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**CULTURAL PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY:
THE ROLE OF CITIES**

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From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism

In the context of the resurgence of organised racist movements over the last decade, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and social and physical exclusion of asylum seekers officially sanctioned by EU member states, the time is overdue for cities to take action. Against the negative view of cultural diversity as a regretful reality, cities have to turn it into a positive enhancement of civic life. However, the debate has come late, as reality has already moved on. Since the 1980s, multiculturalism has been the dominant urban policy response to the presence of ethnic minorities in Britain. However, it has failed to facilitate cultural interaction between different communities across cultural boundaries. *Interculturalism* goes beyond equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences, to the pluralist transformation of public culture, public spaces and civic identity.

The efforts to embrace cultural diversity positively remain uneven. In some European countries, such as Italy, multiculturalism is only now coming onto the agenda. In Germany, the strongly ethnic character of citizenship law has led to strong resistance from the political Right to accepting multiculturalism at all, although at local level, there have been imaginative initiatives. In other countries, such as France with a strong republican and integrationist tradition recognition of cultural differences has never been part of citizenship. Cracks in republican *practice* have become more apparent as the existence of cultural diversity, especially of second generation Muslim communities who have grown up in France, has brought new challenges to previously accepted assumptions of cultural uniformity. This has produced its own problems of detaching universal rights from specific cultural norms – recognising the de facto pluralist character of French culture.

However, the weaknesses of multicultural policies in Britain have now also become more apparent. By treating ethnic minorities as unified communities at the political – though not juridical – level, they often act as corporate groups, dominated by unselected leaders or male elders who speak on behalf of the community, as though no individual rights or diversity of opinion operate within it (see Calhoun on “in-group essentialism”, 1999). This prevents internal disagreements from being aired, and often leads to separatism and fundamentalism. It tends to marginalize dissident voices especially of young people and women. We also know that members of one cultural community, often defined racially and defensively, is cross-cut by many other affiliations. This often means that cultural minorities deploy different languages to suit different situations and allegiances (see Gerd Baumann’s fascinating account 1997). For example, a black identification is adopted when suffering racism and mobilising against it – such as over the level of Black exclusions from schools and forced sectioning of black people with mental health problems – or when claiming specific resources, or recognition to counter discrimination. This is reflected in the debate among Black writers over whether they want to be and should be defined racially and thus classified by publishers separately or, as part of mainstream literature. On the other hand, all members of “the black community” have cross-cutting affiliations which express their internal diversity – composed of people not only from different national origins- with different languages, religions, politics, family and sexual relations but also diverse allegiances to sub-cultures –such as reggae, Rastafarianism, rap, hip hop, feminism, the gay scene.

Cities need to develop policies which encourage cross-fertilisation, not only across the boundaries of different communities, but across all cultural boundaries, between the “majority” and “minority” communities, between high and low brow, between classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, because that is the source of creativity and social innovation: lateral thinking, borrowing and cross-over at the borders.

What Cities Can Do

1. Inclusive civic Identity

Cities are places of multiplicity, not of a single homogenous community. This is not just because of recent post-war or post Cold War migration. They always have been places of outsiders moving in: newcomers from the land to the factories, unemployed from one place looking for work in another, of upwardly mobile workers seeking higher income and status, such as in office work, of casual labour drawn to more stable employment, of refugees and exiles looking for political safety and support, and migrants seeking a better life. The city has always been a source of tension between old and new ways of life, between tradition and novelty and this is the great source of urban dynamism, of cultural as well as economic and political innovation. The political mindset and language of city government often takes for granted a uniformity, a single voice that represents everyone. Often it tries to do so by cutting deals competitively against other cities, or against central government. Again, the assumption is that “we” represent and “we” can therefore speak in the name of “the community”. Of course, the “we” is democratically legitimate and politically represents a majority of some kind. But the political community is composed of citizens who are not equal in representation or organisation. Articulating a collective identity through organising yourself – whether against discrimination, for specific needs and services or as an act of self-expression enables the mobilisation of those without a voice or political clout (Bourdieu, 1992 ; Soysal, 1996). It is incumbent on the city to solicit the active participation of all citizens, especially those excluded from the political process, and misrepresented by the media, to facilitate their self-organisation. Cities can stimulate collective organisation by creating political opportunity structures to draw in those who are poor in organisational resources and the cultural capital needed to acquire a political voice and public presence.

a) Cities can provide training in civic competences – such as how to access the local media, how to apply for grants, how to bring initiatives to fruition in projects for the city. There are rare but outstanding examples of independent initiatives such as Operation Black Vote (OBV, 1997), in London which tours schools and ethnic minority organisations encouraging black participation in politics at all levels and has initiated mentoring schemes where young people from ethnic minorities shadow MPs, councillors, magistrates and school governors to remove the mystique of power, by showing the workings of the institutions and the nature of the job. OBV has set up a Black Civic Forum as part of the London Civic Forum, with representatives of 400 organisations and this body has a consultative relationship with the mayor and the new Greater London Assembly, advising them on issues of special concern to ethnic minorities in the city.

b) Cities need to establish a direct forum with ethnic minorities – a collaborative relationship which addresses those issues of discrimination, demonisation, and criminalisation – such as racial violence, police harassment, higher levels of unemployment and school exclusions.

Such a political relationship of trust built through dialogue can produce constructive solutions. Direct political participation does not exhaust the way in which citizens are bound together – there are a range of cross-cutting ties, of belief, faith, languages and culture which need public expression, open debate and contestation, and also need the means to come to fruition. By fruition, I mean to reach their potential in coherent contributions to the city’s civic life – in ideas and concrete initiatives. This is best expressed in the cultural field through publicly accountable devolved funding to groups and self-managed projects. As Jordi Borje, International Officer for Barcelona City Council, has expressed it: “The city must be perceived as a cultural project. The city is a series of collective projects. There is no social integration without participation in collective projects”. (Borje, 1995, 41-2).

I shall now consider some of the kinds of cultural projects and intercultural initiatives which some cities have taken on board and which other cities could experiment with further to benefit from cultural diversity.

c) Cities need a public art policy which reshapes the collective memory of the city, to include those excluded or suppressed by the official history. This is an ongoing aspect of renewing civic identity and keeping alive debate in the public sphere, not least in challenging racism. The new Jewish Museum in Berlin, designed by a Polish Jew, Daniel Libeskind, challenges for the first time in post-war German history, the official history which has written out the abiding presence of Jewish culture within "German" culture. It retrieves the modernist cosmopolitanism of the early 20th Century - Bauhaus design, Benjamin's urbanity, expressionist conflict, the Kafkaesque fears of power, and reconnects them to contemporary German culture, and through an underground umbilical cord, to the history of the city in the adjoining baroque Berlin Museum. The building, itself a form of sculpture, forces the visitor to go in single file, to catch onto a neighbour or a wall for support, to experience disorientation and empathy with the persecuted, the exiled and exterminated. It seeks to reshape German understanding of the relationship between minority and dominant culture, and of the past to the present (Libeskind, 1999).

Public art symbolises who the citizens of a city are, what events have made them, where they come from, which spaces they can inhabit, where they can go (Miles, 1997). There are very few European examples which embody an intercultural understanding of the identity of citizens, where the history embodied in its images is diverse and dissident. However, a fascinating project in Milan, called Wide City, set up by the contemporary artist Luca Vitone, produced a cultural map of the city that linked up over 500 migrant cultural centres, foreign cultural organisations such as the Goethe Institute and British Council, cultural associations and projects, ethnic boutiques, delicatessens, book and record shops, take-aways and restaurants, community centres and holy places. This alternative itinerary of Milan revolved around a central exhibition, linked to weekly open days, with free buses taking people between the different cultural centres where visitors could get a taste of the different communities, their food, commercial activity, artwork, hear and see the work that goes on there – widening their cultural experience of the city and opening up access to places they would not normally go (Vitone, 1998).

Cities need to develop a coherent public art strategy which confronts diversity and conflicts over the past, makes present the forgotten, obliterated and excluded, remaking the public domain as a challenging, but inclusive, intercultural space.

2. Intercultural Spaces

The settlement patterns in cities through the operation of the housing market, past zoning policies and voluntary clustering of communities have often interacted to produce socially and culturally segregated areas. Without formal ghettos, there are concentrations of ethnic minorities in the inner cities in Britain, in the outer peripheries in continental Europe. Socially and culturally mixed areas do not spontaneously emerge. However, cities can create soft boundaries where people go outside their normal segregated experience and share a common space, within which social and cultural interaction and overlap takes place. Strategically placed parks, -with a wide range of activities – sport, conservation and wildlife, natural history education, and a programme of cultural animation and festivals provide one such meeting-place for shared cultural experience. Cannon Hill Park on the edge of the predominantly poor, working class and Asian Balsall Heath, and upper class, professional Edgbaston in Birmingham, or Clissold Park in London which lies between professional Highbury and the multicultural mixed area of Stoke Newington in Hackney, are such examples. The latter has football pitches, a children's park, tennis courts, wildlife ponds, a small farm and

aviary, a cheap cheerful café open 365 days of the year, a stage and programme of activities managed by conservation and user groups. On visits to the park, you come across people from mental health hostels relaxing on benches, Asian women in saris playing football, Chassidic fathers playing with daughters, Orthodox Muslims in kaftans kicking around a football with their boys, men strolling with prams, mixed groups playing chess. It holds a range of festivals – from Cuban music to the homeless festival of scrap metal art.

But to harness the potential of social and cultural interaction, cities need to create intercultural centres for joint projects of cultural production. The Werkstatt der Kulturen – Workshop of cultures is such a space – a shared production and performance venue in Berlin – which has a concert hall, auditorium, laboratories and studios, run jointly by representatives of German and migrant organisations for young people (Vertovec, 1995). The Berlin Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs has developed an imaginative set of intercultural public policies from an initial public consciousness raising campaign through it meant to be a Berliner, to intercultural festivals such as STREET' 94 aimed at immigrant youths under the slogan "To stay is my right" with street art, music and films and workshops on graffiti and rap music (Soysal, 1996).

3. Intercultural services

Cities are the main sites of citizenship – where citizens experience their entitlements and obligations in public life. Cities deliver public services on which our welfare, mobility, health, knowledge and sociability largely depend. They provide the links with fellow citizens through a common public life and space. Therefore, it is crucial that those services and that common public life are attuned to differences of need and culture, so that the fullest participation in society and its goods can be assured.

In health services this may mean interpretation services, health visitors, and special projects targeted at group specific illnesses or problems such as sickle cell anaemia among Afro Caribbeans or rickets among Asians. Culturally sensitive projects of health awareness or targeted provision are part of making service provision intercultural, just as, for example, providing community mothers/parents to pass on natal care to young (white working class) girls who have lost the tradition of learning how to look after babies, as a programme in Birmingham now does.

In education – this raises issues of a critical and revised curriculum in teaching history and ethics – whether these are taught as part of civics, comparative religion or philosophy; museum visits linked to a reconsidering the way the museum represents the past of conquered and dead peoples and their artefacts, links outside school with a range of communities which can feed into the diversity of sources and interpretations the school can draw on and the use of school after hours.

In employment and training – which is the service I want to focus on in more depth – the third sector and local cultural economy offers great potential to cities to capitalise on cultural diversity, by creating training opportunities and jobs which capture the imagination and utilise the hidden talents of marginalized young people, especially from cultural minorities and integrating cultural enterprise and self-employment to wider urban regeneration and economic innovation initiatives.

Why and how? First of all, the commercial competitive sector is largely producing jobless growth. The arts, crafts, electronic media and IT are the main sectors young people want to work in. Cultural capital – even more than economic and social capital is unevenly distributed, but does not follow a simple market logic (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1992). There are diverse sources of cultural capital including that locked into street and youth sub-cultures, informal know-how in minority languages and multi-ethnic origins, the club scene and musical, dance, religious sub-cultures that

make up a style – what Sarah Thornton dubs as "hipness" (Thornton, 1995). The talents and networks acquired informally, if linked to more formal training and skills offer disadvantaged or disaffected young people opportunities to develop their creative capacities and turn them to economic advantage in small businesses or self-employment. Cities which develop production-based strategies on a third sector model of economic development can capitalise on the creative effects of cultural interaction for economic, as well as cultural, innovation. Clusters of small-scale cultural producers, form creative "knowledge communities" which bring together a range of cultural groups, of diverse backgrounds, cultures and genres. Cities can help harness these resources to produce cultural collaboration and cross-fertilisation which are the source of new artwork, artefacts, performances and cultural services. Some recent cultural hybrids such as Baghra rock or Islamic rap in music testify to this creative combining effect. (Baumann, 1997; Soysal, 1996). The youth training centres with self-governing statutes, such as those set up in Bologna in the 1980s and in Hamburg, like the Honigfabrik, providing courses in rock music, sound recording, computing, photography, reprographics, cartoons etc. capitalised on the passions of young people. (Bloomfield, 1993). In Britain, the conversion of industrial premises into managed centres of cultural enterprise – of studio spaces and micro business such as the Custard Factory in Birmingham or the Chocolate Factory in Haringey, North London can spearhead the regeneration of derelict areas of the city. (Bloomfield, unpublished 1999). The Chocolate Factory, for example, houses among others a South Asian classical dance and art company, Beat Base Productions – an African Caribbean record producing studio, Ambitious productions – promoting British Asian funk music and videos as well as lending video equipment, a floor of community and commercial artists – including a mosaicist, ceramicists, painters and environmental artists, photographic studios which provide in-house publicity as well as commercial services. It runs three certificated training courses where 90 per cent of the students on the music business, sound engineering and photography courses come from ethnic minorities. These are vibrant and growing centres of intercultural creativity and micro-business which have planted the seeds for artistic and economic self-sufficiency.

These examples indicate how cities can intervene to provide links and back-up grants, premises, training and support which enable young people, especially but not exclusively from cultural minorities, become independent producers and acquire a public presence and visibility. Furthermore they show the potential for such centres of creativity to revive urban life where it has all but died, to enrich a locality with new forms of industry by day and light the area up with teaming vitality at night, thus giving new life to the city as a whole.

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