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Challenges in the management of religious and cultural diversity in current democracies: contributions from good governance and the reconstruction of citizenship

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ABSTRACT

Democracies all across the globe are facing serious challenges from increasing ideological polarisation that brings with it the weakening of social peace and its values.

It is necessary to successfully confront the challenge of how to build inclusive, culturally diverse societies, not just because doing so successfully is a precondition for countries to focus properly on other priorities of economic growth, health and education for all citizens, but because allowing people full cultural expression is an important development end in itself. In recent years, the UNDP *Human Development Report* has argued strongly that this is as much a question of politics as economics – from protecting human rights to deepening democracy.

Sustainable development goal (SDG) 16 can help in strengthening and evaluating the conditions for good governance that guarantee diversity, such as: the use of differentiated approaches in legislation, policy and the administration of justice; the effective participation of minorities in decision-making on all measures that affect them; and accountability through the use of human rights indicators.

Keywords

Religious and cultural diversity, right to identity, violent radicalism, minorities, SDG 16, policies of recognition, inclusion, non-discrimination.

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Fears and challenges in complex societies in the 21st Century

The increasing multiplicity of identities, affiliations and solidarities has significant consequences when considering contemporary society. Social reality has become more fluid and diffuse. Democracies all across the globe are facing serious challenges from increasing ideological polarisation that brings with it the weakening of social peace and its values. There is little difference between the xenophobic reaction of many citizens of neighbouring Latin American countries to the immigration crisis in Venezuela, the reaction of North Americans to Hispanic immigrants, the reaction of citizens of Myanmar to the Rohingya and the reaction of Europeans to the impact of the crisis in the Middle East. This occurs despite the fact that the convergence of religious, ethnic and cultural identities and socio-economic contexts is very different in each case. Nor is current radical and violent extremism confined to the boundaries of the modern nation-state; the UN estimates that 35,000 young people from 100 different countries have sworn their allegiance to Daesh.

What is certain is that in the global geopolitical context, the foundations of democracy are being strained to the limit and that borders governed by fear are multiplying everywhere (Innerarity, 2000). The rhetoric and new imaginaries about migrant invasions are persistent and become amplified in the unfettered social media echo chambers that today polarise and spread the discourse of hatred and fear. Simplistic religious and cultural stereotypes abound in popular beliefs and informal communication, with an immense power to shape ways of thinking. In addition, we should not forget that in politics, imaginaries are real, since their reality consists in their effects (García Ruiz, 2018). This has been well understood by both Daesh and the ultra-right of Europe and America. One of Daesh's successes lies not in its good governance but its communication strategy, which creates a perception of good governance. More than 25% of the terrorist group's videos show it providing public services to the Sunni populations of Iraq and Syria. In its own way, the ultra-right of Europe and American is also connecting with the fears of large segments of the population hit by the economic crisis and by the unbridled neo-liberalism in which it was incubated.

Stark reality shows us that the fear of change is not confined to how to manage the arrival of the 'other', nor whether they will embrace our customs. This fear is also aroused by 'other' fellow citizens who are born and raised in the same country, but who are rendered invisible and frequently excluded. Daesh's recruitment of young citizens, born or raised in Europe, confronts us with the disenchantment and scepticism generated by democracies which are not as inclusive and participatory as they should be: Do all who are here belong and are all who belong here? What are our reciprocal duties and the conditions for our loyalty? Who is allowed to be one of *us* and who is no longer included as one of *ours*?

It seems evident that fear is a lack of references for ratifying what we know or what we are. Moreover, the explosion of complexity sparks the desire to reduce it to a scale that is understandable and governable. 'So far the focus has been on how states should manage diversity within their borders. But in an era of globalization states also face challenges from outside their borders, in the form of international movements of ideas, capital, goods and people. Expanding cultural freedom in this age of globalization presents new challenges and dilemmas. Contacts between people, their values, ideas and ways of life have been growing and deepening in unprecedented ways' (UNDP, 2004: 10). And this requires that «our main challenges in global governance – democracy, humanism, justice – need to be considered in a new context that could be summed up as the idea that we must shift from sovereignty to responsibility» (Innerarity, 2012: 12).

Fundamentally, there is a stubborn resistance to assimilating the global change of context that comes with globalisation, which affects the concepts of identity, pluralism and state sovereignty to which we have grown accustomed through the logic of the nation-state. All these concepts are undergoing profound transformation. These new realities affect all of us and compel all of us to make certain changes. At the same time, they offer us new possibilities. «The collective subject is always in a state of continuing self-constitution, and the judgments it makes will have a reflective effect upon its own identity as a community» (Beiner, 1983: 143). I share Innerarity's (2001: 233) view that,

> […] at the heart of any constitutional order or democratic coexistence, there is an inconsistent "we", a disconnect and a contradiction, that continually and provisionally redefines the scope of inclusion and exclusion. This is why politics cannot be monopolised by institutional realities, through the organisation of society and through ritualised statehood. The political sphere is instead the place in which a society acts on itself and renews the shape of the common public space.

And this is where our principles, our capacity to make policy and define ourselves come into play, in and through this change. We must accept that it is not possible to imagine a simpler shaping of the world. This is the intent of all bigotry, dogmatism and fundamentalism, whose practitioners are precisely those who are not capable of absorbing the idea that they may be observed as such (Innerarity, 2001: 231).

In the face of this global danger, therefore, it is crucial to understand that in established democracies the fear of immigration, as well as the fear of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, is not a product of the congenital xenophobia of public opinion. Naïr (2018) suggests that it is the price to pay for the profound social crisis and increased inequalities caused by

the ultra-liberal management of the European and American economies[1]. From this perspective, economic security would be structurally dependent on the ideological security of citizenship.

Taking a broader perspective, other commentators suggest that «contemporary violent extremism is intrinsically related to the crisis of the nation-state» (World Leadership Alliance – Club de Madrid, 2017). The world today has to be considered and governed using categories different from those of the nation-state. Frustration arising from the perception of nation states' unfulfilled promises has created conditions favourable to the emergence of a wave of global rebellion, which manifests differently in diverse regions of the planet. The factors involved in the processes of radicalisation are varied and increasing in number. In addition to religious, socio-economic and geo-strategic motivation, the fascination with contemporary extremism has many underlying causes that are hard to objectify, such as frustration, the trivialisation of violence through popular culture and the creation of alignments of identity in the digital sphere (Crettiez, 2016; Bonelli-Carrie, 2018).

The response of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 'Leave no one behind'

In all cases, the best way to combat discrimination, xenophobia, extremism and violence is to eradicate and respond to these frustrations. The international community, aware of the magnitude of the challenge, adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity on 2 November 2001, which for the first time recognised that cultural diversity «is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations» (Article 1). While the Declaration lacks binding obligations, it is an expression of the increasing relevance of this issue (Burri, 2010).

Diversity was subsequently incorporated into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Human Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly by means of Resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015. It is the specific focus of sustainable development goal (SDG) 16, which aims to «Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels». The 2030 Agenda incorporates important developments. It is *civilizing* because it puts people at the centre, employs a rights-based approach and seeks global sustainable development within planetary boundaries. It is

[1] On average, and taking into account population size, income inequality increased by 11% in developing countries between 1990 and 2010. Meanwhile, the average income of the wealthiest 10% of the population has risen to approximately nine times that of the poorest 10% in the OECD, a seven-fold increase over the last 25 years.

universal because it seeks a renewed partnership where all countries participate equally. It is *inclusive* because it is framed within the bold and ambitious principle to 'leave no one behind', which aims to ensure that all people benefit from the advantages of sustainable development. It is *indivisible* because it integrates all three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – offering a holistic vision of development. In addition, eradicating poverty and reducing inequality are both central to the Agenda, because evidence shows that, beyond a certain threshold, inequality harms growth and poverty reduction, the quality of relations in the public and political spheres of life and individuals' sense of fulfilment and self-worth.

The holistic approach to human development incorporated into the 2030 Agenda urges a greater understanding of the structural factors that cause poverty and inequality (e.g., discrimination, lack of representation, lack of economic funding, salary funds and social policies), and not just the symptoms (e.g., low income, education and health). And this requires broadening the approach to human development.

A place for freedom and identity rights in the concept of Human Development

Today, «Difference, in particular, seems to have displaced inequality as the central concern of political and social theory» (Phillips, 1997: p. 20). The struggle for «recognition of differences» has become the paradigmatic form of social and political conflict. As Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator, indicates, the world must

> [...] successfully confront the challenge of how to build inclusive, culturally diverse societies. Not just because doing so successfully is a precondition for countries to focus properly on other priorities of economic growth, health and education for all citizens. But because allowing people full cultural expression is an important development end in itself (UNDP, 2004: v).

Not surprisingly, the concept of human development advocated by Amartya Sen and incorporated by the UNDP aims above all to expand people's choices to choose the kind of lives they want to lead, but also to provide them with the tools and opportunities to enable them to make these choices. People who are poor and marginalised – who are usually members of religious or ethnic minorities or migrants – have little or no influence on political action at local and national levels, and are therefore unlikely to get equitable access to jobs, schools, hospitals, justice, security and other basic services. «Expanding cultural freedoms is an important goal in human development – one that needs urgent attention in the 21st century» (UNDP, 2004: 12).

In recent years, the UNDP *Human Development Report* has argued strongly that this is as much a question of politics as economics from protecting

human rights to deepening democracy. In specific terms, the 2004 Report advocates an alternative approach that respects and promotes diversity while keeping countries open to global flows of capital, goods and people. This requires policies that explicitly recognise and respect cultural, religious and ethnic differences and, at the same time, address imbalances in economic and political power that lead to the loss of cultures and identities.

As Sen (2004) suggests, the «cultural dimensions of human development require careful attention» since «cultural liberty is an important aspect of human freedom, central to the capability of people to live as they would like and to have the opportunity to choose from the options they have – or can have». In addition, however, given the strong interdependence of the different dimensions of human life, the importance of cultural liberty is not confined merely to the cultural sphere; instead, it also affects the successes and failures within the social, political and economic spheres. Every social practice is simultaneously economic and cultural, but not necessarily in equal proportions, such that the paradigm of recognition does not invalidate the paradigm of redistribution (Fraser, 1995).

The great challenge today is how to articulate coexistence in deeply pluralistic societies while simultaneously avoiding the communitarian model and the privatisation of identities. In this regard, the ability to choose is important to prevent what Appiah (1996) calls «new tyrannies», which take the form of recently adopted identities and which can become «tyrants» by obliterating the demands of other identities that we would also like to accept and respect. This aspect is particularly necessary in confronting the fanaticism of some minority identity claims that constitute human rights violations (Okin, 1999). Democracies can fall into the trap of uncritical recognition of differences based on a cultural relativism, which ignores the universality of rights. For this reason, focusing on cultural freedom is not exactly the same as doing everything possible for cultural diversity, since it would be a serious error to consider diversity as valuable regardless of how it is achieved. Support for diversity comes from the value of freedom. At the same time, the importance of freedom goes hand in hand with the need for the equitable advancement of freedom for all people. Diversity and multiculturalism should be evaluated, therefore, for what they bring to the lives and freedoms of the people concerned (Taylor, 1992).

Reception and monitoring of the management of diversity in SDG 16: a balance sheet

SDG 16 embraces these concerns and includes ambitious targets. The majority contribute to improvements in the management of religious and cultural diversity in society: (a) «promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development», (b) «provide access to justice for all» and (c) «build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels». *Peace, justice and*

effective, transparent institutions are three interrelated aspects that favour fair and equitable treatment of the differences in our complex societies. The most useful targets and indicators for assessing the progress of SDG 16 with respect to the management of religious and cultural diversity are shown below.

Tab. 1 – SDG 16 Goals and targets linked to the management of diversity

Targets	Indicators	Data
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	16.3.1 Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms	No
16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	16.6.2 Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services	No
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	16.7.1 Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions	No
	16.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group	No
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months	Yes
	16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information	Yes
16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles	Yes
16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	16.b.1 Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law	No

Source: UN Docs. A/RES/71/313, E/CN.3/2017/2 y E/CN.3/2018/2.

In accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/290, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The HLPF has established a schedule for thematic reviews on the progress of the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the theme will be «Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality», with a corresponding review of goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. Due to this, there is a current lack of detailed information.

The SDG Report for 2018 provides some generic data for SDG 16 results to date (United Nations, 2018: 12), but there is no information available yet for indicators disaggregated by country, as shown in the table (Dissemination platform of the Global SDG Indicators Database). It is precisely these social indicators that are the most appreciable in the management of diversity because it is these that reflect the real situation of the population with respect to discrimination and harassment, victims of violence, satisfaction with public services and the making of inclusive, participatory and representative decisions that respond to the needs of the people. At the same time, it should be noted that these targets are not only political commitments; rather, they are the reflection of various human rights included in international texts, and as such, entail truly binding legal obligations for the states that have ratified them. These targets require us to adjust our criteria for justice and representation. To some degree, the same principles of universality and neutrality require us to examine the way in which, up until now, we have conceived the public space, because rules and institutions are not created in a historical and cultural *vacuum* (Taylor, 2007; Woehrling, 2011). Who holds the power decides the meaning of the difference (Hekman, 2004: 58).

The paradigm of recognition requires inclusive policies that provide some form of public recognition, space and support for the culture, language, ethnicity and religion of minority groups (Gutierrez-Fresno, 2012; Taylor, 1992; Benhabib, 2002; Evans, 2008). And, above all, it requires policies to facilitate their participation in democratic deliberation (Taylor, 1995; Kymlicka, 2000; Benhabib, 1996). The ideal of recognition entails the need to be respected as subjects involved in decision-making and, therefore, the need to verify our procedures for representation and participation (Innerarity, 2009: 8).

For this reason, it is essential to ensure that these 'left behind' populations have visibility and a voice in the processes of planning, monitoring and evaluation, and are included in data collection. The United Nations World Data Forum was host to extensive discussion on the need for social indicators to be disaggregated by all factors relevant to specific national contexts, enabling detailed analyses to highlight the different aspects of marginalisation. Used effectively, social data bring visibility to the different living conditions of people and communities. However, one of the challenges associated with the use of data for understanding social wellbeing is that these data not only can perpetuate marginalisation, but with the Data Revolution, could exacerbate it. There will always be unknown, silent,

muted and unheard voices. These forms of marginalisation and exclusion should facilitate effective and targeted interventions to address the specific forms of marginalisation.

Ensuring that we 'leave no one behind' is going to take much more than just collecting disaggregated data – it is going to require us to explicitly engage with civil society organisations and community-based organisations that are on the ground working with those left behind. It requires the explicit incorporation of qualitative data, perception data and microdata, and broader and deeper engagement with citizens through citizen-generated data, community-based monitoring systems and crowdsourced indicators (Thinyane, 2018).

SDG 16 can effectively contribute to the strengthening and evaluation of the conditions for good governance that guarantee diversity, such as: the use of differentiated approaches in legislation, policy and the administration of justice (Woehrling, 2006; Cartabia, 2007; Bousset, 2007; Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and León Díaz, 2009; Elósegui, 2013 and 2017; Rodríguez Peñaranda, 2016); the effective participation of minorities in decision-making on all measures that affect them (Minority Rights Group International, 2016 and 2017; Weller-Nobbs, 2010); and accountability through human rights indicators.

We cannot base success simply on changes in policies or legislation, even when these are necessary. In the absence of a change in the political culture – that is to say, in the way that citizens think, feel and act in ways that genuinely accommodate the needs and aspirations of others – real change will never happen. The redrawing of new social contracts between citizens and the state, and the ethical rearmament of public institutions will be the key to countering violent extremism and promoting the social cohesion that our diverse and complex societies demand. Institutions must be strengthened such that citizens regain confidence in their public administrations, by eradicating corruption in public life, implementing policies to create an economy that is capable of absorbing the talent of new generations of citizens, and managing public services efficiently. Together these elements form the basis of a sustainable narrative to counteract violent extremism and to build a more effective and inclusive democracy.

It is not enough to improve standards of good governance if citizens do not perceive them as having improved**.** As has been seen in some countries, the objective improvement of economic, social and development indicators does not necessarily lead to a decrease in levels of frustration and citizen unrest. 'As well as actually improving governance standards, countries must implement communication policies to enhance citizens' awareness and perceptions of positive government actions' (Word Leadership Alliance – Club de Madrid, 2017: 94).

States and public institutions must once again win the respect of their citizens and be credible and effective in the eyes of the public. Achieving this will not be an easy task, but doing so will ensure that respect for hu-

man rights and the freedom of people will continue to mark the norms of coexistence in the twenty-first century.

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