

New Generations, New Paradigms: Turkish German Civil Society and the Pursuit of Equal Opportunities

Author: Filiz Bikmen, Richard von Weizsacker Fellow, Robert Bosch Academy, Berlin

Originally published in German, by Korber Stiftung, October 2014

The United Nations Population Fund lists Germany as host to the third-highest number of international migrants worldwide. With a population of nearly 80 million, more than 16 million are of foreign/immigrant descent (first and second generation, including mixed heritage and ethnic German repatriates and their descendants). Of this 16 million, an estimated 4 million are of Turkish descent.

The first generation of immigrants from Turkey – mainly guest workers who decided not to return back to their home country- formed informal and formal associations in the 1980s and 1990s for social, cultural and religious purposes. As Germany's migration and integration policies, federal-local funding and service provision structures developed, existing immigrant organizations took on new roles, and new ones were formed, mainly to provide services to communities. Commonly referred to as 'migrant organizations', these local and grassroots organizations have developed a somewhat parallel sector of civil society (along with other migrant organizations from different communities). While they now obtain greater financial support than before, a significant portion of public funding and service contracts flows to the major charity organizations (which have greater professional staff and capacity).

All of these existing approaches and structures from generations past are slowly coming under question as new generations are born, raised and educated in a country which is as much, if not more so 'home' to them than the country of their parents and grandparents. While they may not see themselves as any different from their peers without a 'migrant background', mainstream society does not always share the same view. In many cases, young people with such backgrounds face great disadvantages from the very start of their educational and social lives, even though they are German citizens and have the same rights to education and other services. As such, 2nd and 3rd generation civic leaders in the Turkish German community who work to address lack of equal opportunities are beginning to question the terms such as 'migrant organization' and the field of migration-integration, which feels to be a limited and rather niche space of work. There is a sense that these terms and approaches have also kept 'mainstream German' civil society organizations (CSOs) and 'migrant CSOs' apart, thus limiting the opportunity to discuss and work together on broader topics of concern to the whole of society, such as education, youth and the environment.

This new generation appears to be rather actively engaged on discourses of equal opportunity, social justice, inclusion, active citizenship, and asset-based community development. They apply approaches and operational models which engage mainstream German CSOs as well as the Turkish German community and other intercultural community efforts. They are reaching outward to other communities and the broader society, and remaining objective when looking inward, examining their own communities' traditions and practices and questioning the extent to which they serve to benefit current and future generations to come. They are conscious of the fact that in order for real change to take root, all communities not matter what their background, must be part of the process.

Some of these next generation civic leaders have decided to establish new organizations, mainly over the past eight to ten years. In some cases, they have taken over leadership positions of some older organizations, but this is less common as newer generations are feeling increasingly disconnected from organizations established by first generation immigrants. They do not necessarily define their work or approach with a particular political or religious ideology, and they do not focus only on issues that are of concern only to Turkish immigrant or migrant communities. Several of these civic leaders express frustration that their 'migrant background' often comes with expectations that they should be working to address issues only in their own community. But the reality is that their scope and their vision is wider, going beyond migration-integration and seeking to engage more on broader issues facing German society overall and in some cases, European and Global topics. For example, "Yesil Cember" promotes volunteering and awareness among the Turkish community on environmental issues in Germany, and aims to bring more diversity to the environmental movement. DeuKische Generation visits schools and brings youth from different backgrounds together to talk about diversity

and discrimination. The TEMA foundation of Cologne is working on promoting sustainable businesses in the Turkish German community, but looks to European and global standards while doing so. What appears as a slow but sure disconnect from the limitations of the migration-integration lens among the new generation could very well be the beginning of a new discourse on the topic of civic engagement and leadership. For this next generation, what matters is the development and expansion of organizations and approaches which promote equal access to opportunities- for all communities and citizens, not just their own. This shift in paradigm may allow for new strategies and programs to emerge, which can help address the challenges of Germany's diverse communities in a more holistic manner, resulting in more sustainable and systemic change.

So what can be done to foster and support this new generation and the emergence of this discourse? It is always difficult to begin talking about a topic when the exact words are not yet in place to facilitate expression. As such, first it is necessary to create the intellectual and reflective space which facilitates identifying, sharing and documenting of emerging narratives, practices and approaches among this new generation.

Convening the next generation of civic leaders from 'migrant organizations' (not only Turkish German) with their German counterparts, so they can discuss and share perspectives on issues concerning German society such as education, youth, and the environment would also be very fruitful. Perhaps through this 'cross-fertilization', new approaches and strategies can be co-created. In addition, being mindful about creating more diverse and inclusive profiles among staff, volunteers, donors and Board members across all CSOs would help to bring in different perspectives and practices.

Supporting international exchanges of best practice would also be of great benefit. While the political and social context differs, the experiences of CSOs in Turkey and other countries might be among the useful examples to examine and learn from. Over the past two decades, CSOs in Turkey have been increasingly actively developing new strategies for civic engagement, raising awareness about rights, and working to promote social policies which are designed for the margins and are more inclusive. They are tackling some similar challenges, such as empowerment of youth, increasing the literacy of women and capabilities of parents, promoting greater enrolment of children in pre-school, and advocating for more effective educational policies and practices - all issues that are also relevant in the German context as well as in Europe and beyond.

Private foundations and particularly community foundations could benefit from re-examining existing program and funding strategies with inputs from some new generation organizations and leaders, to review existing frameworks and ensure that current and future plans reflect the changing nature of the work in the community.

And finally, it is necessary to strengthen organizations and invest in the new generation of leadership. In order to tackle the rather nebulous systemic challenges around equal opportunities, organizations and their leaders require greater capacity (resources), capability (skills, know-how), connections (national and international) and credibility (with media and decision makers). It will be important also to ensure there are ample opportunities to work skillfully and strategically with media to convey issues of concern to the public and key opinion leaders/decision makers.