

Diversity unites.

The Arts and Intercultural Dialogue in European cities:
Experiences, concepts, perspectives

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1. Prologue: A story of two cities

In November 2007 Cittadella, a picturesque fortified town of 20.000 inhabitants near Venice finally lived up to its name. The Mayor issued an order requiring that foreigners coming from within the EU have the right to live in Cittadella only if they had no criminal record, were in regular work with an income per family member of at least €5,000 per year, and had a home conforming to standards set down by the town. "Now we have 15 new applications for residency per week, 60 per month, 600 per year, and 80 per cent of them foreign," said the mayor. "It's a real invasion.". It would be easy to dismiss Cittadella's Mayors' act as a populist overreaction to an immigration wave following the recent EU enlargement if immigrant bashing and xenophobic fears were not becoming more common nearly everywhere in Europe.

It would be however wrong to believe that xenophobic nervousness is the inevitable reaction to massively increasing influx of migrants. Italy again offers an illustration of the opposite.

Reggio Emilia is the Italian city with the highest percentage of immigrants – they represent around 12 % of the population. And so far it seems reasonably happy with them. But the social piece in Reggio is not a hazard but of political vision, courage and hard work.

Reggio Emilia's leaders are making a massive effort to highlight the positive economic and social contribution of immigrants and maintain the traditionally tolerant, welcoming attitude of the inhabitants to newcomers as the immigration phenomenon accelerates. The city's decalred objective it to celebrate diversity as one of the founding principles of the local community.

Reggio Emilia promotes an active debate around welfare and diversity, rethinking both access to public services and the different needs of the local community. It supports cultural associations of immigrant communities but is careful not to limit consultation and participation of citizens of immigrant origin, and foreign residents, to the official representatives of these communities. The acquisition of the right to vote in local elections by residents without Italian nationality, is to many of the local officials and members of society, a natural right and pre-condition for full integration and citizenship. Housing policies, the design of public spaces, including shopping and cult-related venues are all being assessed to limit segregation and encourage ethnic mixing. The active neighbourhood associations are key to the management of cultural conflict – this is interculturalism at micro-level. The Intercultural centre Mondinsieme carries out intercultural mediation and organises intercultural events to encourage cultural "métissage". Reggio does

not interpret cultural interaction as a threat to its authentic identity – on the contrary, it sees it as a chance to develop a new modern identity, aligned with the spirit of 21st century. To illustrate this, Reggio's slogan is "Positive contamination of cultures". Anticipating conflict, encouraging interaction and mixing across the boundaries of difference – a recipe which works...

What explains the difference between these two cities - geographically so close but so different in their approach to immigration and diversity? Is it possible to bring other cities to take a positive approach to diversity, to see it as an opportunity rather than as a threat? What are the ingredients of a successful intercultural approach in cities?

2. The Intercultural cities programme: genesis and objectives

These are the questions the programme "Intercultural Cities – governance and policies in diverse communities" is seeking to explore. It is a joint programme of the Council of Europe and the European Commission and whilst the Commission needs no introductions, I allow me to briefly present the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe is Europe's largest and oldest inter-governmental club involving 47 member states. It is first and foremost the continent's human rights and democracy watchdog. Having established the Human rights convention and another 200 international legal instruments codifying a range of political, social and cultural rights and principles, the organisation spends much effort in making sure governments comply with the rules. The European Court of Human rights is the most famous human rights defence machinery but the Council of Europe system involves a host of other structures and activities.

It is the Council's belief that human rights and democracy are vulnerable to the pressures of demography, economy, migration, climate and political ambition and need constant vigilance and protection. But one of the sharpest threats to these cherished European values seem to come today from cultural pressures, from the accelerated encounter between native and incoming populations which puts a strain to the natural "absorption capacity" of European societies. It is therefore vitally important that societies find new, proactive ways of accommodating diversity without giving up any of the fundamental rights and freedoms.

Intercultural cities – a joint action of the Council of Europe and the Europe Commission – is an attempt to identify ways in which an urban community, a city, can manage diversity positively.

Intercultural cities is not a research project. It is a process through which 12 pilot cities develop and apply their own intercultural strategies in order to apply the

principles of intercultural governance and policy underpinning the programme's methodology.

Intercultural cities is not simply a networking and good practice exchange exercise either. It is closer to a real-life experiment. It is about city authorities deciding that immigration is not necessarily a plague to be fought or a fatality to be deplored but a reality which can offer new opportunities to cities.

3. The intercultural approach in urban policies

In the context of the programme interculturalism is defined as an integration approach based on shaping community perceptions of diversity as a resource, rather than as a threat and on the development of public policies which facilitate and encourage the cultural mixing and interaction. Interculturalism means accepting cultures as living entities which evolve and transform themselves through encounters with other cultures. It also means understanding that cultures thrive and command respect not when they are ghettoised and marginalised, but when they openly express themselves and mix with other cultures in the public space.

The intercultural approach aims at establishing an understanding that diversity is in principle a good news for cities – as it is for enterprises.

- People from diverse backgrounds bring with them necessary knowledge and skills such as the highly-prized talents of the technology entrepreneur or the nurse. Migrants perform the vital functions that the hosts need but no longer care to perform themselves. However, migrants also bring aptitudes where are different to those of the host and may, if managed well, prove complementary to, and add value to, the skills of the host community. A study of American cities showed that in the ones which received high numbers of immigrants, native workers earned more than their counterparts in low-immigration cities.
- Very often when immigrants arrive in a new city they do not sever links with their homeland but retain connections which they often exploit for the purposes of trade. Whilst such trade may remain limited to the supply of familiar food and cultural goods to the settler, the ramifications can be far wider than this, for example the opportunities available to German exporters in the emergent Turkish market or the greater ease with which British companies are able to interact with the booming Indian high technology market. On top of this, migrants also, of course, represent new markets for local companies in the host city.
- In general, people who leave their home to seek a better life are motivated and future-orientated. They are more likely to be self-employed and be

more entrepreneurial than their hosts. Particularly if they resettle in cities experiencing stagnation or decline they may add a welcome boost to a flat or low-aspirational local economy, whilst their stronger social networks may revive a disintegrating neighbourhood. For example, the mayor of Toronto David Miller acknowledged that immigrants are the mainstay of his city's economy and will remain so.

- Population diversity is also the source of other tangible or intangible benefits such as a cosmopolitan brand which can favour foreign direct investment, trade, business and leisure tourism, or for the location of major events such as tournaments and expos. The modern economy is one which prizes new ideas and rewards innovation in processes and products. Leading edge companies have now adopted the 'business case for diversity' and come to recognise that they must now search far and wide for the best people and the best environments which might spark the inventiveness that will give them a competitive advantage.

4. Interculturalism – the new hype?

Interculturalism represents a different perspective compared to other "ideal type" approaches to the management of diversity such as guest-worker, assimilationist or multicultural policy. Such ideal type approaches obviously rarely exist in pure form in reality. In most cases different combinations of these approaches are used and it is possible to identify variations in policy approach within the same city at any one time. For example whilst a city's arts policy may be to 'celebrate' the differences within its multicultural communities, the housing department might express a 'colour blind' lettings policy which, nevertheless assumes everyone will assimilate to one majority cultural norm. The ideal policy types are nevertheless useful as analytical tools for describing the evolution of policy dynamics.

- Unlike guest-worker policies, interculturalism recognises that emigration is rarely a temporary phenomenon and that immigrant workers are likely to settle and establish their lives in the local community and expect that they and their children should be able to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as the host population.
- Unlike assimilationist approaches, interculturalism recognises the right to cultural identity and cultural pluralism as essential features of democratic, rights-based society and does not consider cultural assimilation as "the price to pay" for social integration.
- Unlike multiculturalism, the intercultural approach discourages communitarian segregation as a condition for the "purity" and "survival" of cultures and promotes active intercultural exchange and interaction in

public institutions and spaces and respect for cultural difference in the framework of common societal values and norms.

It would be easy to draw a normative conclusion from the policy matrix that there is a naturally progressing trajectory as cities become more sophisticated but this would be misleading. Rather, the intercultural approach is another important step in the continuum of integration and city-building. For example, protecting and reinforcing the separate identity of new arrivals to a city could be an important first step in enabling them to engage with rather than feeling overwhelmed by the host community.

The most significant difference of the intercultural approach is that in other policy types the underlying assumption is that they will not ask any serious question of, or require change by, the majority.

An intercultural city is one in which there is the assumption that diversity is the norm and that it is incumbent upon all residents to make adjustments.

5. Towards an intercultural city strategy

Each city is unique and each intercultural city has its unique approach. But there are some common features and requirements for cities which wish to develop an intercultural city strategy.

1. An open commitment to interculturalism. For instance one of the pilot cities, the Neukölln district of Berlin has just received permission to call itself "a place of diversity" in order to stress its pride with its diverse population more than half of which are of migrant origin.
2. A solid framework of rights, leadership and acceptance of conflict as a tool for development

Any city wishing to realise the benefits of interculturalism must ensure that human rights and freedoms are upheld at all times – interculturalism does not mean compromising on violence against women or political rights. The intercultural city cannot thrive without determined leaders who are ready to stand for the value of diversity despite difficulties which inevitably arise, and avoid the pitfalls of populism. The intercultural city is also aware that diversity is a source of tension and makes provision for cultural conflict management such as Torino's Casa dei Coflitti.

3. Intercultural governance system involving a specialised policy-making structure where migrants, foreigners and other relevant stakeholders are represented, an administrative support body with a broad mandate, resources and the right to initiative, support for interculturally-friendly civil society organisations and activities
4. A strategic policy approach

Many of the 12 pilot intercultural cities boost a great number of grassroots initiatives, tools and organisations but they most need to develop the strategic policy frameworks which will ensure co-ordination, resources, lasting political support and sustainability. Education, the design of key public spaces and buildings, housing and community facilities, the business sector and employment, in sport and the arts, the intercultural skills of public administration, the provision of intercultural mediation are all elements of an effective intercultural strategy which I could not explore in any detail here.

5. Adequate public relations and media partnerships

Between March and November, Neuchâtel 2006 carried out a novel, large-scale cultural operation on the theme of its identity. With 185 major events and over 500 side-events, the NEUCHÀTOI campaign provided an opportunity for reflection on the past, present and future shape of the identity of the canton's inhabitants. The programme of events, spread across the entire canton, was aimed at all age groups and catered for all social, cultural or sport-related interests. Following this, a referendum awarded to foreign residents the right to stand in local elections – a motion which had been defeated a year earlier.

Working hand in hand with the local media to create a positive attitude to diversity among citizens is indeed essential and the Intercultural cities programme is proposing a set of instruments such as monitoring tools, training and diversity reporting initiatives for the cities to enrol local media for the intercultural cause.

6. Conclusion

The Intercultural Cities programme only started in January 2008. For the moment we are collecting the pieces of a very complex puzzle: refining the methodology, helping cities to assess their policies through the intercultural lens and plan

ahead. Hopefully we could report some good results a couple of years from now but for the moment the jury is out on the success of this ambitious undertaking.

The 12 courageous cities will certainly need all the support and encouragement they can get – and they are indeed getting it – from our partners such as Eurocities and its network of cities running an intercultural good practice exchange, known as strand 2 of the Intercultural cities programme; United cities and local governments, and many other organisations, institutions and cities. Rather complete information and documentation, concept papers and city profiles are available on the Intercultural cities web site:

www.coe.int/interculturalcities
