

# D o s s i e r   E d i t o r i a l

---

## Plurality, diversity and multiculturalism

**Tüzin BAYCAN-LEVENT**

*Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture Istanbul, Turkey*

In the past decades, cities, especially metropolitan areas in many countries have increasingly turned into pluriform and multicultural societies with the advent of the era of mass migration of people with different socio-cultural and ethnic origins. The influx of migrants has certainly brought about economic advantages (e.g. the contributions to economic growth and the creation of new jobs) but it has also caused a multiplicity of social and economic tensions (e.g. in local housing market, ghetto formation in cities and differences in lifestyle and behaviour). In parallel to the influx of migrants, the impacts of migration on welfare in receiving countries and cities have become an important debate in both migration studies and socioeconomic policies. In this debate, the three interrelated and complementary concepts viz. plurality, diversity and multiculturalism have gained an increasing social and political interest in recent years. This social and political interest accompanies some other related concepts such as ethnic diversity, cultural diversity, cultural identity but also monoculturalism, acculturation, assimilation, and melting pot.

Multiculturalism as an official national policy was adopted from the 1970s onward in several nations such as Canada, Australia and in most of the member states of the European Union. However in recent years, a reverse trend in the national policy and a return to an official monoculturalism has been observed in several European countries. Although official policy often states that cultural diversity enriches a society, history has shown that newcomers or minority groups have not always been regarded in this positive way. Therefore, plurality, diversity and multiculturalism have become the most critical issues in the social and political debate.

What is diversity? Diversity means difference. The differences can be observed both in nature and society. From an ecological perspective, diversity refers to the variation of life forms within a given ecosystem (biodiversity) whereas from a social and cultural perspective to the differences in life styles and behaviors within a society (cultural diversity). Society is diverse and people's differences can be many and varied in terms of race, culture, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic differences, family structure, values, and more. As well as the more obvious cultural differences that exist between peoples, such as language, dress and traditions, there

are also significant variations in the way societies organise themselves, in their shared conception of morality, and in the ways they interact with their environment. By analogy with biodiversity, which is thought to be essential to the long-term survival of life on earth, it can be argued that cultural diversity may be vital for the long-term survival of humanity; and that the conservation of indigenous cultures may be as important to humankind as the conservation of species and ecosystems is to life in general. Diversity can be defined from a social and political perspective as the ideology of including people of diverse cultural and religious background (multiculturalism) and the political and social policy of encouraging tolerance for people of different backgrounds (Wikipedia). Managing diversity effectively follows on equal opportunities and incorporates the principle that everybody should receive equal rights but, rather than ignoring the differences between people, this diversity should be recognised and respected.

What is pluralism? Pluralism can be defined broadly as the acknowledgment of diversity. Pluralism is used, often in different ways, across a wide range of topics. Pluralism refers to religious pluralism concerning peaceful relations between different religions and cultural pluralism concerning small groups within a larger society that maintain their unique cultural identities. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the condition of being multiple or plural as a condition in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are present and tolerated within a society and the belief that such a condition is desirable or socially beneficial. Pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial to society and that the disparate functional or cultural groups of which society is composed — including religious groups, trade unions, professional organizations, and ethnic minorities — should be autonomous (Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia). However, pluralism is neither diversity alone nor just tolerance, but an engagement with diversity and an active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Pluralism is based on dialogue and dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences.

What is multiculturalism? Multiculturalism refers to the existence of linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse segments in the population of a society. Multiculturalism advocates a society that extends equitable status to distinct cultural and religious groups, no one culture predominating. However, the term is more commonly used to describe a society consisting of minority immigrant cultures existing alongside a predominant, indigenous culture. On the other hand, multiculturalism constitutes a specific focus towards the management and organisation of governmental responses to ethnic diversity and refers to the specific policies developed to respond to, and manage ethnic diversity. Therefore, cultural pluralism or multiculturalism is the policy offshoot of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism emphasises that acknowledging the existence of ethnic diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture should go hand in hand with enjoying full access to, participation in, and adherence to, constitutional principles and commonly shared values prevailing in the society. A policy acknowledging the rights of individuals and groups and ensuring their equitable access to society benefits both individuals and the larger society by reducing pressures for social conflicts based on disadvantage and inequality. Multiculturalism is an enrichment for the society as a whole.

As a summary, diversity refers to pluralism and multiculturalism. While diversity means difference, pluralism refers to the acknowledgment of

diversity, and multiculturalism to a state of both cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographics of a particular social space.

There are several international organizations, including UNESCO, that work towards protecting threatened societies and cultures. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by 185 Member States in 2001, represents the first international standard-setting instrument aimed at preserving and promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. The Declaration aims to have a significant impact on humanising globalisation and making it more culturally sensitive and emphasises that this is an opportunity for States to reaffirm their conviction that inter-cultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and to reject the theory of the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that “cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”. In this vision, cultural diversity becomes a new form of capital, embodied in both material (monuments, historical sites) and immaterial cultural assets (languages, traditions and lifestyles). It is accumulated through generations and provides services for economic growth and human welfare. To move beyond the dichotomy nature/culture is to understand that the environment we inherited and that we will transmit to future generations is indeed a combination of nature and culture. Therefore, to achieve a sustainable development is to ensure that we transmit to future generations a quantity and quality of ‘diversity heritage’ embodied in material and immaterial cultural assets.

In recent years, ‘sustainable diversity’ has gained an increasing interest among both academia and policy-makers. The main interest is to better understand the cultural assets and how their diversity contributes to human welfare and knowledge creation, the dynamics of cultural diversity in relation to the processes of globalisation and integration, and cultural dialogue as a key mechanism through which cultural diversity can lead to knowledge creation and social capital.

This special issue of the A|Z ITU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture includes a coherent set of papers on diversity and multiculturalism. This Special Issue aims to address modern theories and concepts relating to research on plurality, diversity and multiculturalism and to illustrate different case studies from different multicultural cities. This collection provides a valuable overview and introduction to this fascinating field for academics, policy-makers, researchers and students who share a common concern about plurality, diversity and multiculturalism.

The first paper of the issue titled “From Outsiders to On-Paper Equals to Cultural Curiosities? The Trajectory of Diversity in the USA” by Betancur engages in a cursory overview of the trajectory of diversification in the USA and its implications for measuring and mapping it. On this basis, the paper examines the implications of the US experience for the ongoing process of understanding, measuring and mapping diversity in the European Union.

In a next contribution, Sahin and associates address multicultural diversity and migrant entrepreneurship and they focus, in particular, on the attitudes and behaviour of native and migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands in order to reveal their cultural diversities. “*Are there culture-based differences*

*in entrepreneurial attitude and behaviour between natives and migrants as well as within migrant groups and can we explain these differences regarding their socio-cultural background?"* In order to answer this question from the perspective of cultural and entrepreneurial diversity, the authors investigate and compare the differences in entrepreneurial attitude both between natives and migrants and within migrant groups, and explain these differences by means of distinct social and cultural indicators derived from the cultural backgrounds of the entrepreneurs concerned.

The following paper by Elkadi argues the culture built heritage in diverse and tensioned societies. The paper discusses the potential global risks that face cultural built heritage while emphasizing that such risks are not only limited to regions where military operations are taking place but also to nations where questions of identity and cultural diversity raised and questions the reasons and the impact of the rise of ethno nationalism on the protection of cultural built heritage.

The last contribution of the issue by Sweeney and associates refers to another dimension, ecological dimension of diversity and examines ecological concepts necessary to the conservation of biodiversity in urban environments. The paper discusses a range of evolving concepts and techniques that have been identified as crucial in the conservation of biodiversity such as island biogeography, minimum viable populations, metapopulations, homogenization, extinction debt, and patch dynamics, which link species richness to biodiversity at the regional scale and draws attention to the range of research necessary to assess biodiversity across multiple scales in an urban environment.

The collection of papers in this special issue provides important insights into the ongoing debate of diversity and multiculturalism. An important conclusion from the papers in this special issue is that the research in the field of diversity and multiculturalism does significantly contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of the issue concerned and is able to develop relevant policies for a sustainable diversity. However, more work needs to be done especially from a multidisciplinary perspective on diversity and multiculturalism.