



Intercultural city: governance and policies for diverse communities

Joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission

INTERCULTURALITY – WHAT IT IS ABOUT

Rather than ignoring diversity (as with guest-worker approaches), denying diversity (as with assimilationist approaches), or overemphasising diversity and thereby reinforcing walls between culturally distinct groups (as with multiculturalism), **interculturalism is about explicitly recognising the value of diversity while doing everything possible to increase interaction, mixing and hybridisation between cultural communities.** Interculturalism is also about addressing issues of cultural conflict or tension (religious customs and requirements, communitarianism, women's rights etc.) **openly through public debate**, with the involvement of all stakeholders.

While multiculturalism underlines the unique value of each culture and encourages the development of policies to preserve minority and migrant cultures, it has also often provoked rivalry between ethnic communities for access to power and resources, and has unwillingly increased ethnic ghettoisation. Ethnic clustering is not an issue of concern in itself but becomes one when it develops into ghettoisation – an effective isolation of certain groups which reduces opportunities for contacts, networking, practicing the language of the host community, and active citizenship, and thus perpetrates poverty and exclusion.

Interculturality recognises strongly the need to enable each culture to survive and flourish but underlines also the right of all cultures to contribute to the cultural landscape of the society they are present in. Interculturality derives from the understanding that cultures thrive only in contact with other cultures, not in isolation. It seeks to reinforce inter-cultural interaction as a means of building trust and reinforcing the fabric of the community. The development of a cultural sensitivity, the encouragement of intercultural interaction and mixing is seen not as the responsibility of a special department or officer but as an essential aspect of the functioning of all city departments and services.

Examples

In **education**, it is important to establish a few schools and colleges as intercultural flagships, with high investment in staff training, intercultural curriculum, co-operative learning models, closer links with parents and community, twinning links with mono-cultural schools or even shared facilities (as in Tilburg where a Catholic and a Muslim school are creating a joint campus). In some cases the compulsory enrolling of newly arrived migrant kids in designated schools may be necessary in order to ensure an optimal mixing of children by ethnic background.

It is also important to adapt pedagogical methods to pupils' family culture backgrounds ("collectivist" cultures in Hofstede's term privilege group learning, rewards for group, not individual success, and a more authoritative, directive role of the teacher). Appointing intercultural mediators in multicultural schools or training some of the staff in intercultural mediation can also be a part of the strategy.

In the public realm, cities should identify a number of key public spaces (formal and informal) and invest in discrete redesign, animation and maintenance to raise levels of usage and interaction by all ethnic groups; develop a better understanding of how different groups use space and incorporate into planning and design guidelines.

In housing, programmes could seek to give ethnic groups confidence and information enabling them to consider taking housing opportunities outside traditional enclaves.

In neighbourhoods, it is useful to designate key facilities as intercultural community centres, containing key services such as health, maternity, childcare and libraries and encourage, including through fiscal measures or the provision of community facilities, the setting up and action of culturally mixed community groups and organisations acting as catalysts of neighbourhood activities and mediators. Small-scale initiatives that enable migrants to act as a link between individuals or families and the services should also be encouraged.