish Aid for Refugees* (<https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/internationalculturalpolicy/dialogue-of-cultures/iaa/>)

5.3 International FORA on Issues Promoting Intercultural Dialogue

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), a political initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General, launched in 2005, aims at merging joint action beyond different societies and cultures in order to fight extremism and overcome cultural, religious and social barriers mainly between the Western and the Muslim world. The Alliance of Civilizations aspires to the ideal of a culture of peace and dialogue, based on the conviction that “differences within and between societies be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity” (UN Development Millenium Declaration, 1-6). The fundamental values of the UNAOC are those values which define the way we should handle the diversity of beliefs, cultures and languages we encounter everyday, namely, respect and tolerance among human beings.

In what follows we will briefly discuss the UNAOC global fora:

The First Alliance of Civilizations Global Forum (15-16 January 2008, Madrid, Spain) brought together over 900 participants and 89 official delegations from 78 countries for an open dialogue on reducing polarization between nations and launching joint initiatives to promote cross-cultural understanding globally. A huge array of issues were addressed during the parallel sessions: the opportunities that multiculturalism can offer to the business world, the challenges and demands faced by religious leaders as advocates for peace, the role of the media in intercultural dialogue, to mention just a few. Special attention was devoted to issues concerning intercultural dialogue in the Alliance’s priority areas of education, youth, migration and the media. The 2008’s Global Forum established itself as a unique international platform facilitating international organizations and representatives of civil society in forging partnerships and developing initiatives in the domain of intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

The Second Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (6-7 April 2009, Istanbul, Turkey), by that time the world’s premier event aimed at advancing intercultural dialogue, understanding and tolerance, provided a venue for over 1,000 participants (among them several Heads of Government, over 50 Ministers, policy-makers, foundation, media and grassroots leaders from around the world) to forge new partnerships and share ideas envisaging the building and fostering of trust, cooperation and collaboration among diverse or divided communities. It mobilized the energy, imagination and ideas of a wide range of committed partners in a joint effort to promote initiatives whose main goals seek to bridge the existing cultural, religious and social gaps.

The Third Global Forum of the UNAOC (28-29 May 2010) took place in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil and brought together a network of political and corporate leaders, civil society activists, youth, journalists, international organizations, and religious leaders who discussed and agreed on joint actions to fight prejudice and fear, combat intolerance and lay down the conditions for long-term peace.

At a time when the world was more than ever shaped by intense interaction among diverse cultural, religious and linguistic communities, the UNAOC Fourth Global Forum (11-13 December 2011, Doha, Qatar) convened over 2,000 participants (including political and corporate leaders, civil society activists, youth groups, faith communities, research centers, foundations and journalists) and served as a platform where joint actions aimed at improving relations across cultures, combating prejudices and building lasting peace were agreed on. The same year the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations co-organized the Fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, themed “Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New Avenues for Human Security, Peace and Sustainable Development”.

The main highlights of the Fifth Global Forum of the UNAOC (February 2013) came on the universal right to religious freedom and the promotion of a new religious pluralism through education. Discussions also arose over the promotion of responsible leadership in diversity and dialogue.

Besides the Bali Declaration, other main topics debated at the Sixth Global Forum of the UNAOC (August 2014, Bali) need be mentioned, such as: the role of culture in the formulation of New Sustainable Development Goals, the perception of migration, the use of interreligious and intercultural approaches to advance mediation, the fostering of understanding through sports, art, music and entertainment, and last but not least harmony through interreligious and cross-cultural education.

The Seventh Global Forum of the UNAOC was held under the motto: *Living Together in Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and a Goal* and was convened in Baku, Azerbaijan from 25 to 27 April 2016.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on the complexity and diversity of modern socio-political contacts between cultures from geographically close or geographically remote regions, the present study sought to analyze the role of intercultural dialogue and the opportunities it reveals for improving the international educational processes. The relevance of this issue is confirmed by the fact that the demands on the global citizen become increasingly dependent on communication skills, attitudes, acceptance, trust and, above all, on dialogue and understanding towards representatives of other cultures [11]. In view of the intricate and subtle nature of the phenomena arising in intercultural encounters, and especially in view of the great variety of possible interrelations, such as diversification in the management of cultural differences, mediation of ethnic and religious tolerance, the analysis could be carried out along different routes [12]. Our chosen approach, namely, the one focusing on the importance of intercultural dialogue as an intensifier positively affecting international relations, on the one hand, and on its importance as both practicable educational resource and competitive project tool, on the other hand, proved to be difficult to apply from a methodological point of view. Although the principles of intercultural dialogue are well underpinned by the principles of intercultural exchange [12], cooperation and cultural diplomacy there are no well-established criteria specifying which approaches should be valid and most appropriate, or how the effects from the impact of intercultural dialogue should be measured, or what its terminological and practical-experimental apparatus should look like. This is the reason why we chose to address the issue from an inductive perspective. In particular, acknowledging the place of intercultural dialogue in international relations and revealing the essence of intercultural education, we proceeded to revealing the added value of intercultural dialogue in education. The scope of these pertinent and intriguing processes we limited to the Mediterranean region in order to clearly highlight the most significant manifestations of intercultural dialogue. This proved helpful in identifying several very important activities and events [13]. It can be argued that many international and European institutions as well as many private non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations are aware of the advantages of intercultural dialogue and are willing readily to promote intercultural dialogue as a successful tool in communicating with “the other”. Much in this vein, many educational and self-educational programmes have been launched at the different stages of the education process but unfortunately a comparative analysis of these programmes could not be attempted in this study due to lack of space. In the context of such educational programs, however, stand out the initiatives that distinguish, award prizes and eventually fund projects implementing the achievements and good practices of intercultural dialogue. Along these lines, the importance of intercultural dialogue as an intensifier of cultural exchanges and an advocate for tolerance in cases of cultural, religious, social and ethnic diversity is much greater than anticipated.

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The Group defined intercultural dialogue not as an abstract meeting of "cultures", but as a process of social change between human beings and individuals with complex identities and different needs and expectations. "To be effective", the 2003 Report stated, "Intercultural dialogue must be set within a context of respect for fundamental rights, and may then also become a powerful vehicle of democratization". In particular, the increase in the education of the young generations and the drop in the fertility rate over the previous thirty years on the southern Mediterranean shore contributed to the rise of renewed needs and goals, especially among young people. Intercultural dialogue is a feature and fundamental objective of all Euro-Mediterranean youth activities. Intercultural dialogue is also a cross-cutting theme for the Council of Europe and the European Commission and is meant to be an implicit part of all the Euro-Mediterranean activities, since intercultural dialogue is a matter of each and everyone one of us. In line with this approach, the EU-CoE youth partnership organised training courses, seminars on intercultural dialogue, as well as launched the project on the Indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal learning/ education acti Request PDF | On Mar 1, 2017, Teodora Kiryakova-Dineva and others published INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR EDUCATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. Obstetric adiposity in the Mediterranean region. July 2013 · International journal of gynaecology and obstetrics: the official organ of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics. Charles Savona-Ventura. Mediterranean Region Departing from antiquity - looking towards the future. 2-day symposium proceedings. Ionian University - Department of Audio and Visual Arts. Introduction The two-day Symposium Art and Interculturality in the Mediterranean Region: departing from antiquity - looking towards the future was organized in Corfu, on the 21st & 22nd June 2013 by the Department of Audio and Visual Arts of the Ionian University and the Ionian Islands Prefecture in the framework of the 7th Audiovisual Arts Festival. It included both theoretical contributions and art presentations, with emphasis on the artistic expression brought by intercultural exchange and the use of new media. They also mark the necessity of an intercultural approach to education, against xenophobic beliefs.