



Fundamental Human Needs and Integration in another Culture

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Introduction

In the past years, migratory movements have grown in intensity. They are the visible sign of numerous upheavals at a planetary level: political, climatic, ecological and social. Western countries have to face the fact that these migrations concern them as well.

Welcoming migrant persons and accompanying their process of integration raises many complex questions, both for the migrants and for their host countries.

This article is intended especially for institutions that specialize in accompanying migrant persons and for individuals who commit themselves to journeying with migrants during their process of integration.

It will explore the complex dimensions of an integration process through the lens of Manfred Max-Neef's concept of «Fundamental Human Needs» as modified by Anne Hope. This framework can help us grasp the immensity of the task of integration, both for the migrant person and the host country.

Let us first discover Max-Neef's / Hope's wheel, before exploring its relevance for integration processes.

1) The Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs

The Authors of the Model

Manfred Max-Neef, a Chilean economist born in 1932, is especially known for his concept of human scale development. With a team of colleagues, he explored the relation between the satisfaction of fundamental human needs and human scale development.

The group developed a «chart of fundamental human needs», in which they identified a difference between «*subsistence needs*» and «*psycho-social needs*».

Anne Hope was a South African expert in the field of adult education and community development. After a long life dedicated to sustainable and just community development, she died in 2015. She turned Max Neef's chart into a wheel, recognizing that needs do not always come in the same order of priority — a perspective shared by Max Neef. In this, Anne Hope and Manfred Max-Neef diverge from Abraham Maslow and his «Pyramid of Human Needs».

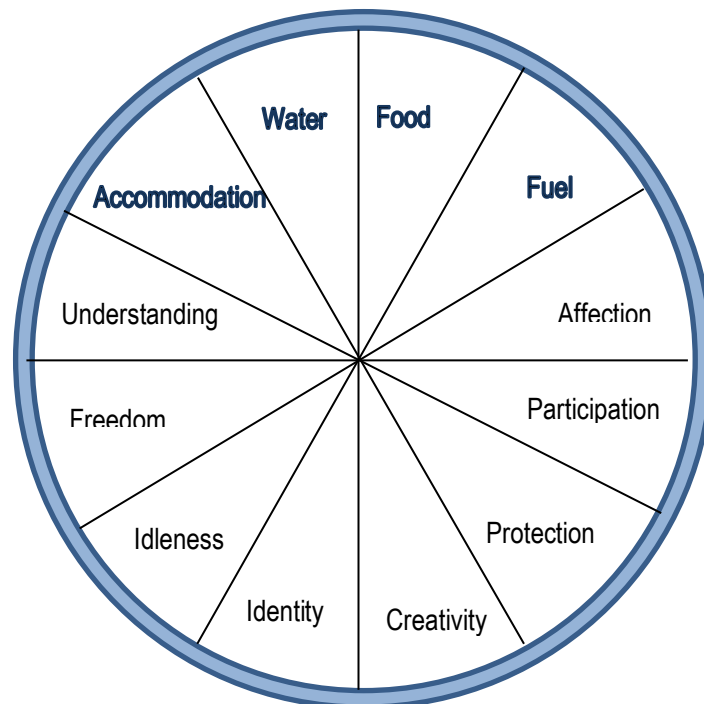
The nature of a wheel is that it turns. Hope and Max-Neef observe that the same applies to needs: sometimes subsistence needs are more urgent, but sometimes psycho-social needs are more pressing and need immediate attention.



Max-Neef reminds us that needs are «an internal state»

(<http://www.alastairmcintosh.com/general/resources/2007-Manfred-Max-Neef-Fundamental-Human-Needs.pdf>), and he adds that fundamental human needs are «finite, few in number, and classifiable» (<http://glorenz.de/?page=max-neef>).

The wheel suggests twelve fundamental human needs, four of which are classified as *subsistence needs* eight as *psycho-social needs*. All twelve have the same degree of importance and relevance for creating a healthy society.



Subsistence needs

Food

Each person needs food to survive. As basic as this statement sounds, the need for food is far from being fulfilled for many people on Earth. Some have been deprived of their lands and can't produce their own food any more. Others are unemployed and lack resources to buy food for themselves or their family. Others still live in war situations, and rely on international aid. Furthermore, the food that is available is often unhealthy, polluted, and of poor nutritional quality. Situations of war, drought, or economic exploitation can have dramatic consequences related to the need for food.



While many people on Earth lack food, sometimes surviving on one meal a day, others get sick from eating too much food or too much unhealthy food.

Children's development and adults' resistance to disease and stress are highly dependent on the quality and quantity of food they can afford.

Water

Water is of course another very basic need. In many communities, this need is also not fulfilled.

Communities need to have access to clean water for their survival, but anyone who has lived in desert regions knows how scarce water can be. Sometimes women need to walk for hours to find the precious blue liquid. In war, water can be poisoned and used as a weapon. In other situations it can be polluted by greed or by neglect. Health in many communities is severely threatened because the water is not clean or because clean water is too expensive and thus unaffordable.

In Western countries it is often wasted by greedy and selfish behaviour.

Fuel

By «fuel» Max-Neef means any kind of energy that provides warmth and light : energy to cook food, to keep the house warm in cold seasons, and to have light to see at night.

Deforestation is a central problem in relation to the need for fuel. Scenes of women walking for hours with heavy loads of wood on their heads are still too frequent. More of the deforestation on Earth has to do with human greed than with providing for fundamental human needs.

In many communities, the price of electricity or gas is too high, and people can't afford it.

Families often freeze in winter because heating is too expensive. Sickness is a frequent consequence of poor heating in many urban and peri-urban areas.

Politics play an important role in questions around the fundamental need for fuel.

Accommodation

Accommodation varies greatly on the planet in response to environmental conditions: a Swiss chalet built in the Alps needs to cope with winter snow and cold, whilst buildings in Japan need to survive earthquakes and houses on the Malagasy coast extreme heat.

If people have accommodation appropriate for their environment that provides security and a feeling of «home», of living in dignity, then the need for accommodation is met.



However, overcrowded housing, excessive rents, or a total lack of housing as in many refugee camps are situations where the need for accommodation is not met.

Land is also an issue when talking about accommodation, especially in countries where thousands of people become landless, forced to leave both their land and their house.

The four subsistence needs are usually given primary attention by many migrant integration programs. They make sure migrants have a roof and that basic needs for food, water and fuel are met.

In some of his work, Max-Neef brings the four needs discussed above under one umbrella term, calling it «the subsistence need».

Subsistence needs tend to be the center of people's concern, although psycho-social needs are equally important yet tend to get less attention.

Psycho-Social Needs

Affection

All of us need to love and be loved.

By «affection» Max-Neef means any kind of positive human relation: an intimate relation in a couple, a loving relation within a family, between various generations, friendly work relations, or social relations with friends or neighbours.

In situations where people have lost their beloved ones in a conflict or a natural disaster, when people have to flee their homes or in times of great family tension, the need for affection is not met anymore. When husbands have to leave their families for most of the year to earn an income, the need for affection within the whole extended family cannot be fulfilled either.

Participation

We all need to participate in our community's life.

Working, having employment, having the right to vote, taking part in discussions and in decision-making, in social or cultural associations are all examples of participation.



An unemployed person, a person from an oppressed minority or an uneducated person can often feel that their need for participation in society is not met. Women and youth commonly have this experience, too.

Protection

Protection can guard against disease, against cold, against violence, against any kind of physical, psychological or economic abuse.

An efficient and affordable health system, a legal system that functions ethically, affordable and earthquake-proof housing are examples of steps toward offering protection.

Many nations fail to provide sufficient protection for their citizens in general. During times of crisis, such as war and natural disasters, the human need for protection can go unfulfilled for thousands of people.

Understanding

We all need to understand and to be understood. Max-Neef includes many important dimensions in this concept.

The need for accessible and affordable quality education for young people and for adults, the need for information, the access to free and independent sources of information are central dimensions of the need called «understanding».

The religious or spiritual dimension of life is located here too: our need to find meaning in our lives, to understand it in a wider and deeper way.

In multicultural societies, the need to speak various local languages and to know the culture of other citizens is central for understanding each other and living together peacefully.

Quality education can be inaccessible for people if it is too expensive. The ability to explore the spiritual dimension is made difficult when some religions are banned or controlled. Prejudice against certain groups or languages can also interfere with understanding.

Freedom

Freedom is a central yet fragile fundamental human need that people need to win over and over, because it is seldom offered. Freedom of movement, of choice, of expression, of opinion are all part of this section in the Wheel.

When they can be jailed for political opinions, for sexual orientation, or for religious convictions, people experience the suffering and consequences of living in a state with no freedom.

Freedom is severely limited and threatened in many countries where political oppression still exists, or where economic oppression and exploitation are prevalent, as in human trafficking, for example.



Idleness

Don't we all have this need to sometimes just sit under a tree, along a river, or on a terrace, and do nothing? Just being, sitting, seeing people pass, watching water flow in the river or birds fly in the sky.

Idleness is not the same as highly-intensive free time activities: playing football or being busy with many cultural activities is not what is meant by idleness.

Idleness means slowing down, becoming still and quiet, arriving at both outer and inner peace in order to recharge the batteries. Zen meditation is a marvellous example of idleness: nothing is expected, except sitting still and breathing. How difficult however...!

Having a gentle walk in the forest or on the beach, or sitting with a dear person, sharing a drink and having a relaxed conversation (not a discussion) can bring this peace, too.

During times of personal, economic, climatic, and political turmoil, this fundamental need is frequently neglected. Endlessly stressed professionals in powerful positions also tend to forget how central idleness should be in their health.

Creativity

Each person has the potential to be creative, and each person needs to use his or her own specific gifts in the service of society. Creativity is about developing our special talents, contributing new ideas, new beauty, new processes, and new potentials.

Again, people living in oppressive systems or in extreme poverty, people who lack freedom or who lack basic health services sometimes have little space to develop their creativity.

Identity

Who am I? Who are we? This central question comes up in many ways at different times in life. The answer changes along the way, but we need to have the right to live with our answer.

In oppressed communities, the need for identity is rarely fulfilled. When people are not allowed to learn or to speak their mother tongue, to practice their culture or their religion, or when they are discriminated against on the simple basis of their colour, their need for identity is not fulfilled.

In Eastern Europe, many countries are still struggling with the question «Who do we want to be?» Other countries are struggling with «How can we deal with our past, with our history?»

These examples illustrate some critical aspects of the need for identity, at both individual and collective levels.



Open questions related to the wheel

Max-Neef offers deep insight into each of the needs briefly presented above.

People who have just discovered the Wheel and try to understand it tend to raise the following questions: «Where is the environment in the wheel? What about money? What about work? Shouldn't there be a need called spirituality?» These questions make a lot of sense. Some of them are answered by Max-Neef, and some are not.

The questions relating to work and money are answered in his section on satisfiers (which are explained below). The one on spirituality gets some answers in Max-Neef's explanation of our fundamental need for understanding, identity, and participation.

The questions related to the environment, the need for unpolluted land, clean air and clean water are not explicitly developed by Max-Neef. One could imagine some answers at two levels. Either the Earth and the environment are a foundation for any (human) life to be possible, and thus it could be the foundation that the Wheel rests on. Or, in a time where water shortage and pollution are becoming serious survival questions, one could imagine adding a new «environment» dimension to the Subsistence section of the Wheel. Finally, one could also add the environment as an outer circle surrounding the whole Wheel.

Satisfiers

For Max-Neef, work and money are satisfiers, not needs. We really don't need work or money for their own sakes. They are just ways to satisfy our deep needs.

Sometimes, we use what he calls «false satisfiers». They give us the illusion of fulfilling our needs, but in reality they do not. They sometimes hold us in dependence. Alcoholism or drug addictions are false satisfiers for the need for affection, participation, or protection, for example. Joining gangs is a false satisfier for our need for affection. They make us forget our need, rather than fulfilling it.

Other satisfiers are called «multiple satisfiers». They satisfy a variety of needs at the same time. Max-Neef's famous example is breast-feeding, that satisfies the need for food and water of the child, and the need for protection, affection and identity for both mother and child.

Pathologies

A healthy society is a society whose members can satisfy their fundamental human needs. A healthy individual is a person who can satisfy his or her fundamental human needs.

According to Max-Neef, any person or any society that does not fulfil all of the Wheel's needs for some time will develop a pathology. Pathologies can range from apathy to violence, from alcoholism to brain drain. Massive emigration is clearly a sign of social pathology.



Poverties

Max-Neef and Hope's Wheel sheds an interesting light on the concept of poverty. For many people, poverty remains associated with an economic notion, with deficits in subsistence needs. The Wheel, however, shows us that the majority of the needs are psycho-social.

Indeed, poverty also exists when we feel that our psycho-social needs are not met, for example, when we lack affection, lack possibilities to participate, to live with dignity, or to express our cultural identity. One can feel poor even when all subsistence needs are met. Like the notion of need, the notion of poverty is very personal.

Max-Neef does not use the term in the singular, but in the plural. He talks about poverties, knowing very well that psycho-social poverties can be as destructive as economic poverties.

Interconnection and interdependence of all needs

All needs are interconnected and interdependent. In the Wheel we see it powerfully: they all meet at the centre. If one need receives new attention, it may have an impact on other needs. If my needs for food, water and shelter are satisfied, I may have more energy to work towards fulfilling my need for understanding, and will be able to concentrate on learning a language or developing professional skills. If my need for identity and affection are satisfied, I may have the inner strength to work towards satisfying my need for creativity or for food.

If my identity is respected and fulfilled, my need for creativity may come alive again, or my need for participation can be satisfied in more creative ways.

In reverse, if one or more of my needs are not met anymore, it may affect other needs as well. If my need for understanding is not met, very soon my need for identity may be affected, as well as my need for participation or for affection. This becomes very real for migrants who do not know the language or the culture of the country where they are trying to settle. Thus it becomes extremely difficult to develop relations with members of the host culture. A sense of isolation and of disconnection may lead to self-doubt, a lower self-image, or even aggressiveness toward the host culture.

The Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs raises dizzying questions in the realm of migration: emigration, immigration, integration of those who had to abandon their home, the place where they lived for so long.



2) The Fundamental Needs in the Country One Leaves Behind

The vast majority of migrant persons would prefer to remain in their home countries if only it were possible to fulfil the most basic human needs there.

Subsistence needs

The majority of migrants could not meet their subsistence needs before deciding to emigrate:

- Lack of drinking water in situations of extended drought or war
- Lack of food, brutally illustrated by pictures of dried out fields, malnourished children, or long queues of adults waiting for food parcels from international aid agencies
- Lack of fuel, because forests are full of landmines, electricity is cut, systems are being destroyed or are under control of «the enemy»
- Lack of accommodation, as shown in the news reports showing houses burned and bombed by the adversary forces, or destroyed by tsunamis or earthquakes.

If most migrants find it almost impossible to fulfil subsistence needs in their home countries, it is usually even more difficult to fulfil their psycho-social needs.

Psycho-social needs

In countries of high emigration, be it temporary or permanent, people's psycho-social needs are usually the last concern of the ruling instances.

- The need for *affection* is very badly shaken, too many babies dying of malnutrition or too many companions killed or fallen on a battle field.
- The need for *protection* being reduced to nothing, when rape and torture are the daily lot of people caught between two fires.
- The need for *identity* is completely denied, when expressing and living a belief or a political opinion in public may earn you capital punishment.
- The need for *creativity*, so commonly dried up by lack of energy.
- The need for *participation* is neither welcomed by authorities nor possible for certain communities.
- *Education*, one of the very central elements of understanding, is badly handled when the powerful fear well-developed minds.



- The need for *idleness* is often fulfilled too well, because all that remains when one is unemployed and lacks security is to wait, to spend time idly waiting.
- Lastly, the need for *freedom* is only a distant dream which is disillusioned, when the smallest deviation from the dominant authorities can lead to prison or to exile.

The impossibility of fulfilling their fundamental human needs leads thousands of people onto the roads of exile, hoping for a better life elsewhere.

Paradoxically, this very journey of integration into a new country, if it grants minimal protection and thus secures survival, also creates new forms of uncertainty.

Indeed, fundamental needs will once more be put to the test, this time in different, unimagined, and often unexpected ways.

3) Fundamental Needs and Integration in the Host Country

When it rolls onto the roads of exile, the Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs starts a long and chaotic journey, during which it empties itself of almost all energy and substance. What is at stake during a process of integration is to enable the Wheel to refill itself with substance and energy, so that it may start to turn again and move forward.

Subsistence needs

Most host countries cover basic subsistence needs for arriving migrants: water and food, a roof, and a minimum of light and heating.

However, for the migrant **food** tastes different, sometimes strange. Many items are unusual and thus difficult or impossible to eat. It takes time and effort to appreciate the new way bread tastes, the new way of cooking vegetables or meat. Even fruits are different.

Water often has a different taste, and the rules for using it are different from the ones back home. When water is available, clean, warm and cold, it is wonderful...but it frequently costs far more than one is used to, and one needs to use it with care if the budget is limited.

Obviously, a **roof** is almost always made available, but it often needs to be shared with many strangers, from different cultures, having different relational codes, and different rules related to living spaces.

In many refugee camps, tents do indeed offer a minimum of protection, but what is bearable in emergency situations gets more difficult when the temporary becomes the norm amid endless waiting and questions.



Does one spend more time in the kitchen or in the sitting-room? Can women and men share the same space if they are not related? Favourite food smells for some are abhorred by others. Cooking and eating times also vary considerably from one culture to the next. All of this sometimes needs intense negotiation and often painful learning.

If **fuel** for energy is available, the initial challenge is to learn and understand many new rules. Why should one not put the heating higher than 21 or 22 degrees, when one still feels frozen at 23-24? Why is it necessary to air the flat even in winter, when it is so cold outside? Why must one switch off the light when leaving the flat, whereas at home one was always taught to switch lights on when leaving, to discourage potential thieves by making them believe that the flat is occupied?

Psycho-social needs

The need to **understand** the new world in which one lives will take years to be fulfilled. Not only does one need to learn the language, but also, and most of all, the culture, to understand the reasons behind practices, rules, administrative systems and ways the community functions. Institutions that specialise in welcoming migrant people need to adopt a long term perspective in their work. One or two years of support are not enough to allow people to feel integrated. In some cases it enables them to acquire a stable foundation for eventual integration.

The need for **affection** is always under enormous strain during an experience of migration, when one leaves beloved ones behind in very precarious conditions, and one still does not know anybody in the host country. Who will extend a friendly human hand? How much energy does one need to invest in order to build new trusting relations? How does one create relations in the host culture? Who can one talk to? And about what?

The need for **protection** is usually covered better than in the countries migrants flee but, here again, the difference in rules and codes takes a lot of time and learning. Ways of functioning in hospitals, gender relations in health care situations, language issues with medical staff, the kinds of treatment suggested by professionals, the mere understanding of disease, how to accompany somebody in the terminal phase of his or her life, these are only a few examples of the many new challenges in matters of protection.

The need for **participation** has very difficult for migrants to fulfil, because migrants are often forbidden to work and it is difficult to participate in the life of a host society when one still lives in a refugee centre, doesn't speak the language, and doesn't know the possibilities and structures that enable participation.

The need for **creativity** can be virtually fulfilled, but for somebody who lives in a system he or she does not understand, creativity and ingenuity are exercised first of all in learning to survive. Sometimes, artistic expressions or relational creativity lead to establishing new connections, and to expressing or coping with complex interior processes (pain, grief, identity...)



Idleness is present in large amounts. Boredom is a dominant presence in refugee centres. This can make them ideal grounds for developing populist or extremist ideas that are not very helpful for personal or social development.

Freedom is granted in principle. In practice, freedom of movement is very limited, especially when one does not have identity documents and lacks financial means to pay transport. Freedom of participation faces linguistic limitations, and is also hindered by insufficient knowledge of local structures. Freedom of expression and of belief is usually more stable, however, than in the countries one had to flee.

Identity is totally shaken. All of a sudden one becomes a foreigner, a migrant, somebody who can no longer just be who he or she is, but who needs to find himself or herself again, to rebuild oneself, slightly different. Even family roles and social roles can be called into question.

4) Implications for the Host Country

Implications for institutions that specialize in offering services to migrant persons

Max-Neef and Hope's work reminds institutions that specialize in hosting and accompanying migrant persons that their work needs a long-term perspective. Integration cannot be achieved in a few months. It takes a few years, with different kinds of needs emerging over time, for both the migrant population and the host country's population as well.

The author has observed that institutions invest a lot of energy in addressing migrant people's subsistence needs, in helping them learn the language, and in training and looking for employment. Unfortunately, psycho-social needs like identity questions, loneliness, the endless grieving at so many levels, the long crossing of the desert linked to migration get far less attention.

The Wheel of Needs helps us to be aware of the immensity of the task, for the migrant persons, but also for the host countries.

It allows organisations to be more precise in analysing the needs their services respond to, and to take notice of other needs, less often addressed.

Finally, the Wheel enables projects that put the human dimension at the heart – mentoring projects, one-to-one journeying – to get a sense of the immensity of the task for the person with whom they journey.



Implications for the host country's population

A country's population is never homogenous. Everywhere one will find persons willing to welcome migrants and persons less willing to do so. The fear that inhabits the latter group is similar to the migrants' fear: the fear of not being able to fulfil their fundamental human needs (any longer) if migrant people enter into their space.

Some people in the host country fear that the presence of migrant persons might cause them to lose their jobs, to lose well known cultural spaces, to lose orientation, accommodation, etc. These fears need to be listened to and to be honoured.

To address them, it is helpful to remember that a well-conceived process of empowerment tends to generate energy and resources for all parties involved, if it is well managed. Enabling migrant people to practice their skills and/or to develop them through trainings and other processes in order to put them to the service of the society contributes to enhancing the global well-being of the host community. It does not reduce it. Figures published at the end of 2018 show that the German economy has already benefitted from the many migrants the country has welcomed. Now the country needs to foster the integration process at the level of the psycho-social needs of both groups: migrants and the host population.

5) Implications for the Migrants

Some people are migrants by choice, hoping to live a better life, others from despair, simply for survival. But any person who decides to pull his or her roots out of home soil and to try to find new soil to settle on, whether for a short time or forever, leaves the old life behind. Each migrant needs to find and recreate meaning for his or her life. Integration is work done every day, over a very long period of time. In fact, the process is never finished, even if one comes to feel well integrated into the host community after some years.

During the integration process, the Wheel of Needs allows migrant persons to put names to the difficulties they encounter. This will then allow them to make conscious decisions to address the needs that are most acute at a given moment.

When the Wheel needs to turn on unknown roads, often inhospitable and stony, strewn with obstacles and snares, it suffers. The Wheel can bend. It can lose some of its spokes, move off its axle and lose its ability to turn. Where can one then find somebody to help level the road, straighten the Wheel, put it back in its axle? Where to find the energy that allows the Wheel to turn again, to want to turn, to want to turn again?



6) The Wheel of Needs, a new Way of Thinking about Integration?

Max-Neef and Hope's Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs offers an interesting lens to rethink the responsibilities of host countries and of migrant persons in the realm of integration. It also highlights the complexity of the task, and the length of time involved. Migrants and host countries are joined in a journey that takes years. A new awareness of the time dimension makes it possible to approach the process in a different spirit.

Trainings exist to understand the Wheel of Fundamental Needs more deeply and to explore its implications for a process of migration and integration.

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