



OBSERVATOIRE
PHAROS

Pluralisme culturel
et religieux

Concept note

World Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism

Creating an indicator of social cohesion and respect for cultural and religious plurality in societies.

Abstract

The modern world seems to be trapped between secularisation and identitarian closure. Although this is by no means new, the dominant dogma of the culture of peace in its different forms, founded on non-violence, tolerance and solidarity, seems to be crumbling, weakened at every turn by fractures where beliefs and allegiances play a major role. In that context, knowing how to examine the state of religious and cultural coexistence within a society would make for better understanding of its mechanisms, and facilitate diagnosing its potential failures.

This is why Observatoire Pharos is creating a tool that will be able to measure the level of cultural and religious pluralism within a society: the intensity of tensions between different parts, and their capacity to absorb shocks between different sets of values, to preserve the common good.

1. Genesis and context of the project

Observatoire Pharos

Created in 2011, Observatoire Pharos is a non-profit organisation under the 1901 law, designed to be a platform for information, action and reflection on questions related to pluralism of cultures and religions. Its core activity consists in monitoring and disseminating reliable and decoded information on the highly sensitive problematics of identity. Its field actions in several countries aim to support actors of social cohesion and promote dynamics of religious pluralism in transitional societies. Finally, its research activities are dedicated to analysing and understanding pluralism as the social organisation of plurality. On these three levels, it aims to grasp the factors for cohesion as well as the factors for fragmentation at work in said societies. Its three core activities make it an observer of identitarian tensions. It is designed to be instrumental in shedding light on conflicts, social crises and to facilitate reconciliation processes or political transitions.

Cultural and religious pluralism

According to the *Dictionnaire des faits religieux* (PUF, 2010) « While plurality is the mere observation of a de facto diversity, pluralism is the statement of a project: that of an organisation facilitating coexistence between various elements without exacting from them what makes them unique.” (Hermon-Belot, Clémentin).

Pluralism in the singular refers to the concept of a balance to be attained within a society, between particularities (the respect of cultural and religious diversity, the principle of freedom of belief) and a common project (social cohesion, which corresponds most of the time to the concept of citizenship). It is an unstable and essentially ever-adapting balance. Unlike diversity, which is the observation of a reality, that very adaptation is what makes pluralism a dynamic set in motion only by will: the will of those who govern a society, and the will of those of whom it is composed; the will to respect freedom of belief and belonging, and the will to build a community of destiny within a shared space. It is a third way, avoiding both cultural dissolution and identitarian closure, and allowing for individual religious freedoms while regulating their interactions in a shared territory. Further than internal appeasement of a society, pluralism allows for a virtuous circle encompassing all dimensions, since pluralistic societies are naturally more prone to interact with neighboring societies without feeling threatened, and to contribute to a shared world respectful of the individual entities it is composed of.

Pluralism therefore does not refer to a unique and universal model. Since it is a balance between the two poles of individual freedom and a collective project, it is rather the pointer of the balance scale, which every society must try and stabilize as much as possible. It is constantly exposed to many potential shocks, and perfect balance is never achieved. To promote pluralism is to encourage societies to strive for an ideal of common good. There are as many ways of organising diversity as there are societies; that is to say that any number of weights can be placed on either pan of the balance. Defending pluralism means ensuring that every weight is matched by a counterpart. The way plurality is organized in a given country is based on its history, its culture and its current political system. While every model is unique and it is difficult to categorize all models according to a norm, it is possible to compare them to ideological concepts such as communitarianism, multiculturalism, interculturalism, secularism, etc.

Since its inception, it has been Observatoire Pharos's conviction that culture and religion are inseparable, and it was confirmed throughout its 9 years of work. Religious belonging and practice are often tangled with cultural belonging and practice, so much so that it is difficult to tell them apart: what seems to belong to culture can also be seen as religious, and vice-versa. This confusion is even greater when looking at intra-religious plurality.

Observatoire Pharos therefore understands that it is its mission to:

- Go beyond sterile debates that cripple our 21st century societies, where supporters of more diversity face supporters of identity, by seeing plurality as a given reality, a feature in any group of individuals;
- Convey the message that plurality, a word that is not ideologically loaded as diversity is, is not a burden, but that it can be a source of enrichment, provided that a balance is found between the communal and the individual;
- Promote pluralism as the necessary balance between individual freedom and citizenship, and to make it known when either of them starts to grow unchecked, or when the majority starts to oppress minorities;
- Better understand how different societies in the world are attempting to achieve that balance, and consequently suggest models, albeit imperfect, for life as a society;
- Finally, offer solutions and support States and societies in the quest for this balance even in projects resulting from policies.

The genesis of an innovative project

The Barometer of pluralism was born out of three major constataions:

1. Over the course of its field actions, Observatoire Pharos has had to work simultaneously in countries with very different situations. It has encountered different ways of organising plurality, and pondered on the question of how these ways are similar: are there specific features to pluralism, or are all models possible and equal?
2. Observatoire Pharos has reflected on how impactful its projects are and felt it necessary to assess them so as to improve its work. It noted a lack of tools for measuring pluralism, and its observation was confirmed in requests made by donors, actors of development and assessment firms.
3. In keeping with this observation, Observatoire Pharos has perceived that this need was a general one, beyond the mere question of project assessment. In the current context, assessing the state of religious affairs and of identities in societies was also felt as necessary by political decision-makers, actors of development and even economic actors¹.

So far, cultural and religious pluralism in societies has been out of the grasp of various existing indicators. There are indicators of fragility in states, of human development, religious liberty, tolerance, acceptance of singularities, etc.: nothing, however, seems to show the reality of religion in a society, in individual and collective aspects, while the stakes of religious affairs, so often a weak spot in societies, have grown considerably over the last decades. On the basis of these three observations, Observatoire Pharos has pondered on the question and decided to start a project for a Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism. Since this reflection started, it has also been clearly felt that there is a need to find common ground in understanding the question of pluralism, in a globalized world where so much is interconnected. Observatoire Pharos is convinced that the Barometer, and all the research that will allow to build it and improve it, will help to create that common ground, and bring together such diverse realities for dialogue.

¹ In his book *Africanistan*, Serge Michailov lists indicators available to actors of development and institutional donors in their work. He especially points to the same lack of data that we have identified.

2. Objectives and intentions

The World Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism's general purpose is to help to bring peace to societies and foster a better understanding of phenomena of identitarian tensions.

Our intention is to create an indicator, a measuring tool consisting of various parameterized criteria and a methodology that will allow:

1. Regularly (yearly or biyearly) publishing an update of existent data, in a report called "World Barometer of pluralism", in order to follow the evolution of coexistence in societies over time.
2. Being ready to assist in the assessment of public policies, projects or effects on the capacity for coexistence of events such as a conflict, a reconciliation process or a natural catastrophe, of the assessment of a society's resilience in religious life.

More specifically, the World Barometer of pluralism has four sub-objectives:

1. **Grading:** this indicator will be an innovative reference for data, usable in various situations. Because of its capacity to measure the weakness or, conversely, the social cohesion of a country's cultural and religious life, the Barometer's results will be meant for **political decision-makers, actors of development aid, producers and conveyors of information, as well as actors of the civil society mobilized for religious pluralism**. Like in the financial world, a country's grade will affect how it is trusted by all, from the country's very society to international organizations, to donors and political associates, and will compel it to react accordingly.
2. **Publishing:** the Barometer's development will be progressive: **in 2022, results of the pilot phase will first be published** for three countries at least (France, Lebanon, Mali); in 2023 and over the following years, 10 to 15 countries will be added per year, upon request made either internationally or locally; **in the medium term, a global report will be published yearly or biyearly**, for all countries where assessment was possible the year before. By thus publishing every year or every other year, the Barometer's objective is to follow the evolution of these countries over time.
3. **Informing:** meant as it is to be disseminated as widely as possible, the World Barometer of pluralism report intends to provide **contextualized keys to comprehension** of the situation in a country or the impact of a given event, on subjects as sensitive and likely to give rise to disinformation as questions of cultural and religious identity.
4. **Accompanying change:** this objective plays out on two levels. On one hand, with the principle of grading, the Barometer aims at **encouraging awareness in states and at helping to improve efficiency of political decisions** seeking pluralism. On the other hand, assessment of a country will be performed in partnership with a local actor, either institutional or drawn from the civil society, depending on the context. **The objective is to favor appropriation of the indicator and its results by the assessed country, in order to raise local awareness of problematics relating to religion and to start a search for solutions.**

3. Methodology

The Barometer of pluralism is the name of both a methodology, which is a tool, and its result, that is, the public report. The tool consists of a body of parameterized criteria combined with a method for collecting data, applicable for a country, a region or a locality. It has both quantitative and qualitative data.

What will the indicator be made up of?

Data: the expected form is the combination of a composite index², and the collection of actual data.

- The composite part will draw up the **country's raw profile**. It will be done in Paris, and combine existing data, reliable and weighted according to appointed measuring criteria. It will use data banks such as the Global Peace Index and ask statisticians for assistance.
- The collection of data will focus **on perception by individuals**. Pluralism must also be considered at the level where religious, cultural and communitarian singularities are found. Coexistence in a society happens, for a great part, at the individual scale, not necessarily as an objective reality, but rather in the perception and psychology of individuals that are part of it, their fears, traumas, feelings of cooperation or competition, and their behavior. This second aspect will be dealt with exclusively on the field and will attempt to fill the identified gaps in knowledge, and to grasp the reality of pluralism on the lower scale.

Measuring criteria: there is a number of them, and they are yet to be defined. However, the current state of our research allows us to posit that pluralism works according to **three vectors** on which we will base the measuring criteria of the Barometer:

1. *Bottom-up approach:* the capacity for representing of individuals in managing the society and the willingness of individuals to take part in a common project; in short, what has to do with citizenship
2. *Top-down approach:* the nature of power, its structural policy and management of plurality, the regulation of religions, the juridical system and the organisation of the justice system
3. *Horizontal approach:* trust between individuals, fraternity, the experience of cohesion, of a common ground with other elements of the society, at the religious level, etc.

Who will perform the assessment of societies?

When the tool's development is completed, the composite part of the analysis of a country will be performed by Observatoire Pharos, according to the set methodology of combining existing data.

For the sake of relevance on the one hand, and in order to achieve the Barometer's goals on the other hand (see p.4) the second part calls for work with local partners. For each country, assessment will be performed in pairs with a local actor and Observatoire Pharos. This method is the guarantee of an analysis as close to the reality as possible, together with quality control and the critical distance needed for reliable results.

² A composite index is a synthetical indicator of a set of valued individual indicators.

What will the final result consist in?

The result of these assessments will be published in a yearly or biyearly report entitled Barometer of Pluralism. Ranking, the method favored by many well-reputed indicators, has no relevance in measuring pluralism. Each country, however, will be assigned a grade, in complete transparency and rigor. Like in the financial world, a country's grade will be a sign of everyone's trust in it: the country's society itself, international organisations, donors, political partners, etc. and will compel it to react accordingly.

The results for each country will be organized into a brief containing the following information:

- A raw profile arrived at through the results of the composite assessment performed with several models
- Key results of the perception study
- Elements for contextualisation
- An analysis of the evolution compared to former results
- Recommendations.

Assessed countries will very probably be grouped in categories according to the type of society and the form of pluralism they are closest to. If results and research were to give evidence of this method's ineffectiveness, a presentation by geographical area or by grade would be considered. The methodology used for the indicator will be explained as transparently as possible at the end of the report.

Finally, once the grade is assigned, the countries will be set up for positive or negative watch, in the event of an anticipated evolution of their grade. Negative watch could allow for greater and earlier awareness of the need for corrective action within a national community.

4. Strategy for dissemination, incidences and expected repercussions

Dissemination

The yearly or biyearly report, which will be published as the World Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism, will be available for free and disseminated as widely as possible. The data will be made available to the public, as well the methodology employed.

A strategy will be devised to publicize the Barometer, to guarantee its credibility and to respond to the criticism addressed to it. The bottom-up approach, supported by scientific credibility, often proves to be the most efficient in raising awareness. As with environmental themes, experience shows how important the combined efforts of the civil society and the scientific world are in calling decision-makers to action. It will therefore be necessary to target the general public, communities, non-profits and the media in publicising the Barometer. Pair-work with local actors and the field-based approach should allow us to use networks capable of attracting the attention of civil societies throughout the world, to encourage their appropriation of the results, and soon to reach a wider public. Meanwhile, a whole advocative strategy will be developed for future dialogue with decision-makers. Observatoire Pharos will be in a position to offer help in the search for solutions.

Finally, donors, states and important international organisations will be approached in the purpose of creating a base of sponsors for assessments, in the hopes of assessing a minimum of 50 countries per year starting in 2025.

Incidence

The World Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism will not only make reliable and exploitable data available, but also facilitate dialogue on a common ground that did not exist until now for these questions. By being committed to preserving its independence and its scientific credibility, the indicator will become a reference for assessment and grading.

On top of this overall impact, the Barometer will have more specific effects:

- Civil societies throughout the world, endowed with a basis of plea and a tool for deeper comprehension, will be more able to prepare action and make it more efficient. They will use the results and recommendations to set the needed changes in motion.
- States and their leaders will be directly called out. Through the Barometer and the grade assigned to them, they will be made to account for their policies or act to improve their score.
- Actors of development, with the data that were missing until now, will be more capable to direct aid, to detect potential deeper perverse results of some of their actions, and anticipate shocks caused by the breaking down of societies. Aid should become more efficient and the situation in beneficiary countries should look up.

Expected repercussions

The expected repercussions on dialogue and comprehension go far beyond the mention made above. By approaching the question of pluralism in the entire world, without electing one universal model for all, but rather taking into account particularities of different social models, the work accomplished around the Barometer of cultural and religious pluralism will allow for theoretical reconciliation on a concept that has been a focal point of important tensions. By striving itself to adopt a pluralistic approach, the Barometer will be a tool for comparing and translating concepts and ideas from different countries in the domain of cultural and religious identities, and will pave the way for cooperation in situations where it has been difficult to enact.

With the data and their analysis being disseminated to a large public, the Barometer will improve societies' knowledge of questions as sensitive as coexistence or identitarian phenomena. It will provide keys to understand the link between a society and the religious sphere, and the reasons why one event is not understood in the same way in different countries. Thanks to this comparison tool, it will be more easy to see why, in 2005, after the caricatures of Muhammad were published, protests in the Middle East and Africa targeted the Danish state, who was deemed responsible for not implementing regulations, rather than the authors of said caricatures. Better understanding of these facts will allow for better response in public opinion, in decision-makers and international relations. It will also allow for appeasement of tensions caused by ignorance.

More generally, the World Barometer of pluralism will be instrumental in promoting the concept itself. While the excesses of globalisation trigger movements of identitarian closure the world over, the Barometer will spread the idea of a third way, a balance between particular and collective, which seems to be the only alternative to conflict. Progressively, cultural and religious pluralism will be acknowledged as one of the major factors of appeasement in societies and will be integrated in other indicators, such as those that measure peace of fragility in states. It can be better integrated in international objectives. In the economic world, the expected repercussion would be the integration of cultural and religious pluralism in ESG criteria and in risk analysis.