

“Intercultural dialogue and language”

Participating in the UNESCO Intercultural Dialogue Program, we meet in different parts of the world to discuss the nature of intercultural and religious dialogue. But how true is this dialogue? Are we really from very different cultures that participate in such attempts at dialogue? It depends the meaning of "culture." Many of us imagine that we would probably join, maybe even most of us.

In a general sense, the objective of intercultural dialogue is to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, the following goals have been outlined:

- To share visions of the world, to understand and learn from those that do not see the world with the same perspective we do;
- To identify similarities and differences between different cultural traditions and perceptions;
- To achieve a consensus that disputes should not be resolved by violence;
- To help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner, by making the necessary adjustments to all types of existing social and political arrangements;
- To bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
- To share best practices particularly in the areas of intercultural dialogue, the democratic management of social diversity and the promotion of social cohesion;
- To develop jointly new projects.

Based on existing experience, one can propose at least six crucial conditions that must be fulfilled from the very outset, or achieved during the process:

- Equal dignity of all participants;
- Voluntary engagement in dialogue;
- A mindset (on both sides) characterised by openness, curiosity and commitment, and the absence of a desire to “win” the dialogue;
- A readiness to look at both cultural similarities and differences;
- A minimum degree of knowledge about the distinguishing features of one’s own and the “other” culture;
- The ability to find a common language for understanding and respecting cultural differences.

You know, as writers, and as thinkers, better than I do: the languages we speak are an inseparable part of who we are. They are how we construct our culture – our writings, our thoughts, our world-view. They define us as individuals, but also as part of a community. We have an enormous wealth of languages in today's European Union. Learning languages, understanding other languages, builds bridges between people, between communities and cultures. Of course, speaking someone's languages doesn't mean we solve all our problems. But it is a window, a way of appreciating that another point of view, another perspective, exists. And that's an essential starting point to understanding each other better.

Improving intercultural dialogue in daily life necessarily embraces the dimension of religious beliefs and philosophical convictions: these are a vital part of how we create our individual and collective identity. Thus, the issue of inter-religious dialogue is also important for us.

References:

https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_07_448