



POLICY DIALOGUE

SHARED SOCIETY AND INCLUSIVENESS:

KEY DRIVER FOR WELL-BEING BY 2020 AND BEYOND

Max Kohnstamm Room • Résidence Palace • Rue de la Loi 155 • 1040 Brussels

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TALKING POINTS DR. GUSENBAUER

Greetings

It is a pleasure to be here and I bring greetings from my fellow Members of the Club de Madrid

The Club de Madrid

As you will know, the Club de Madrid is a forum of over 70 former heads of state and heads of government who were elected democratically.

It fulfils a unique role because the status of Members as former leaders allows us to take a more detached stance in relation to current issues, but we continue to be able to offer our experience.

The Club also has the convening power to bring together current leaders and influential thinkers.

We use these possibilities to engage with current leaders and experts to confront the key challenges that face our world to day.

Working with EPC/The focus of this seminar

It is a particular pleasure to be working with the European Policy Centre because we find ourselves coming to similar positions but starting from different issues and concerns.

The European Policy Centre, and indeed the European Commission, have been much concerned with the challenge of maintaining the social model and at the same time ensuring optimum economic performance.

Sometimes they are being posed as opposing rather than complementary goals, incorrectly in my view.

As we have heard, the European Policy Centre sees that a win/win outcome is possible if we focus our policy choices on delivering a higher level of well-being for European citizens, and improving their quality of life. The challenge is to define what constitutes wellbeing.

The Shared Societies Project

We, in the Club de Madrid have been vitally concerned with the issue of social division and social tension, which exists both in Europe and elsewhere the world.

One of the most important conversations that we all need to have today is how to respond to this issue.

So we have established one of our key initiatives, the Shared Society Project, which highlights the challenges of inter-group division and offers approaches and methods of meeting those challenges by building shared societies.

What is a Shared Society?

We have said:

“A Shared Society’ is a socially cohesive society. It is stable, safe. It is where all those living there feel at home. It respects everyone’s dignity and human rights, while providing every individual with equal opportunity. It is tolerant. It respects diversity. A shared society is constructed and nurtured through strong political leadership.”

We called it a Shared Society because it is one where everyone has a stake and everyone has responsibilities – it is a society shared by everyone.

It is not a society where everyone has to be the same to be accepted, nor is it one where people live in their own separate communities with no sharing of responsibility between them. I will return to this distinction later.

We have set down a set of Ten Commitments which we believe constitute the key policy areas and structural arrangements which taken together will develop shared societies and therefore we call on leaders to make a commitment to them. I will not go through them in detail as they are included in the available literature.

The Economics of Shared Societies

Recently the Shared Societies Project has addressed the issue of the economics of shared societies and established a Working Group which reported to us in November.

We believe that general well-being is at least partly dependent on building shared societies and has a positive impact on economic performance.

We have published the core analysis of their report together with a Statement from the Members of the Club de Madrid and other relevant materials together in a new publication, which is available today.

While we feel we have achieved a lot, it is still work in progress.

Nonetheless we can with confidence make a number of assertions, which relate directly to our topic today – are Shared Societies and inclusiveness: key driver for well-being by 2020 and beyond?

1. Shared Societies have an Impact

Shared Societies work. They lead to a stronger sense of wellbeing, which is not possible where there is not inclusion.

Shared societies generate economic and other dividends for governments, businesses, communities, families, and individuals.

It is still difficult to measure the degree to which societies are shared in order to relate performance on building shared societies to other dimensions of a nation's performance. We would like to develop a Shared Societies Index to fill that gap.

Nevertheless there are indications that there is a statistical link with economic performance, and there are other studies which link some aspects of a shared society to performance in other areas.

2. Shared Societies are Part of a Virtuous Cycle

The economic dividends and other benefits of a shared society further enhance a society's capacity to be shared, which in turn generates more dividends, thus setting up a "virtuous cycle".

How does it work?

If a nation invests in those living in there, and helps them to achieve their aspirations, self respect grows, and we know that in a fair and enabling society the wellbeing of all members improves.

Then the individual is ready to engage with the community, and play a responsible part, economically and socially.

He or she will be a productive member of society, contributing his or her effort, skills and talents as he or she pursues personal aspirations.

This leads to increased prosperity which means there are more resources available to invest in building a shared society.

What are these aspirations?

The fulfilment of non-material aspirations are being increasingly recognised as being an important aspect of wellbeing, and it is not the absolute quantity of those factors that is important but the confidence that they will continue to be available.

Increased wealth does not in itself increase our level of happiness.

Personal wellbeing necessitates not only income and services but also recognition that comes from participation in the economic and social life of the community.

Gallup has identified five essential elements which together make up an overall sense of wellbeing: career; social; financial; physical; and community.

The aspirations of all people are very similar – to have a reasonable quality of life, a sense of control over one's destiny, to be accepted and respected by the wider society and, in parents, the opportunity to give our children a good start in life.

The achievement of this virtuous cycle requires governments and the dominant sectors of society to recognise the desire of individuals to belong and fulfil their ambitions even if they seem different from other sectors of society.

It requires government and society to make spaces for individuals to pursue their personal ambitions in their own way and at the same time give them the support they need.

When this happens then there is a strong motivation and incentive to integrate into the rest of society.

Those aspects of their identity, such as language, religion, clothes and other cultural practices which mark them out as different, do not disappear, but become private matters which strengthen their personal sense of ease and wellbeing. This is true of all of us.

But these aspirations can be easily blocked if there is no encouragement of a Shared Society and discrimination.

Amartya Sen has pointed out that poverty can be understood as the lack of the capacities, tools or opportunities needed to function as a full citizen rather than the lack of money and possessions or a shortage of talent or ambition.

As a result a vicious cycle develops, instead of the virtuous cycle to which we aspire: hostility – tension - increased violence - diversion of resources to security measures - loss of investment.

3. Need for Leadership

None of this is inevitable.

They are the product of attitudes and actions by people and by governments.

Political leaders have a key part to play in efforts to promote social cohesion and build Shared Societies.

It is a central responsibility of government and policy makers to ensure that policies have a positive effect on social cohesion; it cannot be left to natural processes, or the expectation that civil society will solve problems, though they have an important contribution to make.

Responsibility for social inclusion and cohesion must be clearly located within formal government structures.

Leaders can show, by their own actions and policies, their willingness to respect and interact with those with different backgrounds and their commitment to fair and equal treatment for all.

They can also create conditions that encourage others to respect diversity and build Shared Societies.

But they cannot do it on their own.

Shared Societies are achieved when all parts of a community value and feel committed to their shared achievements.

The most effective way is through a partnership between the state and political leaders, civil society, religious institutions and the private sector.

Leaders may need to be challenged.

They may be under pressure to support chauvinistic, sectional interests.

They may claim that they lack resources or face militant opposition, but these are, in fact, reasons to make increased effort.

Some may not care.

In these situations, there is a responsibility on other leaders, international institutions and civil society organisations to challenge such attitudes and practices and show that ultimately an inclusive approach will lead to benefits for all.

The Club de Madrid invites leaders and others to support a Call to Action to build shared societies.

However for leaders to lead they need a vision of how to deal with issues of social diversity and in recent times there has been uncertainty about what that vision should be.

4. Need for vision

We in the Club de Madrid have been concerned by comments by some European leaders in recent years which challenge multiculturalism but do not offer a realistic alternative.

They seem to be saying there are only two options for managing social diversity: assimilation, making efforts to encourage those from different backgrounds to become more like the mainstream community or multiculturalism, supporting identity groups to maintain their own culture and way of life.

If we compare the impact of these policies with the processes which lead to a virtuous cycle of sharing and wellbeing and approaches which lead to divisions and conflict, we see that both assimilation and multiculturalism

as presently practiced are inimical to a virtuous cycle and feed a vicious cycle.

Neither option seems to answer the question of how to effectively manage the growing diversity within our societies.

This is because they do not respect the identity of all groups, and ensure that they have opportunities to fulfil their aspirations.

Benign neglect and welfare provision in isolation do not help. They only create dependency by recipients and resentment by tax payers who fund these services, which reinforces the vicious circle.

The recent challenges in Europe remind us that we need to move beyond old rhetoric and encourage all sectors of society to engage in a new conversation on how we create societies where different groups live in harmony with each other, and a new vision for inter-community relations.

I suggest that this vision is based on creating Shared Societies for all, which makes demands of all sections of society but at the same time is based on mutual respect for all.

I have already mentioned our Ten Commitments that need to be made across all aspects of policy. Our work on the economics of shared societies has led us to propose Ten Guiding Principles that will ensure that economic policies contribute to the creation of Shared Societies.

We use these documents in our work both in peer to peer consultation in specific countries, in its involvement with intergovernmental bodies and in its participation in public debate and discussion generally.

As the Members of the Club de Madrid stated in Rotterdam in 2008 at the first Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies "...At a time when global crises will exacerbate the tendency to seek scapegoats among those different from us, the need to build Shared Societies is more important than ever."

Thank you