



WOLFRAM WEISSE & CAROLA ROLOFF

IDENTITY FORMATION IN EUROPE BY MUTUAL RECOGNITION IN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

INTRODUCTION

- „Interreligious dialogue can (also) contribute to a stronger consensus within society regarding the solutions to social problems“.
- White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue „Living together as Equals in Dignity“. Launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs at their 118th Ministerial Session, Strasbourg, 7 May 2008, 22.
- The term “identity“remains vague & needs further development.

IDENTITY FORMATION

- Instead of “identity”, better: “identity formation”
 - illustrates the processual nature of individual identity in continuous development.
 - In the interest of furthering a more responsible and better “living together“ in Europe, the term “identity formation” may also prove more useful as a way to highlight potential aims and processes that may aid us in reaching this goal.

FRENCH PHILOSOPHER PAUL RICOEUR (1913-2005)

- Argues that the quest for identity cannot be pursued while protectively shutting out others, but only in relation to them.
- In order to achieve mutual recognition and reassurance in the development of our respective identities we must
 - accept the other in his/her otherness and
 - recognise ourselves as active and responsible subjects.

INSTANCES OF IMPROVING COEXISTENCE IN THE CITY-STATE OF HAMBURG, GERMANY

- successful identity formation by building up trust and mutual recognition in interreligious dialogue

THE RELEVANCE OF INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER FOR COEXISTENCE IN THE CITY-STATE OF HAMBURG

- 2 million inhabitants from more than 100 cultural and religious backgrounds – home to a great variety of initiatives to improve the coexistence between religious and secular groups
- religious and secular are intertwined: Peter L. Berger identified numerous overlappings and internal diversities in the fields of religious pluralisation and secularisation in his “Two Pluralisms”

IDENTITY FORMATION IN EUROPE NEEDS TO FOLLOW A GIVEN PATH

- First, we need to overcome ignorance by coming to know each other better, and from there we must build up trust and mutual recognition.
- Paul Ricoeur: We must proceed from “*ignorance*” to “*connaissance*” and from there to “*reconnaissances*” resp. to “*reconnaissance mutuelle*”.

“RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ALL” AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN HAMBURG

- All pupils are free to choose the subject “Religion” regardless of their religious affiliation or world view (non-religious alternative: “Ethics” or “Philosophy”)
- Curriculum designed with two priorities in mind:
 - Learning facts on different religions and their ethical implications
 - Entering into an exchange with the different Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish etc. beliefs and secular world views represented in the classroom

TREATIES BETWEEN THE SECULAR GOVERNMENT OF HAMBURG AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

- Muslims, most of them from Turkey, form a significant community (about 7% of the Hamburg's population)
- In 2012 trust-building measure resulted in formal treaties analogous to Germany's state-church agreements
- Muslim organisations recognized Germany's democratic society as the guiding framework for their members, embracing, among other tenets, equal rights for men and women

30.10.2019

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CONCLUSION

- Interreligious Dialogue can contribute to building knowledge and trust in order to more clearly perceive common ground and differences with the intention of participating in the development of a society that respects differences – and at the same time fosters common values of mutual understanding.
- The examples show that concrete steps can be taken to develop values for all citizens in society, values shaping their own understanding and contributing to an identity formation which is of great relevance for improving how we live together in Europe.

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VISION

- Instead of *one* systematically pursued European cultural “identity”: pursuit of cultural “identity formations” in Europe
 - **Shared aim:** to create awareness and encourage mutual recognition as a vital element of a core European value set.
 - Shaped at different levels and by different actors, transferred into daily practice, tested, encouraged, and developed by many, including individuals and groups of different religious affiliations and world views, in an interreligious and intercultural dialogue, shaping and fostering the core value of a European identity formation – *reconnaissance mutuelle* [mutual recognition].