



# Talk the Walk

## Community Dialogues on Migration

### The Context:

The 2015 Migration Crisis is the biggest crisis to confront Europe since WW2 and the Cold War. Unlike those, however, this one has no clear and defined enemy and is seen as a humanitarian crisis that raises fundamental questions about culture, values and identity. The "European migrant crisis", as it has come to be known, acquired a larger importance in the public and official psyche when five boats carrying almost two thousand migrants to Europe sank in the Mediterranean Sea in April 2015<sup>1</sup>. The crisis came to a head with the washing ashore of three year old Aylan Kurdi's body on a beach in Turkey, in September 2015, leading to the mass debates, protests and frantic steps taken to deal with the hundreds of thousands of refugees. Boatloads of refugees fleeing horrible conditions in war-torn Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and surrounding areas have landed on the shores of southern European countries (primarily Greece and Italy) causing an unbearable strain on resources and bringing into question the very idea and unity of the European Union.

There are, at the time of writing (September 2015), 432,761 refugees trying to gain asylum status in Europe with senior European officials warning that "The greatest tide of refugees and migrants is yet to come."<sup>2</sup> The number of asylum applications received in 2014 in European Union (EU) Member States has risen by 25 per cent compared to the same period in 2013. A quarter of the applicants are of Afghan, Eritrean or Syrian origin, and a similar proportion are under 18 years of age. There have also been many more asylum applications from stateless people, with an estimated total of 436,000 people across the European Union.<sup>3</sup>

The economic vulnerability of many governments, dating from the economic meltdown of 2007, in this region has had an impact on the capacity and readiness of the affected countries to respond to this crisis. Austerity measures have also hit civil-society organizations that provide services to asylum-seekers and refugees. Xenophobia and intolerance have led to mass protests, incidents of discrimination and even sporadic violence. States have responded by concentrating on curbing irregular movements, tightening border controls and detention, or penalization for illegal entry.<sup>4</sup>

Following the recent summit in Brussels where Interior Ministers of all Member States debated on the migration issue and voted (by majority decision, as opposed to the usual unanimous decision process) to implement the quota system for taking in migrants, there has been a wave of disagreement and debate on how best to deal with this crisis. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban has accused Germany of "moral imperialism" over the refugee crisis.<sup>5</sup> Countries who are not willing to accept refugees are re-directing them to others causing a shortage of resources, space and trust. It is estimated that Germany alone, given its current intake of refugees, could spend up to 25 Billion Euros in the next two years on resettlement and other costs<sup>6</sup>, with similar figures in other EU Member States.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32573389>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/24/eu-refugee-summit-in-disarray-as-donald-tusk-warns-greatest-tide-yet-to-come>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e726.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e726.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wsj.com/articles/orban-accuses-germany-of-moral-imperialism-on-migrants-1443023857>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/17/markets-germany-migrants-idUSL5N11N12820150917>



There are a variety of opinions and views both within the European Union and around the world on how to create a humane and sustainable solution to this situation. This is played out within an atmosphere of shrill political rhetoric and the pressing presence of hundreds of thousands of desperate people at the borders that requires quick and immediate solutions - not a situation best suited for deliberation and clear thinking.

### Who are migrants?

The BBC uses the term migrant to refer to all people who have moved out of their native lands and have yet to complete the legal process of claiming residency in a new country. In general migrants can be classified as those:

1. fleeing war-torn and failing states such as Syria, who qualify for refugee status in Europe
2. who migrate because their lives are threatened and because they run afoul of governments and other powerful forces. These people are also likely to stake their claims to be treated as political refugees.
3. moving from their homelands to seek jobs and better lives elsewhere. Governments would classify them as economic migrants.

### The Problem:

For many European leaders, officials, members of Civil Society, ordinary citizens and the migrants themselves, the sheer immediacy of the problem of thousands of refugees at the borders requires quick and effective action. This makes it difficult to gain enough distance to honestly and clearly deliberate about the larger issues at play. For example, there are many fears that plague the minds of Europeans, ranging from the economic costs of resettling the migrants, to fears that the influx of migrants with very different cultural, religious and moral values will “destroy the fabric of European society”<sup>7</sup>, to the possible threats arising from the presence of extremists and Jihadis amongst the migrants.

It is tempting to dismiss these sentiments as “right-wing racism” or “xenophobia” or to ignore the ground swell of discontent as marginal and temporary. However, that would be a mistake since unlike most other 'normal' problems, such as a famine, earthquake, or even war, **this crisis will not disappear after decisions are made about how to settle the migrants.** When migrants become immigrants and they will need to be housed, integrated and absorbed into the larger society in a process that can take a generation or two. This is a long term issue and has the potential for becoming a long standing source of conflict, especially considering the fact that economic conditions in many of these countries is less than stellar.

Given the contentious and conflicting views and the ease with which this can create deep divisions in society, we believe that there needs to be robust platforms for genuinely addressing these issues. The people of Europe, particularly in the cities and the communities, need spaces for constructive dialogue where their views are heard and where they can deliberate about and learn from different view-points on this issue, including that of their governments.

Traditionally societies tend to communicate and engage with critical issues in a few ways:

1. PARLIAMENT: Through elected representatives (in a democratic government) who 'debate' issues in parliament prior to passing legislation. Some limitations are:

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.express.co.uk/comment/columnists/leo-mckinstry/417307/Mass-immigration-is-destroying-the-fabric-of-society>



- The political compulsions of fighting and winning elections tends to make politicians (and hence most discussions) hostage to the interests of vote banks, demographics and the next round of elections.
  - By virtue of following a *plurality voting system*<sup>8</sup> many legislatures and parliaments do not give representations to significant if numerically minority groups.
2. MEDIA: Through media (in a free press) where publishers, editors and columnists of different ideologies debate various points of view. Key limitations are:
- Media are increasingly monopolized by large corporate houses that are driven by profits and have a stake in policies that are business friendly. This can create a dearth of truly diverse perspectives and lead to biased reporting.
  - Even when publishing houses have differing ideologies, the nature of the medium, i.e., TV, radio, newspapers, magazines (all of which are technically one-way broadcasting media rather than two-way communication media) or even social media (which is unregulated and, by its very nature, reactive) does not allow for deliberate and reasoned dialogue or even debate.
  - The nature of the media ensures that the discourse will not be a Dialogue. At best it can be a back and forth exchange of ideas and at worst, shrill and aggressive advocacy.
  - Even letters to the editor or reader call-ins to TV or radio shows favour towards unidimensional perspectives that are easy to grasp and are often polarizing. These attract higher ratings and make for better entertainment.
3. OPINION POLLS: Through polling opinions to gauge the pulse of the public. Key limitations are:
- These tend to be gut checks that don't privilege deliberate and reflective responses.
  - These are better as ways of gathering basic opinions and information rather than capturing subtle nuances or engaging the public in a complex participatory Dialogue.
4. PUBLIC PROTESTS: Through demonstrating against governmental decisions and ideas that are affecting groups. Key limitations are:
- While these are effective at mobilising support for ideas, being physical, immediate and emotional, they are more effective at signalling dissatisfaction than in promoting rational discussion or learning.
5. GOVERNMENTAL EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS: Through the use of media to communicate the government's point of view and get people to 'buy' into it. Key limitations:
- Well-designed public campaigns have a role to play, but can easily look to a cynic or sceptic as propaganda and this could turn out to be counterproductive.
  - It is one way communication that does not allow for participation from the citizens, except in superficial and limited ways.

Most often, the nature of platforms such as parliament, media, public protest, advertising campaigns or polling prevents any objective debate, leave alone a deep Dialogue, during exigencies of a given situation or crisis. The absence of deep Dialogue minimizes the possibility of developing

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/topic/plurality-system>



empathy, understanding or transformation of any kind. The only kinds of changes, like that following the publicising of Aylan Kurdi's body, are provoked by horror, revulsion and outrage, none of which are deep or engender reflection and could just as easily be swept away and replaced by the next photograph or video clip that provokes an emotional reaction.

## The Need:

While most of Europe is involved in trying to develop constructive responses to this crisis, some of the more extreme voices are making themselves heard, through public shows of protests and the social media. At present, these voices might be shared by fringe groups or less influential members of society but over time they have the potential to become very powerful and disruptive. It would be a mistake to marginalize these views and hope that they will go away or die down. The Migration crisis isn't going to end soon, so it is prudent that we deal with even the most aggressive viewpoints in an effective and empathetic manner. Dialogue is a safe and constructive way to address all issues openly, in a place where they can be contested in a healthy manner, and where a better understanding of the problem can be arrived at through discussion.

Since the beginning of this crisis, there have been several collaborative efforts among the EU member states; operations such as Triton and Poseidon to aid stranded refugees at sea to shore safely as well as the recent decision to redistribute migrants to European countries on a quota basis. Other efforts such as providing water, food and shelter within European countries are happening on a continuous basis with governments collaborating with international organisations such as UNHCR, Amnesty International and the World Food Program among many others. Grassroots level organisations are mainly focused on providing shelter and resources to asylum seekers, including the recent RefugeesAreWelcome<sup>9</sup> campaign urging countries to take a more open approach to asylum seekers. Other initiatives<sup>10</sup> are centred on providing spaces for community activities such as sports coaching for migrants as well as language classes.

As far as we know, there have not been any concerted effort to establish *Community Dialogue Processes* that can deliberate issues related to the integration of the new migrants. We are happy to stand corrected if this is not the case. Having said that, if they do not exist, these Community Dialogue Processes would be key in building solidarity and consensus on the many aspects of the integration of new migrants into European society.

There is a need for Dialogue among various stakeholders in Europe to gain a better understanding of the many facets of this issue, including:

- what this crisis actually is,
- the causes of the crisis,
- the decisions made and future decisions that might need to be made,
- understanding collective responsibility (and other concepts like sovereignty, secularism, freedom etc. in relation to the crisis),
- the kind of society Europe wants to create for itself,
- the particular challenges this community can anticipate in accommodating and integrating the new arrivals and
- the implications (both positive and negative) of migration and better ways to collaboratively deal with the problem.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.refugees-welcome.net/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://citiesintransition.eu/cityreport/grassroots-responses-to-the-refugee-crisis/>



## Our Proposal:

### Meta-Culture's Interest in the Migration Dialogue:

As an organization that specializes in dealing with complex and polarizing issues through Dialogue, we have been working on issues related to migration, the integration of minorities and Muslim/non-Muslim relations in South Asia and Europe. This present crisis is a critical watershed moment not just for Europe, but for the whole world which will be watching to see how European countries address this issue. It may not be too much of a stretch to say that how Europe addresses the accommodation *and* the integration of the migrant population will set the tone and provide lessons for many in other parts of the world who will have to deal with similar issues over the 21st century. In other words what is happening in Europe today affects the rest of the world.

We believe that it is necessary through the proposed Dialogue process, to establish and strengthen civic ties across polarized views on Migration so as to build resilience against forces for conflict and create conditions for peaceful co-existence. This initiative also has the potential to significantly enrich the conceptual and applied foundations within the field of conflict resolution and peace building. A sustained Dialogue process that addresses identity-based conflict will provide an exciting learning opportunity for stakeholders affected by the issue, and moreover create a model for addressing other conflicts, especially those that are identity-based.

Tensions between polarized groups around the Migration issue are deep-seated, politically potent, and institutionally ingrained. We are under no illusions that these tensions will be addressed and overcome quickly or easily through a few conversations. Despite our own best intentions, and those of community leaders and government officials, real change will not come about until stronger relationships lead to positive actions with real impacts within and between communities. We therefore anticipate supporting further organizational and participant capacity building beyond the project period – via training, coaching, and facilitation – as well as regular participant follow-up to sustain and deepen project impacts.

### What Meta-Culture can bring to this Project:

We are specialists in Conflict Resolution, and professional Dialogue Facilitation. Given our extensive international experience, we can bring much value to this project to equip European agencies to design and deliver these very complex and difficult dialogues.

Here are a few reasons why Meta-Culture would be a good partner for a European agency to work with:

1. We are an award-winning, highly innovative, and path breaking conflict resolution centre.
2. We are highly experienced Dialogue process designers and facilitators with experience in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America.
3. We have a proprietary methodology, **Meta-Dialogue**, that is innovative, radical, and tested in high stakes community dialogues especially with Muslims and immigrant populations.
4. We are very experienced Facilitation Trainers who have experience working with multi-cultural and multi-national groups.

Hence, Meta-Culture is seeking to partner with a European agency or University to train local facilitators and pilot a series of community Dialogues around the issue of Migration in your city.



## What we are looking for in you as our European partner?

To begin with, as a non-European agency, we cannot do this work locally. We are outsiders and do not have the local knowledge nor the language capabilities to facilitate these dialogues.

1. Local convenors and facilitators are important in order to establish trust among the participants and make them feel that the facilitators truly understand them. It is important for the convenors and the facilitators to speak the language of the participants. There is a great amount of emotion and nuance that is lost when languages are translated; this might lead to a barrier between facilitators and participants who don't speak with same language. A local partner, with their facilitators trained in Meta-Culture's methodologies, would ensure that this barrier is not created.
2. Your institution is already working on issues related to human rights, migration, peace building, consensus building or dialogue. You can and are willing to bring critical resources, on the ground experience and commitment to the project.
3. It has been our experience as facilitators that during the process of Dialogue, it is crucial that the facilitator establish immense trust and respect among participants. It is our understanding that participants (coming from extremely diverse backgrounds, but part of a common issue) would be more likely to 'buy in' to the process of Dialogue when facilitated by local groups rather than those from outside Europe.
4. We recognize that it would be economically and logistically difficult to have Meta-Culture present there for the entire process (considering it can be anything from a one year to even multiple years). Although Meta-Culture's facilitators will be present throughout the pilot program to coach and guide the facilitators through the process, the purpose for training European facilitators to do this is so that the **project is self-sustaining**.
5. It is Meta-Culture's mission **to train a cadre of facilitators around the world in Meta-Dialogues processes**. The Migration Dialogue could be the first of many initiatives that these facilitators could take on in and around Europe.
6. The institute should either have staff who are willing and able to be trained as Meta-Dialogue facilitators or have the ability to recruit trainable facilitators from the local community.
7. The institute/ agency should have the ability and willingness to manage the project in your own city or country and be responsible for all local logistics, communication and project management activities.
8. The partner agency should either have funding or an ability to raise funding for the project. The funding will be used for operational costs including funding for Meta-Culture to train and pilot the Dialogue, fees for your own facilitators who will be trained to deliver the program, costs of renting space, communication materials, food etc.

## Ways in which we can Collaborate with our Partner Organization:

Meta-Culture and any potential partner organization could find creative ways to collaborate with each other for the Dialogue: Below are two potential models for collaboration.

1. **For Organizations with potential facilitators:** The Organisation would identify a few potential facilitators from within the organization; these could be people with teaching, training or even counselling experience. Meta-Culture will conduct an extensive training program on the Meta-Dialogue methodology to equip the new facilitators to conduct creative and complex dialogues. Meta-Culture will then coach and mentor the new



facilitators during between 3-6 sessions of the Migration Dialogue. This will include outreach, convening participants, the actual conducting of the Dialogue sessions and conducting of follow up phone calls.

2. **For Organizations that do not have in their staff people who could become potential facilitators:** Meta-Culture will partner with the Organization to identify potential facilitators from outside the organization who could undergo training in the Meta-Dialogue methodology. Following this, as in the one above, Meta-Culture will then coach and mentor the new facilitators during 3-6 sessions of the Migration Dialogue. This will include outreach, convening participants, the actual conducting of the Dialogue sessions and conducting of follow up phone calls.

## Methodology:

### What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is not just any conversation. It is an uncommon conversation. The term dialogue (with a small 'd') is quite frequently used with its meaning taken for granted. Dispute Transformation practitioners, however, use the term Dialogue (with a capital 'D') in a very deliberate and specific way. Dialogue is not a debate. Dialogue is not an ordinary conversation. Thus Dialogue is not dialogue.

Dialogue, instead, is a structured and facilitated methodology that creates a safe but challenging space for people with different perspectives to engage in open, honest and critical conversations. It can be used to help people with differing views, interests, and beliefs, engage in focused and productive conversation so as to deepen their understanding of each other and the issues concerned. Perhaps most importantly, Dialogue challenges participants to suspend judgement of their counterparts, dispel stereotypes, break out of commonplace assumptions and become more open to perspectives different from their own.

Dialogue is the work of building enduring platforms that allow people to communicate honestly in order to coexist in good and bad times. It also provides the glue to come together when the need arises and to take collaborative action when the situation calls for it.

Meta-Culture's vision for the Migration Dialogue is to institute a sustained process with the potential to strengthen relationships between key stakeholders involved both directly and indirectly in the migration issue and contribute to their peaceful co-existence.

To achieve this vision Meta-Culture will help the trainee facilitators:

- Build their capacity to facilitate *deep, real, and constructive dialogue* between those who have competing perspectives and ideologies;
- Develop the tools to help their Dialogue participants achieve a more complex understanding of each other, and build and maintain relationships based on equity, mutual respect and trust;
- Find ways to help Dialogue participants build consensus by seeking concrete ways to work together and have productive and respectful inter-community interactions;
- Learn about the different ways in which they can assist groups to maintain the collaboration they have established at the dialogue.



## The problem with conventional *dialogue*:

Most attempts at dialogue tend to fall into one of four categories:

1. **Cacophony of Conclusions:** The dialogue focuses on bringing diverse groups together but is neither structured nor facilitated. Participants get carried away with their own passions and the lack of listening quickly degenerates into yelling or at best shutting down of the conversation.
2. **Killing me Politely:** Different people come with the express intention of “getting along”. Everybody is at their best behaviours and hence the stilted conversations end up being exercises in polite meaninglessness.
3. **Consensus by Correctness:** Likeminded people come to talk about issues that bother them but people who disagree with each other are either kept out or silenced by facilitators whose rules and norms sterilize all intensity, passion and honesty out of the conversation.
4. **Re-framing Sterility:** One of the most powerful tools that Facilitators and Mediators have is the ability to re-frame a statement that is not just emotional and ‘colourful’ but even potentially ‘toxic’. Useful as this is, it often takes out all the life, meaning and passion from the statement and expression.

## Meta-Dialogue

The traditional practice of dialogue is used as a structured methodology to help people with differing views, interests and beliefs to have focused, honest and productive conversation to deepen their understanding of each other. However, Meta-Dialogue goes beyond conventional dialogue, in that the approach is honest, frank and devoid of any attempt at ‘correct’ posturing that makes most exercises such as these innocuous and hence irrelevant.

Meta-Culture's 25 years of experience in Conflict Resolution and Facilitating Dialogue on a range of topics, across the world, has led to the development of an innovative and radical approach to conducting Dialogue between polarized groups.

The following six key elements are combined to help create an environment of openness, honesty and irreverence in order to facilitate a deep and robust conversation:

- ✓ **COMMUNICATION:** To establish communication between the parties where hitherto none existed.
- ✓ **COMFORT:** To create an emotionally comfortable environment by bringing humour and a sense of camaraderie into the room.
- ✓ **STORY TELLING:** To develop greater appreciation and empathy through listening to and acknowledging each-others’ stories.
- ✓ **CRITICAL THINKING:** To help participants develop the discipline and skills necessary achieve rigor in their own thinking and engage in clear and constructive conversations.
- ✓ **CREATIVE THINKING:** To open up participants to the imaginative possibilities inherent in conflict and to move away from traditional ways of thinking about outcomes.
- ✓ **HUMOUR & (affectionate) IRREVERENCE:** To use humour and irreverence in order to help people in a conflict experience ‘lightness’ and ‘laughter’ where tension and animosity exist

Ashok Panikkar, lead Facilitator and Executive Director at Meta-Culture, uses case studies from his own work along with models that he has developed over two decades of working on race, ethnicity, migration, sexuality, religious, community and organizational disputes in the US, and parts of



Asia, Europe and the Middle-East. Meta-Dialogue is unique in that, beyond creating conditions for empathy and inclusiveness, it seeks to build clarity and deep understanding through Critical Thinking, liberate the imagination through Creativity and help parties locked in conflict transcend their 'stuckness' through Humour and affectionate Irreverence.

## Meta-Culture:

Founded in 2005, and based in Bangalore, India; Meta-Culture is South Asia's first specialized organization dedicated to the field and practice of Critical Thinking, Conflict Resolution, consensus building, relationship management, and Dialogue. We endeavour to build peaceable and sustainable communities and organizations by changing how people address conflict and make decisions. Meta-Culture's aim is to help conflicting stakeholders first understand and respect each other's perspectives through Critical Thinking processes, and then apply their diverse thinking to joint problem solving. The result is better decision-making, more sustainable agreements, smarter policies, and stronger and more peaceable communities.

Meta-Culture works with a variety of individuals and groups including communities, national and multinational companies, NGOs and civil society, Governments, academic and faith-based institutions, and other local, national, and international organizations.

Meta-Culture uses a range of methodologies including Dialogue, consensus building, organizational audits, conflict assessments, dispute management systems design, mediation, training and coaching. We also provide training services in cross-cultural communication, diversity management, change management, critical thinking, creative thinking, conflict management, collaborative negotiation, team building and leadership development.

Some of Meta-Culture's projects include a pioneering, multi-year, multi-stakeholder Dialogue in the garment and apparel sector in India called the Garment Sector Roundtable (GSR), and two spin off projects: the Joint Fact-Finding Commission, and the Women's Supervisory Training Program; as well as the Hindu-Christian and Hindu-Muslim Inter-faith Dialogues—an ongoing initiative to bring together leaders of religious communities in Karnataka, India, for dialogue and relationship building. The Public Intelligence Project, an advocacy and education initiative to explore ways to better manage diversity through promoting participatory democracy, Dialogue, Critical Thinking, and freedom of expression, is also based out of Meta-Culture. Meta-Culture has, over the years, in South Asia, Europe, North Africa and Europe, engaged deeply with issues as varied as inter-faith, inter-race, labour-management, intra-organization, environmental and inter-personal conflicts. We have trained and mentored organizations in the USA and the Middle East in Dialogue and Conflict resolution. In recognition of Meta-Culture's work, it was the 2010 recipient of the Outstanding Leadership Award of the International Committee of the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR)