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# Intercultural Education in Portugal: Policies and practices

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## Abstract

*Portuguese option regarding cultural diversity anchors on the principle of Interculturality: within the framework of mutual respect claims the value and richness of diversity and dialogue. This intercultural approach is embedded in the paradigm of an equal value of all cultures and cultural miscegenation, moving thus far beyond multicultural coexistence's statement. This intercultural approach supposes more than simply accepting the 'other', it implies 'hosting' the 'other' within us and accept being transformed within that encounter. This paper analyses some hosting and integrating immigrants policies and measures on intercultural Education in Portugal.*

**Key words:** *interculturality; inclusion; intercultural education; intercultural dialogue in Portugal*

## 1. Portuguese option regarding cultural diversity

As a result of their travelling the Portuguese were the first to develop the notion of a global world (Modelsky, 1987). Because their country was small, they crossed the Atlantic in search of the unknown, discovering rather than conquering, with a particular way of colonising (Guilherme, 2002). Intercultural education is about answering the challenge of diversity in a global world. As Robin Wilson explains, in earlier decades, two models of managing cultural diversity seemed to function: Assimilationism (French model) assumed that members of minority communities would assimilate to a prevailing majority ethos ('republican values'). Multiculturalism (United Kingdom and Dutch model), by contrast, sought to give official recognition to minority communities, understood as homogeneous 'cultures'. The assimiliation model went into crisis because members of minority communities felt excluded from the mainstream (Wilson, 2008).

As it is clearly stated in an official document, the National Strategy for European Year of Intercultural Dialogue:

> Portugal has throughout its history largely experienced a dialogue with other cultures. Though, this encounter with the "Other" may not always have been very pacific and often has been imposing and imperialistic, we have ever managed to discover in the "Other" qualities, which have added something to the Portuguese way of being and to the world. (...) Portuguese option regarding cultural diversity anchors on the principle of Interculturality: Within the framework of mutual respect we claim the value and richness of diversity and dialogue. This intercultural approach is embedded in the paradigm of an equal value of all cultures and cultural miscegenation, moving thus far beyond multicultural coexistence's statement. This intercultural approach supposes

more than simply accepting the "other", it implies "hosting" the "other" within us and accepts being transformed within that encounter.

From having been a country with a large-scale emigration, since the last decades became also a hosting country for immigrants. Portugal only became a migration destination in the 1970s, with the independence of its former African colonies: Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde & São Tomé e Príncipe. There has been a reverse emigration from the ex-colonies to Portugal, changing a racially homogenous population to a multiracial one, mainly in the Lisbon area (Guilherme, 2002).

Since the late 1990s, the geography of immigration to Portugal has undergone truly profound changes. Today, different communities, from which one can highlight Brazilian, Ukrainian and Cape-Verdean immigrants, now make up 5% of the population resident in Portugal (more than 500,000 legal immigrants) and about 10% of the active population come from diverse nationalities and diverse cultural backgrounds. Massive increase of immigration from Eastern Europe to Portugal has prompted a great debate about immigration policy. Immigration increased 400% in fifteen years (ACIDI, 2009).

## 2. Some hosting and integrating immigrants policies and measures

In Portugal, law nº 134/99 prohibits discrimination based on race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin and establishes a Commission to accompany its application: CICDR, Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination, dependant from High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME).

### A. The National Plan for the Hosting and Integration of Immigrants

In 2006, a National Plan for the Hosting and Integration of Immigrants, based on a holistic approach and on the participation of the different entities that are responsible for the implementation of the corresponding policies. Comprising 123 measures, it involved 13 ministries, with an implementation deadline of two years. It considered sector-based areas (e.g. Employment, Health, Housing, Solidarity and Social Security, Education), and cross-cutting themes (e.g. welcoming immigrants, descendents of immigrants, family reunification, and racism and discrimination). This plan adopts for the first time a holistic approach to integration, and serves as a reference point for both the state and for civil society. In 2007, a new Law of Nationality was approved with wide political and social consensus.

### B. The High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue, I.P. (ACIDI)

Together with this National Plan for the Hosting and Integration of Immigrants a Public Institute was launched: the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue, I.P. (ACIDI) was created by Decree-Law no. 202/2006 of 27 October. It has as its fundamental attribute, among others, the promotion of the welcoming and integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Portugal. It is endowed with a board of personnel specialized in all the dimensions involving hosting, reception, support and integration of immigrants. It works in partnership with the immigrant associations.

*Seven key principles*

The policy of welcoming and integrating immigrants in Portugal is based around seven key principles that directly influence the concrete programmes and actions in the service of immigrants.

1.Equality of rights and responsibilities: equal access to work, health, education, social security, justice and all the other sector areas. In the same manner, respect for the law, civic participation or the payment of taxes are obligations which immigrants should comply with, in the same way as nationals.

2. Hospitality: often equality is not enough; immigrants have disadvantages or specific vulnerabilities, which demand positive actions. Inspired by the principle of hospitality, Portugal has, similarly to other countries, developed programmes and actions that allow immigrants to be well received.

3. Citizenship: immigrants are citizens with full rights. They are active constructors of a destination community, even though they do not share a common origin. A form of access to citizenship par excellence is the acquisition of Portuguese nationality; this has become easier in the recent alteration in the Nationality Law, with particular importance for the descendants of immigrants who are now able to benefit from the several possible ways which they have of obtaining Portuguese nationality.

4 and 5. Co-responsibility and participation: an inclusive society can only be built through full cultural and political participation of all citizens. Immigrants should seek this participation and, above all, the host society should be open to that participation within its polis. Immigrants, as citizens, will be participative and co responsible for the common good and, particularly with regard to immigration policy, be part of the solution.

6. Interculturality: in the management of cultural diversity – the Portuguese option affirms the principle of Interculturality. Within a framework of mutual respect and acting within the Law, it has promoted the affirmation of richness of diversity in dialogue. More than a peaceful coexistence of different communities, the intercultural model expresses itself at the crossroads of cultural miscegenation, with none being annihilated, nor imposed upon. Much more than the simple acceptance of the 'other', the intercultural model proposes the welcoming of the 'other' and the transformation of both within this meeting.

7. Consensus: the construction of immigration policy in Portugal has been characterised by the principle of consensus, through dialogue and negotiation. This was an essential option to keep immigration policy away from fractious territory, as has been verified in many european countries (ACIDI, 2009).

These are seven mobilising principles both for the State and for civil society. Portuguese government considers that it is essential to reinforce the alliance with bodies from civil society through empowering their generous, flexible and, normally, more efficient

intervention. ACIDI priorities at the service of Immigrants are three: the first of them, is to make the State the principle source of help for the integration of immigrants. Immigrants need to be legally registered in order to obtain work, as well as their social rights. The second priority is to combat the social exclusion of the most vulnerable. Vulnerability requires a response which leads to protection and the defence of human dignity. Amongst those who suffer the consequences of this vulnerability are the children and young offspring of immigrants who are searching for a place in this society. Access to full citizenship, which the alterations to the Nationality Law, enables placement within an inclusive school, and thus helps fight against situations of inequality. The third priority is the sensibilisation of public opinion towards a spirit of welcoming and tolerance. The context of economic crisis and worries about security arising from international terrorism have made this task even more urgent, using the media and interpersonal contact, in a spirit of co-responsibility with the NGOs and Immigrant Associations, which protect the specific rights and interests of immigrants and of their descendants resident in Portugal, to enjoy dignity and equal opportunities (ACIDI, 2009).

In 2007, as part of a commitment in the Government's Plan for Immigrant Integration, ACIDI and the Institute for Employment and Professional Training (IEFP) established a network of twenty-five job centres specifically for immigrants, formed through partnerships with local organisations – principally immigrant associations.

All these policies and measures, among others, justify a recent quotation from MIPEX: 'A relatively new country of immigration, Portugal has put in place a legal framework on integration composed of favourable policies and best practice. Portugal does not have far to go to improve labour market access, family reunion, and anti-discrimination which all score 2nd out of the 28 MIPEX countries' (Niessen et al., 2007).

## 3. Inclusion and Intercultural Education

According to the Council of Europe White Paper, intercultural dialogue is understood as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. It contributes to the cohesion of culturally diverse societies, fostering equality, and human dignity. It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse worldviews and practices, to increase co-operation and participation and to promote tolerance and respect for the other. Intercultural education starts from recognition that our identity is what makes each of us unique and stresses the importance of dialogue (Council of Europe, 2008).

And according to Unesco Guidelines on Intercultural Education, there are three basic principles on Intercultural Education: the first of them, it respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. The second one stays that Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society. And the third principle stays that Intercultural Education

provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (Unesco, 2006).

As the National Strategy for European Year of Intercultural Dialogue explained in 2008, Portuguese schools are multicultural: the previous homogeneous school population is today characterized by ethnic diversity, all over the country, particularly in the urban centres. This issue has been leading to promote the teaching of Portuguese has a second language and to reinforce teacher education in the field of interculturalism.

According to the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, Intercultural Education is part of Citizenship Education (Council of Europe, 2008). Citizenship Education is since 2001, a transversal and compulsory dimension in all the curricula of the Portuguese educational system. A large number of schools are developing projects related to intercultural dialogue issues. Some of these projects involve only a group of pupils, some the whole school and some others groups of schools. There are some national programs open to schools all over the country, involving students attending all grades, for instance the contest 'My school fights discrimination', developed in 2007.

## A. Intercultural Education: 'Between Cultures'

Inclusion in education and intercultural education were recognised in the framework of the political educational policies through the creation, in 1991 (Dispatch 63/ME/91, March 13, 1991) of the *Entreculturas* –'Between Cultures' Board -, a Multicultural Education Programs coordinator organism. According to this document, 'Between Cultures' aims to promote an education that values the human condition, multiplies the opportunities for social, personal and educational success; widens the field of initial and in-service teacher training, mobilises society to civic and democratic education, by promoting it, and finally opens new areas of cooperation and reinforcement of the international community. More specifically, this department intends to stimulate citizenship, which is specifically concerned with and focused on 'multicultural education' and to contribute to a climate of acceptance of, solidarity towards, tolerance of and respect for the right to Difference. As it was analysed in a recent study about Intercultural Active Citizenship Education - INTERACT -, among a high number of strategies, it is relevant to mention, for example, the need to cooperate with higher education institutions in order to develop contents regarding intercultural education and to promote their inclusion in teacher initial and in-service training; to develop multiple projects dealing with specific communities, such as East-Timorese, Gypsies and Cape-Verdian children; to include the intercultural dimension in two important projects, namely 'Education for All' and the Inter-Ministerial Programme on Educational Success. And to identify problematic schools in terms of racial conflicts and tensions. A more recent strategy that is important to intercultural education has been proposed in the 2001 reform when Portuguese as second language was offered to students with a different mother tongue (Guilherme et al, 2007).

## B. 'Choices' Programme

'Choices' Programme (*Escolhas*) is a portuguese government social inclusion programme aimed at children and young people aged between 6 and 24, coming from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as descendants of immigrants and ethnic minorities. The Programme seeks to promote equality of opportunities and to reinforce social cohesion. It was created in January 2001 and has already gone through three phases of development. During the first implementation phase (2001-2003), it was a Programme for Crime Prevention and Youth Integration; in this period 50 projects were implemented. Now, 'Choices' Programme brings together around 770 institutions, all over the country. Each project involves one coordinating institution and various partners, such as schools, training centres, associations, civil society organisations, among others, who together form a consortium. Each consortium develops and implements activities in four complementary areas: School Inclusion and Non-Formal Education, Professional, Training and Employability, Civic and Community Participation and Digital Inclusion. This Programme has received the European Crime Prevention Award (European Union 2003) Honourable Mention for Social Inclusion (United Nations) and it was Selected as a Best Practice in the *Handbook for Integration* (European Commission 2007). At the end of 2007 it covered a target group of around 47,300 people.

### C. Trainers on interculturality

Interculturality is not only resolved in the various organs of power. It arises from democracy and from people learning about and experiencing it. It needs to be learned in the same way as democracy. The process of learning about the Other, about how to know the Other, about how to build things with the Other, whilst always safeguarding what is strange, different and frequently unavoidable and unchangeable between different cultural, social and economic groups. Since 2006 a team of 25 trainers were trained, at a national level, to develop training sessions, among other areas, on interculturality. Any private or public institution can apply to this team to develop training sessions.There is a high demand by diverse institutions, more and more aware of the importance of reflecting about interculturalism in their projects. In 2008 different partnerships were established in order to equip schools with intercultural education pedagogical materials, to promote best practices awards and programs valuing educational projects approaches. Students from university and professional training courses were also involved (ACIDI, 2009).

### D. Involving the scientific community: the Immigration Observatory

ACIDI integrates also an Immigration Observatory, in order to deepen knowledge about the reality of immigration in Portugal and to specify, carry out and evaluate efficacious policies regarding the integration of immigrants. In order to achieve this objective, it acts in a network, through cooperation with universities, research centres and other institutions. This network is composed by ten research centres. It is considered a way to fulfil the aim of privilege actions capable to generate sustainability, involving the scientific community for the development of the research in the areas of intercultural education and dialogue. The publishing undertakings of the Immigration Observatory currently include, among other significant public activities, the following projects: four separate series of publications, comprising more than 40 published academic works – OI

Studies Series, Communities Series, Theses Series and Intercultural Portugal Series -; the *OI Newsletter*, eight issues of which have been published, together with the respective thematic files. The Website of the Immigration Observatory provides a regular and up-to-date source of information and access to the many tens of thousands of interested people who consult it regularly (ACIDI, 2009).

## 4. Intercultural Education: a gap between public policies and actual practices?

Immigrants are now major parts of the social Portuguese system. They contribute to the renewal of the population, to the economic development and to revitalizing of cultural and social behaviours. National laws have been created or developed in order to accommodate them. But still there is a journey to do (Antunes, 2009). And precisely a big part *of* 'this journey to do' regards Intercultural Education, as we will now consider.
The international study on Intercultural Active Citizenship Education already mentioned - INTERACT -, after conducting a considerable number of interviews, noticed that in Portugal, 'European recommendations on 'intercultural education' are given great attention by policy-makers (...). However, there is a gap between public rhetoric and actual practice' (Guilherme et al., 2007, p 100-101). Data gathered noted a general lack of theoretical knowledge on this issue, among teachers. Most of them did not show a structured knowledge of the official European and national recommendations and with regard to teacher education, they had not taken any pre-service or in-service teacher development courses directly related to the intercultural dimension of citizenship education. The urge to acquire more education in this area comes from the consciousness some teachers have that they are not prepared to deal with the growing number of students from ethnic minorities:

> There seems to be a general concern about immigrants, but no well-structured school strategy to facilitate their introduction and integration in school life, except for some Portuguese language support classes. Interculturality only becomes an issue, if there is in fact cultural diversity in their schools and classrooms (Guilherme et al., 2007, p 92).

This study reveals that some schools consider that intercultural exchange can be promoted by organizing events, in which some aspects of foreign and national cultures are exhibited, which is not a sufficient stategy (Banks, 1995). The teachers interviewed in this study who had collaborated with the *Entreculturas* Department acknowledged their teacher education model as the best they had come across as related to intercultural education, mainly due to a strong emphasis on the relationship between theoretical input, with protocols made with higher education departments and research centres, and practice, mainly through project work carried out in their schools and with their students (Guilherme et al., 2007). As it was already explained, in the early 90s, the Ministry of Education created a working group to study and to promote intercultural education. The 'Board of Intercultural Education' aimed to develop particular strategies and activities in schools with a high rate of pupils from immigrant background and high levels of school failure. However, the initial aim of broadening the intercultural approach to education to the whole country and curriculum was never accomplished, remaining confined to projects in pilot-schools. Constant organisational change within the Ministry of Education prevented the consolidation of policies on intercultural education initiated.

The 'Between Cultures' Department has been more and more pushed into a corner area related basically to immigrant and minority children. This became more evident when it was moved away from the Ministry of Education into the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities: 'This dislocation culminated in a bigger gap between intercultural education (Entreculturas) and citizenship education (Ministry of Education)' (Guilherme et al., 2007, p 98). Anyway, I really agree with Roberto Carneiro, Coordinator of the Immigration Observatory and former Ministry of Education, when he says that 'The memory of the Portuguese is clearly intercultural. The future can hardly cease to be' (Costa & Lacerda, 2007, p 9)

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