



# Discourses on governing diversity in Europe: Critical analysis of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue



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## ABSTRACT

The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, published in 2008 by the Council of Europe, is one of the first European level attempts to provide a common guideline for diversity politics in Europe. It introduces the idea of 'intercultural dialogue' as a new focus and a method of governing diversity. Our paper aims to investigate the explicit and implicit meanings included in the idea of 'intercultural dialogue' and how the idea is rhetorically operationalized as a policy in the White Paper. The investigation is conducted with a lexical and semantic analysis of the text in the White Paper and a discourse analysis of its rhetoric, in order to explore how the 'intercultural dialogue' as a policy relies on a mixture of ideas borrowed from different political discourses. The investigation revealed how the concept of intercultural dialogue and other related concepts, such as culture and diversity, embrace power hierarchies. The meanings of these concepts are produced from a hegemonic point of view which grants the 'intercultural dialogue' with the power positions of a *dialoguer* and a *dialoguee*. The policy rhetoric in the White Paper emphasizes social cohesion in Europe. Its policy discourse does not recognize the societal, cultural, historical, religious, or linguistic differences between European societies, but offers unified – and profoundly Western European – views for the governance of diversity. Formulating a common and generic diversity policy for Europe as a whole inevitably simplifies the idea of diversity in Europe and produces new hierarchies between the subjects and objects of these policies.

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## 1. Introduction: intercultural dialogue in a diversifying Europe

For the past two decades, European societies have aimed to govern their increasing diversity through national diversity policies, which have ranged from multiculturalism to integration and from transnationalism to assimilation (Wiesand et al., 2008). The European political organizations have also aimed to react to the diversification of European societies and the societal changes and challenges it has entailed. In fact, diversity has been one of the key words in the European policy rhetoric for a couple of decades. Besides being a popular slogan, it has recently become an important domain of governance in the European political organizations. The diversification of European societies and the political and scholarly debates and critical discussions on national and European diversity policies have brought about a challenge to the European organizations: how to manage and direct the development of diversity policies in a Europe faced with increasing criticism over its current

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modes. The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, published in 2008 by the Council of Europe, is one of the first European-level attempts to tackle the problem and provide a common guideline for diversity politics in Europe. It introduces the idea of ‘intercultural dialogue’ as a new focus and a method of governing diversity. The conceptualizations and policy rhetoric in the White Paper include diverse meaning-making processes of ambiguous concepts and an adoption of explicit and implicit political ideas. What does the ‘intercultural dialogue’ really mean in the White Paper? How does the Council of Europe aim to operationalize the concept and the meanings and political ideas it entails in order to govern the diversity in Europe? These are the core questions of the paper.

The starting shot for the process that resulted in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue was the report by Tony Bennett to the Council of Europe. In it [Bennett \(2001, pp. 65–66\)](#) advised the Council to facilitate the development of international codes of best practice in *cultural diversity* by involving various stakeholders in the development of cultural diversity policies, supporting the creation of international networks on the development of these policies, and facilitating the establishment and co-ordination of research networks on them. In the report, the explicit focus of the diversity policies was culture. The recommendations of the report were applied by consulting the diverse bodies of the Council of Europe and by conducting among the various bodies, organizations, and communities in its member-states a questionnaire study on the practices and needs for diversity policies. On the basis of the investigation, the Council published the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. It aimed to provide practical suggestions for increasing the ‘intercultural dialogue’ as a response to the various problems the multicultural European societies were considered to be facing.

The White Paper participated in and speeded up the shift in the diversity policies in Europe by emphasizing ‘intercultural dialogue’ instead of multiculturalism as its core focus. Like the Council of Europe, the EU has promoted the idea of intercultural dialogue e.g., in the [European Commissions \(2007\)](#) European agenda for culture in a globalizing world. The idea of increasing intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence in the EU member states recurs in several recent cultural and citizenship programs of the Union. Even though the intercultural dialogue is even considered in the Agenda “as one of the main instruments of peace and conflict prevention” ([EC, 2007, p. 7](#)), it is often approached and discussed in the EU programs in cultural terms and its implementation is restricted to activities in the field of art and culture. The White Paper aims to broaden the idea of intercultural dialogue by defining it as an all-encompassing principle and practice engaging all levels and sectors in societies.

The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue does not, however, give an exhaustive definition on how intercultural dialogue may emerge, in which context it could be successful, and how it could be promoted in Europe and find its way into national policies. Since it focuses on general recommendations, one of the major challenges for national institutions and citizens is how to implement the guidelines as broad multi-sectional projects in societies. The openness and flexibility of the intercultural dialogue as concept, practice, and policy characterize the rhetoric in the White Paper, as the quotation from its preamble indicates:

The White Paper responds to an increasing demand to clarify how intercultural dialogue may help appreciate diversity while sustaining social cohesion. It seeks to provide a conceptual framework and a guide for policymakers and practitioners. However, intercultural dialogue cannot be prescribed by law. It must retain its character as an open invitation to implement the underlying principles set out in this document, to apply flexibly the various recommendations presented here, and to contribute to the ongoing debate about the future organisation of society. ([White Paper, 2008, p. 5](#))

The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue has been approached in scholarly discussions by emphasizing its impacts on diverse domains in national and European policies. The recent studies have focused e.g., on education ([Besley & Peters, 2012](#); [Ganesh & Holmes, 2011](#); [Zay, 2011](#)), communication studies ([Hoskins & Sallah, 2011](#); [Houghton, 2009](#)), management ([Wilk-Wos, 2010](#)), and sociology ([Kowalczyk, 2011](#); [O’Grady, 2010](#)). The studies still lack, however, an investigation on the complex meanings intertwined with the conceptualization in the White Paper, and a discussion on how the conceptualization produces certain kinds of explicit and implicit diversity politics and policies. Our paper aims to respond to this lack with a detailed analysis of the language and rhetoric in the White Paper and by discussing the results from the perspectives of intercultural communication, discourse studies, and political science. A detailed analysis of the text in the White Paper and its conceptualization of intercultural dialogue is justified, since concepts like identity, culture, and interculturality are commonly used in diverse political and institutional documents, and as a policy aiming to combine all these concepts, intercultural dialogue represents an ideal repeated in current political discourses (see e.g., [Boudon, 1995](#); [Lemieux, 2009](#); [Ma, 2004](#)). Several recent studies have indicated how the meanings and contexts of these concepts often remain unclear and how they are open to discursive manipulation in order to create a specific effect among people ([Angouri & Glynos, 2009](#); [Dervin, 2011](#); [Wagener, 2012](#)).

The paper starts with a theoretical discussion on the concept of culture and the complexity of the conceptualization of cultural diversity and diversity policies. This discussion is followed by a description of the methods used in the analysis of the concept of intercultural dialogue, its semantic topical cloud (such as, ‘identity’, ‘culture’, ‘diversity’, etc.), and the rhetorical operationalization of ‘intercultural dialogue’ in the policy discourses. The description of methods is followed by two sections in which the data is analyzed and discussed. The paper ends with concluding remarks. The main hypothesis in the paper is that in spite of its aims, the White Paper actually restricts diversity: even though intercultural dialogue as an idea and policy is promoted throughout the White Paper, interculturality may, however, end up as a uniformizing and monocultural concept.

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