

# Introduction

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This book, *The Sustainability of Cultural Diversity*, brings together a series of contributions from different disciplines and in different cultural settings with the aim of increasing our understanding of the functioning of cultural diversity. It represents the insights of more than 30 scholars around Europe and beyond, having studied cultural diversity extensively in their own university or institution as well as exchanged their research results and knowledge in the SUS.DIV network of excellence over a period of five years.

It is the strong belief of the SUS.DIV Network of Excellence that, as emphasized in Chapter 1, no single discipline or perspective can explain sustainable diversity in a comprehensive way. At the same time, though, this book is neither presenting nor striving for a framework representing all important dimensions and processes of sustainable diversity. Such a framework would imply assimilation of the different disciplinary perspectives into one overarching way of thinking, which would imply a loss of the variety and specificity of each discipline as well as of the cultural setting of the study. Rather, this collection of chapters has the aim of advancing knowledge in the area of diversity and sustainability through presenting different insights in such a way that it allows further comparing, contrasting and combining.

As a reader, you will encounter a variety of studies which are connected by two central questions: 1) how does cultural diversity contribute (or not) to central notions of sustainability such as human welfare, development, social cohesion, or socio-economic integration? and 2) How can we create spaces and communities where cultural diversity can unfold in a positive way through particular forms of cultural interactions and processes as well as types of initiatives and structures? The chapters address these two central questions in three arenas: nations, cities and organizations.

## DEFINING SUSTAINABLE DIVERSITY

This book first of all offers a conceptual discussion on the meaning of sustainability. In our search to structure our studies and its analyses in a

comparable way, we examined a variety of definitions and indicators of sustainability. Building on an extensive analysis of the concepts of sustainability and diversity, Chapter 1 [van Londen and de Ruijter] provides a definition of ‘sustainable diversity’ as

the ability to structure and manage diversity in such a way that this diversity results in or promotes (ecological and social) sustainability implying stable and acceptable relationships within and between (groups of) people involving the maintenance of biological diversity, improving material standard of living, and equal (or at least fair) access to scarce resources of all kinds as (paid) labour, health, housing, education, income or whatever.

This definition is used throughout the book and authors have reflected on the relationship between diversity and sustainability from this perspective.

In order to operationalize this definition, Chapter 1 [van Londen and de Ruijter] discusses and reviews various sets of indicators of social sustainability in literature. Specific sets for cities and organizations are developed and provided in Chapter 9 [Bitušíková and Luther] and Chapter 13 [Zanoni et al.], respectively. Although there are differences in phrasing, contexts and perspectives, the overlap is very large and all examples can be read in terms of Eichler’s imperatives on sustainable development (in addition to the fundamental ecological imperative):

*The economic imperative* would then be to ensure an adequate material standard of living subject to the constraints of the ecological imperative. *The social imperative* would be to create or maintain social structures that are beneficial to those involved, incorporating all people within a given context (which will vary from instance to instance) and meeting their diverse social needs. [...] *The cultural imperative* would be to provide a cultural and spiritual base that acknowledges our dependence on the ecosystem, our interdependence with other humans, that transcends material accumulation [...]. Finally, *the governance or decision-making imperative* would be to provide decision-making structures at all levels that are effective and legitimate in the eyes of those affected in order to implement policies that are necessary to fulfill the other imperatives. (Eichler 1999: 201)

Chapter 2 [Chiapparino and Giulianelli] further offers a historical perspective on sustainable diversity. Reviewing European history in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, it discusses past forms of diversity and identifies unsustainable forms of diversity and what their unsustainability consisted in. This illuminating analysis indicates the decisive roles of nationalism and economic disequilibria, together with a large set of religious, cultural and ethnic elements. The insights from such a historical perspective of the dynamics of national and socio-economic diversity serves as a fruitful analogy to point out the present problems of social sustainability.

## THE GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE DIVERSITY

The book shows interesting examples of positive processes and structures towards sustainable diversity. At the level of organizations, Chapter 13 [Zanoni et al.] analyses three cases of businesses whose management practices appear to foster sustainable diversity. Although conducted independently from each other in different countries, industries and by different researchers, they present remarkably similar organizational practices, including a flat organization, attention to developing employees' competences and encouraging employees' participation and responsibility on an individualized basis (not based on groups) for all employees, and promoting interpersonal relations.

At the level of cities, Chapter 9 [Bitušiková and Luther] looks at Bratislava since the 1989 transformations. It shows how opening public spaces, promoting access and relations and a more inclusive and decentralized governance has contributed to bringing more diversity into the city, enriching the quality of life of its citizens and providing new economic opportunities. Also looking at cities, Chapter 8 [Küchler and Lo Conte] compares two different styles of diversity in two areas of London, Battersea and Bow. The chapter shows that the open and inclusive style of diversity in Battersea attracts investments that provide solutions for local needs. As a consequence, people shop locally, wandering around before stopping where they need. This shapes a more individualistic attitude to person–person and person–thing relationships, which in turn sustain this open and chaotic style of diversity.

At the level of the nation, Chapter 5 [Galindo] summarizes the history of diversity policies (notably for the indigenous population) in Bolivia after independence in 1825. It shows the positive process enacted by the election of Evo Morales (2005), of indigenous origin, through a new wave of reform to open local administration, promoting access to land ownership and education with a view to progressively empowering the indigenous population and fully acknowledging the plurality of the Bolivian society. Also Chapter 6 [Bellini et al.] offers insights into policies that appear to foster the integration of migrant groups along the socio-economic dimension and their participation in civic life and the host polity. Comparing four different migrant groups' place in German society, it points to the importance of well-designed policies in terms of providing incentives to migrants to invest for a long-term successful stay in the host country as well as building strong ties between migrants and the surrounding socio-cultural environment, also from a long-term perspective.

The book further offers examples of positive processes which sometimes tend to be overlooked or have been understudied. Chapter 10 [Šešić et al.]

shows the potential of arts and participatory cultural projects to facilitate positive dynamics within local communities where formal policies have failed. Relying on the insights and experiences of European cultural professionals from 12 countries, Šešić and colleagues identify the key characteristics of successful projects referring to the importance of partnership relations with public authorities and other stakeholders, and avoiding ethnicization thereby acting as a powerful means for bringing together individuals from different communities towards an identity based on the sense of place and not on ethnic belonging. Also within the city context, Chapter 11 [Riganti] looks at cultural tourism as a form of ethnic relation with great significance for ethnic identities. Relying on a contingent valuation study in Amsterdam, Riganti promotes the value of tourism as a way of increasing the awareness of cities' diversity and enhancing intercultural exchanges. She shows that tourists and residents value interacting and exchanging across cultures and would be willing to pay for projects aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue in different forms, such as intercultural festivals. This attitude is independent from the ethnic group.

## THE TENSIONS OF DIVERSITY AND DIVERSITY POLICIES

The book further clearly indicates that diversity and sustainable diversity are complex phenomena. In their discussions of either the impact of diversity or the processes and structures leading to sustainable diversity, the chapters show a number of tensions.

### **Diversity versus Inequality**

A first tension refers to the notion of diversity itself. Several chapters indicate that diversity can not and should not be treated independently from the issue of inequality. Chapter 1 discusses how culture is often used as a strategic weapon. Claims about common heritage and shared values are made in an effort to gain visibility and a place on the global stage. What is at stake is the control and exploitation of scarce resources. Diversity is always a bedfellow of inequality. In this context, a number of chapters highlight how diversity discourses have been used to veil fundamental inequality issues further complicating the struggle of some racialized, oppressed, underrepresented or discriminated groups. They point to the one-sidedness of culturalism and the need to embed the discussion of diversity within the economic context.

Chapter 3 [Bowman and Betancur] discusses the conversation on 'diversity' in the US context. It compares this relatively new, all-encompassing term

with other terms such as ethnicity, race, assimilation, or the melting pot by considering assumptions about inter-group power, dominance and voluntary choice. From this analysis it becomes clear that, in a stratified environment with an order of inequality, the term diversity has the misleading connotation of multiplicity with the same opportunities and its social practices may continue to reinforce rather than reduce inequality. Chapter 4 [Rousseau and Mukherjee] on the French debate on cultural diversity has a similar conclusion. Discussing the French intellectual debate on diversity over 1983–2005, it highlights the need for bringing into focus the issue of social inequities and the analysis of the economic model and its role in structuring and exploiting differences and equities. Also Chapter 5 on the case of Bolivia [Galindo] provides insights for rethinking the notion of cultural diversity. Through summarizing the history of diversity policies in Bolivia after independence (1825), it points to the need to approach cultural diversity within politically polarized contexts and rediscover its multiple and relational character and the power game embedded in it.

These chapters, all located at the nation level, clearly show that it is important that diversity policies are embedded in the analysis of the socio-economic context and a critique of the economic model (e.g., capitalism) which structures, generates and uses differences. At the same time, we should not end up also in a prevailing economicist view. As argued in Chapter 1, economicism and culturalism are both one-sided. In this respect, Chapter 16 [Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp] illustrates well how culture and economics come together in the phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurship. This chapter discusses how, although entrepreneurship has a capacity to alleviate poverty, to increase employment opportunities and empower the disadvantaged and under-represented, migrant entrepreneurs often end up in a relatively lower income position compared to self-employed natives.

### **Short-term versus Long-term**

A number of chapters show a clear tension between the short and long term. At the level of cities, the cases of Battersea (Chapter 8) and post-1989 Bratislava (Chapter 9) provide examples of positive processes towards diverse, sustainable communities. In both cases, however, a tension emerged between short and long term as the success of the strategy attracts investments and the high prices and the commercial character of buildings make these areas more difficult for the low-income population and lead to homogenization and standardization of buildings.

At the level of the nation, Chapter 6 [Bellini et al.] shows how the freedom of movement enjoyed by Italian migrants since 1950s (as Italy was founding member of the European Community) enabled them to smooth out the

negative economic shocks in the short term better than other migrants, but enacted longer-term processes of exclusion and separation ending in a long-lasting deficit in terms of educational achievements and political participation. This contrasts sharply with the experience of Greek migrants, who were at a disadvantage at the beginning, but have constantly improved their socio-economic conditions throughout the period.

At the level of organizations, Chapter 13 [Zanoni et al.] discusses similar examples in organizations when, for instance, recruiting first-generation migrants for low-skill manual jobs, although diversity-friendly in the short term, may in the long term favour stereotyping and discrimination challenging the long-term sustainability of the policy. Chapter 15 [Siebers and Poels] also shows how focusing on short-term issues, such as promoting identification of employees within the company, may counter longer-term diversity issues. It is therefore important that diversity policies takes a long-term view and are dynamically reassessed to adjust to changing contexts and situations.

### **Top-down versus Bottom-up Processes**

Other chapters show how policies that are designed bottom-up are deemed to fail. As Chapter 5 [Galindo] illustrates, this was the case in the Bolivian experience during 1980–2005 when the government enacted a series of reforms to grant rights to indigenous people. Rather than creating a truly pluralistic society, this resulted in a dual institutional system, clearly categorizing indigenous people as something ‘other’ from the rest of the population. Similar outcomes were obtained in Sweden (Chapter 14 [Hamde and Wåhlin]) during the 1970s, when a number of Immigrant Organizations were created with the task of maintaining and promoting migrants’ languages and cultural activities resulting in separating migrant communities and creating islands rather than interconnection. The role of Immigrant Organizations was revised in the 1980s and 1990s first to be ‘schools of democracy’ and then to ‘promote integration’. In both cases, however, the top-down approach resulted in Immigrant Organizations representing and promoting an assimilation agenda to Swedish styles and attitudes. This was in practice refused by migrants, resulting in unsustainable social outcomes (high criminality, unemployment, school failure rates among immigrants).

These chapters all suggest that diversity policies should be built from a bottom-up approach as it has the potential to allow pluralistic processes of acculturation. They should aim at empowering without imposing pre-designed structures and norms. In contrast to a top-down approach which instigates a unilateral way of acculturation, bottom-up processes allow for a bilateral process, where minority members are free to enact behaviours of their culture as well as those of the majority culture.

## Commonality of Issues and Plurality of Models

Finally, we learn always by comparing, looking for commonalities and differences. This process is inherent to research. Indeed, in what we did above, we have tried to extract some common lessons from a variety of situations, cases and methodologies. Yet, we should never forget that diversity is always the outcome of a dynamic, relational, power-laden and context-embedded process in which identities are construed.

This is clear when looking at Chapters 3–5. National debates are deeply entrenched in national history. In the US (Chapter 3 [Bowman and Betancur]), the debate is dominated by the black versus white divide and the slavism heritage. In France (Chapter 4 [Rousseau and Mukherjee]), issues related to Islam and to the colonialist heritage have a key role in shaping domestic debate and policies. In Bolivia (Chapter 5 [Galindo]), the key issue is the role of the indigenous population in the country. The importance of national patterns in the attitudes towards diversity is also confirmed by the analysis of World Value and European Value Surveys in Chapter 7 [Esmer]. At the level of cities, Chapter 12 [Uherek] shows the complexity of urban development patterns in Prague, and the plurality of ethnic-specific patterns of localization of migrants groups and therefore of sustainable development concepts.

## CONCLUSION

This book addresses the questions of whether and how we can live and prosper together while keeping and enjoying our differences. This is, we believe, a fundamental issue in a world of growing interconnection and interdependence.

Concerning the ‘whether’, we subscribe to article 3 of The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), and believe that preserving and valuing the rich and diverse body of cultures that history provides is crucial to human welfare and development. Indeed, the chapters provide concrete examples where diversity contributes to thriving communities and prosperous nations, as well as competitive companies. This is what we call sustainable diversity. At the same time, the chapters show a number of tensions which may undermine the positive potential of diversity. This could result in a failure to appreciate and even hatred of other cultures, which will turn diversity into lost opportunities, violent conflicts and eventually threats to peace and prosperity.

The ‘how’ therefore becomes central: What policies and structures are appropriate for sustainable diversity? Although we stress that diversity

policies are context-specific and cannot be just transferred from one place to another, we can discern recognition, empowerment and inclusion as the common denominator, the three milestones on which diversity policies should be built. It is vital that all actors are recognized, empowered and included, rather than rejected, imposed or excluded, irrespective of their culture or ethnicity. This is necessary for the emergence of trust and legitimacy that in turn provide the groundwork for sustainable diversity.

## REFERENCES

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