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RSCAS PP 2014/02

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Global Governance Programme

Cultural diversity and cities –
the intercultural integration approach

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ISSN 1830-1541

© Irena Guidikova, 2014

Printed in Italy, January 2014

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I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)

Italy

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Abstract

Research has convincingly demonstrated that diversity of cultural backgrounds and associated differences in skills, education and abilities can be a rich resource for companies and creative teams but also for the social and economic development of societies. The challenge is to conceive and implement public policies and institutions that make it possible to realise the positive potential of diversity. The Intercultural integration policy paradigm which takes up this challenge has been developed and tested by the Council of Europe in a range of cities across the continent. The article introduces this paradigm as well as a series of examples of how it translates into different policy areas.

Keywords

Diversity, diversity advantage, local policy, integration, inclusion.

Public policy is usually a compromise between rational, evidence-based ideas and partisan or concerns linked to elections and public opinion. In the field of diversity policies, the impact of public opinion is particularly strong.

Research has consistently demonstrated (Khovanova-Rubicondo and Pinelli, 2012) that diversity of worker' skills, education and abilities can be a rich resource – for companies and creative teams but also more generally for social and economic development of societies. Ashraf and Galor (2011) found that cultural diversity has a positive impact on economic development in the process of industrialization, from its inception through modern times. Other research shows that enterprises with diverse staff are more innovative, and that diverse teams are better in solving problems if diversity is endorsed and embraced, that productivity and wages are higher in regions and cities with a more diverse population. Diaspora entrepreneurship fosters economic development both in host countries and in countries of origin and immigration increases foreign trade.

The positive potential of diversity is also valid at the level of cities: several studies have related diversity with urban agglomeration and highlighted that the functioning and thriving of urban clusters relies on the variety of people, factors, goods and services within them. For example, Ottaviano and Peri (2005, 2006) have found that a more multicultural city environment makes native population more productive.

However, native citizens often perceive immigration as a nuisance or a threat with a resulting potential for weakening social cohesion and trust and increasing discrimination and even xenophobic violence. Diversity can have high social costs if public authorities fail to communicate properly about the reality of migration, develop a “social pedagogy” of diversity and put in place institutional and governance structures and policies which effectively minimise the threats and maximise the benefits of diversity.

From a policy perspective, the challenge is to design and implement comprehensive strategies with a long-term perspective, which are binding for both urban administrations and implemented in a broad partnership with non-governmental actors, so that they deliver sustainable benefits despite possible changes in the political landscape.

The Council of Europe has supported the development and testing of an urban policy paradigm for diversity management within the framework of its Intercultural Cities programme. Growing diversity is most tangible in cities and it is cities that are compelled to learn how to manage cultural diversity as a resource. Many cities experiment with new policies and try to develop a discourse that endorses cultural pluralism. Cities are therefore natural laboratories where such approach can be tested.

This policy paradigm, called *intercultural integration*, is based on the notion of **diversity advantage** – considering migrants as a resource for local economic, social and cultural development, and not only as vulnerable groups in need of welfare support and services, or a threat to social cohesion. Intercultural integration implies a strategic reorientation of urban governance and policies to encourage adequate representation, positive intercultural mixing and interaction, and institutional capacity to deal with cultural conflict.

Based on a range of international, in particular Council of Europe, standards (Council of Europe 2013, p.31)) and the analysis of successful policy practice in a range of cities in Europe and beyond, Intercultural cities offers a comprehensive methodology for helping cities develop their diversity strategies, and a range of analytical and assessment tools, including the very successful Intercultural cities INDEX. The model is now being implemented by over 60 cities in Europe, as well as in Japan, Korea, Mexico and Canada and there is interest by cities in the USA.

The Intercultural integration paradigm covers a range of policy areas: intercultural governance; official and media discourse - developing positive perception to diversity and bashing rumours; intercultural approaches in education, urbanism, housing and neighbourhoods; public services and

civic administration; business and the economy; sport and the arts; urban safety; mediation and conflict resolution; language and plurilingualism; international relations and city diplomacy; intercultural awareness training; welcoming newcomers

The remainder of this article will propose examples of policy approaches in some of these fields.

Governance and participation

The intercultural city cannot emerge without a **leadership** which explicitly embraces the value of diversity while upholding the values and constitutional principles of European society – equality, justice, non-discrimination. It takes political courage to confront voters with their fears and prejudice, address them openly in the public debate, and invest taxpayer money in initiatives and policies which promote intercultural integration. The public statements of the Mayor of Reggio Emilia in favour of “cultural contamination” are in this sense exemplary and emblematic. In all cities involved in the Intercultural cities programme, key leaders “come out” as strong defenders of the value of diversity for the local community. It is, however, of utmost importance that they dispose of facts – demographic, economic, financial, - in order to be able to provide evidence for the cost-benefit ratio for the city and present the spending on integration as an investment.

Related to the question of leadership is the issue of **political discourse** – understood in the broad sense of symbolic communication - the way in which public perceptions of diversity are shaped by language, symbols, themes, dates, and other elements of the collective life of the community. Cultural artefacts symbolising the identity of cultures are often first to be destroyed in violent inter-community conflicts – they can convey a powerful message about the plurality of the city identity.

By inviting foreign residents or people of migrant background to speak at the official city celebrations (Neuchâtel); by symbolically decorating a school with the pillar of a Mosque from Pakistan and letters from the alphabets of all languages spoken in the city (Oslo), or inviting migrants to join in the traditional forms of cultural participation such as the preparation of carnivals (Tilburg, Patras), or the adoption of non-stigmatising language (“new generation” rather than “third generation” – Reggio Emilia) the community makes a symbolic gesture of acceptance and openness to “intercultural transfusion”.

Symbolic politics of diversity can go beyond words, using strong gestures and actions. In an interview with the Italian newspaper Corriere di Milano the city’s alderman for immigration, Nadia Conti shares her impressions of another important day in the life of Campi Bisenzio, the intercultural city. Campi Bisenzio has made all minors residents in the town who have a foreign citizenship, honorary Italian citizens. She says: ‘The invitation was sent to all minors under the age of 17 years old. During the ceremony we selected eight, four myself and four the mayor. Amongst the ones I selected there were two very young ones, one two month old of Albanian origin and another one who was nine months old of Shri-Lankan origin. The presence of these children sent an important signal as it underlined the will of their parents to integrate”.

But discourse about the positive value of diversity needs to go along with real opportunities for all citizens/residents, regardless of origin and background, to take part in local political debate and policy-making. The institutions of representative democracy are still, in most places, unable to stimulate adequate participation of people of migrant background. **Alternative, more participatory and direct methods of involvement** are therefore required to compensate for the deficiency in representation.

In January 2012 Tenerife’s authorities launched a civil participation initiative in the culturally diverse neighbourhood of El Fraile in the Arona municipality in the south of the island. The idea was born from the cooperation between the project *Juntos en la misma direcciòn* (Together in the same direction) and the European initiative *Puzzled by Policy* conducted by the La Laguna University with the aim to incite citizens to participate in designing migration policies. The El Fraile neighbourhood

was chosen due to its vibrant migration history and its wish to re-consider its human and cultural diversity as a resource rather than as a problem. The initiative was supported by the local school, church and the mosque, associations of neighbours, mayors, immigrants and as public bodies such as the Arona Municipal Council, the Department of External Affairs and the Immigration Observatory of Tenerife.

At the first of nine meetings the participants mapped their neighbourhood and the existing social actors dealing with integration matters. The attendees also shared their aspirations and concerns regarding living together in El Fraile, its resources and potential development. At subsequent meetings participants came up with the name for their initiative – El Fraile para todos (El Fraile for all) – and set goals to be achieved. These goals include, for instance, improving the image of the neighbourhood and contributing to its transformation into a leader in diversity management; strengthening partnerships between neighbours and social actors; encouraging the neighbours to participate in cleaning up the area; strengthening social bonds within the neighbourhood; creating a friendly and participatory environment and promoting accessibility by removing language barriers. To achieve these goals, five working groups were established to focus on different thematic areas, such as environment, communication and relations, translation and linguistic exchange, mediation and intergroup cooperation. Each group designed an action plan featuring specific goals. In June the five groups presented their action plans to the Social Participation Board of the Juntos en la misma direction project.

According to Ms Eva Luz Cabrera, Municipal Council for Citizen Participation, the initiative has the full potential to be extended to all other neighbourhoods of the municipality since there is growing demand for similar projects. The first step in this direction is to create **citizen working groups** which would mainstream their ideas to newly-formed participatory councils. “It is essential to convey the message that each and every person living in the neighbourhood has a crucial role to play to enrich, build and design a place for living together in unity, respect, cleanliness and in compliance with common values. We need to rely on citizen involvement and participation to build more cohesive and sustainable cities” (Intercultural cities 2013).

The Italian city of Campi Bisenzio offers an interesting example of participatory platform for citizens of migrant background.

Seventeen candidates from nine countries of origin recently stood for election at Campi Bisenzio’s **Forum for New Citizens** organised by Campi Bisenzio’s City Council and the association Intercultural Meeting Point. The forum is a participatory body which gives a say to migrants in the social and political spheres in the absence of a right to vote in local elections as recommended by the Council of Europe Convention for the participation of foreigners in the political life at the local level. The Forum’s are: “to be a resource for the associations of citizens of non-Italian origin, to be a place and point of reference where they can meet, build collectively training paths and implement public initiatives.”

In practical terms, the forum will act as “**an educational laboratory** for students through the involvement of primary, secondary and high schools to organize occasions for intercultural education during the school year with events held in symbolic areas of the city”. The Forum will act as an agent of intercultural communication with the support of local media in order to raise awareness of the benefits of cultural pluralism. A prize for promoting intercultural understanding will be given on an annual basis “to people who have been active in promoting intercultural dialogue and combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination”.

The Forum organised by Campi Bisenzio touches upon many areas which are crucial to the well being of all of the city’s citizens. It is a truly participative, right based and educational tool which touches upon so many best practice examples observed by the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities network. To name but a few they include ensuring representation and active involvement in local

decisions and training journalists and students alike on the advantages of a pluri-cultural society. This initiative launched in Campi Bisenzio may provide inspiration for other cities to follow.

In 2010 the London Lewisham Council launched a participatory budgeting initiative, asking people how they would like to distribute the forthcoming public expenditure cuts. 2500 people took part. In 2011 Lewisham hosted a special project to create ‘conversations’ in neighbourhoods. The aim was to increase awareness of the richness and diversity of local people, to discover hidden talents, create a greater sense of connection and belonging and create collaborations between people who wouldn’t normally meet. The Project was the idea of writer Theodore Zeldin, author of ‘An Intimate History of Humanity’, and is in association with the National Portrait Gallery and the National Health Service. The eventual aim was in each neighbourhood to connect together groups of up to 200 people from all walks of life who would not normally belong to such a diverse group.

The Council also collaborated with the RSA to map social networks in localities and New Cross Gate was used as a guinea pig. It produced some surprising and enlightening findings about people’s social connections in a diverse community and found that the supermarket tended to be the hub of modern communities.

The Lewisham Young Mayor Initiative is exceptionally successful in involving young people of diverse backgrounds in public life. The London Borough of Lewisham is probably the only local authority in the UK which has been pursuing an explicitly intercultural approach, and it has been doing this for several years prior to its acceptance into membership of the ICC network. This dates back to the period 2005-7 when it hosted a case study as part of the original Comedia Intercultural City research project.

The Young Mayor is elected by direct ballot every year and – along with a cabinet of young advisors – is given a budget (£30,000 per annum) to initiate a programme of work, as well as to scrutinise the work of the Mayor - Sir Steve Bullock and the local Council. The participation of young people (below 18) in the vote is higher than the turnout of official local elections. The key for success is the real power the young mayor has over decisions of the local administration, and the close link he/she maintains with young people throughout his/her mandate. While the gender balance of the young mayors elected so far is heavily skewed in favour of boys, their cultural backgrounds have been impressively diverse.

Voting takes place at around 40 different sites in Lewisham, at polling stations in Lewisham secondary schools and colleges. Young people who go to school outside the borough can vote by post. Voting is carried out using a preferential ballot system with voters casting two votes for their first and second choice candidates. The election count and administration is carried out and overseen by the Council’s Electoral Services, and the final results ratified and formally announced by the returning officer for Lewisham Council. The first four candidates are announced and serve as Young Mayor and advisors.

Young people can only put themselves forward and stand for Young Mayor of Lewisham if they are aged between 13–17 years on the day of the election and live, work or go to school or college in Lewisham. If candidates meet the above criteria, they then need to collect 50 young people’s signatures supporting their candidature.

The young people standing are provided with training by the Young Mayor Team (members of the local administration) and former young mayors and young advisers. Roles and responsibilities are defined and support is provided for candidates to produce a manifesto which is published as an election statement. Photographs are taken for use with free promotional materials such as t-shirts, flyers and stickers, produce a video message for the Young Mayor’s YouTube channel, get tips and advice on public speaking and campaign techniques, arrange to talk with young people across the borough at schools, youth clubs and events.

Past and current young mayors and advisors demonstrate a high level of self-confidence and understanding. They have travelled extensively around Britain and the rest of Europe and this has helped them to appreciate what has been achieved in Lewisham. They have encountered few other places where young people's participation in the democratic process is taken so seriously. Also they have noted how much more diverse Lewisham is and, importantly, how much more comfortable it seems with its diversity, than most other places. They concur that whilst Lewisham may not be the most comfortable of places to live, and that it can at times be quite threatening particularly for young people, few of the district's problems are attributable to ethnic divisions.

Managing Inter-faith relations

The Lewisham Council has a specialised Faith and Social Action Officer and a specific budget to offer small grants to faith-based organisations – a provision which is rare across European cities. Among the explanations for this positive approach are the large numbers of residents who declare belonging to a religion and of the rapidly growing number of faith groups (over 200). On the one hand, the coexistence of such a range of organised faith communities needs to be actively managed to avoid problems, but on a more positive note these faith groups are seen as having a vital social role to play. Without ever directly engaging with the act of worship or with proselytising, the Council believes that one of the best and most cost-effective ways of communicating with many of its residents is through their membership of faith groups.

The role of the Faith Officer has been to establish relationships and build trust, both with the Council and between different denominations. Interdenominational conflict within a single faith can be just as challenging as between the different faiths. From this basis of trust dialogues are encouraged around shared values and positive solutions to social issues such as supporting the elderly, young people or promoting cohesion (Lewisham Intercultural Profile 2011)

Business development

While research consistently demonstrates that **businesses are the ones that benefit the most from a diverse workforce**, relatively few cities actively engage with businesses in order to encourage them to diversify their employees, especially in the management positions, and to support them in acquiring capacity to manage a diverse workforce. Copenhagen is decidedly at the forefront of this agenda and has put in place a range of programmes to encourage intercultural developments in business.

Engage in CPH is the diversity programme of the City of Copenhagen. With this programme, the city wishes to collaborate with private enterprises, associations and citizens to transform the city's diversity into economic growth and quality of life. The vision is that "Copenhagen is the most inclusive city in Europe by 2015"

The international financial crisis has not been easy on the people relying on profits to survive – many private companies in Copenhagen are struggling and the city has been discussing with them how they can enhance sales and secure future growth.

The answer the city gives is diversity. It is collaborating with "Association for Integration of New Danes on the Labor Market" and "Innoversity Copenhagen" to recruit private companies in the new diversity program: INNOGROWTH via Diversity. In the first year, 30 companies were recruited to undertake an analysis of how diversity can be used as a way of increasing innovation and productivity within the organisation. The challenge was to make manager realise that recruiting more diverse employees can be a way out of a recession.

The good reasons to join the program are clearly stated. "Innoversity Copenhagen" has shown that diverse cleaning teams in ISS Facility Services Denmark have an average of 3,7 % more earnings than

homogenous teams. ISS Facility Services Denmark has more than 11.000 employees in Denmark, and if every cleaning team were as diverse it could mean higher revenue of 100 million Danish kroner pr. year. The government's Agency for Research and Innovation has published an official report proving that diversity within the organization enhances the chances of being innovative with up to 30 %.

The aim of the INNOGROWTH program is to make companies realise the positive potential in recruiting new employees in a broader perspective and with a more diverse aim than before and make decision makers realise that diversity is here to stay and that it can be a turning point if used correctly.

Oslo is another city where the **business and integration agendas are closely interlinked** – the integration service is actually located in the business development department.

Oslo's companies and education establishments have started to recognise and take advantage of the diversity opportunity already present in the city. A number of programmes supported by the city serve this purpose, such as Global Future, Diversity in Academia, Diversity in the Workplace and Top 10 diversity initiatives. The Global Future programme, co-funded by six business partners and the city government, provides courses in leadership and cultural competence free of charge, along with mentoring to young talents with a migrant background living in Norway. The University of Oslo is also actively attracting students across cultures through direct advertising in schools, informing minority parents of higher-education opportunities for their children and creating a multi-cultural environment at the University. For those interested in starting up a sustainable business, the city's Agency for Business Development offers courses in English, Polish, Turkish, Arabic, Farsi and in Somali.

Place-making and urbanism

In housing, intercultural cities seek to promote mixing, de-segregation, inter-cultural contacts and interaction through special activities and events. Such events give ethnic groups confidence and information enabling them to consider taking housing opportunities outside traditional enclaves.

Intercultural place-making is the art of creation of spaces which make it attractive for people of different backgrounds to encounter others, and to minimise avoidance, apprehension or xenophobia. It implies a deep recognition and engagement with all forms of difference in cities, and a preparedness on the part of urbanism professionals to engage with the human and cultural aspects of a city. Multicultural planning practice established important principles such as the requirement of equality for all in the face of planning law; and for equitable and just treatment of all in its application. The Intercultural City demands more of the people, the professionals and the politicians.

Whilst multiculturalism is predicated upon static notions of group identity, interculturalism thrives on a dynamic and constantly changing environment in which individuals and collectives express multiple, hybrid and evolving identities and needs (Wood 2012).

It is not physical space that makes a community, but the people using it together (Mean & Tims 2005:38, 66-67). The researchers highlight the importance of places that support a broader range of public experiences (not just serve the needs of a selected few) and thereby foster a feeling of belonging, familiarity and trust in other people that cross our paths (ibid: 42-56).

In Australia, an investigation of backyard culture suggests that even the weakest social contact across backyards could foster interculturalism (Morgan, 2005, quoted in Bagwell and Evans 2012). For these relations to flourish such ties between community members need to be maintained over several years. The aim should be to design a network of sustainable neighbourhoods that meets the needs of all residents - no matter their background and encourages long-term intercultural contact, using design measures but also deliberate initiatives targeting social and cultural inclusion.

On Oslo, the Area Lift programme aims to upgrade living standards in highly diverse and vulnerable places. Groruddalen is a vast area of 1960s high-rise development on the edge of Oslo, superficially typical of many such examples in European cities. But most untypical is the high standard of care and maintenance given to the infrastructure and public spaces here. Whilst some Norwegian journalists might wish to describe Groruddalen as a ghetto, it is far from that when compared to similar places elsewhere in Europe. For example, prior to developing the Alna and Furuset areas the local administration collected residents' opinion through mapping, workshops and door-to-door surveys in cooperation with minority advisers and field workers. Thus emerged, for example, the idea of a 'World Park' to be designed and maintained by the residents. Consequently, the residents feel greater ownership of the regeneration process and now engage more actively in housing cooperatives and other common ventures. A sharp drop in youth crime incidence between 2008 and 2012 is also partly attributed to the increased participation and ownership.

Mouraria, the most diverse and vibrant neighbourhood of Lisbon, has been acting as a diversity and inclusion laboratory in the past few years. Mayor António Costa has closed the traditional office of the 'first citizen' and moved to Largo do Intendente, a place more associated in the minds of most Lisboans with poverty and trafficking than offices of state. The message he wished to convey is that Lisbon is a city open to the world and its people, so no longer can its most diverse district be hidden away and ignored as an embarrassing secret. The tool which was designed to shape the intercultural development of the neighbourhood was the TODOS (all) festival focused of Mouraria. The Festival has achieved an impressive amount of in-kind support from a wide range of agencies particularly the media. National TV and newspapers have given in free coverage and the local media is supportive of the broad thrust of the city council's intercultural approach.

Accustomed to being neglected, some residents greeted the news of a festival with suspicion. Some asked whether the money might be better spent on improving housing and amenities, whilst others doubtless feared the heightened attention and security would threaten their nefarious money-making activities. Others, who may have observed the trends in other European cities, might have worried that a poor but proud and distinctive community could fall under the threat of gentrification – for which the arts are sometimes a harbinger. And there is also a view from some in the longstanding indigenous communities who feel themselves to have been neglected for many years, and who are suspicious of new initiatives which they perceive to be directed towards the welfare of new arrival rather than to themselves. This is a common phenomenon across many European contexts and one which can harden into resentment if not handled sensitively by the authorities (Wood 2010).

The Festival was expected to bring both instant public opinion impact and longer term stability and prosperity to Mouraria. And the development has been tangible – from the originally improvised "ethnic" food stall during the festival, the central Mouraria square has been refurbished with permanent diversity food huts and has become an "in" place for dining. A business innovation incubator has been planned to connect the small ethnic minority businesses with universities and bigger companies and materialise the diversity advantage.

Intercultural cities is not simply a network but a learning community with carefully designed processes and a set of tools to help a wide range of urban actors understand the complexity of issues, make changes in the design and implementation of policies and assess progress. It is also a political community of cities which believe that diversity is their future and refuse the politics of fear.

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