

# Chapter 6

## Multicultural Context

Jean-Paul Close and Rüstem Demir

Not many cities in the world can be seen in the present day as being a community of a singular cultural background. Most have seen migration patterns from within and outside their national boundaries. Eindhoven itself grew instantly to 40,000 inhabitants in 1920, when the small transit town of about 6000 souls annexed 5 villages so as to gain in size and extension. This was necessary to host the many people who were attracted by the industrial activities of Philips (lighting and electronics) and DAF (automotive). The city grew rapidly, now counting over 220,000 residents. The workforce needed exceeded the capacity of the Dutch community, so borders opened up for guest labor from other countries. Post-war development saw lots of people from Southern Europe, and later migration came from Northern Africa, Turkey and the old Dutch colonies. Right now, Eindhoven counts over 150 different nationalities. The largest sub-communities are Turkish and Moroccan.

When we decided that we wanted to work on a healthy city with the innovative participation of the local population, we also realized we needed to find ways to address the cultural diversity. Since the credit crisis, a lot of people had experienced some sort of isolation due to their foreign origins, looks and lack of integration. In times of economic abundance, such individuals could well take part in economic activities and still remain socially isolated from the main culture. When I was asked to speak during a set of encounters designed to highlight the complexity and value of a great diversity of cultures interacting in one region, I could draw from my own extensive personal experiences as a global expat executive between 1981 and 2001, research performed in Nordic countries in the '90s by my old Swedish teacher,

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Anita Ekwall, and my multicultural marriages. The Nordic nations went through an economic crisis back in the late '80s while hosting Chilean refugees fleeing from the dictator Pinochet. At the same time, Sweden and Finland were exchanging industrial activities through takeovers and fusions. Both on the level of company boards and in the streets, there was intercultural misunderstanding and unrest. Research by people like Anita Ekwall on the basis of local boardrooms and Geert Hofstede worldwide was published in subsequent years. These publications<sup>1,2</sup> helped to visualize cultural differences through pictures and my own research.

It became a new personal challenge to see how those other cultures could become involved in the healthy city challenge of AiREAS. What differences could be detected in lifestyle and how could the context of health and air quality trigger a response among this segment of the population? Contacts were established with multiple NGO's and individuals of different ethnic origins. Not many were interested in developing new kinds of social relationships, because they were being subsidized to perform other types of activities. Suggestions for addressing the different cultural groups through the health challenge were not seconded by the subsidy providers, because such activities did not clearly focus on creating jobs, economic growth deliverables or integration. Early participants from Africa, the UK, Morocco, etc., helped to set up some seminars dealing with 'The fear of the other' and 'Cultural diversity and sustainable entrepreneurship', but these did not connect proactively to the other communities; they just explained the difficulty of integration and the beauty of cultural differences and interaction throughout history as seen through language, architecture and cultural development. Our communication through the media and blogs was in Dutch, while many the subcultures tended not to access such media due to language difficulties and lack of contact. It had become a major, mind-boggling dilemma figuring out how to connect all cultures to the higher purpose of health and air quality, not just the mainstream Dutch.

## 6.1 Erasmus+

For several years, the high school teacher Rüstem Demir, who came from a background of Turkish migration, had joined the evening inspiration sessions of STIR academy. He had learned about Sustainocratic views, but found it difficult to apply them in his current job, as a teacher in a Dutch school for professional education. Then, he was contacted by a Turkish agency that was looking for partners in the Netherlands to develop the European Erasmus+ exchange program for students. He contacted STIR to see if we could incorporate some of our views into the inspiration sessions for those visiting youngsters from Turkey. We rapidly linked the two challenges and tried to get the Turkish community, the largest

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<sup>1</sup>Mötet (1999) Anita Ekwall, ISBN 9789525306125 Ad initium **Utgivningsår**.

<sup>2</sup>Hofstede (1991) 'Allemaal andersdenkenden'.

foreign presence in Eindhoven, to open itself up for visits from students from Turkey so they could learn about AiREAS and the healthy city challenge. To our surprise, this time they accepted!

When asking this group of foreign, long-term residents in Eindhoven “why is the segregation between cultures persistent?”, the answer was directly related to the social, political and economic environment into which these people had arrived in the Netherlands. The following factors were given that stood in the way of the integration of cultures:

- Low level of education of the first generation of immigrants,
- Their fear for discrimination due to ‘being different’,
- Language problems,
- The persistent idea that ‘we are here temporarily and will go back one day’.

During times of economic recession, this feeling was exacerbated due to local attitudes against foreigners, who were perceived to occupy jobs or take part in the social system, thereby reducing the chances for the locals. The Dutch have certain words for locally-born people and others for those who immigrated or were born from immigrants. Such linguistic classification is itself a form of discrimination, one that can also be found in the behavior of the system, government regulation and an overall culture around “the fear of the other” (an ‘us and them’ culture). This cold, materialistic, classification-based manner of dealing with people in an unequal way had been one of the main reasons that I had founded STIR, out of a powerful desire to reform and redefine a new society based on equality, respect and trust. That was also the essence of Sustainocracy, and for the first time, it could be applied to different cultures. A multi-faceted experiment started which introduced innovations into the field of intercultural involvement, education and persuasive communication, with both local and international components.

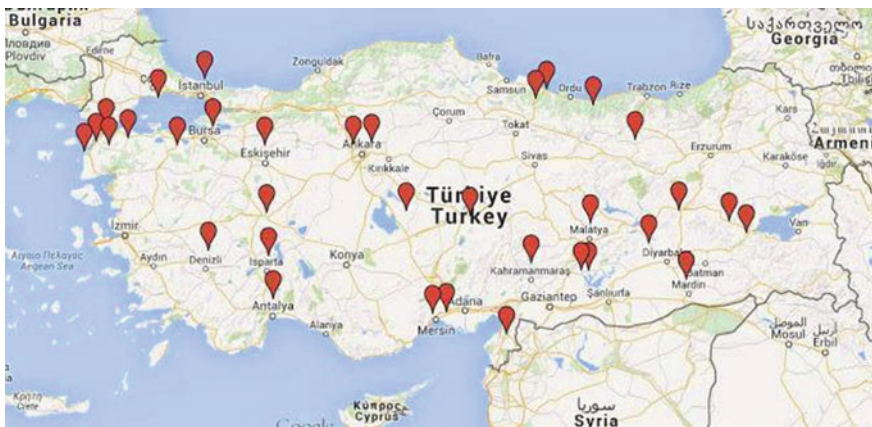
### ***6.1.1 Turkish Students from Turkey***

When the first group of students arrived, they were asked to help explain the AiREAS healthy city challenge to the Turkish community in Eindhoven. With this exercise, a variety of objectives were covered. The students were inspired to come to understand the complexity of air quality in relation to human health. They also learned about intercultural complexity and were challenged to use their creativity and study material to communicate in public. And they did all this by establishing teams that would each work out their ideas together. The students were all aged 15–17, and reacted to the opportunity to participate with great passion and drive. During their preparations, they were supported by professional teachers who helped them forward with the tools and understanding they required along the way. According to the visiting teachers, the groups of young people learned more in four days through their self-educative impulses than they did in one year at school at

home. The fact that they were in another country, challenged with a real life issue connected directly to their own awareness and talents, had opened up their minds and creativity, and their ability to perform with joy and happiness. Interestingly, after the exercise, we received calls from parents in Turkey who wanted to know what secret we had used to motivate their children to such a great degree that they had started to learn a foreign language and paid much greater attention to their studies!

A new educational theory developed that was equivalent to the practical proof of principle of the Transformation Economy. This type of economy positioned core value-driven change at the core of a productive, self-reflective community. This focus on change had so many innovative deliverables that each could show patterns of growth, producing continuous new economic development and impulses. The trick was to avoid focusing on growth, but rather learning to take growth for granted as a natural process if the value-driven change produced valuable innovations. The same appeared in the educational process. In asking these students to connect their inner motivation and creativity to a core human issue of perceived and recognized importance, their inner stimulus to search for knowledge and develop abilities was triggered. In giving them freedom and access to facilitating expertise, their learning curve jumped to unprecedented heights instantly. In the end, their deliverables were excellent, serving multiple purposes.

All these direct and collateral benefits were very much appreciated and added up to our own STIR participative learning curve. In subsequent groups, we would be able to anticipate such benefits and try to enhance them. Meanwhile, we confronted one of the Turkish communities in Eindhoven with the motivated presence of the youngest generation from Turkey carrying an important message. The students had put on a small show and entertained the Turkish people present with their youthful, modern enthusiasm and powerful message. The connection was made, bridging the local Turkish community with the local health challenge. It became clear that the core values of Sustainocracy are a common denominator for all cultures and serve the beautiful inter-human function of co-creation and connectivity, independent of language, religion or background.



A view of the origin of the groups of students received throughout the program in 2015

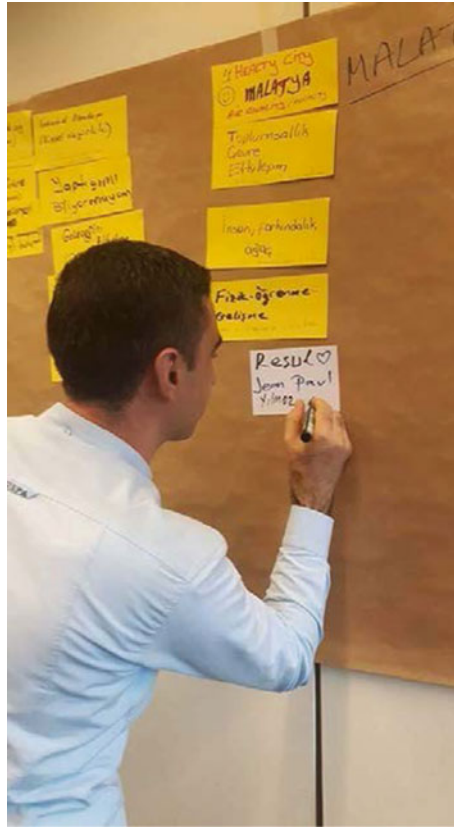
### 6.1.2 *Bridge to Turkey*

Another curious side effect of the integration of the Turkish Erasmus+ program with the AiREAS objectives was the bridge function with air quality in Turkey. The students and teachers were also naturally looking at their own situation at home. Internet research rapidly revealed the local hot spots in their home country, making the challenge even more real. Posters were made that could be used to communicate with their local authorities and teachers started to integrate core values into their own programs and practicals for the students. Soon, politicians and government people started to join the exchange program and came over to get inspired by Sustainocracy. Not only did AiREAS become an issue, but so did the other STIR programs, such as the STIR academic method of participative learning and FRE<sup>2</sup>SH local consumption and productivity. Local regional topics were discussed from the point of view of core values, including the problems the local executives face as the result of historical decisions that are now an impediment to progress and change.

One group, for instance, came from the small town of Soma. Soma is a town that was built around a coal mine. This mine fulfils a key role in the existence of the town, its local labor and the financial wellness of the resident population. In 2014, disaster struck when over 300 were killed in a mining accident. The group of visiting students that researched their AiREAS challenge on the internet was nearly all girls around the age of 17–18, young women on the verge of adult fertility and ready to develop formal relationships. They were shocked to discover that children currently born in their own home town have a life expectancy of just 50 years, due to the pollution created by the mine. Government officials said that they wanted to address the problem, but were blocked by a coal supply contract with a foreign nation. This nation pays for the coal in a competitive environment, but does not take responsibility for the local social and ecological damage.

We see this type of tension between old commitments and desired progress everywhere in the world. Extensive dialogues were developed about the complexity of change and the path of building up something new within the scope of the new reality of  $4 \times$  profit, while downsizing the old commitments and consequences.

Another example is the delegation that came from Malatya, a town in the Eastern region of Turkey. The group was chaired by a local governor. With our partner, Rüstem Demir, we had agreed to focus our 3-h session on core value-driven entrepreneurship. We went through the cycle of human complexities and the  $4 \times$  profit approach. Together with Eugen Oetringer, who introduced a method for highlighting opportunities and ideas from the group and pinpointing difficulties in reaching objectives, we were able to define the preconception of a health deal for Malatya.



Co-creation in action

One of the issues raised was the proximity of the warzone of Syria. A stretch of land over 250 km long was filled with landmines, a serious hazard for the local community and a conundrum for the local executives. Within the entrepreneurial network of STIR, we have a creative group of entrepreneurs who have developed various innovative initiatives to detect, map and destroy landmines in a cheap and effective way using drone technology. Their inventions have captured the interest of the United Nations. Their lab was just 5 minutes' walking distance away from the STIR academy, so a link was rapidly made.

Such issues were raised in many of the local groups, resulting in formally-stated intentions to use sustainocratic level 4 regional development to address these issues for the sake of sustainable human progress in each region. The visiting generations, both students and professionals, reached a level of understanding of the benefits that core values have for their community, the potential for tourism and foreign investment opportunities, and the evolution of wellness, social cohesion and productivity of the local community. The Erasmus+ program, as of this writing, still has 6 more years to go and promises to be a powerful instrument and platform for

leveraging both Dutch and Turkish value-driven activities and relationships at humanitarian, educational, ecological and entrepreneurial levels. During the POP, we received over 700 students and about 70 teachers and regional executives. Throughout the program, we expect to inspire a total of 7000 visiting students and professionals, all while establishing and maintaining productive relationships with the local schools and communities.



Some of the creative results of the students from Turkey

The program is, of course, not exclusive to Turkey and the local Turkish community. It just so happened in the course of the POP that we were able to experiment intensely with that particular social reality. The learning curve is now available for the entire world in the form of value-driven participative learning at all age levels using core values as bonding instruments.

## 6.2 Conclusion

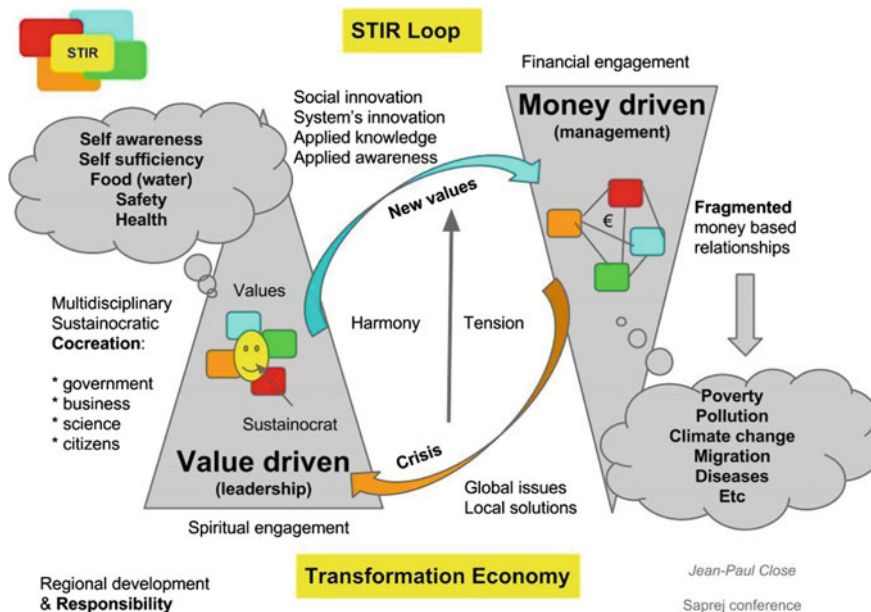
We learned various things throughout this program. The first conclusion is that core human values are common for all people and have an effect of bonding and community building irrespective of cultural background. People overcome their differences with ease when invited to work together on the development of those core values. The different cultural backgrounds subsequently become an inspirational diversity of creativity. The Dutch tend to be more rational in their expression, while the Turkish lend emotion and colorful creativity. Language issues are overcome through images and illustrative videos on the internet that everyone can understand.

We learned to distinguish between information supply and the art of communication. How one gets a message across is different from how one gets people involved.

We also developed the STIR participative learning pattern. For over 100 years, we have educated our young generations by the standards of industrialized processes and labor in hierarchical structures. Obedience and mass productivity (no individual identity or initiative) were the leading educational drivers, as they still are today. But the enormous challenges that the world faces no longer require

robotized human beings, but rather participative, passion-driven, creative contributors to progress. This demands a new educational system which STIR defined within the scope of our level 4 sustainocratic participation society. At various times, we have tried to introduce this way of thinking into the Dutch school system, but without real success. Every time we managed to introduce a program, such as our ‘In search of the hero’ or ‘Entrepreneur of your own life’ programs, the schools would embrace them at the educational level but not at the executive. When an executive commitment for continuity was needed, the doors would close and remained closed. The dependence on money, with national governmental guidance through inspections, blocked this progress. It was therefore very interesting to see the positive results within the Erasmus+ program with the Turkish students who were the first to really benefit from this type of learning process.

The impression arose that structural innovation never comes from within a system but needs to be developed outside first. We had already called this the STIR loop (see figure below), which was applied in AiREAS at the operational level. It takes executives outside of their regulated comfort zone into the core value-driven reality of Sustainocracy. The sense of freedom opens up the creativity of the executives, who tend to commit to the innovation they themselves propose. Subsequently, they address the burden of their own organization and help it to transform step by step through powerful arguments. However, the educational system is not governed by the executive of the schools, but rather by the financial dependence on the central government. The executive is simply managing the national interests, which are confined to the historical context around which national financing is based. Many young people feel a separation between educational obligations and what they themselves and society expect from them.





After our success with the Turkish youngsters, we also invited the Dutch schools to participate, and we gradually saw steps being taken in this endeavor too. Finally, the approach we had taken had become a true ambassador for ideological and practical connection with Turkish regional development. We started to consider opening up our program to other European countries as well. The key was in developing relationships of trust with local partners, and that would take time.

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