

Promoting Diversity Wisely

Both nationals and expatriates need to understand the integration process clearly says **Katarzyna Richter**, Cross Cultural Psychologist.



Katarzyna Richter

Facing people of different cultures is a common while living in Bahrain. Non-Bahrainis make up nearly 50 per cent of the population. Multiculturalism is a great concept, promoting diversity, openness, and learning. It helps us develop tolerance towards those from other parts of the world, enriching all our lives. But is it that simple?

Over the years, multiculturalism has created problems like poverty, crime, burgeoning extremist groups, weakening social trust, and racism. This may have led to greater segregation in society as noted by several influential politicians, scholars and executives. According to a research published by the Journal of Sociology, multiculturalism has been declared a failure both in Europe and in the Anglophone West. Political leaders including Australia's former Prime Minister, John Howard; former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy; and UK's Prime Minister, David Cameron have publicly declared that the attempt to create a multicultural society has failed. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "The so-called 'multikulti' concept where people live side-by-side happily - did not work." These problems are mostly visible in countries which pursued an ethnic diverse migration policy, such as Canada and Australia. So, what went wrong?

The lack of integration of different ethnic and cultural groups with existing laws and values is the problem. For immigrants, the integration path is clear: understanding local values and languages results in better jobs and business. Not knowing local laws may mean jail. This path is established and evolves fairly easily because countries can change immigration selection or improve



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regulation and law enforcement at will.

But for nationals the path is less clear and thus more challenging. They must acquire the patience and tolerance for foreign cultures while new immigrants learn. Also, there inevitably will be individuals who behave badly in any culture. Filtering them out, as they disrupt society will demand an extraordinary open mind.

We are fortunate that Bahrain a country led by enlightened leaders, committed to promoting the country as a diversity-friendly place, displaying warm Arabic hospitality towards people who decide to make Bahrain their home.

The recently organised event “Bahrain for All & All for Bahrain” is a very thoughtful initiative to bring diverse communities together, bridging the gap between expatriates and locals. Experiencing different aspects of a range of cultures, such as music, dance and food is great. Such multi-cultural projects appeal as entertainment and are good for encouraging interest and curiosity. That said, in order to truly integrate with other cultures we also need to learn their values, and the best way to do that is to live within the said cultural values. That's perhaps why some attention must be focused on creating exchange programs where participants actually live through all the aspects of everyday life of a certain culture. This does not necessarily mean the expense and commitment of sending people to live overseas; but rather includes easier ideas such as locally organised workshops that would involve people of various backgrounds to work together on a project, or swapping households for a few days. And always remember, developing cultural intelligence means stepping out of our comfort zone!