

## **INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: CHALLENGES FOR SOCIOEDUCATIONAL ACTORS IN CATALONIA**

### **EL DIÁLOGO INTERRELIGIOSO EN EL ESPACIO PÚBLICO: RETOS PARA LOS AGENTES SOCIOEDUCATIVOS EN CATALUÑA<sup>1</sup>**

### **DIÁLOGO INTER-RELIGIOSO NO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO: DESAFIOS PARA OS AGENTES SOCIOEDUCACIONAIS NA CATALUNHA**

Marta SABARIEGO PUIG\*, Ruth VILÀ BAÑOS\* & Montserrat FREIXA NIELLA\*

\*Universidad de Barcelona

Received date: 25.XI.2018

Reviewed date: 3.IV.2018

Accepted date: 24.VI.2018

#### **KEY WORDS:**

cultural differences  
religion studies  
religious cultural  
groups  
immigration  
social attitudes  
social environment

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the concept and the elements that encourage intercultural and interreligious dialogue, from the point of view of experts involved in the management of religious diversity in the public space: policy-makers, associations and academics in Catalonia. It responds to a comprehensive-descriptive study with a qualitative approach and an hermeneutic-interpretative rationale as the most appropriate methodology to examine the accounts of the three aforementioned groups. Eleven individual semi-structured interviews have been conducted with representatives of each group. The results reveal different but complementary definitions of interreligious dialogue: the relationship between culture and religion, dialogue as a first step of mutual recognition and the benefits of it. The participants contribute elements that facilitate this dialogue. It concludes with a management model of religious diversity in the public space with community and educational proposals to guide future prevention, mediation and social cohesion policies in Catalonia.

CONTACT WITH THE AUTHORS: MARTA SABARIEGO PUIG. Universidad de Barcelona. Facultad de Educación. Departamento Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación. Despacho 202. Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171. Edifici Llevant-2a planta. 08035 Barcelona. Tel.: (0034) 93.403.50.10. E-mail: msabariego@ub.edu

<p><b>PALABRAS CLAVE:</b> diversidad cultural estudios de religiones grupos religiosos y culturales inmigración actitudes sociales entorno social</p>	<p><b>RESUMEN:</b> Este artículo examina el concepto y los elementos que favorecen el diálogo intercultural e interreligioso, desde el punto de vista de expertos implicados en la gestión de la diversidad cultural en el espacio público: profesionales de la Administración, entidades sociales y mundo académico en Cataluña. Responde a un estudio descriptivo-comprensivo que sigue un enfoque cualitativo, y en el que se ha optado por la fundamentación hermenéutica-interpretativa para obtener el relato de estos tres colectivos. Se han desarrollado once entrevistas semiestructuradas a participantes representativos de cada uno de ellos. Los resultados revelan definiciones diferenciadas pero complementarias sobre el diálogo interreligioso: relación entre cultura y religión, diálogo como un primer paso de reconocimiento mutuo y los beneficios de éste. Los participantes aportan elementos que facilitan este diálogo. Se concluye con un modelo de gestión de la diversidad religiosa en el espacio público con propuestas comunitarias y educativas para orientar futuras políticas de prevención, mediación y cohesión social en Cataluña.</p>
<p><b>PALAVRAS-CHAVE:</b> diversidade cultural estudos de religiões grupos religiosos e culturais imigração atitudes sociais ambiente social</p>	<p><b>RESUMO:</b> Este artigo examina o conceito e os elementos que favorecem o diálogo intercultural e interreligioso, do ponto de vista de especialistas envolvidos na gestão da diversidade cultural no espaço público: profissionais da Administração, entidades sociais e o mundo académico da Catalunha. Responde a um estudo descritivo-abrangente que segue uma abordagem qualitativa, e no qual a base hermenéutico-interpretativa foi escolhida para obter a explicação desses três grupos. Onze entrevistas semi-estruturadas foram desenvolvidas para os participantes representativos de cada uma delas. Os resultados revelam definições diferentes mas complementares do diálogo inter-religioso: a relação entre cultura e religião, o diálogo como primeiro passo para o reconhecimento mútuo e os benefícios dele. Os participantes contribuem com elementos que facilitam esse diálogo. Conclui com um modelo de gestão da diversidade religiosa no espaço público com propostas comunitárias e educacionais para orientar futuras políticas de prevenção, mediação e coesão social na Catalunha.</p>

## 1. Introduction

Differing religious traditions have always been in contact, but their way of seeing each other has always been exclusive and their rivalry has been at the root of many confrontations and social conflicts (Javier, 2014). Currently in Europe contact between religions has increased due to immigration, turning the presence of religion in the public sphere into a more complex issue and confirming Kettel's 2009 prediction: "Debates over the involvement of religion in the public sphere look set to be one of the defining themes of the 21st century" (Kettel, 2009, p1). It is true that religious ideas provoke argument and controversy, often giving rise to extremely strong emotions (Brie, 2011).

Hozu and Frunza (2013) argue that two main principles lie behind the need to debate religion in the modern public sphere, characterized up to now by secularism. Firstly, the rise of the radicalization caused by globalization makes it necessary to reevaluate the place of religion in the public sphere in a non-violent way. Secondly, we should turn our attention to the ambiguous relationships between states and religious organisations. Aaroe (2012) identifies two opposing views of the relationship between the state and religion/s: that religion should form part of the public sphere; and that it should not. Their study reveals that both these postures tend towards religious intolerance, although for different reasons: the first because it projects stereotypes onto minority religions, and the second due to the principle of secularism, which is not always respected in practice, since states often

claim to defend it selectively in order to grant more or less rights to different confessions (Bowen, 2008). In this context, religious diversity appears in the public sphere when conflict becomes visible, for example when places of worship are built or in debates around religious symbols.

Given this situation, an interreligious dialogue is needed that would help overcome such conflicts. Prieto (2014), along the same lines, argues that the different cultural and religious traditions of the world should take steps towards accepting religious pluralism in order to strengthen their own identities and to affirm the religious presence in secular societies. For their part, Dupuis (2009) and more recently Tamayo (2012) have shown an interest in bringing religious pluralism and the theology of religious pluralism closer to society. Theirs is a theological reflection on and through dialogue in an interreligious context, built on the basis of a Catholic theology which values religions in themselves.

### *Interreligious dialogue: towards social cohesion, prevention and mediation in conflict situations*

The European Union White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2006) defines dialogue as a process involving the respectful and open exchange of points of view on the basis of mutual understanding and respect between individuals and groups of different origins and cultural, religious and linguistic heritages. The principles of interreligious dialogue aim to foster both an ability to embrace and

respect the diversity of beliefs in order to identify common religious experiences and an openness towards difference from the standpoint of critical and participatory citizenship (Torradeñot, 2012). This presupposes a willingness to rethink one's own religious ideas in the light of others', oriented towards mutual enrichment and transformation (Santiago & Corpas, 2012).

This view represents a huge challenge for interreligious dialogue, since it is not based on an exclusive perspective or on the predominance of one religion over another. Faith in the superiority of one religion above all other belief systems can give rise to hatred, exclusion and persecution, causing violent and sometimes extremely violent incidents. Dialogue should seek to overcome these barriers (Tamayo, 2005; Torradeñot, 2011). Interreligious prevention and mediation of conflicts is also useful for averting xenophobia, racism and other religious phobias, especially antisemitism, Islamophobia and Christianophobia. Thus interreligious dialogue is not an exchange of courtesies, traditions or monologues; it involves "an encounter in the depths and richness of humanity's religious life" (Torradeñot, 2011, p. 5) between people or groups with different cultural, religious and linguistic heritages, in order for the religions involved to mutually understand and respect each other. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue involves receptive, active and reciprocal listening and honest testimony, respect and equality (UNESCO, 2015).

Two types of interreligious dialogue can be defined: the one informal and the other organized (Torradeñot et al., 2012). The first is the living dialogue which arises in the different contexts where people coexist in plurality. Thus, people of differing faiths and beliefs live and work together, sharing their lives and common spaces: shops, parks, school playgrounds, after-school activities, the works canteen, etc. The most fundamental principle in this situation is mutual respect, which in some cases may lead to friendship. These are invisible dialogues which pass unnoticed and are not consciously religious, but which strengthen human ties.

Organized dialogue appears on the initiative of civil society, the religious communities and/or the state. On the civil level, the objective is to gain better and wider mutual understanding through the organization of intercultural or social activities in the immediate social environment. Religious communities, for their part, aim for encounter and dialogue to create positive values and cultivate the traditions, interests and shared priorities of the various faiths. State bodies promote interreligious initiatives to benefit social cohesion by involving the religious communities, particularly in

neighbourhoods and cities with high cultural and religious diversity and the attendant risks of social conflict.

Torradeñot (2011) suggests the following classification of interreligious groups according to their nature and major objectives: mutual recognition; study and research; deeper knowledge and spiritual exchange; social cohesion and mediation; and institutional representation.

The main objective of the *mutual recognition groups* is understanding through dialogue in an interpersonal relationship which strives to discover the identity of the other. This situation may give rise to friendship and enables the building of relationships between the different members of a group. The groups are open to everyone independently of their religion or belief system. They usually hold face-to-face meetings but may also organize joint meals and interreligious events. Their goal is to overcome mistrust and potential hostility.

*Study and research groups* include experts, academics and university researchers together with believers from different traditions who meet to exchange the theological-philosophical bases of different religious faiths. The aim is to reach a common understanding of each religious tradition's approach to and explanation of reality. These may be single-issue groups discussing peace, the role of women in religions, immigration, etc. They help eradicate prejudice and false ideas by widening views of the topics considered.

In *spiritual dialogue groups*, believers, mystics and others of a spiritual orientation meet to explain to each other their spiritual lives and forms of worship. These dialogues take the form of participation in practices such as meditation/silence and mutual education rather than debate or common action. According to Pannikar (2005) this is a particularly deep dialogue which reconciles people and inspires other forms of dialogue.

*Social cohesion and mediation groups* are found in highly culturally and ethnically diverse municipalities and neighbourhoods and are made up of members of civil society organizations and municipal social, educational and health service workers. Their objectives are to foment cohesion and coexistence, to struggle for peace and against discrimination, and to defend civil rights and disadvantaged groups.

Lastly, *institutional representation groups* are composed of religious authorities: official spokespeople for their communities who organise themselves in councils, forums or assemblies. Their objectives are to make their voices heard and to lead the dialogue of their respective religious communities. They tend to be the preferred groups in communication with the public administration.

Interreligious dialogue in the immediate community is the closest to people's everyday lives and therefore has the greatest positive effect on residents' wellbeing. It can also promote and enrich citizen participation, avert conflict or mediate when it breaks out and work towards solidarity and justice (Torradeñot, 2012).

## 2. Methodology

This article corresponds to the second part of a larger project (Direcció General d'Afers Religiosos, Ref.2014RELIGOO019). It adopts a sequential, exploratory (Creswell & Plano, 2011), mixed-method design (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010). In this second phase of the study the aim is to nuance the regulatory needs for managing religious diversity in the public sphere identified in the previous phase, basing ourselves on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and taking as our framework for understanding the issue the views of three collective socioeducational actors: public administrators, community organizers and academics. The specific objectives of the article are:

- To understand these actors' concepts of intercultural and interreligious dialogue
- To describe the factors favouring intercultural and interreligious dialogue according to these actors

- To identify and propose community and/or policy initiatives that may favour intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

A qualitative study of a descriptive-comprehensive type was chosen to describe and interpret this experience in its real contexts (Maykut & Morehouse, 1999), using eleven individual semi-structured interviews with the specialists from the three profiles identified above. This approach justifies the study's hermeneutic-interpretative theoretical grounding, which aimed to garner participants' narratives on the definition of and the factors favouring interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the public sphere, from the standpoint of their own experience and the meaning they attributed to it.

### Participants

Eleven participants were chosen intentionally according to criteria such as their calibre and standing as experts and social actors working in the management of cultural diversity in the public sphere. Three were chosen from the public administration, six from the academic field and two from civil society organizations. The data were collected between March and April 2015. Table 1 summarises participants' professional profiles.

**Table 1. Professional profiles of the participants interviewed**

Participants	Field	Profession
Participant 1	Organisation	Migrastudium
Participant 2	Academic	University lecturer, philosopher and theologian
Participant 3	Academic	Lecturer in the Theology Faculty of Catalonia
Participant 4	Academic	Lecturer at the Centre for the Study of Traditions of Wisdom (CETR).
Participant 5	Administration	General Direction of Religious Affairs. Department of Governance and Institutional Relations, Generalitat de Catalunya
Participant 6	Administration	Unesco for Interreligious Dialogue - UNESCOCAT.
Participant 7	Academic	Lecturer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Participant 8	Academic	Lecturer at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra
Participant 9	Administration	Religious Affairs Office. Councillor for Women and Civil Rights, Barcelona City Council
Participant 10	Academic	Lecturer at the Universitat Abat Oliba
Participant 11	Organisation	Catalan Islamic Committee

## Techniques and procedure

The outcomes of the eleven individual semi-structured interviews (Cabrera, 2011) were recorded on audio in order to obtain direct data. 20 questions following a logical order – starting with sociodemographic, introductory and basic questions – explored five main dimensions of content: (i) the conceptual approach: spirituality and religiosity; (ii) the religious orientation of secular states; (iii) the promotion of interreligious dialogue; (iv) the need for management of religious diversity to counter discrimination, patriarchy and interreligious conflict; and (v) actions, initiatives and development in the educational sphere. In this article we present these socioeducational actors' views on dimensions (iii) and (v): the concept and promotion of interreligious dialogue and suggestions for action, i.e. initiatives for managing religious diversity with a view to fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the public sphere, put forward as proposals in the section on conclusions.

## Data analysis

A qualitative analysis of the information taken from the interviews was carried out using the QSRNIVO 11 program to facilitate activities such as the segmentation of the text into quotations, coding and the writing of commentaries (Gibbs, 2012).

After the interviews were fully transcribed, a qualitative analysis was undertaken, divided into three phases:

1. Coding. The transcripts were read to create the first codings of the text and to group these into categories. This process began by defining the categories and indicators, which were derived deductively from previously published studies and theoretical concepts

(Augé 2001; Gómez, Alonso & Cabeza 2011; Henry 2001). This first reading of the interviews was undertaken by the research team.

2. Category triangulation. The research team reached a consensus on the categories for analysis. Categorization took place through a twofold process: inductive, since the initial categories with their subcategories and the relationships between them were developed from the transcripts; and deductive, since the categories were studied in the light of the regulatory needs identified within the theoretical model in the prior phase of the project (Álvarez & Essomba, 2012; Corbí, 2007; Dietz, 2008; Melloni, 2003; Panniker, 2010; Torradeflot, 2012; UNESCO, 2005). The documentary analysis carried out in project's first phase lead to the identification of four broad blocks of regulatory needs for managing religious diversity (Vilà et al., 2015):
  - The need to clarify concepts and the religious orientation of secular states.
  - The need for management of religious diversity: discrimination, patriarchy and interreligious conflict.
  - Fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
  - The need for actions, initiatives and development in the educational sphere.

Using this model, once the initial, provisional system of categories and subcategories had been set up, the research team coded a small sample of texts individually. This was followed by a group analysis which led to a restructuring and final consensus on the definitive system of categories used to code all the units of analysis from the interviews:

**Table 2. System of categories agreed for interview analysis.  
Categories, subcategories and definitions**

Name	Description
1. Conceptual Clarification	Definition, impact and value of religion in society.
1.1. Definition of religion	Religion and culture, spirituality and religiosity, variability of definitions.
2. Religious diversity	Factors favouring or hindering the management of religious diversity. Public opinion and presence in the public sphere.
2.1. Factors favouring or hindering the management of religious diversity	Legal framework, state secularism, separation of religion from politics.
2.2. Public image	Perception of religious diversity in the public sphere.
2.3. Discrimination	Patriarchy, religious discrimination and interreligious conflict.
2.4. Presence in the public sphere	Places of worship, management of religious diversity in the public sphere.
3. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue	Definition, currently existing political and/or community factors favouring it.
3.1. Definition of intercultural and interreligious dialogue	Definition and conceptual approach.
3.2. Factors favouring intercultural and interreligious dialogue	Collaboration between, knowledge and recognition of the different religious beliefs in the public sphere.
3.3. Currently existing community and/or political initiatives	Formal and informal actions aimed at fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
4. Role of education	Role of education and its social function, in both formal and socioeducational spheres.
5. Challenges faced by interreligious dialogue	Proposals for a public culture enabling us to benefit from the diversity of cultural and religious diversity.

In this article we present the results obtained from the third category on intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

3. Obtaining and checking results. A content analysis was carried out for more in-depth sequencing of the information yielded. For each category the information obtained was analysed on two levels: (a) a general one, to obtain an overall view of the categories specified, and (b) according to the profiles of the interviewees, in order to nuance the data in each of the three categories.

The article concludes with proposals for community initiatives and/or specific formal and

informal actions to foster dialogue and favour its management in the public sphere. It should be noted that while private individuals were interviewed, our analysis seeks a transversal dimension among the views of the three groups, but without claiming to represent or exhaust the totality of the opinions of these groups (civil society organisations, the public administration and the academic world in the Catalan context). For this reason a horizontal and perspectival triangulation was carried out whose purpose was to compare experiences and narratives among the different groups, paying attention to both common features and divergences their concepts of and views on intercultural and interreligious dialogue in Catalonia.



### 3. Results

#### Definitions of intercultural and interreligious dialogue

The narratives from the three points of view yielded differing concepts of intercultural and

interreligious dialogue. As the coding matrix in Table 3 shows, the percentage of the weighting of the coded words in this category (column 3.1) is not the same in all groups: it figures more heavily in the narrative of the academic group than in the other two.

**Table 3. Comparative coding matrix of the categories used for analysis (percentage of column)**

	3.1. Definition of intercultural and interreligious dialogue	3.2. Factors favouring intercultural and interreligious dialogue	3.3. Existing community and/or political initiatives
Administration	21.65%	2.76%	33.99%
Organisations	19.69%	23.16%	22.61%
Academic world	58.66%	74.08%	43.41%

More detailed analysis of the most frequent words and their meaning from the interviews afforded the identification of varying patterns in the definition of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in each of the three groups.

The academics tended to see interreligious dialogue as that between individuals (of different religious traditions), since it is individuals who of necessity approach each other and respectfully exchange their beliefs. To paraphrase Pannikar (2003: 20): "dialogue should take place on all levels, but in the mystic sense, particularly at the roots of each identity and tradition".

There are various different levels of interreligious dialogue (from the most institutional to the social and individual) and, as the word cloud below illustrates (Figure 1), in this narrative they appear nuanced by their purposes: the recognition of the other and the synthesis involved in change, transformation and development.



**Figure 1. Word cloud showing significant terms from the academic experts' narratives defining the category of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Created by the authors using information generated by Nvivo software<sup>2</sup> (People / We can / of this / dialogue / religions / colour / white / purpose / synthesis / giving)**

Interreligious dialogue involves the willingness to rethink one's own ideas in the light of others', opening oneself to mutual enrichment and transformation (Santiago & Corpas, 2012):

*Another thing is that after the first step, your recognition of the other, the second step is that after getting to know each other, can we enrich each other? And also, can we transform each other? (Org. 4, Group 3, ref. 3)*

This is the capacity to be called into question by the other while still remaining oneself, and of advancing towards white as the sum of all colours, towards an integrating synthesis of a higher order in which no party is subsumed and which adds up to more than the sum of its parts:

*White isn't purple or green or red. White is another colour, a higher synthesis of all the colours. Mixtures are intermediate situations whereas synthesis is white. So are we moving towards white? Looking at it mystically I would say that we are (Org 5, Group 3, ref. 5).*

Thus this is a narrative which shares the UNESCO definition of interreligious dialogue, which brings horizontality into line with equality, and sees dialogue, situated on an individual level, as "the exchange of words and reciprocal listening which commits believers from different religious traditions on an equal footing." It is also consistent with the concepts found in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (EU 2006), where it is defined as a process involving the respectful and open exchange of viewpoints between individuals and groups of varying origins and with different cultural, religious and linguistic heritages on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.

The public administrators group referred to intercultural dialogue in order to define interreligious dialogue: religious dialogue goes further than intercultural dialogue but is one form of the latter. As the word cloud (Figure 2) shows, “interreligious” and “intercultural” appear next to the word “dialogue,” the most used in the narrative. The relationship between culture and religion was drawn on to define intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Cultural diversity emerges significantly in the diversity of religions and beliefs and should be channelled positively through dialogue between cultures and religions:

*I understand that interreligious dialogue can be a form of intercultural dialogue, but it goes a little further (...) because they may also be people from the same culture with different religions (Org 1, Group 1, ref. 1-2)*

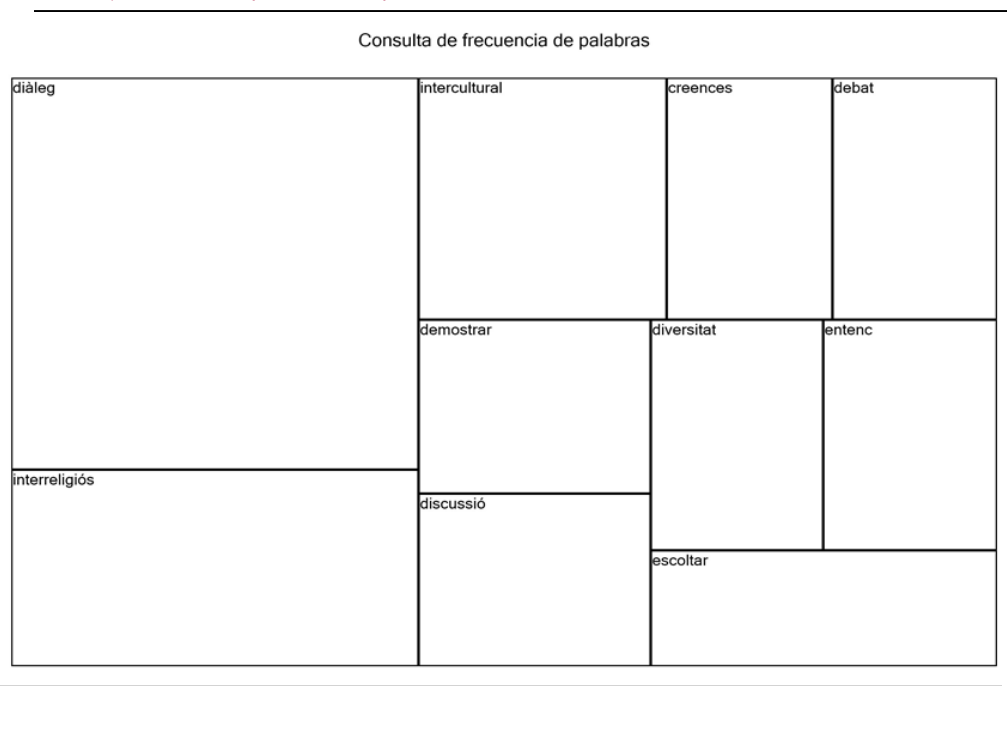
*/ interreligious / dialogue / intercultural / diversity / beliefs / demonstrate / listen)*

The treemap below also shows that the definition and meaning of dialogue in the narrative of the public administrators was closely linked to the value of listening and to understanding others around diversity and different beliefs. Although knowledge of the other in itself does not guarantee dialogue, it is an unavoidable requisite. And if, as Moliner & Aguilar (2010) remark, such knowledge is offered in a critical spirit and with the necessary empathy, it is sure to favour a culture of dialogue enabling coexistence and cultural exchange.

*We live in a diverse, plural society and (...) that means we have to live with this diversity and we have to take advantage of it to enrich our lives, to build a more cohesive society (Org 1, Group 1, ref. 2-3).*



**Figure 2.** Word cloud showing the most significant words from the public administrators' definitions of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Created by the authors using information generated by Nvivo software. (*I understand / discussion / debate*



**Figure 3.** Treemap showing the most significant words from the public administrators' narratives on interreligious dialogue (*Dialogue / intercultural / beliefs / debate / demonstrate / diversity / I understand / interreligious / discussion / listen*)



The interviews with the community organisers yielded a narrative of interreligious dialogue which referred less to its purpose and more to the enormous benefits it offers in itself: improved self-knowledge, the relativisation of one's own point of view, the ability to be self-critical in order to open oneself to others and, in the last instance, its social benefits in terms of enhancing citizenship. In Torradeflot's words (2012), the principles of interreligious dialogue are oriented towards developing the abilities to listen, to respect the diversity of beliefs, to identify common religious experiences and to be open to difference, giving priority to human rights and democracy and offering solutions to problems from the standpoint of critical and participatory citizenship. One expert from the civil society organisations put it this way:

*But when we make an effort to build a relationship, we create contact between the different parties and this enables us to enjoy mutual awareness and recognition, which facilitates all our tasks and turns us into a more organized and civilized society, without a doubt (Org 2, Group 2, ref. 1).*



**Figure 4. Word cloud showing significant terms from the community organisers' narratives defining interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Created by the authors using information generated by Nvivo software. (dialoguing / beliefs / knowledge / talking / person / know / you reach / dialogue / interreligious / religion)**

When interreligious dialogue takes place in the immediate social environment, apart from helping avert and resolve religious conflicts, it enriches citizen participation, creating conditions which foster solidarity and justice (Torradeflot, 2011).

These outcomes confirm and are consistent with the three purposes for which UNESCO (2015) understands that interreligious dialogue is practiced and promoted:

- a) to live in a spirit of openness and social cohesion, a challenge to society which the public administrators see as highly important in managing cultural and religious diversity.
- b) to work together with a view to the comprehensive development of people of different religions, which, in Pannikar's view (2003), should arise particularly in the mystic sense at the spiritual roots of each tradition and

identity. The fear that some groups and communities have of losing their identities, or the natural desire for wholeness, preservation and continuity stemming from a biased, ethnocentric and superior perception of one's own religion can lead to closed-mindedness, exclusion and even hatred. Interreligious dialogue faces the challenge of finding ways to break these barriers (Torradeflot, 2011). According to one of the academic experts interviewed, overcoming barriers of difference involves taking advantage of natural opportunities to approach the other in order to create common spaces and promote dialogue:

*We have to make the most of the opportunities, we have to get to know each other even more, we're very reluctant to approach others. Working more on the sensibilities which can bring us together and the naturalness of this because it creates shared spaces (Org 5, Group 3, ref. 2)*

- c) to appreciate spiritual values and understand in more depth the different religious heritages. Understanding their common features enables us to learn about and appreciate the differences more fully. From this perspective religious dialogue encompasses working on one's personal spiritual dimension, and not only the aspect of religious practice:

*I don't know how to say this: religious beliefs or the adoption and practice of religious beliefs can really be socially marginal (Org 1, Group 1, ref. 1)*

*I think that knowing people who think differently from you helps you to question your own faith or way of life, and therefore I think that it's really important especially for this knowledge that you get to know people who have other ways of life or beliefs (Org 1, Group 2, ref. 1)*

*Dialogue is the next step after the simple realization that pluralism exists, and dialogue includes an interest for the other and an ability to let yourself be questioned by the other (Org 5, Group 3, ref. 1).*

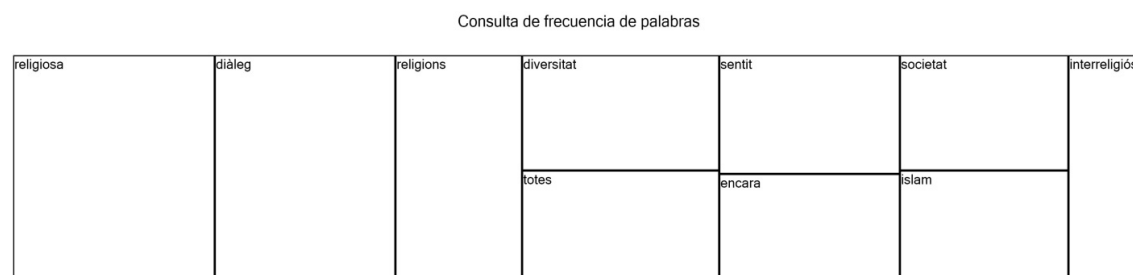
Interreligious dialogue in the wider sense of the term cannot be conceived without including atheism, agnosticism, religious diversity and different beliefs and spiritualities in the conversation.

## Factors favouring interreligious and intercultural dialogue

When speaking of the salient factors which favour interreligious and intercultural dialogue, differing patterns can also be observed among the different groups interviewed, as Table 3 shows. Thus, in the academic experts' narrative the weight of the information coded in this category is significantly higher, particularly in comparison with the administrators' narrative, where its importance was

minimal, in the light of this column's percentages (see 3.2, Factors favouring intercultural and interreligious dialogue).

In the academic experts' view, according to their word frequency count, currently interreligious dialogue is an important factor for social cohesion, and is consistent with the need for a new interreligious sensibility (Torradeñot, 2011) and the existence and experience of religious diversity in our context (Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Treemap of the significant words from the academic experts' narratives on the category of factors favouring interreligious and intercultural dialogue. (Religious / dialogue / religions / diversity / meaning / society / interreligious / everyone / yet / Islam)**

Among the main aspects highlighted by this group for fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue, *three fundamental points* were insisted on:

### A) AMONG THE COMMUNITY

- Mutual understanding and the fostering of contact at grassroots level in order to overcome barriers to difference, taking advantage of naturally-occurring opportunities for contact to create shared arenas for dialogue:

*In any case we need to work so that the real situation can be expressed, we need to create all kinds of platforms from the arts to the social level (Org 5, Group 3, ref. 2)*

### B) AMONG THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Communicative competence, knowing how to explain oneself, particularly among religious leaders and representatives of religious bodies, in order to favour intercultural and interreligious encounters:

*...the inability of many of the religious leaders and the representatives of the religious*

*communities to explain themselves, and that's a communication problem, not that they don't know who they are and what they're doing, but they don't know how to get across to the public at large who they are (Org 2, Group 3, ref. 2)*

It was also seen as important to train the media to recognize, explain and make intelligible the phenomenon of religion and the diversity of beliefs, since there is wide public ignorance around these issues. The risk, if this prerequisite is not met, is the spread of errors, stereotypes and prejudices in throughout society.

- Formal education in awareness and understanding of cultural and religious diversity. Specifically, one academic expert argued that the lack of religious education in schools results in ignorance of one's own religious background, thereby obstructing intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

*But they haven't received any of this, normally, from the state schools or some of the private ones, and they know nothing about it, and this means that they're not capable of understanding the world they live in and the world they've lived in (Org 3, Group 3, ref. 1).*



diversity and non-religious beliefs such as atheism, agnosticism or indifference. Morgan and Sandage (2016) argue that mental rigidity is linked to stereotypes, prejudices and even discrimination on cultural and religious grounds. Thus awareness of one's own spirituality and of cultural and religious diversity can be a starting point for overcoming such discriminatory trends.

If we see the data obtained in terms of the systems in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological theory (see Table 3 for the relative weight in the narratives of the three groups of category 3.3, concerning currently existing community and/or political initiatives), our findings shed light on how we should build proposals for managing religious diversity in order to foster intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in the public sphere.

The microsystem is the person's everyday environment, the level on which a life dialogue can arise. The family is one of the main microsystems; its sphere can be defined as private and it is where a religion, a belief, a spiritual faith or a philosophy of life is experienced and/or shared. The school is a more formal context of religious diversity and should take advantage of this opportunity to foster such living, everyday dialogue. Informal sites such as the school playground are natural areas of contact which can foster mutual understanding, as Torradeflot (2012) remarks, and as some of our participants indicated when describing the importance of the community in fomenting interreligious dialogue. In the formal sphere, the study of religions enables us to understand both religious diversity and each child's own background, also enabling us to explain their families' traditions and beliefs, a factor underlined by the academics and in the literature. Thus Moliner and Aguilar (2010) argue that if this knowledge is offered in a critical spirit and with the necessary empathy, it can ensure the fostering of a culture of dialogue enabling coexistence and cultural exchange. Elósegui (2009) advocates intercultural education with a sound pedagogical structure in the area of education in values. This is a basic set of values involving a wide range of elements, from hospitality and awareness of the other to consideration and our unavoidable responsibility for solidarity towards all others. Elósegui calls urgently for a radical ethical education, capable of overcoming all types of selfishness, and thus making rewarding forms of intercultural coexistence possible.

In the mesosystem, the area of relationships between microsystems, groups and/or dialogue initiatives for mutual recognition can be set up. Here also schools represent the ideal sphere for forging links between religious and non-religious organisations and for encounters between students

with different attitudes towards religion (Weisse, 2009; Jackson 2015), thus forming a mesosystem which supports mutual recognition. Moliner and Aguilar (2010) and Weisse (2009) suggest that experts from the various communities should be consulted in the development of curricula and educational materials. Schools can organise a range of activities for mutual recognition, not only with students but also their families, oriented towards discovering the other: for example tea parties with typical dishes in which members explain how the food relates to their beliefs, exhibitions with the families' graphic/plastic expressions of religious art, etc. These are sites which can nurture the identity of each person and group of different beliefs, at the same time as bringing these diverse identities face to face. The mesosystem enables us to set up dialogues in a context of naturalness, closeness to the other, and openness to others in shared public spaces.

The exosystem is represented by the groups for study, spiritual dialogue and social cohesion and mediation described by Torradeflot (2011), since these influence people's lives more indirectly. These are dialogues promoted by civil society organisations, as they themselves mentioned in our study, but which require partnerships with the state; the public administrators, however, did not position themselves explicitly with regard to this issue in our interviews. The potential of these two categories of participants lies in their power to help eradicate prejudices and foster cohesion in towns and neighbourhoods, amongst other things.

Lastly, the macrosystem consists of society's overall belief systems: in our case, regarding religion, religious diversity and interreligious dialogue. It is of the utmost urgency that we adopt policies on religious issues which enable us to take advantage of the diversity of our cultural and religious heritage, in line with Buades and Vidal's (2007) ideas on the diversity of beliefs, which call for the political autonomy and public cooperation of the religions in the quest for common ground. It was for the same reason that various participants in this study, from the political perspective, called for the political autonomy of all organisations, including government bodies such as the Department of Religious Affairs.

One of the limitations of this study can be attributed to the composition of our sample, since it does not represent all of the thirteen faiths coexisting in Catalonia. While on the one hand we interviewed two theologians and one person of Islamic faith, representing only two faiths, it is also true that Catalan society, according to the Religious Map of Catalonia (2014), is mainly composed of Catholics (58%), followed by atheists (16%) and

agnostics (12%), while Islam, at 4.8%, is the most represented minority faith. Also we should note that the first steps towards interreligious dialogue in Catalonia were taken by experts either from the Catholic tradition or from a range of different religious traditions.

In the future, interreligious dialogue in Catalonia should provide a platform for all the religious

faiths in order not to be biased towards exclusivity or privileging one religion over all others – in our case, Catholicism over the other twelve faiths. This is one factor which may contribute to eradicating the radicalization, particularly among young people, that we are currently experiencing in the European Union.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Partial outcomes of a study funded by the General Direction of Religious Affairs of the Generalitat de Catalunya. If the article is accepted we will provide the title and code of the project.
- <sup>2</sup> The word clouds and treemaps presented in this article maintain the original words from the interviews, carried out in Catalan. This is why they appear in this language. Among the most cited, we provide here translations of: diàleg (dialogue), interreligiós (interreligious), diversitat (diversity), religió (religion), conèixer (to know/understand).

## References

- Aaroe, L. (2012). Does tolerance of religion in the public space depend on the salience of the manifestation of religious group membership? *Political Behavior*, 34, 585-606.
- Álvarez, J.L., & Essomba, M.A. (2012). *Dioses en las aulas. Educación y diálogo interreligioso*. Barcelona: Graó.
- Bauman, Z. (2002). *Modernidad líquida*: México: S.L. Fondo de cultura económica de España.
- Bowen, J. R. (2008). *Why the French don't like headscarves*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brie, M. (2011). *Ethnicity, Religion and Intercultural Dialogue in the European Border Space*. Debrecen/Oradea: Editura Universitatii din Oradea.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 187-248). Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley
- Buades, J., & Vidal, F. (2007). *Minorías de lo Mayor. Religiones minoritarias en la Comunidad Valenciana*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Cabrera, F.A. (2011) Técnicas e instrumentos de evaluación: una propuesta de clasificación. [En línea] *REIRE, Revista d'Innovació i Recerca en Educació*, Vol. 4, núm. 2, 112-124. <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/REIRE>
- Corbí, M. (2007). *Hacia una espiritualidad laica: sin creencias, sin religiones, sin dioses*. Barcelona: Herder.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dietz, G. (2008). La educación religiosa en España: ¿contribución al diálogo intercultural o factor de conflicto entre religiones?, *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas*, XIV (28), 11-46.
- Direcció General d'Afers Religiosos. (2014). *Mapa religiós de Catalunya*. Generalitat de Catalunya. [http://governacio.gencat.cat/ca/pgov\\_ambits\\_d\\_actuacio/pgov\\_afers-religiosos/pgov\\_serveis/pgov\\_mapa\\_religions/](http://governacio.gencat.cat/ca/pgov_ambits_d_actuacio/pgov_afers-religiosos/pgov_serveis/pgov_mapa_religions/).
- Dupuis, J. (2002) *El cristianismo y las religiones. Del desencuentro al diálogo*. Sal Terrae.
- Elósegui, M. (2009). Políticas públicas y educación intercultural. A M. Esteban (Coord.). *El diálogo intercultural en España: un requisito de la educación y cultura de Paz*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación.
- Flick, U. (2004). *Introducción a la Investigación Cualitativa*. Madrid: Morata.
- Gibbs, G. (2012). *El análisis de datos cualitativos en investigación cualitativa*. Madrid: Morata.
- Hozu, J., & Frunza, S. (2013). Religious affiliation and social action in the public space. *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 43, 240-254.
- Huddy, L. (2003). *Group identity and political cohesion*. In D.O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (511-558). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, R. (2015). *Señales-Políticas públicas y prácticas para la enseñanza de las religiones y las cosmovisiones no-religiosas en la educación intercultural*. Estrasburgo: Editorial del Consejo de Europa.
- Javier, M. (2014) El diálogo interreligioso acerca a las distintas religiones a la modernidad. *Tendencias 21. Tendencias de las religiones*. [http://www.tendencias21.net/El-diálogo-interreligioso-acerca-a-las-distintas-religiones-en-la-modernidad\\_a37996.html](http://www.tendencias21.net/El-diálogo-interreligioso-acerca-a-las-distintas-religiones-en-la-modernidad_a37996.html)



- Kettell, S. (2009) On the public discourse of religion: An analysis of Christianity in the United Kingdom. *Politics and Religion*, 2, 420-443.
- Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1999). *Investigación cualitativa: una guía práctica y filosófica*. Barcelona: Hurtado.
- Melloni, J. (2003). *El Uno en lo múltiple. Aproximación a la diversidad y la unidad de las religiones*. Santander: Sal Terrae.
- Moliner, A., & Aguilar, N. (2010). *Les tradicions religioses en els llibres de text*. Barcelona: Montflorit Edicions i Assessoraments S.L.
- Morgan, J., & Sandage, S. J. (2016). A developmental model of interreligious competence. A conceptual framework. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 38, 129-158.
- Pániker, S. (2003). *El diàleg indispensable. Pau entre les religions*. Barcelona: Edicions 62.
- Panikkar, R (2005) *De la Mística. Experiencia plena de la Vida*. Barcelona: Herder
- Pániker, S. (2010). *Pluralisme i interculturalitat, Cultures i religions en diàleg*. Barcelona, Omnia.
- Prieto, M.D. (2014) El pluralismo y la diversidad enriqueceran las tradiciones religiosas. *Revista electrónica de ciencia, tecnología, sociedad y cultura*. [http://www.tendencias21.net/el-pluralismo-y-la-diversidad-enriqueceran-las-tradiciones-religiosas\\_a37465.html](http://www.tendencias21.net/el-pluralismo-y-la-diversidad-enriqueceran-las-tradiciones-religiosas_a37465.html)
- Santiago, M., & Corpas, C. (2012). Bases para el desarrollo de buenas prácticas de educación para la convivencia en la diversidad cultural y religiosa. En, J. L. Álvarez; M. A. Essomba (coords.), *Dioses en las aulas. Educación y diálogo interreligioso* (pp. 123-143). Barcelona: Graó.
- Tamayo, J.J. (2012) *Otra teología es posible. Interculturalidad, pluralismo religioso y feminismos*. Barcelona: Herder.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2010). *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*. Sage.
- Torradeñot, F. (2011). *Religiones y pluralismo. Las vías del diálogo interreligioso en España*. Madrid: Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso en España.
- Torradeñot, F. (coord.) (2012). *Catalunya i el diàleg interreligiós. Aportacions innovadores al diàleg interreligiós des dels valors de les nacions unides*. Barcelona: Associació UNESCO per al diàleg interreligiós.
- UNESCO (2005). The Rabat Commitment Conclusions and Recommendations of the Rabat Conference on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations through Concrete and Sustained Initiatives Rabat, Morocco. Acceso en: <http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/rabat/commitment.html>.
- UNESCO (2015) *Diccionari de religions*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament de Governació i Relacions Institucionals.
- Unión Europea (2006) *Libro Blanco sobre el Diálogo Intercultural*. Decisión nº1983/2006/CE del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo del 18 de diciembre.
- Vilà, R., Burguet, M., Escofet, A. & Rubio, M.J.(2015) Hacia el dialogo intercultural e interreligioso: necesidades normativas para una gestión de la diversidad religiosa en el espacio público. Comunicación presentada en el V Congreso REPS: Desigualdad y democracia: Políticas públicas e innovación social. Barcelona. 5 y 6 de febrero.
- Weisse, W. (coord.) (2009). *Religión en educación: Contribución al diálogo. Sugerencias del proyecto de investigación REDCo para la política*. Comisión Europea. Acceso en: <https://www.uni-hamburg.de>

## HOW TO CITE THE ARTICLE

Sabariego, M., Vilà, R., & Freixa, M. (2018). El diálogo interreligioso en el espacio público: retos para los agentes socioeducativos en Cataluña. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, 32 139-153. DOI:10.7179/PSRI\_2018.32.11



## AUTHOR'S ADDRESS

**MARTA SABARIEGO PUIG.** Universidad de Barcelona. Facultad de Educación. Departamento Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación. Despacho 202. Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171. Edifici Llevant-2a planta. 08035 Barcelona. Tel.: (0034) 93.403.50.10. E-mail: msabariego@ub.edu

**RUTH VILÀ BAÑOS.** Universidad de Barcelona. Facultad de Educación. Departamento Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación. Despacho 264. Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171. Edifici Llevant-2a planta. 08035 Barcelona. Tel.: (0034) 93.403.52.13. E-mail: ruth\_vila@ub.edu

**MONTSERRAT FREIXA NIELLA.** Universidad de Barcelona. Facultad de Educación. Departamento Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación. Despacho 204. Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171. Edifici Llevant-2a planta. 08035 Barcelona. Tel.: (0034) 93.403.50.19. E-mail: mfreixa@ub.edu

## ACADEMIC PROFILE

**MARTA SABARIEGO PUIG.** Doctora en Filosofía y Ciencias de la Educación. Profesora titular de Universidad del Departamento de Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación (MIDE) de la Facultad de Educación de la Universitat de Barcelona. Miembro del Grupo de Investigación en Educación Intercultural (GREDI). Los proyectos más recientes en su trayectoria académica se han centrado en el desarrollo de metodologías participativas para promover la convivencia y la inclusión social en contextos comunitarios y multiculturales, en calidad de coordinadora (Ministerio de Educación, Política Social y Deporte- Fundación Europea Sociedad y Educación, 2009; Fundación InteRed, 2010; Programa Estatal de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación Orientada a los retos de la sociedad- EDU2013-46704-R) y como miembro del equipo investigador (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia- EDU2008-00332/EDUC; ARAF1 00045; AGAUR, 2014-RELIG00019 y AGAUR, 2015-RELIG00007).

**RUTH VILÀ BAÑOS.** Doctora en Psicopedagogía. Profesora en el departamento de Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación de la Universitat de Barcelona. Forma parte del grupo de investigación en Educación Intercultural (GREDI). Es miembro del Consejo de Dirección del Instituto de Investigación en Educación (IRE). Ha participado en investigaciones sobre competencias interculturales y diálogo intercultural e interreligioso. Ha coordinado dos proyectos subvencionados por Asuntos Religiosos de la Generalitat de Catalunya: Gestionar la diversidad religiosa y cultural a la educación desde el diálogo intercultural e interreligioso (2014RELIG00019) y Las entidades y los centros de Secundaria ante la diversidad religiosa (2015RELIG00007). ResearchGate: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ruth\\_Vila](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ruth_Vila).

**MONTSERRAT FREIXA NIELLA.** Doctora en Filosofía y Ciencias de la Educación. Profesora titular de Universidad del Departamento de Métodos de Investigación y Diagnóstico en Educación (MIDE) de la Facultad de Educación de la Universitat de Barcelona. Ha sido secretaria de Departamento, jefe de estudios de Educación social y vicedecana académica de la Facultad de Pedagogía. Miembro del grupo de investigación Trals, consolidado por la Generalitat de Catalunya. Su trayectoria investigadora se ha desarrollado fundamentalmente vinculada a proyectos sobre las transiciones, el abandono escolar y universitario y la orientación universitaria. Las investigaciones más recientes se centran, por una parte, en la Transiciones y trayectorias de acceso a los estudios de Másteres universitarios (MCOC, EDU-2016-80578-R) y por otra, en la diversidad religiosa y el diálogo interreligioso en el ámbito de la educación (AGAUR, 2014-RELIG00019 y AGAUR, 2015-RELIG00007).

