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LEARNING TO KNOW THE OTHER
The power of intercultural dialogue in improving human rights in multicultural societies

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Abstract

The increasing cultural diversity of European societies is an issue that can bring great benefits to everyone living in the continent. However, if not handled properly, it can also have terrible consequences in regards to the respect for the human rights of all its members, particularly for those who do not share the majoritarian culture.

In order to address this situation, intercultural dialogue appears as the most effective instrument to prevent conflicts, by including minorities and guaranteeing the right of every member in the society to have a cultural identity of their own. Holding that the practice of intercultural dialogue is needed, this thesis argues that its promotion at every level shall be encouraged, a task that involves different actors such as political leaders, the European Union and the national governments, mass media and civil society. Therefore, in order to prove the outcomes of intercultural dialogue, a case study of several initiatives in the city of Thessalonki, Greece, has been carried out, pointing out the benefits and also the challenges that its practice implies in the current context of the country. In order to improve its practice, some recommendations have been formulated aiming to contribute to its improvement not only in the city, but also to be generalized in the wider European context.

"What people often mean by getting rid of conflict is getting rid of diversity, and it is of utmost importance that these should not be considered the same. We may wish to abolish conflict, but we cannot get rid of diversity…Fear of difference is fear of life itself."

Mary Parker Follett

Table of contents

Abbreviations

AI   Amnesty International

EU   European Union

ICD   Intercultural Dialogue

CoE   Council of Europe

CM/Rec(2011)1   Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)1 of the Committee of Ministers
                          to member states on interaction between migrants and receiving
                          societies

FRA   Fundamental Rights Agency

ICC   Intercultural Cities Programme

IGOs   International Governmental Organizations

NGOs   Non-Governmental Organizations

UN   United Nations

UNAOC   United Nations Alliance Of Civilizations

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

I.   Introduction

1.1   A first glance to the topic

"Tolerance, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected"[1]. These words were pronounced by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the 21st of March of 2004. Today, it is evident that his message remains as up to date as it was thirteen years ago, and the consequences of intolerance, cultural misunderstandings and marginalization of the ones that don't share the hegemonic culture, are becoming more and more devastating as the 21st century goes by.

Due to the context of globalization from which hardly no place can escape, ICD has been referred to by numerous IGOs as a tool that should be always considered to manage diversity in the different societies of the world. At the global level, we can find the view of the UNESCO, which suggests that "in the context of globalization and increasing migration and urbanization, the interrelated challenges of preserving cultural identity and promoting intercultural dialogue assume a new prominence and urgency" while it emphasizes "the essential role of intercultural dialogue in bridging cultural differences, while nurturing the diversity of cultural expressions through processes of mutual interaction, support and empowerment."[2]. Similar suggestions have been made within the European context, as demonstrated by the many initiatives that have been taken to promote ICD[3].

Nevertheless, despite the efforts of reports, declarations, forums and good practices guides, the societies in the different regions of the world seem to be dealing with a wide variety of struggles arising from a bad management of diversity within them, whereas at the same time more than forty national and international conflicts are ongoing in the world[4] and the amount of people seeking asylum is nowadays the biggest

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[1] UN Press release,2014
[2] UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, 7
[3] View Chapter III
[4] IISS, Armed Conflict Database, 2017

in history since the Second World War[5]. Within this unfortunate context, the conflicts hitting Middle-East and Sub-Saharan African countries are particularly affecting the receptors countries in Europe, having a big impact on the ideological discourse concerning migration policies and the socio-political response to the so called "refugee crisis". We are nowadays witnessing to the rise of far-right political movements in Hungary, Greece or France, which are becoming strongly fueled by the economic crisis, while spreading the hate-speech against migrant and refugee people. At the same time, the terrorist attacks in France, Germany or the United Kingdom during the past two years have created a generalized climax of fear and insecurity within the population, which contributes to the perfect breeding ground for the marginalization and the sometimes consequent radicalization of those who are perceived as a threat to the so called "European values".

However, in this alarming scenario, there is a not negligible amount of policies and initiatives taking place in order to reverse this situation, willing to make easier the lives of those who are suffering the worst consequences of it -migrant and refugee people- while contributing to their integration in the European societies. Governmental policies, projects run by NGOs, and civil society initiatives are part of an also very important movement trying to counter-rest the effects of that extended wave of racism and xenophobia present in the European societies. It is inside this resistance movement where ICD appears as an everyday remedy to combat prejudices, allowing the citizens living in diverse societies to learn about how to accept the way of living of those holding another cultural background, while also engaging in a transformative process towards a more inclusive and culturally richer society. This process, though, is not exempt from challenges coming from the different levels involved in the management of this issue; lack of political and financial support, difficulties to foster participation and interaction between the local and migrant and refugee communities, prejudices towards foreigners, etc. Nevertheless, the impact on changing migrants and refugees' lives and their daily work on creating a more tolerant society can be much bigger than the difficulties these initiatives are constantly facing. It is this fact what makes important to keep on working on the construction of a more inclusive scenario where interculturality seems to be the key to peace and equality inside our societies.

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[5] UNHCR, *Global Trends,* 2015

1.2   Research aims and scope of the thesis

Is intercultural dialogue a useful practice to promote immigrant and refugee people inclusion in diverse societies? This is the main question guiding the contents of this thesis. Holding a positive response to that question, this thesis will analyze WHY it is useful and HOW it could be practised in a more effective way. While analysing the reasons why ICD is useful, theoretical and practical arguments will be provided. Secondly, to respond to how it could be practised in a more effective way, this research will analyse a variety of recommendations within the Council of Europe and the conclusions extracted from practical examples in the city of Thessaloniki, where ICD has been practiced while promoting the inclusion of migrant and refugee people.

The scope of this thesis will not refer to the benefits of ICD on a global scale, nor will it provide a guide of good practices that could be applied anywhere in the world. Instead, this thesis will focus on the European context, which is nowadays facing extremely important challenges in terms of inclusion of migrant and refugee people. In addition, while the main reflections of this research may be applied to every European country, this thesis will examine the particular case of Thessaloniki, a port city in the north of Greece that besides being a place of reception of migrant people during the past twenty five years, it has been dealing during the past 2 years with the arrival of thousands of refugee people fleeing from war, coming mostly from Middle East. Another important characteristic of the city which concerns this research is the fact that Thessaloniki, as well as the rest of the country, is seen by the refugee people as a transit place on their way to the North of Europe, and not as a country of destination, making the integration process much more complex.

At this point it is important to mention two things concerning the focus of this research. First, that both migrant/refugee people and the wider society will are considered benefitted from ICD. This fact needs to be present when practicing it; avoiding presenting it as a tool that would only help the minorities -in this case the migrant/refugee people. Second, that even if we use here the terms "refugee" or "migrant" person/people in order to employ a more direct language, these terms do not intend to categorize people under a permanent label that pictures them just through a personal circumstance that they have lived in a particular moment of their lives. The approach of this research is that these people are going through/have had "a

refugee/migrant experience", but this fact does not reduce them just to that, the same way that any other experience, traumatic or not, defines a person. We believe in this paper that it is crucial to understand this fact due to the problems that this reductionist view can cause to these people: their stigmatization as merely passive actors of their society and as permanent victims in constant need of assistance, instead of human beings capable of contributing equally as any other person to the well-being of the societies they live in.

Its geographical and historical particularities make Thessaloniki a very interesting place for field research, but beyond that, and as far as this thesis is concerned, the city has witnessed a burst of solidarity with refugee people in the past two years, whereas also faced many problems linked to the management of the flow of people arriving with no place to stay. In this context, this thesis will explore different forms in which the civil society, together with already settled NGOs and places that have inevitably become spaces of interaction between locals and refugee people –such as schools- are promoting migrant and refugee people inclusion in the society through the practice of ICD.

Within the different varieties and ways to approach ICD, the research will analyze the practice of interaction between locals and migrant and refugee people in the spaces mentioned above. Through this analysis, it will examine the positive outcomes of these practices, but also its flaws and what should be addressed at the different levels - intra and interpersonal level, community level and institutional level-, in order to improve the processes of inclusion and intercultural understanding inside these practices.

The aim of this thesis is to provide some recommendations to make ICD more effective not only in the concrete cases examined in the city of Thessaloniki, but also in similar cases in other places in Europe dealing nowadays with the issue of diversity management, migrant and refugee inclusion and conflict prevention.

1.3   The relevance of this thesis

Much has been written on intercultural dialogue as a path towards a more peaceful and inclusive world, where diversity would be seen as a valuable asset from which all the society would be benefitted. We can find researches on this topic both in literature and in the evolving sources of materials developed by International Agencies and Organizations working on the promotion and respect of Human Rights[6].

However, despite all these efforts, ICD is far from being a common practice in Europe. As previously mentioned, we are experiencing nowadays a rise of far-right movements fueled by the context of financial crisis which are targeting immigrant and refugee people as an obstacle to the economic recuperation and as a threat to the national security. At the same time, the European governments don't seem able to manage the increasing diversity of our societies in a correct manner, and whereas social conflicts linked to xenophobia and racism keep on growing, marginalization and radicalization find the perfect breeding ground all around the continent.

This situation of increasing diversity in Europe is becoming bigger by the arrival of thousands of refugee people fleeing from the wars in Middle East and Africa. During the last year, the situation of emergency in countries such as Greece was every day present on the media, but after the EU-Turkey agreement[7]implying the reduction of the flow of refugee people into the European borders, the attention paid to this topic has drastically decreased. Nevertheless, this lack of attention does not mean that the reality of thousands of people living nowadays in Europe is better. Even if the emergency situation has diminished, the challenge for Europe is now much bigger because it cannot be solved just by the deployment of humanitarian assistance. Europeans need to acknowledge that the composition of the societies they are living in is changing, that this change is unstoppable and that they will need to manage this new situation in an open and tolerant way. But beyond that, to prevent potential conflicts and to live in a more equal society, the people of Europe will need to approach this diversity as an asset and as a tool to improve their societies, and is it at this point when ICD becomes crucial.

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[6] These literature and materials will be mentioned in further Chapters of this research

[7] AI, *The EU-Turkey deal,* 2017

In this sense, this research aims at spreading the idea that the practice of ICD is needed in every European society in order to fight prejudices, racism and xenophobia within its population, attitudes that lead to the marginalization of migrant and refugee people and that are also creating a conflict scenario.

In addition to that, there are three main contributions that this thesis can make to the field of human rights and ICD:

First, the observance that the main recommendations and standards developed by IGOs and Human Right Agencies in order to promote ICD are far from being reflected in the reality of the increasingly diverse European societies[8].

Second, this research will also contribute to highlight the new challenges for the practice of ICD arising from the current situation in Europe, a context with a climax of fear of terrorist attacks, rise of far-right movements and with a level of interdependency never seen before that needs to be addressed.

Finally, the different initiatives using ICD observed in the city of Thessaloniki will contribute to the growth of the knowledge and *savoir-faire* of the already big number of strategies, methods and approaches to this practice. Through this analysis, this research will also contribute to point out where and how this practice could be improved and which actors would play a major role in this task.

1.4   Methodology and outline

This research has been conducted under a mixed approach combining legal primary sources (soft-law international texts such as declarations and recommendations mainly from the UNESCO and the CoE), together with secondary literature including philosophical, anthropological and social sciences, reflections about the practice of ICD. This approach has been addressed using mainly qualitative methods to answer why ICD is necessary and how it could be practiced in a more effective way.

A significant component of the thesis has consisted of analyzing the impact of the practice of ICD in promoting the inclusion of migrant and refugee people, while also

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[8] View Chapter III

contributing to the transformation of prejudices into more open attitudes oriented to the acceptance of other ways of living, and its implications in the building of a more peaceful and equal society. On the other hand, this research also points out the main challenges faced by practitioners and it will suggest by which means they could be overcome.

For the purpose of identifying and analyzing the outcomes of these practices and the challenges faced, field-based research has been conducted in the city of Thessaloniki. The different variety of initiatives and projects with different levels of spontaneity taking place in the city provides an overview of the general picture concerning ICD in the city. The richness of these experiences, in counterpart, can make it more difficult to reach a conclusion that could be applied to any kind of practice in any kind of place within Europe. In that sense, this thesis does not intend to suggest a universal pattern to make intercultural dialogue happen in any situation, nor to conclude that the same challenges are faced everywhere in Europe. Its purpose is rather to point out the main outcomes and challenges of this practice in Thessaloniki as an example that might find similarities in other parts of Europe, contributing to expand the already existing knowledge in this topic.

The field-based research has been developed through several methods. First of all, a lot of information has been received through the observation while volunteering in the refugee camp of Diavata, as well as through the visit and participation in activities taking place in spaces dedicated to promoting interaction within the city. During these moments, informal talks with the participants took place giving a general overview of the development of the projects/activities. Besides this, semi-structured interviews to people participating in six of the more relevant projects of the city of Thessaloniki where interaction between local and migrant/refugee communities takes place have been carried out. Among these projects we count on those organized by one NGO, one day center supported by several NGOs, three politically active initiatives helping refugees, and one primary school. At the same time, this research has also been benefited by the information gathered from the Conference "Building on trans-cultural capital: participatory practices for inclusive societies". This interdisciplinary symposium addressed the issue of participation, empowerment and inclusion of refugee and migrant people in the city and also at European level, counting with speakers from UNHCR, the Municipality of Thessaloniki and several NGOs and activists, all of them working on

the integration of refugee people. Finally but not less important, much information has been provided through the courses imparted at the UNESCO Chair Office of Artistotle University of Thessaloniki, which very often addressed issues related to this research such as intercultural education, socio-psychological understanding of racism, refugee children education or the solidarity movement towards refugees in Greece.

The thesis proceeds as follows: ***Chapter II*** gives some important definitions for this research, while at the same time it goes through the different approaches to dealing with diversity and the theory of intercultural dialogue. ***Chapter III*** focuses on the international promotion of ICD, both at the global and European level. ***Chapter IV*** gives responses to the question of why ICD is useful, through the examination of psychological theories which place positive interactions at the center of the reduction of prejudices between people. ***Chapter V*** gives response to the question of how ICD should be practice, examining all the factors that should be taken into account to achieve the best conditions for positive interactions. ***Chapter VI*** focuses on the case study of the city of Thessaloniki, analyzing six of the most relevant projects where these positive interactions take place. Finally, ***Chapter VII*** summarises the reflections developed, and concludes with proposals to encourage the practice of ICD.

II.   Why intercultural dialogue? : The emergence of the theory

2.1.   Some definitions of intercultural dialogue

The path towards a definition of ICD has not been obvious, and neither has been the elaboration of the theories about why and how this practice has a huge potential to benefit cultural diverse societies. The term intercultural dialogue is relatively new, as well as its presence in the human rights international context, the Academia and the practitioners. It started to be heard in the 1990s[9], but nowadays, the employment of the term in the international context and the development of literature about the issue of interculturality are much normalized, appearing in every debate about management of diversity, regardless of the geographic area concerned. However, before becoming the

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[9] De Perini "The Origin of Intercultural Dialogue Practice in European Union External Action", 2015

widely accepted paradigm that it is nowadays, many other ways of dealing with diversity were employed and proven to fail. The failure of all those policies and practices has made intercultural dialogue-with all its complexity- the most acclaimed approach to deal with diversity in multicultural societies.

Many authors have contributed to the elaboration of a definition of ICD, mainly from the fields of sociology, political sciences, and anthropology. In order to give a clear explanation, we will start from the meaning of the term "dialogue" itself, based on the definitions adopted by the Discussion Paper Based on the Forum on ICD of 2006. One of the approaches to dialogue contained in this paper is the one given by David Bohm: "Going back to the Greek origins of the word "diá" and "logos" – meaning 'through' and 'word' or 'meaning of the word' – he has come to consider dialogue as "meaning flowing among, through and between us." In his influential paper "On Dialogue" (…), he suggests that dialogue is a way to explore "the roots of the many crises that face humanity today". In Bohm's opinion, dialogue is "exploratory" by which he means that no rules can be fixed for processes of dialogue; its essence is learning which must be based on exploration, a process that defies limitation and restriction[10]." Among other reflections, the paper highlights his vision of dialogue as "a conversation between equals", where the participants should suspend their assumptions while considering other points of view. Besides, this process cannot be rushed or hierarchical: it will need its time and take into account power relations and adjust power disparities. For the author, there are not strict rules about how to carry out dialogue as far as its practice counts on the characteristics mentioned above. On the same line, the paper reflects the views of Paula Allman who distinguished between dialogue and discussion. She considers the first one as "a form of action aimed at transformation", whereas she sees discussion as something that "focuses primarily on allowing each person to express or communicate and thus clarify what they think". By contrast, she says, "dialogue involves an exploration of why we think what we do and how this thinking has arisen historically[11]".

The views of the philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas are also considered as a good analysis of the nature of dialogue. Gadamer argues that in the processes of interaction, people challenge their "horizons of understanding",

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[10] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2006, P. 6
[11] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue ,* 2006, P. 7

encountering other's prejudices as well as their own's. Thus, by trying to understand the standpoint of others through conversations that are leading us – rather than us leading the conversations – we experience what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons". On the other hand, and unlike Bohm's view, Habermas considers that dialogue "does not require egalitarian relationships, but that it must not be constrained by differences in role or status and that all participants must have equal opportunity to participate"[12].

These definitions of dialogue help us to understand the dynamics of this process, as well as its main features: its flexibility, its capacity of negotiation and its openness towards a shared outcome from which every participant can be benefitted. Once we have understood the characteristics of the process of dialogue, it is time to answer to the question of what exactly is ICD, and why is it so important to manage culturally diverse societies. We can find some definitions in the literature, as well as in the official documents of many IGO's. In this sense, the Rainbow Paper[13] defines ICD as "a series of specific encounters, anchored in real space and time between individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, with the aim of exploring, testing and increasing understanding, awareness, empathy, and respect. The ultimate purpose of ICD is to create a cooperative and willing environment for overcoming political and social tensions"[14]. Continuing with this definition, the Opatija Declaration goes a bit further adding that when talking about different cultures within the same society "the two aspects of "similarities" and "differences" must not be regarded as alternatives, but more as the two sides of a single coin which should be explored in order to start a true dialogue and to identify solutions that transcend apparent or real antagonisms.[15]" In the same line, the Discussion Paper Based on the Forum conceives it as: "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's world perception"[16], and gives a broader explanation, saying that "ICD is about positive approaches to living together. It is also about the perceived differences that influence the communicative processes underway in society (…)As inequality is often present in contexts where people with different cultural

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[12] Ibídem
[13] View Chapter III
[14] Platform for Intercultural Europe, *The rainbow Paper,* 2008. P. 4
[15] CoE, *Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention*, 2003, P. 10
[16] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2006, P. 19

backgrounds and affiliations meet, it has to be exposed and brought to the awareness of those who engage in ICD.[17]"

The last definition that we shall give in order to proceed with the theory of ICD is the one of the object of this approach: what is a multicultural society? To answer to this question is unavoidable to make reference to Will Kymlicka, who has been, together with Bikhu Parekh, a main contributor to the theories of cultural diverse societies. For Kymlicka, multicultural societies are those where people from many different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds live together with people who hold a culture which is dominant within the same territory[18]. The response to manage such a diverse society for the author is the multicultural approach, which with the passing of the years has been revised- an issue that will be addressed further on in this Chapter.

However, IGOs such as the CoE have made a distinction between multicultural and intercultural societies. For instance, the Intercultural learning T-kit4 defines the first ones as "a society where different cultures, national and other groups live together, but without a constructive and realistic contact with each other. Within such societies, diversity is seen as a threat, and usually a breeding ground for prejudices, racism and other forms of discrimination", and an intercultural society as "a society where diversity is viewed as a positive asset for social, political and economic growth. A society where there is a high degree of social interaction, exchange and mutual respect for values, traditions and norms.[19]"

Considering that intercultural societies as are defined by the T-kit are far from being achieved and are rather in a permanent process of construction, in this research we will use the term "multicultural society" in Kymlicka's sense as a synonym of culturally diverse societies.

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[17] Ibídem
[18] Kymlicka. "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism" 2010
[19] CoE, *T-kit No4* ,2000,P. 100

2.2   Intercultural dialogue: A solution for what?

After going through the different definitions proposed, we can conclude that intercultural dialogue is seen as the most effective tool to achieve three main aims: a) avoiding conflict and misunderstandings in diverse societies, b) promoting inclusion of minorities (being them national minorities, migrants or refugee people), and c) guarantying the right to have a cultural identity in a multicultural society. These issues are deeply interrelated, and constitute the three principal challenges that culturally diverse societies need to face.

The risks of non-dialogue and its impact in <u>avoiding conflicts</u> had been proclaimed within the international community; the events that the world is facing nowadays- and as far as this research is concerned, particularly in Europe- are proving the veracity of these analyses. We can find a reflection about these risks in the White Paper on ICD, which reflects how "the risks of non-dialogue need to be fully appreciated. (The lack of) dialogue makes it easy to develop a stereotypical perception of the other, build up a climate of mutual suspicion, tension and anxiety, use minorities as scapegoats, and generally foster intolerance and discrimination. The breakdown of dialogue within and between societies can provide, in certain cases, a climate conducive to the emergence, and the exploitation by some, of extremism and indeed terrorism (…) Shutting the door on a diverse environment can offer only an illusory security. [20]" At the same time, the paper also highlights the consequences of non-dialogue both in terms of inclusion of minorities and loss of cultural openings, by saying that "a retreat into the apparently reassuring comforts of an exclusive community may lead to a stifling conformism. The absence of dialogue deprives every one of the benefit of new cultural openings, necessary for personal and social development in a globalized world. Segregated and mutually exclusive communities provide a climate that is often hostile to individual autonomy and the unimpeded exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Only dialogue allows people to live in unity in diversity."[21].

As has been commonly said, peace means the absence of war, but absence of war does not necessarily mean peace. The conflict we are referring to here when talking about ICD is a form of violence perhaps more subtle than the physical one, but not

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[20]CoE *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.16
[21] Ibídem

because of that less harmful for those suffering from it. As mentioned in the T-kit4, "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."[22] Besides, this symbolic violence has also the potential of evolving into other serious forms of violence such as radicalization of those who feel excluded from their societies due to their continued exposure to racism and discrimination. The absence of conflict, therefore, would mean to find a way of living all together in an environment of respect and understanding among all the persons composing a society.

As we said at the beginning of this section, the inclusion of minority groups is another major aim of ICD[23]. For the purpose of this thesis, we will consider the following definition of integration, provided by the White Paper on ICD: "Integration is understood as a two-sided process and as the capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual,(…) diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. It encompasses all aspects of social development and all policies. It requires the protection of the weak, as well as the right to differ, to create and to innovate. (…) Strategies for integration must necessarily cover all areas of society, and include social, political and cultural aspects. They should respect immigrants' dignity and distinct identity and to take them into account when elaborating policies"[24]. We can say, therefore, that integration is about making people feel active part of the society, as an opposition to exclusion, that would be the situation of people who are somehow dropped out of it. This way of being part of the society cannot be a passive one where a person is object of the assistentialism of the State or charity organizations. Social integration is about

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[22] CoE, *T-kit4*,2000,P. 17

[23] It is important to remark some critics made to the term "integration" especially in the educational context. The critics have focused on a practice of integration where children with disabilities/ minority children were part of the same class as the other children, but were not considered as equal as the rest of the pupils. In opposition to that, inclusion would refer to the practice where every child would be seen as equal, despite their personal necessities, in a more participative approach. In the context of migration this critic has also been done concerning "until where" integration is happening, or, in other words, if migrants and refugees are just tolerated/integrated in the societies or truly accepted/included (Vislie." From integration to inclusion" 2003, pp. 17–35) However, due to the employment in the literature of the term "integration", we will use it as a synonym of "inclusion" in this research.

[24] CoE, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.11

people contributing to the societies they live in, people giving something to their societies as well as receiving what others have to offer, while creating a place where everyone can live with dignity.

In order to achieve this state of integration, minorities need to have a way of living which allow them to survive, as well as citizen's rights that permit to make this task easier. At the same time, social integration is also about creating bonds with the rest of the people of the societies, which is profoundly linked with living in non-segregated areas and with not being discriminated by their belonging to a minority. In order to make this happen, ICD can be a key tool to fight discrimination, which is certainly at the root of these integration problems. The consequences of discrimination can be devastating for a person, affecting very different aspects of human life such as health- discrimination in the access to sanitary services, living in poorer areas with bad living conditions, bad housing, etc.-, self-esteem- a person discriminated would, as a consequence, feel inferior to those who discriminate him/her, which might lead to anger and apathy- and professional development –people in a situation of discrimination will have more difficulties to learn new skills which could help them to improve their situation. Finally, discrimination is also an obstacle to the access to power of people belonging to minority populations- creating a vicious circle very difficult to break.

Ensuring the right to have a cultural identity in a multicultural society is also considered a big challenge that can only be addressed by ICD. The right to hold a cultural identity and to shape it and change it over time is central to the respect of human rights. This right is strongly linked to the right to equality, non-discrimination and freedom of religion, all of them being essential for the respect of the autonomy and dignity of a person. During all his/her life, an individual might adopt different cultural affiliations, depending on their life experiences. Even if the socialization of an individual is highly influenced by their heritage and cultural background, this does not mean that cultural identities cannot be enriched, modified or that integrate other affiliations. Any individual shall be free to change their worldviews, renounce past affiliations and live in a continuous process of defining their own cultural identity. This view is reflected in the White Paper when stating that "ICD is therefore important in managing multiple cultural affiliations in a multicultural environment. It is a mechanism to constantly achieve a new identity balance, responding to new openings and

experiences and adding new layers to identity without relinquishing one's roots"[25]. In the same line we can find the vision of the Rainbow Paper that speaks about diversity as a fundamental asset for humanity, while defending ICD as a tool that "can turn our diversity away from being socio-cultural difference into active inter-group collaboration (…) It should be a natural process for healthy societies where everyone can exercise rights and duties as citizens."[26]

The notion of culture is at the core of the practice of intercultural dialogue. Therefore, to really conceive its utility to guarantee the right to have a cultural identity, we must go a bit deeper in the understanding of culture and its links to the formation of identity. We can find an explanation of this link in the definition of Galvan Titley: "culture may be used to describe 'ways of life' and life practices, collectivities based on location, nation, history, lifestyle and ethnicity, systems and webs of representation and meaning, and realms of artistic value and heritage. (…) However, culture as a space of contestation involves the tendency to prefer and embed some meanings over others, and these preferences involve the interaction of power and meaning. (…)[27]" This tendency of preferring some meanings over others and the creation of a space of contestation during the interaction of different cultures becomes key to understand the importance of ICD.ICD, thus, can be a tool to de-codify this tendency by helping people to understand the equal value of different worldviews, even if this does not mean that people would feel more comfortable or identify with some cultures than with others. A similar view was also reflected on the Forum of ICD of 2006, which concluded that "culture is, in other words, not only part of our identity, but also part of our problem. It remains the primary source of our identity, and the primary source of our marginalization of others which it constantly reproduces and reaffirms."[28]

It is essential, thus, that on the one hand societies start to see culture not as something static and untouchable thing, but as a dynamic process in constant reinvention, and on the other hand, that ethnocentric views give way to more open conceptions of the reality, where other interpretations of the world could also have their place. Therefore, culture needs to be contextualized within the history and the social

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[25] CoE, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.18
[26] Platform for Intercultural Europe, *The rainbow Paper,* 2008. P. 5
[27] Titley, *Resituating Culture*, 2004, P. 10
[28] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2006, P. 5

processes of a territory or a group. By doing so, racist and xenophobic attitudes will be targeted while at the same time societies will gain a broader knowledge of the world they are living in. As the participants in the Forum of ICD of 2006 reflect, "by presenting culture as a monolithic, nonnegotiable and unmediated 'something', in practice (the people) fail to distinguish between the ways in which participants think about culture and the ways in which culture is treated in their context by governments, media or society. Ultimately, culture collapses into an arbitrary 'feel good' notion and becomes completely depoliticised."[29]

Finally, a last but not least issue that we shall consider when examining the links between cultures and identities is the diversity existing within every group, whether it is a majority or a minority. Human beings are complex, and neither an ethnic group nor a nationality can describe all the aspects of a person's identity. This complexity creates difficulties when dealing with ICD, and can lead us to the question of how dialogue can be carried out on the basis of interculturality without making generalizations such as the Roma people/the Senegalese migrants/the Syrian refugees "act this way and have this particular identity". In the same line, the Opatija Declaration says about cultural diversity that "this principle cannot be applied exclusively in terms of "majority" or "minority" for this pattern singles out cultures and communities, and categorises and stigmatises them in a static position, to the point at which social behavior and cultural stereotypes are assumed on the basis of groups' respective status"[30].

However, this characteristic should be considered also an asset and a way of going deeply into the practice of dialogue, instead of discouraging us to do so. If within the different communities there is an evident diversity and at the same time many commonalities, we might consider these people to be somehow "outsiders" within their communities as "bridges of understanding" between the different groups of the society.

2.3   The different approaches to diversity: seeking the formula to live together

Despite having exposed the benefits of ICD in the consecution of the three main aims that have been described, it would be unfair to say that this approach has been the

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[29] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2006, P. 15
[30] CoE, *Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention*, 2003, P. 10

only one which has tried to achieve them. Some other ways of dealing with diversity has been practiced and have tried, in their way, to avoid conflict, promote integration and-to a less extent- recognize the right to have a cultural identity. The lack of this last component, though, has been crucial to make the other two failing. The interdependence of all of them is something essential to address in the whole issue of dealing with diversity, and whereas some approaches have not considered the right to have a cultural identity at all, others have tried to deal with this issue but in a wrong way.

The first approach that shall be considered is assimilationism or "melting pot" theory. This model argues that the values and culture of the receiving society must be not only respected, but also adopted by any individual coming from another culture or belonging to a national minority. Assimilationism implies that minorities must forget their cultural background in order to fit in the wider society –being the only contribution they can make- and any attempt to vindicate their own culture is seen as a threat to the values of the mainstream society and to the peace and stability of the whole nation/society. The role of minority groups is to find a way to eliminate all the non-local features, to interiorize that they are living in a place where the majority has other sets of values and cultural identity, and that their own identity is not welcomed. Thus, Parekh speaks about assimilation as a model that "takes the nation state as its ideal and believes that no policy can be stable and cohesive unless its members share a common national culture, including common values, ideals of excellence, moral beliefs and social practices. As a custodian of societies' way of life, the state is assumed to have the right and the duty to ensure that its cultural minorities assimilate into the prevailing national culture (…) in the assimilationist view the choice for minorities is simple: if they wish to become part of society and be treated like the rest of their fellow-citizens, they should assimilate. If they insist on retaining their separate cultures, they should not complain if they are viewed as outsiders and subjected to discriminatory treatment."[31]

The criticisms to this view are not so much related to their good or bad intentions in terms of efforts to avoid conflict or integrate minorities as in the failure of its application and its wrong conception of respect of human rights. If people belonging to minorities want to assimilate and eliminate features of their own culture there is nothing bad about it, as much as it is a voluntary choice. The problem is that this choice,

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[31] Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism.,* 2000, P. 197

even if it is not a legal imposition, is not likely to be voluntary. People may feel obliged to change their cultural features because of social pressure, and we cannot diminish the suffering that not being accepted by the society has, even if there is not a legal sanction behind it. Assimilation models have been common in places where different ethnicities were living, provoking a lot of suffering to the population as well as promoting ethnocentrism and superiority of some cultures over others. On the other hand, this model has neither achieved nor avoided conflict nor the integration of minorities, but, on the contrary, it has provoked resentment and resistance on the side of the minority population.

Another model which has been implemented has been the "civic assimilationism or "French integration model" (due to the fact of France being its main representative). This model, unlike assimilationism, takes into account the right of every citizen to have their own identity. Under this approach, everyone is welcomed to be part of the society, and contribute to the well-being of everyone, regardless of their cultural background. However, this acceptance of other cultural identities has a cost in this model, and it is that the public sphere does not have a particular interest in who the person is, which is his/her identity or cultural practices[32]. The premise would be that in the private sphere individuals can do whatever they want, but they must assimilate to the culture of the wider society when they are in public. This assimilation proclaims itself to be needed in the name of the "well-being" or "the civic values" of the society, without reflecting about how other identities and cultural backgrounds can also contribute to this well-being and to the improvement of the societies. It is based on a cultural superiority that claims that the values in which the societies are based are "the good ones" or "the true ones" so they must not be questioned or exposed to new influences. Unlike assimilationism, other cultures are tolerated in the private sphere, but when it comes to the public one, they must be hidden. This model has been implemented in France in many levels of the public sphere by practices such as the ban of religious symbols in schools or the most recent polemic of the use of the "burkini". The negative consequences of these models are especially relevant nowadays after the terrorist attacks that are taking place in France since 2015. Thus, Bigea points out the inseparable link between the discrimination of descendants of migrants in many areas of the social life (difficulties to get a job, discrimination at school, institutional and social

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[32] Bigea, *The French Republican Model of Integration,*2016 P. 23

racism) which its consequent creation of a sense of non-belonging to the French society, and the engagement in hateful terrorist attacks imbibed by rage against a society that has never included nor valued their identity.

Finally, the last model to be analyzed is the multiculturalist approach, which started in the 60s fueled by the agitated climax of civil movements around the world[33]. Multiculturalism rose as a response to assimilationist policies that had tended to eliminate any cultural manifestation differing from the dominant culture. This approach started to vindicate minority languages, migrants' cultures and promoted the equal value of every culture within the society. Thanks to the openness to multiculturalism, societies started to be more inclusive and protective of national languages, whereas at the same time migrant associations started to pop up as well as schools where education was imparted in foreign languages. Unlike the previous models examined, this approach has been very effective in promoting equality and recognition of other cultural identities. Alternative worldviews, customs and languages were encouraged and supported not only on the private sphere, but also in public. Through this approach, thus, diversity started to be seen as an asset and not something to be ashamed of.

After analyzing all the advantages of this last approach one could ask: why do societies need interculturalism? What are the flaws of this last approach if, as it seems, it has achieved to deal with the recognition of non-dominant cultural identities? The answer to this question can be found in the other two aims that were referred to when talking about what the different approaches pursued: multiculturalism has not been effective in the prevention of conflicts nor in the adequate integration of minorities. The lack of these two solutions has given way to the emergence of the intercultural approach, whose differences regarding multiculturalism will be analyzed next.

2.3 From multiculturalism to interculturality: the new alternative

As has been mentioned, despite its efforts to promote a positive conception of diversity, multiculturalism is considered to have failed in fostering integration and in the prevention of conflict, two variables deeply interrelated. The major flaw of

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[33] Titley, *Resituating Culture*. 2004, P. 58

multiculturalism lies in its failure in making people from different groups interact, talk and discuss with each other. As a consequence of this lack of communication, minority groups have remained isolated within the societies they live, establishing relationships only with those who share the same culture, and getting used to living without the need of understanding the other cultures coexisting with them. This view is also reflected by the White Paper in ICD: "Assimilation to a unity without diversity would mean an enforced homogenisation and loss of vitality, while diversity without any overarching common humanity and solidarity would make mutual recognition and social inclusion impossible."[34].The paper also reflects that "one of the recurrent themes of the consultation was that old approaches to the management of cultural diversity were no longer adequate to societies in which the degree of that diversity was unprecedented and ever-growing. The responses (…) revealed a belief that what had until recently been a preferred policy approach, (…) "multiculturalism", had been found inadequate. On the other hand, there did not seem to be a desire to return to an older emphasis on assimilation. Achieving inclusive societies needed a new approach, and intercultural dialogue was the route to follow"[35].

Continuing with its analysis of multiculturalism, the White Paper criticised the view of this approach when seeing identities that partly overlap as contradictory, instead of an asset which would make possible a common ground. Also, it remarks its failure on integration of minority groups saying that "whilst driven by benign intentions, multiculturalism is now seen by many as having fostered communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, as well as having contributed to the undermining of the rights of individuals –and, in particular, women – within minority communities, perceived as if these were single collective actors.(The advantages of interculturalism would be that) it takes from multiculturalism the recognition of cultural diversity, and it adds the new element, critical to integration and social cohesion, of dialogue on the basis of equal dignity and shared values."[36]

Nevertheless, Kymlicka -unlike Parekh and the views of the CoE- considers that multiculturalism has not been a failure. Instead, for him this approach is still evolving and going through different processes of transformation due to the articulation of

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[34] CoE, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.14
[35] Ibídem P. 9
[36] Ibídem P. 19

ethnic/inequality of power struggles around it. Hence, he prefers to talk about a process of citizenisation within multiculturalism rather than a "post-multiculturalism" approach. As he states: "multiculturalism is first and foremost about developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human rights ideals, to replace earlier uncivil and undemocratic relations of hierarchy and exclusion (…) this account of multiculturalism as citizenisation differs dramatically from the 3S[37] account of multiculturalism as the celebration of static cultural differences. The citizenisation account says that multiculturalism is precisely about constructing new civic and political relations to overcome the deeply entrenched inequalities that have persisted after the abolition of formal discrimination.[38]"

In this research, however, due to the perspective of the CoE and the general shift of the paradigm in the literature about the topic, we would consider interculturalism as the term to talk about what Kymlicka might call "citizen multiculturalism". In this sense, we will take into account Parekh's view, among others, to analyze the practice of intercultural dialogue.

2.4   Intercultural dialogue, the ultimate solution?: some considerations for its practice

As we have been developing, the practice of intercultural dialogue seems to have a very important role to play in culturally diverse societies. The main task now would be to find a way to implement interculturalism in general, and intercultural dialogue in particular, in order to achieve a good practice. But before that, we should address the most delicate issue when dealing with different set of values: how to find an agreement between which values should prevail. Should we accept some cultural practices in the name of respect of diversity while forgetting some universal values such as the general consensus in the protection of Human Rights, or should we put limits to relativism? The Intercultural approach has as one of its aims to find an answer to this controversial and difficult dilemma.

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[37] By the "3S", Kymlicka refers to the model of multiculturalism in Britain, a term coined by Alibhai Brown to refer to : "samosas, steel drums and saris" (Kymlicka, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies", 2010)
[38] Ibídem P. 101

Being that within multicultural societies it will be likely to find different communities whose values and practices may offend those of the majority, and after have examined the failure of the previous approaches to diversity, intercultural dialogue seems to be the ultimate –although inevitably imperfect-solution to decide which practices and values a multicultural society should accept, which ones it should not tolerate, and within which limits.

Parekh approaches this question through the logic of what he calls "Intercultural Evaluation". The author analyzes four principles that traditionally have appeared in the literature when addressing this issue: the appeal to universal human rights or values, the appeal to cored or shared values of the given society, the disallowance of only those practices that cause harm to others and the dialogical consensus[39]. After analyzing how they work in practice and which are its advantages and flaws, he concludes that "there is no single principle in terms of which disputed practices can be evaluated. We start and cannot but start with what I shall call society's operative public values, which provide the context and point of orientation for all such discussions. These values, however, are not sacrosanct and may themselves be questioned. The resulting dialogue, in which different values are brought into a creative interplay and balanced and traded-off, yields an inherently tentative consensus that helps us decide on a generally acceptable response to disputed practices"[40]. These operative public values, according to Parekh, are composed by the civic and legal values that shape the public culture of the society, which are known by the majority of the society (hence they are public) and that are also practiced and not abstract concepts (hence they are called operative). These values, however, are not static, but a result of a historical process that has built and shaped them, and they are either lacking internal contestation from some groups or individuals within the society. Nevertheless, despite all these characteristics, there is something objectively undeniable, and it is that even if the members of a given society may personally hold and live by different values, "in their interpersonal relations they are expected to abide by those the society collectively cherishes"[41]. Members of the society judge each other's behaviors in terms of these values, and even if some members of the society do not share nor believe on them, they will not contest them in public because of their social acceptance. In Parekh's theory, these operative public values represent "the

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[39] Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* , 2000, P. 264-268
[40] Ibídem P. 267
[41] Ibídem, P. 268

shared moral structure of society's public life, and they provide the only widely acceptable starting point for a debate on minority practices"[42]. It is through these values that societies judge its minority's behaviors, and the reactions can go from the ban of certain practices to the tolerance or even celebration of them, depending on how they can adjust to what is acceptable under the umbrella of these public operative values. When these minority's practices are seen as positive for the majority-due, for instance to the positive impact on their society- there is no conflict, but a cultural enrichment from which everyone feels benefitted.

The problem, therefore, appears when a minority practice offends the values of the majority. However, for Parekh's theory, the disapproval that it causes it is not by itself a reason to disallow it for two reasons. First, because at previously said, the operative public values of a society are not static, nor extent from change or criticism, so they should not be considered as impenetrable dogmas but, on the contrary, something constantly reassessed. Second, because society needs to allow its minorities to explore until which point their practice is essential in their way of life, what its value is and whether they can adapt it to the culture of the majority by themselves in case they deem it necessary. It is at this point that the author suggests that "rather than use the operative public values as a crude and non-negotiable standard for evaluating minority practices, society should engage in a dialogue with the minority"[43]. This response as a dialogue, needs to give reasons involving the explanation of why these practices are offending the majority, and also needs to hear the argumentation that the minority gives to defend and justify them. This feature is what characterizes this dialogue as intercultural. Due to its focus on both sides-the society's operative public values and the minority practice- it takes into account the minority's culture and in the wider society's lifestyle.

In this sense, ICD has the transformative power to affect all involved in it. It opens the debate within the minority community, but also inside the wider society and between both of them. This transformative power resides in the fact that none of them can be confined inside their own community, but, on the contrary, they will need to re-examine their own values, also forcing each party "to become conscious of its values

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[42] Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* , 2000, P.270

[43] Ibídem

and reasons for holding them, and contributes to their critical self-knowledge"[44]. In the practice of intercultural dialogue there is no way to escape from the other part's judgment or scrutiny, and both cultural context and the appealing to universal values from the two groups will be always playing a major role in the debate. Due to all these factors involved, intercultural dialogue is not an easy task. It will contain arguments of many different levels of generality and the parts will naturally try to expose the arguments that would lead to their desired outcome -many times in a messy and unorganized way. Therefore, a high level of sympathy and patience will be needed to make it happen with a positive result.

Beyond the theoretical base proposed by Parekh, the Discussion Paper based on the Forum of ICD of 2006 also provides some guidelines to take into account when practicing it. Among them, we can highlight the following: a) ICD needs to have a purpose. It is not an end in itself, but a mean towards a "living model of intercultural co-operation and co-production rather than multicultural co-existence"[45]; b) Intercultural dialogue needs clear limits. When practicing it we have to bear always in mind that the respect of human rights, diversity and participation are nonnegotiable values; c) ICD is a flexible learning process that will not work on a rush or following a concrete scheme. It will, as a consequence, have an "open-end", impossible to be planned; d) ICD is not an exclusive responsibility of a single actor: state, civil society and individuals shall make their contribution and cooperate to make it happen; e) People engaging in ICD must be aware of their own assumptions so that they can, as much as possible, suspend their judgments[46] ;f) ICD requires the questioning of power relations, which means that "for at least the purpose and duration of the dialogue, a balance needs to be negotiated between those with more power and those with less"[47] ;g) ICD is not a "straight" way, and it shall not try to impose a concrete answer, but to explore the main points of disagreement and try to find a consensus on how to solve them ;h) The practice of ICD needs to be connected with concrete spaces that mean something to the people living in them and engaging in the dialogue: the places where they work, live and socialize ;i) Finally, as it is evident, ICD must turn its words into action, and this action should be reflected on and followed up.

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[44] Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism,* 2000, P. 272
[45] CoE, *Forum on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2006, P. 9
[46] Ibídem P. 10,
[47] Ibídem

In conclusion, there is not a standardized way to practice ICD. It will depend on the context, the participants involved, their level of awareness of their own assumptions, or the place where it happens. The practice will also vary depending on whether it is something already organized-like a forum of discussion or a community workshop- or an everyday interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds.

III.   International promotion of intercultural dialogue

3.1   From the Vienna Declaration to the latest developments within the UN, the EU and the CoE

3.1.1   Intercultural dialogue within the UN

ICD has been especially present in the international debate since the celebration of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on June 1993, which ended up with the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. This Conference was held on the context of the end of the Cold War, a key moment when the whole world system of power was being restructured. At that time, the reconsideration of the cultural dimension of Human Rights was a strong demand from many nations that, liberated from the hegemony of the two blocks, claimed their right to participate in the advance of the standard setting in Human Rights. This demand is reflected in the part I paragraph 5 of the Declaration, which proclaims that "All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner (…) While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms."[48] At the same time, the Declaration also encourages "the examination of optional protocols to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[49]" in order to give them an equal treatment to the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights.

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[48] UN *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action*, 1993
[49] UN *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action* , 1993

The importance of the Declaration of Vienna has been remarked by the UN being that it provided the international community with a new "framework of planning, dialogue and cooperation" that will enable a holistic approach to promoting human rights and involve actors at all levels - international, national and local".[50] This new framework proclaimed that the universal nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms was beyond question and also the undeniable interdependency of all human rights. However, this apparently victory of universalists didn't mean that the different cultural traditions of the world should not be taken into account when it comes to implementing human rights. On the contrary, it states the importance "to respect the value and diversity of their cultures and identities."[51]

After this Declaration, we can find the biggest effort to promote intercultural dialogue with the establishment of the United Nations Alliance Of Civilizations (UNAOC), a political initiative of the former Secretary General, Kofi Annan, launched in 2005. The UNAOC consists of a global network of international organizations, states, civil society foundations, and the private sector with the aim of improving cross-cultural relations between regions, nations and communities. It has as a vision the work "towards a more peaceful, more socially inclusive world, by building mutual respect among peoples of different cultural and religious identities, and highlighting the will of the world's majority to reject extremism and embrace diversity (…) seeking to operate in situations where is can contribute to broader efforts to ameliorate identity based crises and promote culturally sensitive development policies."[52]

As for the documents elaborated on this issue by the UN, probably the most important instrument is the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), whose content was fully developed in its World Report "Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue", published on 2008. In this Report we can find the promotion of ICD when it explores the concept of divergent memories[53] and when it talks about the importance of ensuring the views and voices of minority groups. In terms of the concrete practice of intercultural dialogue, it stands for the interaction as the best way of overcoming prejudices and avoiding conflicts, stating that "what is needed, then, is to define policies that give a positive slant to these 'cultural differences'

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[50] UN, *Human Rights Day* ,2013
[51] UN *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action,* 1993
[52] UNAOC, *Who we are,* 2017
[53] For more details of this concept, see UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity,* 2008. P. 20

so that groups and individuals that come into contact, rather than with-drawing into closed identities, discover in this 'difference' an incentive for continuing to evolve and change.[54]"

Finally, we can find the most recent project carried out by the UNESCO in the "International Decade for the Rapprochment of Cultures" (2013-2022) following the path traced by the previously mentioned initiatives. During this decade, it aims through an Action Plan adopted by the UNESCO in 2014 to elaborate a response to the current conflicts, violence and intolerance under the premise that "international security and social inclusion cannot be attained sustainably without a commitment to such principles as human dignity, conviviality and solidarity which are the corner stones of human coexistence, in all faiths and secular ideologies.[55]"

3.1.2 Intercultural Dialogue at the European Level: main documents and initiatives developed

The promotion of intercultural dialogue has been also present at the European Level, especially through the auspices of the CoE. The first effort to promote this practice can be found in the Opatija Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention, adopted in 2004.This Declaration aims to create a European cooperation framework "which creates conditions enabling the promotion and construction of a society based on ICD and respect for cultural diversity and fostering the prevention of violent conflicts, conflict management and control and post-conflict reconciliation[56]". The Declaration also highlights the main problems faced by European Societies derivative of a bad management of cultural diversity, saying that on the one hand "new forms of conflict, increasing the difficulties of dialogue between cultures, may be used by certain groups with the avowed or unstated aim of fuelling hatred, xenophobia and confrontation between different communities;[57]" and on the other hand that "cultural "impoverishment" and marginalisation, on the one hand, and prejudice and ignorance, on the other, are among the prime causes of the increase in violence and of the stereotyping of others, thus altering the nature of the peaceful and constructive relations

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[54] Ibídem

[55] UNESCO, *What is the "rapprochement of cultures" all about? ,* 2017

[56] CoE, *Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention,* 2003

[57] CoE, *Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention,* 2003

between different cultural communities[58]", stating that intercultural dialogue and the rapprochement between cultures shall become instruments for conflict prevention in all context and at every level.

One year later, we find the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue. This Declaration strengthens the commitment to assert the political vision of the CoE for "developing intercultural dialogue both inside European societies and between Europe and the rest of the world[59]" and suggests as action plans the engagement into a dialogue with the neighbouring regions of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia as well as promoting, among others, intercultural exchanges in schools, human rights and intercultural education and promoting cultural diversity through arts.

The Conference in Faro proposed the preparation of a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue aiming to promote this practice both within Europe and between Europe and its neighbour countries, and also to provide a guidance on methodological tools and standards, being probably the most ambitious document on Intercultural Dialogue developed in Europe. Within these standards we can find on the one hand the conclusion that "intercultural dialogue is not a new tablet of stone, amenable to a simple definition which can be applied without mediation in all concrete situations"[60], and on the other hand some non-negotiable premises such as the inherent equality of all human beings, paying special attention to gender equality. The White paper also remarks that "no sphere should be exempt from engaging in ICD – be it the neighbourhood, the workplace, the education system and associated institutions, civil society and particularly the youth sector, the media, the arts world or the political arena"[61]. As for the conditions of ICD, it highlights the respect of Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law, the principles of equal dignity, mutual respect, gender equality, and the importance to combat the barriers preventing ICD. This fourth condition is crucial as it points out the structural barriers to dialogue- such as poverty, marginalization or exploitation- derived from power inequalities, as well as very important threats such as extremist groups portraying racism and xenophobia, refusing the idea of dialogue.

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[58] Ibídem
[59] CoE, *Faro Declaration,* 2005
[60] CoE *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008
[61]Ibídem, P. 10

At the same time, it distinguishes five interrelated dimensions to the promotion of intercultural dialogue that should be developed through policy approaches. These dimensions include a) democratic governance of cultural diversity, b) democratic citizenship and participation, c) learning and teaching intercultural competencies, d) the promotion of spaces of intercultural dialogue, and e) the intercultural dialogue in international relations.

Finally, the publication of the White Paper in 2008 coincided with the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue fostered by the European Union. This year, the Platform for Intercultural Europe was also launched; it was presented through the Rainbow Paper as a civil society initiative that linked organisations and people promoting ICD at the grassroots with those working on policy on the higher levels. The Rainbow Paper presents itself as a call for social action and change from the civil society towards the public authorities, and focuses on local diversities, such as migration issues and ethnic minorities. It also considers that human encounters must be at the heart of ICD, but remarking that "people need to be equipped with skills for such a coming together. Capacity and skills must be created"[62]. Besides, it argues that "rather than focusing on any specific type of cultural diversity, we are interested in drawing out generally applicable civil society contributions to local ICD (…) these contributions include education, civic participation, social responsibility and dynamism, good communication, and creativity."[63]

3.1.3   Current initiatives of Intercultural Dialogue at the European Level

After the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008, some of the initiatives −such as the Platform for Intercultural Europe- are not active any more, and we could critically observe this as a weakness of this "Year-based" initiatives: they risk to foster some initiatives just for a short period of time, undermining their potential because of a lack of attention/economic resources in the following years.

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[62] Platform for Intercultural Europe, *The rainbow Paper,* 2008*,* P. 4
[63] Ibídem, P.6

However, at the European level, some projects on the promotion of intercultural dialogue are still being carried out. One example is the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, better known as the North-South Centre, established in Lisbon in 1990. It was founded to promote dialogue between North and South "fostering solidarity and raising awareness of global interdependence", and to ensure that "civil society, in particular youth and women, is empowered through intercultural dialogue and global education to play an active role in member States and neighbouring regions"[64].Another successful initiative is the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC), started on 2008 by the CoE with the objective of supporting cities in its intercultural strategies to manage diversity positively and to raise awareness on the diversity advantage. For the ICC, an Intercultural City has "a diverse population including people of different nationalities and origins, and with different languages or religions/beliefs.[65]" Among its characteristics described we find citizens regarding diversity as a resource, accepting the natural change of cultures when they encounter each other in the public arena, but, most importantly, the description of an Intercultural City as the one that "actively combats prejudice and discrimination and ensures equal opportunities for all by adapting its governance structures, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population, without compromising the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.[66]"

Finally, the efforts at both global and European level to encourage ICD have one of its best expressions in the celebration of the World Forums of Intercultural dialogue, supported by the UNESCO the CoE, and the Islamic, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization among others[67], which takes place every two years since 2011 in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan[68]. These Forums have evolved towards a more inclusive participation since its first celebration, including an increasing number of representatives of NGOs and Civil Society movements. Also their main topic has changed every year, being the most recent motto "Advancing Intercultural Dialogue – New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development". This last World Forum proclaimed itself as "an international platform to enable and encourage people,

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[64] European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, *Our Mission, 2017*

[65] ICC, *What is an intercultural city?*, 2017

[66] Ibídem

[67]World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, *Dialogue Baku Hosts First World Intercultural Dialogue Forum,* 2011

[68] UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity*, 2008, P. 10

countries and organizations around the globe to take concrete actions to support diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding among nations by raising awareness on the importance of intercultural dialogue worldwide."[69]

3.2   Some conclusions about the promotion of ICD at European level.

As we have observed, there is a wide range of Declarations, organizations and initiatives that are or have been settled at the European Level, being evident that the importance of ICD is highlighted within the European Institutions. However, it is also obvious that all these initiatives have not resolved the problem, and that, moreover, European societies are facing growing challenges that during the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" in 2008 were not foreseen. Despite the efforts at the European level, especially on the part of the CoE, the situation does not seem to improve but, on the contrary, the tensions and the conflicts are growing. The economic crisis has reduced the budget destined to social projects dealing with the issues of ICD, the rise of far-right parties fostering hatred towards migrants and refugees does not seem to stop in countries such as France, Austria or Hungary, and the terrorist attacks in different points of Europe show the devastating consequences that the bad integration of minority populations within our societies may have[70].

It is time, thus, to think about what it is that is not working when dealing with diversity in Europe, and particularly how to spread the practice of ICD to make its outcomes something that everyone in the society could benefit from. Following the standards of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, and paying special attention to the recommendation of the Rainbow Paper regarding the focus on local diversities, the proposal of this thesis is that local interactions should be encouraged and supported in order to reach as many citizens as possible, creating a more engaged society where cultural diversity could be seen as a positive asset and not as a threat to the so-called European values.

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[69] World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, *4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue*, 2017
[70] Fischer J "Immigration, integration and Terrorism: is there a clash of cultures?", 2010

IV.   How to practice intercultural dialogue? The need of interaction

The benefits of the practice of ICD seem to be clear. On the one hand, the different approaches to deal with diversity have failed, promoting the emergence of the theories of ICD as the most accurate solution to this failure. On the other hand, this theory has the support of the international community, which is encouraging it as the best mean to avoid conflicts, promote cultural diversity and overcome xenophobic and racist behaviors.

Nevertheless, as it usually happens, the challenge appears when the theory needs to come to practice. Some authors, such as Parekh, speak about intercultural dialogue as a task of the "minority spokesmen" with the wider society[71], whereas at the international level we find initiatives at a bigger scale following this approach, such as the World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue, where Ministers of Culture and Foreign affairs, minority leaders and practitioners from NGOs and activists come together to exchange views about different aspects of ICD.

These ways of practicing ICD hold an immensurable potential in terms of positive outcomes and political and social responses to the arising conflicts in our societies. The importance of these international big-scale events has been highlighted due to the necessity of spreading concepts like interculturality, as well as the role of media in mainstreaming the efforts to promote contact between cultures. We can find in documents like the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue a claim to expand this contact between cultures beyond the local level, being that not every person is in contact with the reality of immigrants- to set an example- but almost everyone does watch TV. However, these international events have at least two important weaknesses that we cannot ignore, due to the fact that these encounters happen in spaces and contexts already prepared for this aim. First, we have to acknowledge that despite the inherent tensions that ICD entails, it will always be easier to practice it when it is under the umbrella of an organized event, where experts in this field -with a background of reflection in the topics that are going to be discussed –come together to engage in a dialogue in order to reach a positive outcome. Second, we cannot disregard either that the people participating in these encounters are usually part of an educated elite that,

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[71] Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism,* 2000, P. 272

despite their honest intention and their deep knowledge of the issue debated, they do not necessarily represent the mainstream opinion of the wider society. Besides what has been mentioned above, we have to add the fact that the people attending these events in the end can only represent their own reflections and thoughts, and as much as they would like to extend these reflections to everyone within their society, in the end the conclusions achieved may not reach a bigger audience.

It is essential to bear in mind that every person needs their own reflection process to interiorize the outcomes of the ICD they are engaging in. This mean, for instance, that it is not because a religious leader comes to a reflection after discussing with other members of the society about adapting some religious practice, that all the people following this religion will arrive to the same conclusion. This fact makes other kinds of spaces, where interactions between minority and majority members happen, very interesting to analyze. Unlike the Conferences and Forums mentioned in Chapter III, spaces such as schools, social centers, or markets where migrant and refugee people interact with locals facilitate interaction between people that otherwise would not share common spaces in everyday life with members of these collectives. Whether through activities previously organized by NGOs and social centers, or through more spontaneous meetings in which members of the majority and minority communities have no choice but to interact, the practice of intercultural dialogue has an enormous potential to change bottom up many xenophobic and racist prejudices that affect our societies as a whole, as well as the capability to avoid intercultural conflicts that often arise from the ignorance of the other part's culture.

In this sense, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue promotes the interaction at the local level as a crucial part of the strategy of mainstreaming ICD, especially highlighting the importance of the spaces where it happens: "It is essential to engender spaces for dialogue that are open to all. Successful intercultural governance, at any level, is largely a matter of cultivating such spaces: physical spaces like streets, markets (…) schools and universities, cultural and social centres, churches, synagogues and mosques (…)urban space can be organised in a "single-minded" fashion or more "open-minded" ways. The former include the conventional suburb, housing estate (…). The latter embrace the busy square, the park, the lively street, the pavement café or the market. If single-minded areas favour an atomised existence, open-minded places can bring diverse sections of society together and breed a sense of tolerance. It is critically

important that migrant populations do not find themselves, as so often, concentrated on soulless and stigmatised housing estates, excluded and alienated from city life. [72]"

At the same time, the Paper puts the responsibility of creating these spaces on everyone in the society, defining it as a collective task with an unlimited number of possibilities for creating them, addressing especially civil society organizations, including religious communities to provide an adequate organizational framework for these kinds of encounters[73].

In the same way, we can find a call for action expressed by the Rainbow Paper. Its message is clear: "Action: Beyond encounter and dialogue, we also value intercultural action: living, working and creating together. Practical engagement is more effective than debates. Most issues, from the resolution of violent conflicts to environmental protection to public health, are more successfully advanced by taking cultural differences into account and by engaging constructively with diversity as a resource"[74].

4.1   Intercultural dialogue through interaction: why and how does it work?

4.1.1   The theory of the Contact Hypothesis

Besides highlighting the importance of interaction and how it is encouraged, it is important to understand why these interactions are useful, and how the processes of reducing prejudices and understanding other identities work.

Much work has been done through social-psychology research to understand what is underlying racism and prejudice and how to combat it. Understanding prejudices is not an easy task, and the review of "modern racism" theories draw the possibility to understand prejudice and racism in more than one way to avoid its simplification. In this manner, empirical findings have shown that there are many explanatory resources to understand how racism is created. Nevertheless, and despite the complexity of the issue, due to its relevance for this research, we will focus on one

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[72] CoE, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.47
[73] Ibídem P. 47
[74] Platform for Intercultural Europe, *The rainbow Paper ,* 2008. P. 4

of the possible explanations to racist behavior: the existence of prejudice as a function of ignorance due to a lack of contact. In order to combat prejudice, therefore, it will be needed to undermine distance between people by putting them in contact with each other's realities. In this sense, the theory of the Contact Hypothesis suggests that this process would have as a result the undermining of differences, making people realize that there are many similarities between them despite their cultural differences.

This theory was developed by Gordon Allport in the 1950s in the United States, and holds that acceptance and tolerance can be achieved by the contact between two groups[75]. Nevertheless, this process it is not that simple: some conditions are required to make it happens in a successful way, bearing always in mind that not every interaction between people is positive. Hence, this contact has to be managed so that it will create an adequate environment where the participants of the interaction can feel comfortable. We shall not forget that, even if any interaction is potentially transformative, we are talking here about contact between people belonging to different ethnic/identity groups, where the inequalities of power-understood in this case as the influence people have in terms of participation, decision making and general integration in the societies they live-outstand in a very pronounced way. This interaction, thus, needs to lead to a transformation in people's behavior in order to eliminate prejudices and stereotyping on both sides.

Reached this point we shall ask which conditions are required to make these interactions have a positive outcome. Regarding the Contact Hypothesis Theory, these conditions are, among others, the equal status between the participants, cooperative interdependence of the participants, egalitarian norms ruling the interactions, opportunity for self-revealing interactions and superordinate goals that all the participants shall be willing to achieve[76]. In this theory, the concurrence of these conditions would create an adequate environment where contact could be transformative and not reaffirming already existing stereotypes.

Allport's theory has been the reference point to many other studies since its publication in the 1950s, and as it is expected, new findings have appeared with them. One of the concepts developed from this theory is the Common Identity Intergroup

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[75]American Psychological Association, *All you need is contact,* 2001
[76] Ibídem

model for reducing intergroup bias. The model proposes that intergroup bias and conflict can be reduced by factors that transform members' cognitive representations of the memberships of two different groups to one more inclusive social entity that would include in it people that otherwise would be seen as holding an out-groups status[77].

We can find a deep study of the Contact Hypothesis Theory in the work of Gartener, Dovidio and Bachman "Revisiting the contact hypothesis", a paper presenting one laboratory experiment, two field studies and one field experiment testing propositions of the common Intergroup Identity model[78]. The ideas of this model would contribute to the theory of the Contact Hypothesis, explaining that the successful reduction of inter-group bias is in part because they transform member's cognitive representations, expanding their own group and making, thus, that the out-group members become part of a unique more inclusive group "transforming member perceptions of the membership from "Us" and "Them" to a more inclusive "We"" [79]. The main goal of the research is to develop interventions to improve intergroup relations while at the same time explore new strategies in order to align the behaviors of aversive racists with their self-perception as non-prejudiced and liberal individuals[80].

The findings observed through this research support the utility of the Contact Hypothesis as a strategic framework for reducing intergroup bias, and came up with interesting conclusions when viewed in the context of the Common Intergroup Identity Model. On the one hand, the research demonstrates how differences in the variations of the nature of intergroup contact might operate to reduce intergroup bias, being some of the conditions already mentioned (equal status, egalitarian norms, etc.) more or less relevant depending on the context of the interaction (in some occasions, for instance, equal status between the participants will be more important than interdependence, etc.).

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[77] Gaertner, Dovidio, Bachman "Revisiting the Contact Hypothesis" , 1996, P. 271

[78] This model suggests that "the racial biases of some people may be driven, at least in part, by an inability to expand their circle of inclusion when considering other people's in-group and out-group status. Therefore, strategies that expand the inclusiveness of one's in-group to include people who would otherwise be regarded as out-group members may have beneficial consequences for promoting more positive inter-group behaviours". Ibídem P. 273

[79] Ibídem P. 271

[80] Aversive racism refers to the theory developed by Gaertner and Dovidio according to which people who consider themselves as non-racist and professing egalitariant beliefs change their behaviour in the context of an interaction with a member of a minority group/ethnicity. This type of racism it is not characterized by hatred and discrimination towards members of minority groups, but by more subtle, rationalizable and unconscious negative feelings that may have, however, consequences as negative as those resulted from traditional racism. ("The Nature of Contemporary Prejudice: Insights from Aversive Racism", 2009)

On the other hand, the research highlights the important role played by affection in intergroup attitudes, and the role of Dual Identities.

The conclusions signal how affective reactions shape and are shaped by group representations, being responsible for reducing intergroup bias. This would be reflected on the difficulty of determining prejudiced attitudes when observing people from different identity groups that are friend of each other, being that this might not be representative of what they actually think about those out-group members in general. However, proving the fact that affection reduces prejudices, the research considers that through the role of these affective reactions the subtle biases of aversive racism might be eliminated. This conclusion was first developed by Thomas Pettigrew, who claimed that the reason why contact helps to eliminate prejudices is emotional rather than cognitive. In his study, he explains how many times stereotypes do not necessarily change, but "*affection* for one or more out-group members might spill over to include the majority of the out-group "[81]

On the other hand, the research suggests that holding a dual identity makes people more tolerant towards out-group members, being that these people are constantly experiencing what it means to be part of more than one identity group, while at the same time belonging to a superordinate identity where both identities were combined. This superordinate identity, while not necessary being a perfect concept suitable for everyone, seems to encourage positive intergroup behaviors.

Based on the research analyzed, therefore, it seems clear that there are good reasons to defend the practice of interpersonal and intergroup interaction to reduce prejudices and racist behaviors. Besides, we find on the one hand that, despite not being the perfect solution for the total elimination of prejudices, the consequential development of affective reactions through contact is a potential way to eliminate discrimination towards members of minority groups. On the other hand, we observe that the development of dual identities within our societies could be a successful way to promote inclusion of minority groups while encouraging interculturality.

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[81] Pettigrew and Tropp "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory", 2000, P. 753

4.1.2 The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

After analyzing the Contact Hypothesis Theory and some of the works reviewing it, it is important to understand through which cognitive process people change their prejudices and racist behaviors. In this research, we are going to take as a reference the famous explanation by Milton J. Bennett and his developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett's model explores intercultural sensitivity through stages of personal growth, moving from ethnocentrism towards what he calls "ethnorelativism", passing by several stages of recognition and acceptance of difference[82].

The main concept underlying the intercultural sensitivity model in Bennett's work is what he calls "differentiation", referring to two phenomena. First is that people can view the same thing in a variety of ways. Second is that "cultures differ from one another in the way that they maintain patterns of differentiation, or worldviews"[83]. This second phenomena is key to the development of intercultural sensitivity. As cultures will provide the framework through which we interpret reality, and as these interpretations and views of the world differ from one culture to another, intercultural sensitivity would be about recognizing and dealing with the different perceptions of the world depending on the culture we are imbibed.

Ethnocentrism, for Bennett, is the situation where an individual is when he or she believes that his or her view of the reality is the only valid one. Within this ethnocentric behavior we find different stages. The most basic of these stages is denial about cultural difference. In this stage, Bennett describes that people are "unable to experience differences in other than extremely simple ways. They may be perplexed when asked about their own culture, because they have not considered how culture impacts their own or others' lives"[84]. For the author, this denial can be expressed in two different ways. Denial can be a result of isolation, like people living without any contact with people from a different cultural background. This situation generates disinterest, being that these people might not have the opportunity or the motivation to approach

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[82] Co", *T-kit 4*,2000,P. 30
[83] Ibídem
[84] Bennett, *A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity* ,2011

cultural differences. But denial can also be a result of avoidance. In this case, people intentionally decide to create the conditions for isolation as a way to protect their worldview from any outside influence. In this situation, thus, recognition of cultural differences and contact with other worldviews has already happened. At this stage, the developmental tasks proposed by Bennett would be the recognition of cultural differences and the beginning of contact with other cultures in order to arouse curiosity[85].

The second stage of the model would be "defense". Cultural difference, here, would be experienced in a polarized way, generally in a dichotomy of "Us" and "Them". In this stage difference is perceived in a more sophisticated way, but it is also fought against: stereotypes are built and the different culture will be viewed as a threat to one's identity. The outcomes of this defence are usually denigration- where the differing worldview is negatively criticized- and superiority- where the positive attributes of one's own culture are emphasized by evaluating the other culture as a lower one[86]. The other strategy to deal with differing worldviews of this stage would be "reversal", where the opposite would happen: the individual would value the other culture as the superior one, denigrating his/her own worldview. To overcome this stage, Bennett suggests working on "mitigating polarization by emphasising common humanity" and at the same time "distributing criticism equally"[87].

Finally, the last stage of ethnocentrism presented is what Bennett calls "minimisation", and it is probably the most complex one of all. Here, we find respect for individuals holding another cultural background through the inclusion of all human beings in the same "big family". This position can be seen as a very positive stage; however, it entails a big risk. As Bennetts explains, "this assumption of similarity is then invoked to avoid recognizing one's own cultural patterns, understanding others, and eventually making necessary adaptations. The assumed commonality with others is typically defined in ethnocentric terms: since everyone is essentially like us, it is sufficient in cross-cultural situations to "just be yourself."[88]This process unconsciously imposes cultural norms, reducing the reference point to one's own worldview by taking for granted that it is common to the reality of everyone, and disregarding other's

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[85] Bennett, *A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity* ,2011
[86] CoE, *T-kit4*,2000,P. 32
[87] Bennett, *A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity* ,2011 P. 4
[88] Ibídem, P. 5

cultural background. This minimization can appeal both to biological and psychological similarities between all human beings, or to universal values. This discourse has as unintentional consequence the trivialization of cultural differences, and it is, according to Bennett, the position of many people that while holding open views toward other cultures, should develop cultural self-awareness and reconcile unity and diversity.

These three stages just mentioned are all part of an ethnocentric perception of the world, and can be expressed through many different kinds of behavours. The characteristics of these stages, however, do not mean that individuals cannot evolve from one to another, neither that they cannot develop a degree of intercultural sensitivity that place them into what Bennett calls the "ethnorelativist" stages. Ethnorelativism, according to the developmental model of cultural sensitivity, assumes that cultures can only be understood within their specific context and always in relation to other cultures[89]. This fact changes the whole perception of differing cultures and worldviews, being that they are not perceived as a threat any more, but rather as a challenge.

The first stage of ethnorelativism would be "acceptance". It implies accepting that all behaviours and values are different depending on the culture and worldviews, and that the perception of them is culturally made. These behaviours and values deserve respect and are understood as tools to organize and understand the world, with a comprehension of their social function, even if this does not imply to agree with them. Bennett would say that people in the acceptance stage "see cultures as offering alternative viable solutions to the organization of human existence, and they are curious about what the alternatives to their own culture are. Acceptance does not mean agreement or preference for alternative values, but rather acceptance of the distinctive reality of each culture's worldview"[90].

The next stage of the model would be "adaptation", and it is based on the actual application of acceptance when interacting with people from another culture. In this stage, new cultural codes and behaviours are appropriated and can be even substituted for one's own codes in a given cultural context (a common example of that could be the use of another language to adapt to a new country). People in this stage conceive culture as a process that flows and changes, and have a wide understanding of the other's

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[89] CoE, *Intercultural Learning T-kit4*,2000,P. 32
[90] Ibídem, P. 7

cultural background. This ability is what Bennett calls "intercultural empathy", where the individual can successfully rely on diverse cultural reference points. In this stage difference is internalised, and becomes part of one's normal self. However, to develop these frames the individual usually necessitates living in a different cultural context for a more or less long period of time[91].

Finally, the last stage of ethnorelativism would be "integration", and it is described as a kind of "final stage" that only certain people could fully reach due to its particularities. The integration stage is characterized by a deep on going's definition of the own identity[92], an experience of being a person bicultural or multicultural, in the sense of not being defined in terms of a single culture. For Bennett, "the experience of integration may occur when individuals intentionally make a significant, sustained effort to become fully competent in new cultures. It may become the predominant experience for non-dominant group members who have adapted (not assimilated) to a dominant or colonial culture, or it may characterize people who grew up or lived for extended periods of time in other cultures."[93] People in the integration stage, however, may feel that they do not belong to any culture and that "anywhere is home". On the other hand, they can lively participate in different cultures and have a wide repertoire of intercultural tools that allow them to construct a positive contact and flow between cultures. In this stage we find contextual evaluation, which would allow evaluating different worldviews from more than one cultural background, depending on the circumstances.

In Bennett's theory, we need to bear always in mind that the development of intercultural sensitivity is always a process that, on the one hand does not necessary goes towards the next stage, and that on the other hand can move back and forth. In conclusion, even if Bennett's model is not perfect-considering the difficulties of elaborating a theory on how much intercultural sensitivity an individual has developed-it points out in a very accurate way at least two things. First, the different strategies to deal with cultural differences that apply depending on the context and on the abilities that a person has developed through the process of intercultural learning; second, the most essential obstacles that are faced when trying to develop intercultural sensitivity,

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[91] CoE,*T-kit4*,2000,P. 32
[92] Ibídem P. 33
[93] Ibídem. 11

together with an explanation on how different life experiences shape our vision of our own culture and identity and the one of the others.

V.   How to achieve a successful practice of ICD at the local level: objectives, conditions required, acknowledges through the experience

As we have mentioned, recognizing diversity is not enough to ensure social cohesion in our societies. We have analyzed how contact can be a useful tool to undermine prejudices; however this task requires some conditions to be successful in practice.

First of all, as it was examined, the mere interaction it is not enough to provoke a change on people's attitudes towards others. In order to be effective, interactions must be positive. If we consider as interactions the moments where migrants share their time with the local people of their receiving communities as well as with each other, we can picture many different scenarios where good or bad impressions from the other can be found, depending on the context. An interaction can be someone giving back to another person the wallet that just fell from his/her pocket, but also someone stealing the same wallet from his/her bag. An interaction can be the welcoming words of a local person to a migrant, but also a racist insult towards the same person. As it is evident, the consequences of these interactions, based on the perception of the other that is created, can be radically opposed. Nevertheless, not every interaction between people creates or eliminates prejudices: this only happens when "the other" belongs to a group different to ours. Thus, if the person who stole our wallet is a local from our same social class, the person robbed will not be keen to associate this action to a negative prejudice. At the same time, if the person addressing welcoming words to a migrant is another migrant, this person might not have a reason to change their views towards his/her receiving society, as this person is part of the same group. Through these examples, we can understand what makes these positive interactions between migrants and locals so

important: by limiting relationships with each other, people living in the wider society will live a sort of parallel lives where prejudice and stereotypes are more likely to rise[94].

The fact of not knowing the other and not to engage with them promotes simplistic views of the other's culture and way of living. But the consequences of this isolation go beyond the obstacles to social cohesion and the rise of conflicts: they also affect deeply the effective realization of rights of migrant people, as well as the development of the intercultural potential that diverse societies offer. Therefore, due to the interrelation of equality and the fulfillment of fundamental rights, discrimination towards migrants can lead to big difficulties to get a job, to have access to a proper health care and to develop social relationships that otherwise could help them to reach a deserving standard of living, as well as affecting their empowerment and potential integration[95]. On the other hand, by this lack of interaction societies condemn themselves to the loss of a huge potential in terms of intercultural values, skills and knowledge.

Reached this point, we should ask ourselves, which are the characteristics that an interaction must have to be considered positive and how to make them happen. In his work, Orton defines positive interactions as "those processes which help these (migrant and local) people to effectively build networks of mutually supportive relationships with each other in ways that contribute to a more cohesive society. This type of interaction provides a foundation for improved relationships involving more than just tolerance of each other's existence. Instead, deeper relationships can emerge from an interactive process of relationship-building that incorporates a developing empathy, mutual respect and dialogue between diverse individuals and groups[96] ". In his work, the author develops the view of the "Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers (2011) on interaction between migrants and receiving societies", that states that "with a view to going beyond the simple tolerance of difference, achieving full recognition of migrants' human dignity and building a sense of their belonging to receiving societies, member states should take all necessary actions to facilitate diverse and positive interactions between migrants and receiving societies[97]". Thus, the empowerment of migrants by giving them a voice while at the same time making them

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[94] Orton, *Building migrant's belonging through positive interactions,* 2012, P. 15

[95] FRA, *Inequalities and multiple discrimination in the access to and quality of health care*, 2013 P. 31

[96] Orton, *Building migrant's belonging through positive interactions,* 2012 P. 9

[97] CoE, RCM/Rec(2011)1, 2011

feel a sense of belonging to the place they are currently living is considered a crucial basis for the achievement of integration.

These positive interactions, nonetheless, may involve disagreement and conflict. As it was previously explored in Chapter II, intercultural dialogue is characterized by these traits too, and they must not be seen as a negative aspect but as a way of working towards the resolution of sensitive issues involving values, worldviews and customs. Through positive interactions, thus, conflicts will be managed in a respectful manner, by also providing the basis to further relationships between people living in the same society.

In order to achieve these aims, Orton considers that a positive interaction must have the following characteristics: a) It must empower migrants, b) It must enable the wider community to recognize the contributions migrants can bring, c) It must provide the relational basis to solve the conflicts arising during the process of integration d) It must help to build a cohesive society that benefits everybody[98]. Therefore, the question that arises now is the following: what is needed to achieve these positive interactions? The literature about this issue identifies mainly five components.

The first one is the <u>context</u> where the interaction takes place, which also includes the policy environment and its influence in the several dimensions of integration (job opportunities, participation in the public life, etc.). Due to the complexity of the European context in terms of migration-especially accentuated nowadays with the flow of asylum seekers willing to arrive to North European countries-it is difficult to design a perfect "welcoming pack" of policies and practices. However, there are some factors that highly influence the welcoming of migrant and refugee people that must be taken into account in any integration process. Among others we can highlight acquisition of citizen's rights, the availability of services teaching the local language, or the access to introductory information and orientation[99]. Another essential factor within the context of interaction is the role of the media and the image they portray about migration. As the UN University reflects, "clearly, public attitudes are not wholly shaped by media. However, in the age of globalization, media become very powerful tools and some of

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[98] Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration,* 2011, P. 14
[99] Ibídem

the main determinants of public opinion. Depending on the type of media and the aims behind them, they can either reinforce the criminalized image of a newcomer and underline anti-immigrant rhetoric or, on the contrary, help to better integrate migrants and serve as a genuine transmitter of their stories, thus counteracting misunderstanding and fear. To ensure that the human rights of migrants are protected and that intercultural understanding is built, the international community needs to address the power of media and the effects they produce in the public conversation on migration"[100]. Without an appropriated environment, the efforts towards ICD would be much bigger and many times not effective enough. Besides, the importance of context resides in the fact that it also conditions the other following components, influencing their successful practice and development.

The second one would be the spaces and times, the "where" and "when" interactions take place. These spaces and times can be casual or previously organised, they can be in the neighbourhood, the school, at work or in the market, and they can also be recreational, religious etc. These spaces and times will directly affect the process of integration of migrant people, and also the perception that the wider society has towards them and vice versa. As the White Paper on ICD states "Without appropriate, accessible and attractive spaces, ICD will just not happen, let alone prosper, (and there are) an unlimited number of possibilities for creating such spaces.[101]" These spaces and times can promote the reflection about different worldviews through the experience of different forms of living while people interact with each other. For this reason, they must be as much open to diversity as possible, and with a peaceful and tolerant atmosphere. In the case if interactions previously organized, reflections about different worldviews and ICD shall be encouraged and designed to take advantage of the potential of the people willing to participate in them.

A third component would be the skills that people develop in order to be able to interact with each other. The most important of them would be the language spoken in the receiving society, but other skills also have a crucial role, such as knowing the operative public values in Parekh's sense[102], or learning from the history and culture of the new place. As these encounters will involve intercultural interaction even if both

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[100]UN University, *Media and their role on shaping public attitudes toward migrants,* 2014
[101] CoE *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,* 2008, P.47
[102] View Chapter II

people manage to understand each other in the same language, the cross-cultural nature of these interactions also requires the development of intercultural skills. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity previously examined in Chapter IV is a good example of the important role of developing certain skills in order to overcome ethnocentrism.

The fourth component identified would be the <u>processes to support the interactions</u> in the places where they happen, in order words, what is done to encourage interaction within those spaces, and how to give them continuity. The engagement with the dynamics of interaction, especially if people participate in them voluntarily, is essential to achieve a successful practice of interaction. As Orton suggests, "the recognition that many of these opportunities occur in everyday contexts where people have a choice whether or not to interact, with whom, and how, means that a primary concern for promoting interaction must be establishing conditions where people want to interact, or at least recognise that they need to interact or that it would be in their interests to do so in a particular situation."[103] . As already discussed, interactions must be developed in a way that reduces prejudices and also motivate their participants to engage in them.

Finally, the fifth component identified refers to the <u>people and organisations</u> involved in the process of integration, referring both to migrants and the local community and how they promote these interactions and solve the problems that may arise. Special attention should be paid to the participation of migrant people in their own process of integration and in their views about how interaction processes can be improved. In their analysis of the perspectives of practitioners, Orton exposes how prejudicial can be the "one size fits all" approach: "Participants critiqued those projects which were based on an approach that assumed "one size fits all", especially when combined with a "lack of flexibility" (…) there is a need for a more tailored/individual approach to ensure participation. It is easy for projects to fail as a result of not being accessible, flexible and responsive enough to meet the needs of those involved.[104]"

Among these responses to specific needs, <u>gender perspective</u> must be always considered when dealing with intercultural practice; the specific inequalities in power

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[103] Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration,* 2011, P. 29
[104] Ibídem P. 39

relations between genders must be addressed in order to reverse the situation and empower women participating in it. Gender inequality is a very sensitive issue when dealing with intercultural dialogue due to the different role of women within cultures, but intercultural dialogue must make sure that all voices are heard and that the equality of all human beings will always be something to promote. For these reason, both men and women should be considered as a target audience when promoting women's empowerment[105].

5.1 How to make positive interactions happen: some key recommendations

In order to achieve positive interactions, the appropriate development of these five components needs to be promoted also by understanding the interdependence of all of them. Thus, here we will consider some key recommendations from the CM/Rec(2011) on interaction between migrants and receiving societies, that are further explained by Orton in two of his publications.

a)The author highlights the importance of creating "diverse, improved opportunities for public interaction"[106], referring to the everyday encounters, special events or long-term projects that can lead to the building of lasting relationships between the different communities of the society. However, these opportunities can be affected by the way the spaces are designed or by the moments they happen. If, as it often happens, migrants live in isolated places far from the local people, the common spaces such as markets, schools, squares or public events will not be the same. On the other hand, if locals and migrants live in the same neighbourhoods, another barrier can be the lack of motivation to interact, which could be due to the perceived absence of benefits of these interactions. In those cases, "particular attention may need to be paid to how to promote the personal benefits of interaction as well as helping people to recognize common objectives which are also beneficial to the wider community.[107]" The importance of these spaces and moments for interactions is huge, being that otherwise the relationships built between migrants and locals would only rely on the

[105] CEPAIM, *Catálogo de Buenas Prácticas en acción comunitaria intercultural,* 2013 P. 24
[106] Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration,* 2011, P. 16
[107] Ibídem P. 18

ones created in their workplace- where on the other hand many times migrants do not work with locals-, excluding, for example those who are unemployed.

b) Another key issue is the <u>development of skills for interactions between both groups.</u> The interaction with people sharing a different culture, values and worldviews can be very challenging, and can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. In order to avoid these negative outcomes, it is necessary to develop intercultural skills that enable the participants to overcome the cultural barriers. These skills can be developed through the study of the history and customs of the receiving society/the countries of origin of the migrants, but also through less formal means like the participation of intercultural events. However, among all these strategies, undoubtedly the most essential one is related to languages.

Learning the language of the receiving society must be a priority for any person who wants to integrate in a new place due to its importance as a communication tool, as it is evident that interaction will be much more limited when people cannot speak fluently to each other. But this learning of a new language shouldn't be a task restricted only to migrant people, and it is important to consider the role of locals in this process. As Beacco states, "the acquisition by adult migrants of the/a language of the host society is deemed to be offset by some form of acceptance of the new residents' languages. This "adaptation" mainly concerns the development or encouragement of attitudes of curiosity about and "benevolence" towards these "new" languages, so as to prevent the linguistic intolerance that stems from systematic disparagement of migrant languages[108]". This is also the view of the CM/Rec(2011)1, which remarks several times that "integration is an interactive process based upon mutual willingness to adapt by both migrants and the receiving society.[109]" The diversity of languages that migrants bring with them is nowadays a characteristic of European societies: migrants live using different languages every day depending on who they are with (their families, friends, or other members of the society). These languages are part of their cultural capital, and the transmission and teaching of them to their children shall be encouraged. In this aspect the role of schools can be crucial, due to their potential to promote migrants' languages by introducing them into their curricula. This could work as an "official"

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[108] CoE, *Adult migrant Integration policies,* 2010, P. 9
[109] CoE, RCM/Rec(2011)1, 2011

recognition of the importance of these languages as a tool for communication and for promoting cross cultural understanding. Also, this cultural capital must be considered an asset for everyone in the society, which could also expand their language repertoire and help them become more open towards otherness as well as more prepared for the globalized and interdependent world in which we live[110].

In which concerns the development of cross-cultural skills, we need to bear in mind that they do not come naturally, especially for those who are not used to interacting with people from a different background: they need to be learnt by formal or non-formal education practices, in a context favorable to dialogue and open to questioning the other culture as well as their own. Both skills (language and cross-cultural skills) are the main tool of intercultural strategies, and without a good command of them, misunderstandings and conflicts will be much more likely to occur[111].

c) Another step to enable positive interactions would focus on <u>the processes to support and develop them; generating a wider involvement in these interactions and an appropriate training for those promoting them</u>. One of the main problems of intercultural interactions is that often people can choose whether they interact or not with out-group members. As a consequence, as Orton suggests, "new opportunities created to promote greater positive interaction between migrants and receiving communities may only be taken up by those who are already open to building positive relationships, and fail to reach those with the most to learn." For this reason, these processes need to meet some characteristics. On the one hand, they need to involve people from different identities and backgrounds and place them in a shared space where they can have-as far as possible-equal status[112]. These processes also need to make people find similarities and common goals among them while challenging prejudices and false stereotypes of the other group. At the same time, the ideal thing would be that these processes develop gradually and in a more or less spontaneous way. Nonetheless they can be promoted by the participants, civil society organizations, etc. Moreover, it is important that they are sustainable over time in order to create a relational structure in which people can rely. As for the training, due to the complicated task of building bridges of interaction between individuals and

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[110]Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration,* 2011 P. 8

[111] Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans and Chasiotis , *Cross-Cultural Psychology,* 2011, P. 337

[112] Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration,* 2011 P.20

communities that have not been in contact before, we must acknowledge that "quality training and support for those creating these opportunities is imperative if they are to be successful and sustainable."[113]

d) Particularly emphasized is the <u>promotion of migrant's positive contributions.</u> In order to build positive interactions, the societies need to value, recognize and respect what migrant people are bringing with them. This recognition is essential to send the message that migrant presence is welcomed, counteracting the negative image often portrayed by the media. This recognition would encourage migrants to interact more "due to a perceived greater likelihood of receiving a positive reaction when they try to do this"[114]. The means of achieving it could be, for example the organization of receptions for migrants at their arrival, the mainstreaming of positive images of migrants (volunteering activities where they take part, etc.), or the promotion of migrants/refugees culture (their languages, gastronomy, music, etc.).

e) Another recommendation is related to the <u>empowerment of migrants by creating opportunities of participation.</u> This view defends the active role of migrants in their own process of integration, becoming agents of the development and cohesion of the receiving society. These opportunities can be oriented to promote participation in different fields such as the labor market, the political processes or the civic and associative sphere. In order to enable this, it is important to facilitate migrant's citizenship, as well as helping them to develop communication skills and to recognize the qualifications from their countries of origin.

f) Finally, in order to improve the context where positive interactions can happen, the key recommendation given is to <u>consider how existing policies can promote or inhibit interaction.</u> This recommendation has to do with the possibility of some policies to inhibit positive interactions, many times with an unintentional purpose. These policies can promote segregation in the delivery of some services (health care, social aids, schooling) which can lead to the segregation of migrants and reduce the opportunities of interaction.

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[113] Orton, *Exploring Interactions in Migrant Integration* , 2011, P. 21
[114] Ibídem P.24

The last set of key Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers are focused on the promotion of the recognition and respect of diversity, building at the same time a sense of belonging through the development of a web of interactions[115]. The feeling of belonging to the receiving society is crucial to the integration of migrant people, due to its psychological transcendence in the well-being of the person. If a migrant feels part of the community he/she is living in, he/she will be willing to interact with locals, as well as work on improving the receiving society. This feeling of belonging, however, is very subjective and difficult to measure, varying a lot depending on the person involved. Nevertheless, the view of Orton's work is that this sense of belonging can be promoted by different means, and that it can be developed if the person is exposed to continuing interactions to out-group members, and with their social and cultural context.

For the author, self-identity, interpersonal interactions and wider context are inter-connected. As a result, "positive interactions with a wider range of people within supportive contexts can play an important role in developing the extent to which individuals feel that they belong to particular communities, places and countries.[116]" But besides that, these interactions do not only affect the migrant person, but also set the basis to make ICD possible. As the author reflects, "each positive interaction across diversity is a two way process that can lead every participant to learn and change by understanding others better, whilst also becoming more grounded in an increasingly better understanding of oneself and one's own culture. [117]". The nature of these interactions, thus, needs to be designed thinking both in the migrant and the local community, making the feeling of belonging as part of a broader sense of being together sharing a common future.

g) The first recommendation to achieve this would be the <u>recognition and respect of the complexity of diversity when seeking to enable migrants to be involved in the wider society,</u> especially when involving them in developing policies, services and interventions. When promoting positive interactions, it is necessary to take into account the different needs of the participants involved. It is essential to realize that

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[115] Orton, *Building migrant's belonging through positive interactions,* 2012 P. 29
[116] Ibídem
[117] Ibídem

there are not only differences between migrant and local people, but also within the migrant communities. The role of the women, the importance they give to religion or the languages they speak are not homogenous nor common to all of them, and this complexity needs to be addressed. In order to be effective for this purpose, Orton highlights the importance of consultations and dialogue that ensure the active listening to the migrants and the consideration of the voices of those with less power within their communities, such as women and youngsters. The openness of channels of consultation and communication is essential to hear all the voices of the different communities composing our societies in order to balance the power relations within the different groups whilst favoring interaction.

h) Another practice encouraged by the Recommendation CM 2011 is the development of policies which make the most of the potential arising from the multiple aspects/dimensions of everyone's identity. The citizens need to understand that all societies are a product of interactions and exchanges between different cultures and identities. Thus, what nowadays is seen as "pure" and "traditional" in the cultural repertoire of a society, once was an innovation, something that someone-or a group of people- created. This person or group, at the same time, held a particular identity that was not built in isolation but through a collective process of interaction and transmission of cultural values, that at the same time, were influenced by other cultures from the past. It is necessary, therefore, to encourage the new cultural expressions that may rise in our societies due to the different identities composing them, in order to respect everyone's identities and allowing the whole society to benefit from them.

i) Finally, the last recommendation has to do with building stronger networks across diverse groups based on multiple connections and affiliations. As has been explained, identities and cultures are in a social process of constant evolution. Thus, the experience of engaging with people who are similar to us in some aspects but different in others is something common to everyone's life experience, and the fact that migrant people are exposed to this process in a more challenging way does not mean that it is exclusive of them. Therefore, a key challenge is to build stronger networks between the diverse groups of the society, and this is suggested to be done through common connections and affiliations. As identities are composed by many different traits, two

people belonging to different groups may have shared interests or affiliations such as the music they like, the football team they support, or the school where their children go. However, a key point in this discussion is that this sense of belonging is not only determined on an individual level.

As Orton explains, "other people (and their groups, organisations and authorities) may also decide whether they consider a particular person (to be part of the same group) as they are. Profound difficulties often arise for those who experienced these different identity claims as competing with each other, especially where they feel forced to choose between important aspects of themselves.[118]" For this reason, it is crucial to spread the value that holding more than one identity it is not incompatible and that all the identities a person has do not have to collide with each other. The recognition of this fact can play a major role in the facilitation of interactions between people from different groups, blurring the separations between them while accepting the possibility of individuals to belong to overlapping groups. As was previously examined in Chapter IV, the belonging to a superordinate category where different identities can fit inside was proven a very effective strategy to bridge the distance between "the other" and the broader "us". Thus, the more inclusive this superordinate category is, the easier it will be to be part of it. For this reason, enabling locals and migrants to find a shared basis for identity is very important. In the same line, Bosswick and Heckmann talk about the importance of "interactive interaction" which would refer to the inclusion of migrants by including them in primary relationships, such as the creation of friendships, marriages, or social networks among others[119]. However, as Orton reflects, "for them to work in building a wider sense of belonging, it is crucial that those engaging in the interaction see their positive experience as being able to be generalized beyond the particular individuals involved[120]". Otherwise, there would be a risk of excluding those who do not share these affiliations, being that some people might not share many traits of their identity with the other group and, as a result, can be even more excluded creating scales of "more or less otherness" inside the different communities.

It is important, therefore, that at the same time that people engage in closer relationships with each other through shared affiliations, they also respect the diversity

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[118] Orton, *Building migrant's belonging through positive interactions,* 2012 P. 33

[119] EFILWC, *Integration of Migrants, contribution of local and regional authorities*, 2006, P. 10

[120] Orton, *Building migrant's belonging through positive interactions,* 2012 P.32

present in their societies-even if they do not share many things with some of the people living in it. It is important, thus, to encourage the building of a range of connections between people as diverse as possible, finding a balance between facilitating new links and connections based on shared identities and, at the same time, avoiding that they will be formed around exclusive affiliations or shared interests that could lead to the exclusion of some people. In order to achieve that, it is essential to promote associations, initiatives and activities promoting the diversity of connections between migrants and local people, helping to expand the links between the different communities living in the society.

VI. Experiences of intercultural dialogue in the city of Thessaloniki: a case study of projects and spaces of interaction between locals and migrant/refugee people

6.1 Context of the city: the roots of the creation of a multicultural society and its migration processes

In order to understand the dynamics in the welcoming and interaction practices of refugee and migrant people in Thessaloniki, it is essential to analyze the present context of the city, as well as its history in which relates to migration, refugee flows and interculturality.

First of all, it is important to understand the relevance of the geographic location of the city. Thessaloniki is the capital of the region of Macedonia. It is placed in the North of Greece, at a distance of 1300 km to the border of Turkey, 480 km to the border of Bulgaria and 210 km to the border of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, which has made it a center of trade exchange in the region. At the same time, its condition of port city in the eastern Mediterranean Sea has made Thessaloniki a very important commercial and economic enclave between the North of Africa, Eastern Europe and Middle East. These geographical characteristics have made Thessaloniki a crossroad between three continents, a city in constant contact with people from other regions and a place recipient of very diverse cultural influences. This fact has had a huge impact in its history and has shaped the urbanism, arts and personality of the city.

Among all the historical events happening in the city since its foundation, we can highlight two main influences that we could catalogue as "externals" to what is known as the classic Greek culture. First, the cultural dominance that the Byzantine Empire had from the 4th to the 15th Century a.c., when Macedonia was the most important Balkan region from every point of view-commercial, economic and cultural. During that period, the region was "a center of Greek culture, the Greek language and the Christian faith, it was also a crossroads of international strategic and commercial routes, and at the point where East and West came together[121]". The second major influence was the dominance of the Ottoman Empire which brought the Turkish Culture and the Islam to the Region .It lasted from the 15th Century until the Balkan's wars of 1912-13, when Macedonia was liberated from the Ottomans. Since these years on, we find some very relevant events for the purpose of this thesis which are related to the population exchanges and migrant and refugee flows.

First of all, we shall remark the exchange of populations that took place between 1919 and 1925 aimed to create an ethnically homogenous Greek state. During those years, thousands of people moved between Turkey and Greece based on their faith and ethnicity (Muslim Greek people went to Turkey, whereas Orthodox Turkish came to Greece). This experience was very traumatic for the people displaced, while at the same created a "refugee origin" identity within many Greek people, which has been remarked as a sign of openness of most of the people in the Greek society towards foreigners. As Alice James reflects, "Greeks who fled from Asia Minor after 1922 and their descendants created a refugee identity that they have used as a strategy to cope with the trauma of forced displacement. Their memories of their lost homeland of Anatolia have played a major role in establishing their separate status as a refugee group within a population with the same language and religion."[122].

The next event that shall be examined is the experience of the Second World War under the Nazi occupation, when more than 54.000 Jewish people were deported and sent to concentration camps. As a result, more than the 90% of the Jewish population in the city were murdered during the war[123]. This event affected profoundly the life of the city and its cultural composition, both because of the human tragedy and

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[121] Pandermalis, *MACEDONIA: The Historica Profile of Northern Greece*, 1992, P.15-18

[122] James , "Memories of Anatolia: Generating Greek refugee identity", 2001. P. 13

[123]Katrantzis, *A story of Thessaloniki: The Jewish and the holocaust,* 2003

the loss of a very important component of their cultural tradition. After this terrible experience, the next big refugee flow happened during the period of the Greek Military Junta that ruled the country from 1967 to 1974, when particularly left-wing politics and activist had to leave the country due to their persecution. Some of them returned to Greece when the dictatorship ended, but many others never came back.

In more recent times, due to a prosperous economic situation, Greece became a reception country for people coming mainly from the North of Africa, Middle East, and the Balkan Region. During the Yugoslavian War from the 1991 to 1995, and during the War in Kosovo in 1999, thousands of refugees mainly from Albania came to the country, becoming the classical image of the refugee in the city[124]. With the end of these Wars, Greece has kept on being a reception country-especially until the beginning of the crisis in 2008- , receiving people searching a better future.

The situation of migrants and refugee people in the city during the first years of the crisis was reflected in the research "The social integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Thessaloniki", by Kiagia, Kriona and Georgaca. We can find in it some interesting conclusions reached after interviewing a group of refugees living in the city. One of the conclusions was that "those who intentionally chose Greece as their destination country (…) report as reasons for their choice the geographical proximity and the cultural resemblance[125]". However, despite this fact, asylum seekers reported many difficulties in their everyday life here, especially concerning housing, unemployment and the lack of recognition of their educational qualifications. As for the relationships with natives, most of the participants in the research reported good relationships with Greeks, even if the authors remarked a racist tendency within the Greek society, particularly with those holding a different religion. However, the people interviewed did not report any big cultural misunderstanding, remarking a feeling of good relationships with locals. Besides, they highlighted the importance of the people from their country of origin living in the city, describing it as "the most important source of support"[126].

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[124] Kiagia, Kriona and Georgaca "The social integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Thessaloniki", 2010, P.36-68
[125] Ibídem, P. 52
[126] Ibídem, P.43

Another conclusion of this research was that Greece can be included in which concerns the different approaches and circumstances of migrant and refugee people integration, within the group of South European countries. These countries, unlike the group of North European countries, do not count on a good reception system where refugee people receive many benefits such as housing, pocket money or free languages courses. However, in North European countries there is a tendency towards the creation of ghettos and a perception of refugee people as merely recipients of positive discrimination measures. In contrast, in South European countries "foreigners have to survive financially on their own resources and that they live together with the local population appears to have functioned favourably for the development of relations with the natives"[127].

Since the publication of this work in 2010, the picture of migration and asylum seekers has changed a lot. In the past four years, and especially since 2015, thousands of refugee people, coming mainly from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan have arrived to Greece fleeing from War and poverty. The vast majority of refugee people arrived to Greece after a long journey that had driven them through their country of origin to Turkey, from where they came to Greece mainly through the sea, having as a first arrival destination different Greek Islands. According to the UNHCR, "in 2016, between January and December, 362,376 people crossed the Mediterranean Sea, risking their lives to reach Europe. These new arrivals are in addition to more than one million refugees and migrants who made the journey across the Mediterranean on unseaworthy boats in 2015. In 2016, the number of those arriving decreased substantially after March. Of those reaching European shores so far this year, 53% came from the ten countries currently producing the most refugees globally[128]". According to the data of the Hellenic Coast Guard and Police, a total of 173,450 refugees and migrants arrived to Greece by sea between January and December 2016, while in the year 2015 the number was of 856,723 people. The vast majority of the arrivals in 2016 were men (42%) followed by children (37%) and women (21%)[129].

Crucial to the current situation was an event that conditioned the whole arrival crisis with regard to Greece: the closure of the border with Macedonia on March 2016.

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[127] Kiagia, Kriona and Georgaca "The social integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Thessaloniki", 2010, P. 59
[128]UNHCR, *Refugees & Migrants sea arrivals in Europe,* 2016
[129] Ibídem

This decision forced 13.000 people to stay in refugee camps close to Idomeini, in the North of Greece, waiting for the moment to continue their route towards the North of Europe[130]. This situation obliged these people to go back in their steps and to stay within the Greek borders. The fact of Thessaloniki being the main city in the North of Greece made it one of the major points of concentration of refugee people after the closure of the borders, spreading the refugees mainly among the refugee camps in the area of Thessaloniki, while some others were hosted by locals often self-organized through solidarity groups.

At the time of writing this thesis, the emergency situation has given place to another stage where other issues -not just linked to the survival of the refugee people through a humanitarian response- need to be addressed. Whereas middle-term solutions have been reached regarding the housing of refugees at very different levels –organized by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, NGOs and self-organized groups- there is still a big amount of people living in refugee camps, hosted both in containers or tents provided by UNHCR. The consequences that this situation is implying to the refugee people living in the camps are devastating. In terms of adequate living conditions, whole families are living in less than 20 square meters, forced to share kitchens and bathrooms, often with no adequate acclimatization for the different seasons. In addition to this situation, there is a common struggle added both for the people living in the refugee camps and for those living in houses in the city of Thessaloniki: their lives are paralyzed in a standby state whose end is never clear, waiting for a solution that will allow them to continue with their lives in Greece or in another European country.

In this context, initiatives at very different levels- organized by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, by NGOs and by self-organized collectives- are trying to support the refugee people in many different ways: establishing temporary housing solutions, promoting activities involving interaction with local people and organizing events where intercultural exchange is promoted and valued. At the same time, all of them are politically active, lobbying for human rights at very different scales. In the next section, some of these initiatives will be examined in order to find out what is working and what it is not in promoting ICD through interaction.

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[130] The Telegraph, *Macedonia closes its border 'completely' to migrants,* 9-3-2016

6.2 Experiences of interaction in the city of Thessaloniki: an analysis of its dynamics, benefits and challenges

After going through the general situation that refugee people are facing in Greece, we will focus on which concerns the interaction between locals and refugee and migrant people in the city of Thessaloniki, in order to contrast in the practice what has been exposed all along the research.

The purpose of this section is to analyze these experiences of interaction and their implications in terms of fostering intercultural dialogue and their three main aims: avoiding conflict, allowing migrant and refugee people inclusion and promoting the right to have their own cultural identity. The particular focus of the field work carried out is not exclusively centered on refugee people, but also in migrant people living in the city. However, due to the particular moment that Greece is facing concerning the issue of refugees, most of the participants interviewed referred mainly to issues regarding to refugee people.

As it was exposed in the Chapter I, the field work carried out has consisted on interviews to people participating on six of the most relevant projects in the city of Thessaloniki promoting integration between migrant/refugee people and the local community. The initiatives analyzed are the NGOs Antigone and Alkyone Refugee Day Center, three politically active initiatives helping refugees in their main buildings – Oikópolis, Micrópolis and Steki Metanastón- and the 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki- where refugee children attend School.[131] Besides, the views of the participants of the interdisciplinary symposium "Building on trans-cultural capital: participatory practices for inclusive societies" has been taken into account to elaborate an analysis of the general situation of interaction between locals and refugees in the city. Thus, the REACT (Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki) Program, implemented through an agreement between the UNHCR and the Municipality has also been considered in this research through the information gathered in the symposium.

Through this field work, this research aims to give an answer to some key questions regarding the development of interaction between locals and migrant/refugee

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[131] Further information about these initiatives is provided in the Annex (pages 90-107).

people in the city, while at the same time trying to generate some advices in order to improve this practice in the fostering of ICD.

The first set of questions concerned the <u>participation</u> of people from both groups. The dynamics of participation depended a lot on the nature of the initiative analyzed; thus, in the case of the three political collectives, the Greek participants were those already engaged in them and also those who went often to the events organized in these spaces (conferences, concerts, collective meals, etc.). The fact of these spaces being open every day to the public- all of them count with a bar in their main buildings- seems to involve more people from both collectives. In contrast, the political nature of these spaces also could condition and somehow "filter" more the people who attend them. In the case of the two NGOs, the participation was promoted mainly through social media and campaigns looking for volunteers. As for the case of the School, the dynamics of participation are completely different for two reasons: first, the children "have to" interact, being that attending school is an obligation for them. Second, the particularities of the school as a place where many activities for the community are carried out configured it as a "natural" point of interaction, unlike the other spaces where people have to take the initiative in order to meet each other.

One common feature observed in all the interviews was that many local people engaged in these initiatives driven by the need to help newcomers, particularly in the emergency situation that was being experienced when the borders were closed. However, once the emergency situation past, the engagement in these projects also decreased, and the participation had to be promoted again through different campaigns.

In which concern migrant and refugee people, many of them knew about the existence of these projects in Idomeini -where they had their first contact with them-while others knew them through word of mouth. Also, some of the refugee people targeted by these initiatives live in refugee camps and come to the city to participate in the activities organized.

As for the way both groups participate on these initiatives, it varies a lot depending on the case. In some projects such as Micrópolis, the involvement of the refugee people is very active, becoming the organizers of many activities of the center. As one of the interviewed expressed:

"Refugee people are fully involved in this initiative. We do not want to have an assistentialist role, but to make them feel that they have a home and a place to count on in Micrópolis. Many activities developed here are carried on by refugees; they are part of our collective in the same way as locals. For example they work in the bar, and are part of our general Assembly. Besides, we have many activities that have started thanks to their initiative. We have for instance a hairdresser service, a group of kickboxing, a group of taekwondo and Arabic lessons, etc.(...) We all listen to each other suggestions and this is how the activities are organized".

The people interviewed in Oikópolis reflected a similar view:

"In Oikópolis, migrants, refugees and Greek people collaborate in an egalitarian way, except for some things which require fully knowledge of the Greek language"

The NGO Antigone and the Refugee Day Center Alkyone had also a participative approach, but due to the nature of these initiatives - not only volunteer based and less flexible- the activities are organized mainly by local people working there. As the director of Antigone express,

"In the activities we develop, we try to make refugee people the protagonist of the event through cooking lessons, artist performances, etc. The interaction with local people is very important, and we try to find any excuse to bring them together(...)We have observed that people want more or less the same things according to their age, so our activities are designed to bring them together, after asking them for suggestions"

The second set of questions asked had to do with the <u>benefits</u> that these initiatives are having for both groups. Within these benefits, we have considered the impact of these initiatives on: a) the acquisition of new skills to deal with intercultural challenges, b) fighting prejudices, c) preventing conflicts, d) the empowerment of migrant/refugee people, e) recognizing the positive contributions of migrant/refugee people to the Greek society, and f) developing a sense of belonging among migrant and refugee people.

All the people interviewed –both locals and refugee people- coincided on the fact that the initiatives they were taking part in had a positive impact on the people participating on them. When we asked about the impact on the acquisition of new skills to deal with intercultural challenges, the interviewees remarked the importance of the

language courses provided as a very important tool to help the newcomers to adapt to their new societies. Besides, welcoming work-shops and informative sessions about the life in the city or the familiarisation with the cultural particularities of the country were considered very important. The interviewees in Oikópolis, for instance, remarked that:

"These spaces of interaction helps migrant and refugee people to understand the country they live now, the western way of life, the different ways of communication, etc."

The fighting against prejudices has also being emphasized as one of their biggest aims in each of the initiatives, putting interaction at the core of this process:

"We contribute to avoid stereotypes by putting in contact Greek people and refugees. There are many misconceptions and cultural misunderstandings, especially towards Muslim people. We try to show that they are the same as Greek people, with their own fears, problems and dreams. We try to challenge prejudices and false myths" (Christos, Oikópolis)

"We believe that interaction is the basis for integration, respect and understanding (...) We do not expect that people are going to "click" between each other; we just want people to get to know each other. We cannot like everyone and this is normal; our objective is trying to break the labels that create stigma.(...) One of our major aims is to stop the perception of refugees only as victims that want to take "as much as they can". We want to show that they have a lot to give and that they are not only passive recipients". (Paulina, Antigone)

The impact of these initiatives in the issue of conflict prevention has appeared as the most difficult to prove in the short term. The potentiality of a conflict is something that cannot be predicted with exactitude; however, there are some factors linked to marginalization and inequality that can highly contribute to the rise of conflicts. For this reason, the interviewees were asked about how the initiatives were promoting the empowerment of migrant/refugee people, the recognition of their positive contributions, and the development of a sense of belonging to the Greek society. All of them explained how the different activities carried on had an impact on the referred factors, highlighting the importance of the projects of renting houses for refugee people and the economic independence as major contributions to refugee's empowerment:

"Our vision is not to "help" refugees, but to make them have a normal life. We want to support them to be independent: refugee people understand that this place needs them, so they want to be part of it. Our vision is to promote their empowerment (...) we want them to be active. Also, we want to build a sense of community, a sense of belonging to the Greek society, and this is not possible to do in a refugee camp. For this reason, our biggest project in terms of funding and organization is the "renting houses" project (...) in order to allow them to have a normal life inside the city. Besides, aware of the economic problems (...) we provide them with some money when it is needed (...) Also every Sunday we have dinner all together: some of the people take the responsibility to cook, other people clean, etc."(Mariela, Micrópolis)

Besides that, the moments of interaction with people from the local community, and the different opportunities that refugee and migrant people had to express themselves -through artistic, culinary or any other cultural manifestation, teaching locals their own languages or celebrating with them festivities like the end of Ramadan- were also remarked as crucial to the processes of empowerment, recognition of positive contributions and development of sense of belonging. This appreciation appeared often during the interviews:

"Two or three days per week migrant and local people are coming to this space to cook and eat together. Especially migrant women like it very much because many of them do not work, so those occasions are good for them to socialize and to relax. It is a very nice activity where everyone discovers the others gastronomy and cultural traditions."(Christos, Oikópolis)

"Our vision is not to tell the people what to do. We want a bottom-up approach that also inspire and empower these people. For refugee people is very important to share what they have to offer with others. Many of the people told us that through our activities it was the first time they got to know Greek people, a thing that they can barely do in the camps."(Paulina, Antigone)

"We have many kind of activities where local and refugee people are mixed (...) a cooking group (...) city tours in which locals choose a place on the city and spend time with refugees/migrants while sharing their knowledge about the place, and a weekly meeting (...) in a Cultural Center of the neighborhood. This last meeting is especially important for us because it happens every week and it is a very good chance of

gathering between refugee/migrant people and locals and creating a community out of the Center. We have (...) a cultural group which organizes visits to museums (...) and movie nights with Arabic movies, among other things. Also, we have created a virtual tour about some cities in Syria which was very important to them (...) For us is very important to build bridges of communication, and this is why the cultural group is so important. For instance, we have had a workshop about poetry where people wrote multilingual poems in Greek and Arabic. These kind of things also promote the empowerment of refugee and migrant people, giving them a chance to be creative, express themselves and interact with Greeks" (Gabriella, Alkyone)

In the case of the 67th School of Thessaloniki, the different variety of activities developed with the children also seems to reflect this positive impact:

"Some Greek children stayed after school and thanks to this, a relationship between local and refugee children was created. One of the most important goals was for these children to get to know the other students and to get out of the camp. This was the first time they got out of the camp and they could go for a walk in the neighborhood of the city (...) We did tours to let them know this neighborhood (...) we invited children from the camp and Greek children to organize a joint event: "Food festival and world cuisine" with traditional recipes from Greece, from the migrants of our neighborhood and from the refugees. This event had the aim to welcome the refugee children and parents. (...)We also organized a program of "Olympic Games" with both the children from the morning school and the refugee children (...)we went to the International film festival(...) and we had a lot of activities to make the children tell us what they had felt watching the movies.(Also) we celebrated in the Municipality of Thessaloniki a multilingual event. The most important thing was that both Greek and Syrian children danced together a Syrian dance and a Greek dance, and they also sang a Greek and an English song. (...) One of our major aims was to create a safe place for these children. We wanted to set a successful practice for refugee children and adults. (...) when the children arrived they were very afraid, now they smile and we can really see a difference."(Dimitris, Head Teacher)

Reached this point, it is useful to remark that the words transcribed until now mostly correspond to local people participating on these initiatives. However, both in Oikópolis and in Micrópolis, refugee people were present at the moment of doing the

interviews, adding important information and actively participating in them. As it has been repeated, one of the main premises of this research is that both the receiving society and the newcomers are benefited by intercultural dialogue. However, we consider important to reflect their specific opinions about how they perceive the benefits of these initiatives. In this sense, some the answers expressed are quite symbolic:

"I was in the hospital after coming from Idomeini (…) when I went out of the hospital I did not know what to do. I knew the people from Oikópolis, and they helped me a lot. I had a house, Greek lessons, (…) and a place where I could meet people from my country and from everywhere. Now I come every day and I help with the things they need here". (Ahmed, Oikópolis)

"They have helped us with housing, food, when we have small problems…many things that big organizations don't do. Here I feel I am more than a number, but a person part of Micrópolis" (Abud, Micrópolis)

"We are a family here. I feel very happy, it is like home. Especially on Sundays when we have dinner all together, when I arrive and everybody says "Hi" to me, this is enough". (Ahmed, Micrópolis)

"If there was not for Micrópolis, I would not have known what to do. Here I help with everything that is needed. We cook together, we know each other, I have made many friends here and I feel part of this place. Thanks to Micrópolis I met people who employed me as a translator. This place has helped me a lot." (Nizar, Micrópolis)

Finally, the last set of question aimed to identify the main <u>challenges</u> these initiatives are facing. Among them, the most relevant have been those related to a) cultural misunderstandings -particularly because of the lack of translators and the different world views of locals and migrant/refugee people-, b) the budgetary restrictions to develop the projects- which also implies the need of volunteers, who cannot commit to the initiatives as much as the workers- , c) the prejudices of many people within the wider society, and d) the particular situation of Greece as a transit country. We will divide each of these issues to understand them more in depth.

   a) Cultural misunderstandings

Some of the reflections had to do with the lack of translators, whereas others referred to the professionalism of them:

"We had some problems with translations and language misunderstandings. In the city there are not many people knowing Arabic/Farsi and Greek/English, and these people are working for other organizations. These misunderstandings lead to conflicts that could be avoided if we had some translators here." (Christos, Oikópolis)

"A translator is not just a person who speaks several languages, but a person prepared and trained to do a translation as accurate as possible to the reality. The problem is that many times we don't count on professional translators, but people who have prejudices, who are critical and not impartial. This is not the role of a translator, and sometimes people helping with translation can blow whatever you try to do." (Paulina, Antigone)

In the same line, the Head Teacher of the 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki expressed how the activities developed with the children were not as effective as they could potentially be due to the language barrier:

"I believe that arts are very important to promote integration. Unfortunately in this program we have some difficulties, one of the biggest is that we don't have translators to Arabic. Sometimes some Syrian friends of ours helped us with the translators, but it was not easy because we could not listen to "the voice" of the children (...) I do not want to say that this program failed, but it would have had much more potential if there was not the barrier of the language. (...) For the next year, the plan of the Ministry of Education is that refugee children will be in the morning school with especial teachers to help them, but I am not very optimistic about it due to the difficulties concerning the level of language" (Dimitris, Head Teacher)

As for the cultural misunderstandings due to the different worldviews of both communities, some of the interviewees considered it as a challenge to the effectiveness of the initiative, especially in which concerns women's rights:

"The main challenges are related to cultural misunderstandings. Sometimes is difficult to achieve our aim of being all of us part of the same community. Sometimes it is difficult to agree with other worldviews, like how some people think about women, etc.

It is a big challenge to "mix" all these cultures and arrive to common points of understanding between all of us" (Christos, Steki Metanastón)

"We have had many cultural misunderstandings, and this is probably one of the biggest problems. One of the most difficult issues is related to the role of the women. How to deal with issues such as polygamy? It is very difficult to force people to behave in the way Europeans do when it comes to the role of women within some communities. Of course within the communities people are very different and many people, for instance, do not practice polygamy. What we try to do is to bridge these cultural misunderstandings by finding a "middle way", but this is not easy. There are some limits concerning Human Rights that need to be clear, and women's rights are one of these limits" (Paulina,Antigone)

   b) Financial problems

   The lack of enough budget and its consequences for the development of the projects has also been highlighted by the people interviewed:

"Another problem that we are facing is related to the funds we count on. We work a lot with volunteers, which is very important to promote social awareness. However, volunteers can only commit to some point, and many of the needs we have in Antigone require people working here every day, fully committed- and for this you need to hire people" (Paulina, Antigone)

   The lack of enough money has also been emphasized by Micrópolis:

"I think the main problems could be resumed in this: hands, heads and money. Many times people are here just for a short amount of time, and their commitment is not long enough to make this initiative work properly. We need people all day here, there are many little problems arising every day and it is essential to have people to help to solve them. In summer, for example, there are always less people in the city and as a consequence fewer activities are carried out. The thing is that the problems do not disappear in summer, and we don't have enough people to be here." (Mariela, Micrópolis)

   c) Prejudices of the local population

Prejudices of the local population also appear as a big challenge for all the initiatives examined. This was reflected in the general perception of refugees by some locals and in the attitudes of the parents in some schools:

"Some Greek people complain about our work, they say we do not take care about locals but only about migrants and refugees, but this is not true. We have always taken care of locals. The paradoxical thing is that refugees and migrants are nowadays taking care about locals, organizing meals and activities with homeless people. We are trying to show this kind of actions to reverse stereotypes by posting pictures of these moments in social Medias, but unfortunately our scope is not very big"(Christos, Oikópolis)

"There have been some problems within local people of Thessaloniki, and we have tried to make them understand that many of the prejudices they had were not true (…) some of us went to a school to answer the questions of some parents who did not want their children to attend school with refugee children. They were concerned about health problems, especially with the issue of vaccination: the media had spread the alarm about how refugee children could transmit some illnesses to the Greek children. We went there to explain them that the only children in risk would be the refugee children and not the Greek children-who are vaccinated- and they understood it."(Mariela, Micrópolis)

An interesting appreciation came from the Head Teacher of the School interviewed, who remarked the existing racism from "old" migrants to the newcomers, showing how racist behaviours are very complex phenomena that need to be addressed at very different levels:

"The reactions of Greek children were different depending on the case (…) there is a level of curiosity, also a level of empathy. We have a level of racism as well, which comes from the parents. It is very interesting that sometimes this reaction does not come from the Greek parents, but from the old migrant parents. The reason is that "If I am part of "the others" and I cannot be like you, if there is an opportunity to be like you because there are "new others", I will take the opportunity to show my similarity towards "you" and become part of the majoritarian group. This is the most interesting reaction, and it comes from migrants from Albania and from other countries. It is not as simple as it seems sometimes. The fact of sharing the label "migrant" does not mean that people will support each other. Many times programs in school about tolerance fail

because we need to approach the reactions of the parents otherwise."(Dimitris, Head Teacher)

This reaction shows that there is a lot of work to do in the construction of a society where different identities can fit, without being those who hold an identity different from the dominant group marginalized. The image of the migrant/refugee cannot be seen as a negative label from which people need to escape to become "the other" or "the non-migrant/refugee", but as a circumstance and a life experience that deserves respect and understanding.

d) The particularity of Greece as a transit country

As we exposed at the introduction of this Chapter, the geographical and social situation of the country has made Greece a transit place where refugees do not intend to stay. However, a common feeling among them is that they would stay in Greece if the economic situation of the country was better, being the impossibility to find a job and the lack of economic support from the state which make North European countries a more appealing destination. This fact has been pointed out as a very important circumstance conditioning the whole process of integration:

"I would say that the main question underlying here is until where do we help to integration. We would like to have a complete integration of refugees in the society, but it is very difficult, especially in this particular situation where people are often hosted in refugee camps waiting for the moment to move to another country." (Paulina, Antigone)

"We have mainly two challenges here. One is the sustainability of the project: this is a two year project, so we don't know yet if it will continue in the future: it is impossible right now to know if we will have funds. Another problem is related to the situation of the refugee people coming here: most of them are still in move and do not see Greece as a place to stay (...) they feel temporary, and only those who have a permit of stay in the country (...) are more committed. However, we always tell them that their integration process starts from here, no matter if they are moving to another country in the future. Greece is already a country with a western lifestyle (...) so it is important that they start to be familiar to the cultural differences they will have to face here. Another big

problem that some migrants are facing is their situation of homelessness. If they do not have something as basic as a place to sleep, they are not going to be thinking in integration within the Greek society because they have other priorities to think about."(Gabriella, Alkyone)

The problems of housing, with thousands of people living in the refugee camps, are also deeply affecting the process of integration. Despite the temporary accommodation provided by some of these initiatives, most of the refugee people live in refugee camps where interaction with locals is barely existent. This view has been expressed by Mss. Sofia Aslanidou, one of the persons responsible from the REACT Program:

"Despite the efforts of the projects of integration and interaction developed by the Municipality, the biggest challenge remains to bring together local and refugee people living in the camps in a "natural" way. Instead, in order to make interaction happens we have to provide transportation to the camps, we have to create punctual events and encounters, and this is not enough to achieve inclusion"

In the same line, the Head Teacher of the School expressed this view:

"Local and refugee children interact during a short amount of time due to the different schedules. However, especially through the activities organized (...) children do many things together (...) other thing that happens is that the children are changing: some move to another countries, other arrive, and we need a stability to create this safe place for children. (Besides) it is very difficult to the refugee parents to come to the school from the camps, so the relationships between Greek parents and refugee parents are not as close as we would like to." (Dimitris, Head Teacher)

6.2   Conclusions and recommendations

After the analysis of these six experiences, we can extract some important conclusions.

In which concerns the <u>participation</u> of both local and migrant/refugee people, it seems that the more open to the public these initiatives are, the more people will engage

on them. For what have been observed both by frequenting these places and through the interviews, the initiatives counting on a bar/restaurant or organizing different kind of events in their main buildings (conferences, round tables, parties, etc.), attract more people, especially locals. Besides, activities in public spaces give the opportunity to reach a bigger number of people that, otherwise, might not have known about the initiatives through social media or other channels of communication. For these reasons, the promotion of events and activities in public spaces shall be encouraged, giving visibility to the projects and spreading their message of tolerance and interculturality.

As for the benefits that these initiatives are having, it seems to be a general agreement on their positive impact for both groups. All the participants highlighted how the different activities developed are helping migrant and refugee people to adapt to their new societies through diverse activities that allow them to interact with the local community. Also, it was pointed out that they aim to empower this collective, giving them the opportunity to organize and be in charge of them rather than adopting an assistentialist approach. Moreover, the people interviewed have signaled how these encounters mixing both communities have a positive impact on all the people participating on them. On the one side, migrant and refugee people count on spaces where they feel valued and part of the wider community, sharing their culture, relaxing there and getting to know the new culture while establishing relationships with locals. On the other hand, locals find a place where they can get to know people from other cultures who are living among them, knowing different customs and engaging into a dialogue about the different worldviews that newcomers bring into their societies.

As it has been examined, these interactions create the conditions to engage into dialogues of many different types: from small talks and informal conversations to organized events where sensitive intercultural issues can be discussed. The relevance of each of these interactions shall not be underestimated, even if measuring the "advances towards interculturality" is a difficult task. As we explained in Chapter II, ICD is a flexible process that requires time, and whose outcomes cannot be predicted. During the time spent in these spaces, we could observe people from many different cultural backgrounds interacting, sharing their customs and discussing about cultural sensitive issues -such as the role of women in the society, or the place that religion should have in the public sphere. The process of reflection resulting from these discussions is extremely important for the building of intercultural societies, and the dialogue taking

place in these open and familiar spaces contributes to the understanding and acceptance of cultural differences. Thus, instead of creating hostile atmospheres where prejudices eclipse the whole interaction, these initiatives promote an open-minded attitude, where the person has a bigger importance than the prejudices commonly associated to their social group.

Finally, with regard to the <u>challenges</u> that these initiatives are facing and conditioning the effectiveness of their work, we have mainly identified four issues that were previously analyzed: a) cultural misunderstandings, b) financial problems, c) prejudices of the local people towards migrants/refugees, and d) the particularity of Greece as a transit country. After have examined them in depth in the previous section, we can make some considerations.

The first one is that some of these challenges are much easier to overcome than others. Whereas some of the financial problems might be resolved by increasing the budget allocated to these initiatives, other issues would need to be addressed by other means beyond the economic resources of the project. For instance, with regard to the cultural misunderstandings, counting on more funding would allow to hire more translators and make communication easier; however, addressing other cultural misunderstandings arising in these interactions can be much more complex. Even if counting on more people specialized on dealing with potential cultural misunderstandings could significantly improve the results of these interactions, this would not imply its automatic disappearance. A similar consideration can be done in respect of the prejudices existing towards the migrants/refugees. The complexity and the nature of prejudices, as well as the social process towards their elimination, involves addressing the issue at very different levels, being determinant the action at the national scale. Among other actions that could be carried out, we could suggest the creation of national campaigns promoting interculturality, the presence of a positive image of migrant and refugee people in the public media, or the mainstreaming of intercultural skills in the educational curricula.

Finally, we must take into account the crucial role of the EU Policies in the field of asylum and migration and how they are influencing the whole process of integration of this collective. In which concerns the response to the so-called refugee crisis, we can identify two main factors that are conditioning the integration process. On the one hand,

the response to the housing problems has been focused on the enlargement of already existing refugee camps, favoring the process of "ghettization" instead of promoting the coexistence with locals within the cities. On the other hand, the Asylum Relocation System established by the EU -according to which member countries would undertake to accommodate around 160.000 people from Greece and Italy to other member states- is failing to meet the agreed commitments. Thus, by the end of 2016, only 8,162 people had been resettled from these two countries–which accounts for only the 5% of the target intended[132]. As a consequence, people are waiting during months –exceeding in some cases the year- to start a new life in another European country. In the meanwhile, during this waiting process some people are not interested in integrating into the Greek society due to the effort that implies the learning of the language or the building of relationships with locals. Therefore, the uncertainty of this situation –where people many times do not even know when they will be allocated in another country- promotes a situation of isolation within the refugee community.

To these specific issues, we have to add some factors that are also affecting the promotion of interculturality in Europe. Even if an in-depth analysis of European foreign policy does not fall within the scope of this study, we can maintain that agreements such as the so-called "EU-Turkey Deal" or the words of some European leaders against the work of NGOs developing rescue efforts in the Mediterranean Sea[133], do not foster at all a positive image of migrant and refugee people in the continent. These political gestures, together with the xenophobic discourses of some political leaders, are creating a non-welcoming atmosphere that does not help to advance human rights in the region.

In conclusion, there are multiple factors affecting the work of the initiatives analyzed. Even if some challenges might be overcome by increasing the funds of these initiatives, some others will depend on political decisions at national and European level. For this reason, the political role of these initiatives, through any type of actions aimed at lobbying for human rights at every level, shall not be underestimated as important means towards the fostering of ICD.

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[132] The Guardian, *EU met only 5% of target for relocating refugees from Greece and Italy*, 8-12-2016
[133] Eldiario.es, *Zoido: "Hay que concienciar a las ONG de que no favorezcan la inmigración irregular"*, 6-7-2017

VII.   Conclusions

7.1   Summary of the thesis

The main purpose underpinning this thesis has been to demonstrate how ICD constitutes a crucial tool to deal with potential problems arising in culturally diverse societies. Particularly, in which concerns this research, the effectiveness of ICD has been analyzed with regard to the challenges of avoiding conflict and misunderstandings in diverse societies, promoting inclusion of minorities -being migrant and refugee people at its center- and guarantying the right to have a cultural identity in a multicultural society. The focus of this thesis has been the current context of Europe, whose societies are becoming increasingly multicultural due mainly to migratory flows.

In its first Chapters, this research has given a definition of ICD through different perspectives coming from anthropologists and psychologists among other social scientists. Subsequently, we have analyzed the elaboration of the theory of ICD through the contributions of authors such as Parekh or Kymlicka, who elaborated their theories after examining the failure of previously implemented models to deal with diversity. Besides, this research has also considered the official view adopted by the UNESCO and the CoE, which promote ICD as the most accurate approach to deal with diversity in contemporary societies. The international recognition of this practice both at global and European level has been considered particularly important by this research, representing further evidence of its relevance as a human rights-based approach in building more peaceful and tolerant societies.

Once the theory was presented, this study had to face the most relevant task: to substantiate until which extent theory and practice match. For this purpose, we have analysed of the role of positive interactions as a means of practicing ICD. First, we considered the results of several researches on the Contact Hypothesis, a theory which laid the foundations of how interactions help to reduce prejudices. Secondly, we examined Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, in order to understand the complex process of overcoming ethnocentric views while passing through several stages that eventually might lead to what he calls "ethnorelativism".

Finally, a case study of the city of Thessaloniki was carried out in order to get empirical knowledge of the practice of ICD, while at the same time contrasting the ideas presented all along the research. For this purpose, six of the most relevant initiatives helping migrant and refugee people in the city were analyzed, obtaining the information both based on interviews and through the assistance to several activities and events organized by them.

7.2   Limitations of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis has been to support the role of ICD as a human rights-based approach which promotes, among other issues, the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the European societies. Nevertheless, the fact that this thesis has focused on the Greek case and on the city of Thessaloniki implies some limitations on its scope, especially in which concerns the generalization of the conclusions achieved through the case study.

The main limitation has to do with the current context of Europe, which is dealing with the welcoming of thousands of refuge people arriving mostly through the Mediterranean Sea. As we have mentioned, the fact of Greece being a transit country conditions the whole process of integration for these people. Although this is not the case of the people migrating to Europe who cannot obtain the status of refugees –the simply called migrants, who do not necessary see Greece as a transit country and whose process of integration starts since their arrival-, due to the amount of refugee people in the city and to the international attention that this issue is receiving, most of the initiatives examined have refugees as target population. Thus, even if none of the initiatives exclude migrant people from their projects, the presence of larger communities of refugee people in the city makes them more present in the activities developed.

This fact creates a situation in which many of the activities carried out are addressed to people who, in many cases, are not going to stay in the city for a long time. As a consequence, some difficulties appear concerning the following up of the process of integration of these people in the Greek societies. In this research we reflected the opinion of some people interviewed who signaled that despite this situation,

Thessaloniki shall be seen by the refugee people as "the beginning of integration". Nonetheless, we cannot disregard the particularities of the current situation of Greece, which are quite exceptional compared to those of other European countries which are seen as a final destination by the people arriving there.

7.3   Message of the thesis

This thesis aims to contribute to the academic reflections about the need of ICD in the increasingly multicultural European societies. But more importantly, beyond academic purposes, this thesis intends to send a message to the various actors that play a role in fostering ICD at a national, regional and global level.

First, to those political leaders who spread the message of the "clash of civilizations", taking advantage of their position of power to blame migrants and refugees for events such as the terrorist attacks that are shaking Europe. These political leaders shall accept that the increasingly multicultural nature of European societies is an unstoppable process, and that no matters how many fences are built, or how little efforts are put into rescue the people wrecking in the Mediterranean Sea, people will continue to search a way to flee from war and misery. Blaming the most vulnerable members of the society for situations that are both a consequence of geopolitical strategies and of the radicalization of marginalized citizens -who had been excluded from their own societies- is not just irresponsible, but also shameful and cynical.

Second, to the mass media, which have an enormous responsibility in portraying how the wider society perceives migrants and refugees. This thesis aims to make a call to these actors, to make them aware of the importance of the language they use when referring to this collective, and to encourage them to promote a positive vision of interculturality.

Third, to the EU and the national governments, which shall fulfill their obligations to guarantee the right to asylum, as well as accelerate the process of allocation of refugees, instead of fostering a policy of closure the borders of Europe totally incoherent with all the existing human rights treaties. Moreover, in addition to

the declarations at the European level promoting ICD, it becomes urgent to set up national plans that have the necessary funds for their effective realization.

And last but not least, this thesis aims to send a message to the wider society as a catalyst of the social change that is needed to build more peaceful, inclusive and tolerant societies. It is needed that citizens start to see the benefits that interculturality can bring to their lives, abandoning ethnocentric views that impede to see the richness of being exposed to other cultural influences, and to understand that this does not mean a threat to their own culture and identity. Also, this thesis intends to encourage a critical thinking towards the meaning of culture itself, and how globalization promotes some cultural influences while despising others, sometimes in such a subtle way that makes it difficult to be aware of it.

It is essential to realize how other worldviews can improve the reality of European societies, contributing to the generation of knowledge, artistic expressions and new ways to respond to the problems arising with the new times. Cultural diversity has always been present in European history, but the way of dealing with it has often lead to dramatic consequences. The current situation of fear and distrust towards migrant and refugee people should make us reflect about the terrible consequences that racism and marginalization has had in the past of the continent, and of all the suffering that it causes to people. Therefore, instead of repeating the same mistakes, we shall work all together, from every level, to promote the practice of intercultural dialogue in order to make a society where everyone can live with dignity.

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IX.   List of Interviews

Interview Oikópolis:

Q: How did this project/initiative start? Which are the objectives of this project/initiative?

A: Oikópolis is a social space created as an initiative of the ecological movement of Thessaloniki. Our objectives are: 1) the dissemination and application of green ideas and values and alternative solutions through organizing events, lectures, discussions, seminars, workshops and other activities on issues of ecological, political, social and cultural, content,2) the practical solidarity to individuals and social groups in need, as well as the realization of raising-awareness actions on issues of discrimination, racism, violence, etc., but also support actions for those who suffer from them.

Previously, our main focus was to raise environmental awareness in the city, as well as trying to give a social response to some of the problems affecting vulnerable collectives of the society, such as homeless people and migrants. Due to the emergency situation faced by refugee people trying to cross to Macedonia, the people collaborating with Oikópolis started to provide food, clothes and some basic needs to the refugee people trapped in Idomeini, and nowadays the support of refugee people is its main activity. When the situation in the borders started to be regulated by big IGOs and NGOs, the people from Oikópolis decided to keep on working in the city of Thessaloniki again with people mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. (Christos, member of Oikópolis)

Q: In which way are the Greek people involved in this project/initiative?

A: At this time we are around ten people constantly here, but during the emergency situation we had around 30 to 50 people after the call they did to the Greek society. (Christos)

Q: In which way are the migrant/refugee people involved in this project/initiative?

A: Many refugees know this space from the work they were doing in Idomeini, and also through social media. (Christos)

Q: How are you promoting participation of local people? And of migrant/refugee people?

A: We try to promote it through social media, but we need to do bigger efforts. The thing is that we are an organization volunteer-based, which makes things more difficult. (Christos)

Q: Which are the BENEFITS you can tell about this project/initiative?

A: (Concerning local people) We contribute to avoid stereotypes by putting in contact Greek people and refugees. There are many misconceptions and cultural misunderstandings, especially towards Muslim people. We try to show that they are the same as Greek people, with their own fears, problems and dreams. We try to challenge prejudices and false myths

(Concerning migrant/refugee people): These spaces of interaction helps migrant and refugee people to understand the country they live in now, the western way of life, the different ways of communication, etc. We had a project of rented houses for refugee people. We do it together with other NGOs such as Antigone, Naomi, and the ecological movement of Thessaloniki. We also provide Greek and English Lessons and leisure activities like sports. Besides, two or three days per week migrant and local people are coming to this space to cook and eat together. Especially the migrant women like it very much because many of them do not work, so those occasions are good for them to socialize and to relax. It is a very nice activity where everyone discovers the others gastronomy and cultural traditions. In Oikópolis, migrants, refugees and Greek people collaborate in an egalitarian way, except for some administrative things which requires fully knowledge of the Greek language. (Christos)

A: I was in the hospital after coming from Idomeini because my mind was not in a good state by that moment. When I went out of the hospital I did not know what to do. I knew the people from Oikópolis, and they helped me a lot. I had a house, Greek lessons, sports, somewhere to stay and a place where I could meet people from my country

(Syria) and from everywhere. Now I come here every day and I help with the things they need here". (Ahmad Ail, member of Oikópolis)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims? Have you faced any <u>barriers regarding to interaction</u> between Greek and immigrant/refugee people? If so, which are the strategies/tools you are using to overcome these barriers?

A: Some Greek people complain about our work, they say we do not take care about locals but only about migrants and refugees, but this is not true. We have always taken care about locals. The paradoxical thing is that refugees and immigrants are nowadays taking care about locals, being that they organize meals and activities with homeless people. We are trying to show this kind of actions to reverse stereotypes by posting pictures of these moments in social Medias, but unfortunately our scope is not very big. (Christos)

Q: Has this project/initiative faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)?

A: We had some problems with translations and language misunderstandings. In the city there are not many people knowing Arabic/Farsi and Greek/English, and these people are working for other organizations. These misunderstandings lead to conflicts that could be avoided if we had some translators here. What we try to do to solve these problems is to do common meetings with the presence of translators, but everything would be much easier if the translators were working here (Christos)

Q: Which are the CHANGES you would suggest in order to improve the outcomes of this project?

A: As we already mentioned, a translator would be very important to improve our work. Also to have more budget, we manage to find the money through donations from volunteers and individuals, but we don't have any kind of support from the state nor from the municipality, maybe because they consider ourselves "too radicals" in our views (Christos)

Interview Micrópolis social space for freedom

Q: How did this project/initiative start? Which are the objectives of this project/initiative?

A: Micrópolis Social Space for Freedom is a self-organized collective, independent from any government and working in a non-authoritarian way. There are no hierarchies within the collective and everything is discussed in a weekly Assembly. It is called "micro-polis" which in Greek means "little town" because all the different issues that are interconnected and discussed here. The involvement of Micrópolis with the issue of supporting refugees started around three years ago, being a key moment the closure of the borders with Macedonia and the concentration of people in the city of Idomeini. At a first moment, Micrópolis provided help to the people trapped in the border, but its main role has been supporting refugees in the city of Thessaloniki, having as a priority the inclusion of refugee people in the life of the city. We realized that some NGOs just gave to the refugee people an apartment with just a mattress inside, so people started to come here looking for support. Within the collective of Micrópolis, the group "Solidarity with Refugees" meets once a week to discuss the main issues concerning life of refugees in the city. (Mariela, member of Micrópolis)

Q: How are you promoting participation of local people? And of migrant/refugee people? In which way are the Greek people involved in this project/initiative?

A: Most of the Greek people involved are part of the collective of Micrópolis since years ago, but we also count on people who came to help us when we started the "solidarity with Refugees" group. We can say that there is a flow of people: some of them come just for a few months, other for a few weeks and other people stay for a longer time. The fact of having a bar within our building and the organization of different kind of activities (theatre, live music performances) and Conferences makes Micrópolis an open space where many different people come along. Also, probably the way where people had been the most involved was through the organization of a network of people willing to host refugee people in their houses. (Mariela)

Q: In which way are the migrant/refugee people involved in this project/initiative?

A: Refugee people are fully involved in this initiative. We do not want to have an assistentialist role, but to make them feel that they have a home and a place to count on

in Micrópolis. Many activities developed here are carried out by refugees; they are part of our collective in the same way as locals. For example they work in the bar, and are part of our general Assembly. Besides, we have many activities that have started thanks to the initiative of the refugee people. We have for instance a hairdresser service, a group of kickboxing, a group of taekwondo and Arabic lessons. Besides that, we try to do more activities according to the needs of the refugee people. We all listen to each other suggestions and this is how the activities are organized. During the past year, for example, we also had a school for the children, and we have from time to time English and German lessons, apart from Greek lessons. Also, we started a bakery project, a saloon where people could come and hang out and an space for knitting. (Mariela and Nizar, member of Micrópolis)

Q: Which are the BENEFITS you can tell about this project/initiative? (Concerning local people/concerning migrant/refugee people)

A: Our vision is not to "help" refugee people, but to make them have a normal life. We want to support them to be independent: refugee people understand that this place needs them, so they want to be part of it. Our vision is to promote the empowerment of refugee people: we don't want them to ask us for things, we want them to be active. Also, we want to build a sense of community, sense of belonging to the Greek society, and this is not possible to do in a refugee camp. For this reason, our biggest project in terms of funding and organization is the "renting houses" project. Through this project we rent houses to host refugee people in order to allow them to have a normal life inside the city. Besides, aware of the economic problems of the refugee people, we provide them with some money when it is needed or with bus tickets in order to allow them to come to the Assemblies. Also we have a group of legal support, a bazar where we sell some clothes and every Sunday we have dinner all together: some of the people take the responsibility to cook, other people clean, etc. (Mariela)

A: They have helped us with housing, food, when we have small problems as well. Many things that big organizations don't do (Abud, member of Micrópolis)

A: We are a family here. I feel very happy here, it is like home. Especially on Sundays when we have dinner all together, when I arrive and everybody say "Hi" to me, this is enough (Ahmed, member of Micrópolis)

A: If there was not for Micrópolis, I would not know what to do. Here I help with everything that is needed. We cook together, we know each other, I have made many friends here and I feel part of this place (Nizar)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims?

A: I think the main problems could be resumed in this: hands, heads and money. Many times people are here just for a short amount of time, and their commitment is not long enough to make this initiative work properly. We need people all day here, there are many little problems arising every day and people to help to solve them it is essential. In summer, for example, there are always less people in the city and as a consequence fewer activities are carried out. The thing is that the problems do not disappear in summer, and we don't have enough people to be here. The financial problems are also a big issue. We do not accept money from the government nor from the EU, so we found our projects (especially the one of renting houses) through the bar and restaurant of Micrópolis , as well as from money sent from donations of people and fundraising events. However, happily we manage to keep our projects going on. (Mariela)

Q: Have you faced any <u>barriers regarding to interaction</u> between Greek and immigrant/refugee people? If so, which are the strategies/tools you are using to overcome these barriers? Has this project/initiative faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)? Which are the CHANGES you would suggest in order to IMPROVE the outcomes of this project?

A: We never had problems with cultural misunderstandings. Happily we have always counted on translators who have helped a lot. However, sometimes some refugee people arriving think that we are an NGO which is going to help them with money, and this is not our role. We want to build a sense of community, and some people need time to understand this. (Mariela, Nizar)

A: There have been some problems within local people of Thessaloniki, and we have tried to make them understand that many of the prejudices they had were not true. For example, some of us went to a school to answer to the questions of some parents who did not want their children to attend school with refugee children. They were concerned

about health problems, especially with the issue of vaccination: the media had spread the alarm about how refugee children could transmit some illnesses to Greek children. We went there to explain them that the only children in risk would be the refugee children and not the Greek children-who will be vaccinated- and they understood it. (Mariela)

Interview Steki Metanastón

Q: How did this project/initiative start? Which are the objectives of this project/initiative?

A: Steki Metanastón is a political collective of the city of Thessaloniki that has been active during the past eight years. It works as a platform agglutinating a large number of groups not only supporting migrants and refugees, but also LGTBQ groups, groups that practice activism through arts, groups that promote a more ecological way of life, etc. Inside Steki, "Room 39" is the solidarity group with refugees of the collective. (Christos Georgiadis, member or Steki Metanastón)

Q: Which are the objectives of this project/initiative? In which way are the Greek people involved in this project/initiative? In which way are the migrant/refugee people involved in this project/initiative? How are you promoting participation of local people? And of migrant/refugee people?

A: Our main purpose is to welcome newcomers in the city. We want them to be included in our collective, participating in the same things as we do in a self-organized way. We support families and individuals, both of refugees and migrants, without making distinctions between them. We don't want migrants/refugees to depend on us, but to be active and part of the society. We organize many things all together: a Bazaar, music nights, parties, collective meals, etc., and they also participate in the Assemblies. We also had a photography exhibition with pictures taken by the refugee people in some of the camps. Also, one of the main activities was the participation in the anti-racist festival that takes place every year in the city, where Room 39 was in charge of one of the food points, selling among other things Syrian food prepared by the refugee people. (Christos)

Q: Which are the BENEFITS you can tell about this project/initiative? (Concerning local people/concerning immigrant/refugee people)

A: In my opinion, there are many benefits that come from the participation of migrant and refugee people in Steki. Here they have legal support, Greek and English lessons, the people from the LGTBQ group- which they can contact, for example, if they are part of this collective- etc. Also we participate in the demonstrations for migrants' and refugees' rights. On the other hand, we, the Greek people, gain a lot with the participation of migrant and refugee people in Steki: they allow us to know different cultures, gastronomy and ways of seeing the world (Christos)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims? Has this project/initiative faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)?

A: The main challenges are related to cultural misunderstandings. Sometimes is difficult to achieve our aim of being all of us part of the same community. Sometimes it is difficult to agree with other worldviews, like how some people from Syria or Iran think about women, etc. It is a big challenge to "mix" all these cultures and arrive to common points of understanding between all of us" (Christos)

Interview ANTIGONE (Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence)

Q: How did this project/initiative start? Which are the objectives of this project/initiative?

A: Our complete name is ANTIGONE Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence is a non-profit organization. Antigone was created on 1993 by the ecological movement of Thessaloniki .We develop activities on anti-racism and non-discrimination, human rights, social ecology, peace and non-violent conflict resolution. The aim of the organisation is the promotion of equal opportunities for all without any discrimination -on the basis of sex, race, national origin, social/economic/educational status, disability, age, religion etc. Through its activities

that are based on solidarity and active participation, we target to awareness raising and sensitization of the society on issues of non-discrimination, human rights, ecology, non-violence and interculturality. Our target are the people in situation of vulnerability, such as people with disabilities, LGTB, Roma people, migrants and refugees.

Our vision is not to tell the people what to do. We want a bottom-up approach that also inspire and empower these people. Our methods try to promote non-formal education as a way of learning. Within our biggest aims is the creation of a "democratic school". In order to achieve this, we are trying to implement workshops on Human Rights in the Schools involving the children and the parents, as well as giving training to the teachers at every level. (Paulina Lazaridou, Director of Antigone)

Q: In which way are the Greek people involved in this project/initiative? In which way are the immigrant/refugee people involved in this project/initiative?

A: There is a lot of work to do in transit schools in the area of Thessaloniki and around the refugee camps. We are nowadays working in non-formal education activities in the camp of Diavata, and also with some of the schools where refugee children are attending class. Our activities aim to promote interaction at all levels. In the Schools, we develop "official and unofficial" activities where local and refugee students share their time together. We believe that interaction is the basis for integration, respect and understanding: the human aspect would not exist without interaction. We do not expect that people are going to "click" between each other; we just want people to get to know each other. We cannot like everyone and this is normal; our objective is trying to break the labels that create stigma. (Paulina)

Q: How are you promoting participation of local people? And of immigrant/refugee people? Which are the BENEFITS you can tell about this project/initiative? (Concerning local people/Concerning immigrant/refugee people) Would you say that this experience has made the participants gain new skills to deal with possible intercultural challenges? If so, which ones? Would you say that this project/initiative is contributing to fight prejudices? If so, in which way? Would you say that this project/initiative has empowered immigrant/refugee people in any way? If so, in which way?

A: In the activities we develop, we try to make refugee people the protagonist of the event through cooking lessons, artist performances, etc. The interaction with local

people is very important, and we try to find any excuse to bring them together, such as sports, arts or other social activities like tandem-skills. We have observed that people want more or less the same things according to their age, so our activities are designed to bring people from the same ages together, after asking them for suggestions. One of our major aims is to stop the perception of refugees only as victims that want to take "as much as they can". We want to show that they have a lot to give and that they are not only passive recipients.

For refugee people is very important to share what they have to offer with others. Many of the people told us that through our activities it was the first time they got to know Greek people, a thing that they can barely do in the camps, apart from the Greek people working there. (Paulina)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims? Have you faced any <u>barriers regarding to interaction</u> between Greek and immigrant/refugee people? If so, which are the strategies/tools you are using to overcome these barriers? Has this project/initiative faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)?

A: We are facing a lot of challenges at very different levels. I would say that the main question underlying here is until where do we help to integration. We would like to have a complete integration of refugee people in the society, but it is very difficult, especially in this particular situation where people are often hosted in refugee camps waiting for the moment to move to another country. We also depend a lot on the authorization of the municipality, the government, etc. to do things. For example, when it comes to work in schools the role of the directors is crucial: they have a lot of power in allowing or not the development of integration activities.

Another problem is the translation. A translator is not just a person who speaks several languages, but a person prepared and trained to do a translation as accurate as possible to the reality. The problem here is that many times we don't count on professional translators, but people who have prejudices, who are critical and not impartial. This is not the role of a translator, and sometimes people helping with translators can blow whatever you try to do.

We have had many cultural misunderstandings, and this is probably one of the biggest problems. One of the most difficult issues is related to the role of the women. How to deal with issues such as polygamy? It is very difficult to force people to behave in the way Europeans do when it comes to the role of women within some communities. Of course within the communities people are very different and many people, for instance, do not practice polygamy. What we try is to bridge these cultural misunderstandings by finding a "middle way", but this is not easy. There are some limits concerning Human Rights that need to be clear, and women's rights are one of these limits. We also face problems regarding to prejudices. The treatment of the so-called refugee crisis by the medias fuels prejudices and stereotypes, and create a negative image making Greek people consider that "they are too many".

Another of the problems that we are facing is related to the funds we count on. We work a lot with volunteers, which is very important to promote social awareness. However, volunteers can only commit to some point, and many of the needs we have in Antigone require people working here every day, fully committed- and for this you need to hire people. (Paulina)

Interview Alkyone Refugee Day Center

Q: How did this project/initiative start? Which are the objectives of this project/initiative?

A: Alkyone Refugee Day Center, is an initiative of the Ecological Movement of Thessaloniki, with the support of the NGO Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe. The aim is to address basic needs of refugees who are stranded in the country, and especially the most vulnerable ones. We provide Breakfast and lunch for 100 people daily, clothing distribution, psychosocial support, limited time housing in apartments ,skills development workshops and seminars and activities and events aiming to cultural exchange, communication and interactivity between refugees and the local community (Gabriella Angeliki, director of the cultural group of Alkyone)

Q: How are you promoting participation of local people? And of migrant/refugee people? In which way are the Greek people involved in this project/initiative? In which way are the immigrant/refugee people involved in this project/initiative?

A: The first people who knew about Alkyone were those who were already in contact with the ecological movement. Besides that, people started to know that we were in the neighborhood and came to know what we were doing. Also we have a very active facebook group were we explain every activity we do.

The target of Alkyone are both migrant and refugee people. The fact that it is called "Refugee day Center" is due to the context we are living right now in Greece, but it does not mean that migrant people are not included. For example, many people who come to our Center are people who have not been in a camp, among others many people from Pakistan. (Gabriela)

Q: Which are the BENEFITS you can tell about this project/initiative? (Concerning local people/ concerning immigrant/refugee people) Would you say that this experience has made the participants gain new skills to deal with possible intercultural challenges? If so, which ones? Would you say that this project/initiative is contributing to conflict prevention? If so, in which way? Would you say that this project/initiative has empowered immigrant/refugee people in any way? If so, in which way? Would you say that this project/initiative is contributing to develop a sense of belonging among the immigrant/refugee people? If so, in which way?

A: In Alkyone we organize both activities where local and refugee and migrant people come together and activities exclusively for refugee people. We have many kinds of activities where local and refugee people are mixed. On the one hand, we have workshops of "soap making" and "eastern candle decoration" whose products are later sold in a Bazaar. On the other hand, we organize several meetings such as a cooking group –where women, especially from Nigeria are very active-, city tours in which locals choose a place on the city and spend time with refugees/migrants while sharing their knowledge about the place, and a weekly meeting on Mondays from 19:00 to 22:00 in a Cultural Center of the neighborhood. This last meeting is especially important for us because it happens every week and it is a very good chance of

gathering between refugee/migrant people and locals and creating a community out of the Center.

As for the activities where only refugee and migrant people attend, we have "spaces to talk" both for men and for women, and a cultural group which organizes visits to museums in the city, a comic group, a photography group and movie nights with Arabic movies, among other things. Also, we have created a virtual tour about some cities in Syria which was very important to them. Besides that, we always try to go to as many events as possible organized by the Municipality to promote interaction.

We design the activities according to the needs of people, but also based in our impressions and discussions and what we consider important. For example we have "welcoming-integration" workshops about life in Greece. For us is very important to build bridges of communication, and this is why the cultural group is so important. For instance, we have had a workshop about poetry where people wrote multilingual poems in Greek and Arabic. These kind of things also promote the empowerment of refugee and migrant people, giving them a chance to be creative, express themselves and interact with Greeks. (Gabriela)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims? Have you faced any <u>barriers regarding to interaction</u> between Greek and immigrant/refugee people? If so, which are the strategies/tools you are using to overcome these barriers? Has this project/initiative faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)?

A: We have mainly two challenges here. One is the sustainability of the project: this is a two year project, so we don't know yet if it will continue in the future because it is impossible right now to know if we will have funds. Another problem is related to the situation of the refugee people coming here: most of these people are still in move and do not see Greece as a place to stay but as a transit country. They feel temporary, and only those who have a permit of stay in the country -after having their asylum granted- are more committed, which is normal. However, we always tell them that their integration process starts from here, no matter if they are moving to another country in the future. Greece is already a country with a western lifestyle quite different from countries such as Syria or Iran, so it is important that they start to be familiar to the

cultural differences they will have to face here. Another big problem that some asylum seekers are facing is their situation of homelessness. If they do not have something as basic as a place to sleep, they are not going to be thinking in integration within the Greek society because they have other things –much more priority- to think about. (Gabriela)

Interview 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki

Q: How did this educational program start? Which are the objectives of this program?

A: The 67th Primary School is located in the west edge of the municipality of Thessaloniki, just behind the railway station, in an underprivileged neighborhood called Xirokrini (…). The history of our school is closely connected to Xirokrini and its people. It was initially founded in 1926(…) shortly after the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey and the oncoming wave of refugees, in order to house the local children. Poverty and misfortune didn't prevent them of working hard to succeed living under difficult conditions. We also come upon names of children of poor Jewish, children most of them lost shortly after the first deportation to Auschwitz in March 1943. (…) In the beginning of the 90's, the school had welcomed children from immigrants from former Soviet Union and Albania. Today our school counts 204 pupils, whose families are the descendants of these old refugees and breadwinners immigrants,-from Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Albania-, people who have lost their jobs due to economic crisis that plaques our country. Despite significant difficulties, our teachers work with faith consistency, altruism and affection for children while parents and the entire local community are embracing the school with love and unwavering trust. It seems like history repeats itself.

In October 2016, the 67th Primary School of Thessaloniki has welcomed an approximate number of 30 refugee children from Derveni camp and ever since they are part of our school. It is worth mentioning that our school is the only school with refugee children in the municipality of Thessaloniki. The 30 refugee children attend the educational adjustment program (D.I.E.P.) that is divided in three aged groups in three classes. (…)Nevertheless, the purpose of the existence of a school unit covers not only the

domain of general knowledge, but also includes and conveys the values of cooperation, tolerance, respect for the other and responsibility. We will try our best to help these children be better for their family and for the society.

At the same time, one of our most important goals is for these children to get to know the rest of our school students, to make friendships and to be given the opportunity to get out of this camp in order for them to walk around our neighborhood and the town of Thessaloniki in general.

I would like to point out that our children, like any other children, have the need to make dreams, unravel their talents, seeking opportunities in order for them to be distinguished. On the one hand our role for the refugee children is to help them get adjusted to a normal life and on the other hand to give them as much knowledge as we can in order for them to deal with the present and future challenges in their life. When a humanitarian crisis arises, education is most important. It can foster social cohesion, provide access to life-saving information, address psychosocial needs, and offer a stable and safe environment for those who need it most. It also helps people to rebuild their communities and pursue productive, meaningful lives.

Our vision is to create a learning an entertainment safe place for these children and their parents, which will set a successful model of good practice for refugee children and adults in a deprived neighborhood of a European city with a rich multicultural past and present, a model that would offer an optimistic perspective concerning the difficult task of education and the smooth integration of refugees in Europe.

We hope that one day, when everything will be better for all the refugee children, they will remember our school with beautiful feelings, as we believe that apart from knowledge, we are trying to offer something very important to children: love, affection and empathy. Perhaps in this way we will have the chance to honor our country, the very one that thousands of years ago invented the Greek world "filoxenia" (hospitality), that means "love for the foreigner". (Dimitris Goulis, Head Teacher)

Q: In which way are the Greek children involved in this program? In which way are the refugee children involved in this program? How are you promoting participation of local people? And of refugee people? Which are the BENEFITS

you can tell about this program? (Concerning local people/concerning immigrant/refugee people)

A: The refugees that this school is receiving are from Syria, and they come to school from 14:00 to 18:00. The thing is that some Greek children stayed after school, and thanks to this a relationships between local and refugee children was created. This school is in a very unprivileged neighborhood, where also children of migrants and Roma people attend. One of the most important goals was for these children to get to know the other students and to get out of the car. This was the first time they got out of the camp and they could go for a walk in the neighborhood of the city.

We carry out many activities. We did tours to let them know this neighborhood and also the city of Thessaloniki. At the end of November we invited children from the camp and Greek children to organize a joint event: "Food festival and world cuisine" with traditional recipes from Greece, from the migrants of our neighborhood and from the refugees. This event has the aim to welcome the refugee children and parents. At the beginning of December we also organized a tour in Thessaloniki. While parents made a walking tour around the city in general (main monuments and museums), the children attended a theatre play. We also made a program of swimming for these children, which was very important for them. We also organized a program of "Olympic Games" with both the children from the morning school and the refugee children, in Kaftantzoglio Stadium, where they all played together. We also went to the International film festival and we saw all together some very beautiful films. That was very interesting because after the film we had a lot of activities to make the children tell us what they had felt watching the movies. Some children had reflections very linked to their refugee experiences, making allusion to their wants to meet their relatives who were in other countries.

Last Friday we celebrated in the Municipality of Thessaloniki a multilingual event. The most important thing was that both Greek and Syrian children danced together a Syrian dance and a Greek dance, and they also sang a Greek and an English song. Also the children of the 5th Grade sang a French song for the refugee children wishing them "tout le Bonheur du monde" (all the happiness of the world)."

I remember that when the children arrived they were very afraid, now they smile and we can really see a difference. One of our major aims was to create a safe place for these

children. We wanted to set a successful practice for refugee children and adults. I think that our model was very successful because from the European Parliament last December they invited us to present our school as a good practice to educate the refugee children. The difficult task of education and integration of refugee children is not a national problem, but a European problem, so our school was a model that could be used in other places. (Dimitris)

Q: Which are the MAIN CHALLENGES this project/initiative is facing to achieve its aims? Have you faced any <u>barriers regarding to interaction</u> between Greek and immigrant/refugee people? If so, which are the strategies/tools you are using to overcome these barriers? Has this program faced particular <u>challenges dealing with cultural misunderstandings</u>? Which are the strategies/tools you are using to deal with them (if they happen)?

A: I believe that arts are very important to promote integration. Unfortunately in this D.I.E.P program we have some difficulties, one of the biggest ones is that we don't have translators to Arabic. Sometimes some Syrian friends of ours helped us with the translation, but it was not easy because we could not listen "the voice" of the children, also because they do not speak Greek yet. I do not want to say that this program failed, but it would have had much more potential if there was not the barrier of the language

The reactions of Greek children were different depending on the case. We have a lot of levels. There is a level of curiosity, also a level of empathy. We have a level of racism as well, of course, which comes from the parents, of course. It is very interesting that sometimes this reaction does not come from the Greek parents, but from the old migrant parents. The reason is that "If I am part of "the others" and I cannot "be like you", if there is an opportunity to "be like you" because there are "new others", I will take the opportunity to show my similarity towards "you" and become part of the majoritarian group." This is the most interesting reaction, and it comes from migrants from Albania and from other countries. It is not as simple as it seems sometimes. The fact of sharing the label "migrant" does not mean that people will support each other. Many times programs in school about tolerance fail because in my opinion we need to approach these reactions of the parents otherwise. We try to meet with the parents to discuss about it. However it is very difficult to the refugee parents to come to the school from

the camps, so the relationships between Greek parents and refugee parents are as close as we would like to. We are trying to organize some reunions into the camps as well.

The problem for us was that we don't accept that our educational system was able to accept all these children. Greece is a transit country, and we had also the problem of the economic crisis so it was not a very favorable situation. Also other thing that happens is that the children are changing: some move to other countries, other arrive…and we need an stability to create this safe place for children. Local and refugee children interact during a short amount of time due to the different schedules. However, especially through the activities organized by the teachers of physical education, children do many things together: they dance, they play football…but the problem as I said is the language, mostly at the beginning. For the next year, the plan from the Ministry of Education is that refugee children will be in the morning school with especial teachers to help them, but I am not very optimistic about it due to the difficulties of this year concerning the level of language. And the problem here again is that Greece is a country in crisis, so we don't have as many funds as we would like to. (Dimitris)