



City of Patras

Intercultural Profile

Background

The region of Western Greece is the third biggest of the thirteen regions in the country. This region involves the areas of Achaia, Ilia and Aitolokarnania with an area of 11.350 km. involving 19 municipalities and a population of 740.506 inhabitants.

The capital city of this area is Patras with its population of 202.757 people and its five municipalities.

Patras prodes itself as being the doorway to Europe – it has been so since a very long time. It is also the world’s doorway to Greece, since a long time, too. The history of Patras is a history of immigration and integration. The city leadership, many of whose members have a migrant intercultural background, is proud of the colourful history and multicultural present of the town and regards openness to the world as important for its prosperity and future.

Patras, as a harbour doorway connecting Greece to the Mediterranean since 2 500 years, has never had the “chance” of an isolated mono-ethnic development. Indigenous people, Greek colonists from other parts, Phoenicians, Romans, Franconians, Byzantines, Venicians, Osmands have in turn conquered Patras and left their mark. After modern Greek independence – which was announced in 1821 in Patras – an important economic and cultural stream of merchants from England, France, Germany and Italy came to the small city in the second half of the 19th century. Patras then became a wealthy trade centre. They shaped the face and life of Patras -the tracks or layers of history are visible still today. “Achaia Clauss”, founded by a German merchant and a famous vinery till today (Mafrodafne!), is on of the most important symbols of this intercultural process.

Historic experiences with refugees: 13 000 Greek refugees arrived from Asia Minor in the city of 40 000 inhabitants after the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922. The “Refugee Quarter” is visible and called this way even today. In the 1960, more refugees arrived from North Cyprus.

Many Italian migrants came to Patras after the failure of Garibaldi and later. They brought political and social ideals to their new Greek home, and they developed an independent press. The fifth generation of today seems well integrated. The Deputy Mayor of the city image, Mr. Spiros Demartinos, is one of them. The Italian community gathers in the surroundings of the Catholic Church.

At the same time, Patras was a gateway for Greek emigration to the USA (most notably following the “raisin crisis” of 1920 which devastated the local economy) and – after World War II – to European states like Western Germany. An increasing number of former emigrants are now returning thanks to the economic upturn brought by EU-membership.

An element of the intercultural heritage is the coexistence of different Christian religions, visible in different churches (Greek-orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) and cemeteries. Patras is the city of the apostle and martyr Andreas, important for all denominations. A synagogue does not exist any more. Nothing was to hear about a mosque.

Surely, centuries of international trade and migration have made the City of Patras sensitive for migration and integration issues since many years.

However, the city has been facing serious challenges. The most important one is related to the sudden increase in illegal migration in the last decade – mostly people from Africa the Middle East coming in ship containers and planning go to Italy, Germany and elsewhere in the European Union.

The city authorities are genuinely trying their best to manage the situation, as much as its limited resources and autonomy allow it. Furthermore, their approach is not simply of “coping” but actively trying to design policies and actions to encourage migrants to remain in the city. The public opinion, in a country where every family has an emigrant, has not been hostile, in principle, towards foreigners, but the people’s patience is being stretched enormously during the economic crisis of 2010-2011.

However, Greece being a rather centralised country, the local authorities have few powers and resources in relation to migration, asylum, work permits and other social and urbanism matters.

The Asian migrants who arrive in Patras under inhuman conditions just willing to pass to the “Eldorado” of Germany, France or Great Britain. Patras as Schengen frontier station is their eye of a needle, there is no legal passway. They are not interested in remaining in Patras and try to go further illegally. They have been for a long time locked up in a private owned camp in the heart of the city which has been more recently moved a few kilometres away. The city is confronted with the desperate health and hygiene situation.

Patras has had a change of local government during 2011 involving quite an extensive and marked impact on various areas of local government and the question of intercultural development has been given a new and very strong priority from the new administration. The city realises that it needs to engage a debate with citizens on the difference between the irregular migrants and those legally residing in the city, and adopt distinct policies towards including the latter in the community.

Intercultural commitment and governance of diversity

In 2011 the Lord Mayor and local authorities have made clear and unambiguous statements with regards to the development of an intercultural cities and have put into place important infrastructures and council decisions which clearly emphasis this new attitude towards interculturalism which can be seen by the budget allotment of 30.000 euro to the above activity for

the 2011 year and another 30.000 euro already earmarked for the 2012 year on the Intercultural cities development plan.

The new Regional Administrative Unit of Western Greece has openly acknowledged the complexity of managing a port area such as Patras with its constant arrival of non Greek persons and the conflicts that this occasionally creates and has therefore initiated work, together with local governments, on the 'ethnographic' aspects involved.

Local authorities now have what can be seen as an intercultural strategic action plan which takes its point of reference with the appointment of a Vice-mayor with a clear intercultural mandate and the setting up on an intercultural office or 'council' within the city centre equipping this agency with its own staff and a clear mandate on intercultural and immigration issues across the board. This council has also set up a number of agencies which have a specific action plan with regards to intercultural issues as will be illustrated below.

Patras has also instituted a Vice-Mayor (Councillor) of Volunteerism, Gender Equality, NGO's, Integration of Immigrants and Services to Citizens. Within this portfolio this council office has the mandate and has openly declared its involvement on intercultural issues and has set up and developed specific activities in this regards such as :

- The /agency for the integration of Immigrants defined by the law 3852/2010. This entity also has migrants within its organizational structure and has its own staff. Through this agency, migrants are represented and participate in the promotion of immigrant's views at the local level. The agency is able to enrich the decision-making process of the municipality via its main objectives which are :
 - To incorporate and to encourage immigrants to attend and participate in local public life.
 - To improve & to harmonize relations between the inhabitants of the city (all of them) and the official bodies of the city.

Via help from this agency the various migrant populations have been able to set up a number of local associations capable of participating in joint activities with the local Greek population and the municipality.

- Office of Services for the Immigrants: This office has now been moved into the centre of the city and further developed. The office provides services for the benefit of immigrants living within the city, helping them to manage the procedural issues such as permits, licenses and other official documents.
- Office of Volunteerism : This is the first of three office of this type in Greece. Via this office the number of registered volunteer members has risen markedly from within the migrant population. One of a number of expressions of there actions is the 'Omada Epsilon team' which involves persons from quite a diverse cultural background.

The intercultural outlook of Patras has been much enhanced over the last year or so through the establishment of the municipally supported and funded agency ADEP (Enterprise for Planning and Development). This organization has a wide mandate with respect to migration issues, as well as others, and has developed a number of European projects and on interculturalism such as:

- Youth in Action - TICTYM; Intercultural Education of youth in intercultural issues .

- Integration of third party nationals –Sparda project.
- Sensitization projects involving all citizens.
- Acting together with NGO’s, local authorities and associations of immigrants to promote intercultural living.

The ADEP has its own staff team and municipal funding and therefore is able to function without great difficulties.

Education

The school system is being adapted to immigration. Around 600 pupils with migrant background lived in Patras in 2008, their number today is certainly larger. If the percentage of migrant pupils in a school exceeds 45%, the schools are labelled “Multicultural schools” (26 in all Greece), with reduced classed (8 to 12 pupils) and reinforced links with the local community.

It should be noted that the city does not provide for mother tongue education for the children of migrant background.

The municipality of Patras has put into place a plan of action within the education system which sees non profit charitable organizations, the University, other community based entities working in close connection and together with local authorities to further develop the intercultural perspective within the education system knowing full well the powerful influence that schooling has within the local society.

One of the strategies put into place has been that of addressing the families (Greek and other origin) in order to enhance the process of inclusion and to diminish the pressure towards stereotyping. Schools are now officially striving to destroy these barriers via the use of multilingual courses being made available within the curriculum.

An interesting move forward has also been that of guaranteeing the presence of migrant representatives within school boards and local institutions with particular attention being paid to protecting the cultural heritage of persons of non Greek origin.

An important action has been to encourage students and their parents to act together through associations in organizing intercultural events through the schooling system. Recently there has been an important administrative decision (after months of negotiations with local authorities) which has led to the opening of school premises during the afternoon (after hours) so these can be utilized as free common public spaces for initiatives and as social gathering areas.

Since 2009 within the Patras municipality there has been established special educational support for culturally diverse citizens via courses for immigrant children within 25 of the typical school programs as well as having 198 schools where there are minorities and 194 of these are primary schools. Such schools also have support programs for refugees, Roma and Muslim students.

On the other hand it must be noted the high number of underachievers for the difficulty inherent with the language but this is most notable with the Roma children.

To help overcome some of these difficulties the school system has to connect minority families to the school with the support of linguistic mediators.

The university of Patras is in the process of concluding a multicultural sensitivity research project to measure the intercultural position of staff operating in the education system. Further to this action the same university is offering short courses on discrimination issues, cultural awareness and intercultural issues but not always in a structured manner but often as electives within other courses.

Another institute also in cooperation with the local municipality with active involvement in intercultural issues is "Achaeco Institute for Adult Education".

It is also dedicated to education of adults but extends its actions to issues such as migrants, intercultural education and support for migrants and refugees. The center offers school support, lessons in Greek for those who use it as a second language .

KEMPO (Education and Care Centre for Families and Children) which is a charitable organization is in close collaboration with the education system of the municipality and has in its mandate the support of socially vulnerable groups, the development of actions aimed at the acceptance of diversity and other intercultural themes.

Culture and Creativity

Patras cultural life in the 19th and beginning 20th century was moulded by the international bourgeoisie (building of the theatre, museums) and conformed to European trends. Today, an ambitious summer music, theatre and dance festival invites artists from abroad and is held in beautifully restored Roman "Odeon". new archaeological museum which will be finished this year). The Patras Carnival, which is the most important and famous one in Greece (since 1826, but probably dating back to Dionysos festivities), is nevertheless yet not an intercultural event like the new carnivals at Notting Hill or Berlin. Important pieces of cultural heritage are the Karagiozis theatre, the new archaeological museum and the only Greek museum of the press.

Patras cultural scene is relatively open to the world also today but more could be done to give recognition, space and visibility to the cultures of different communities present in the city.

The municipality is considering a proposal by foreign students to organise a festival to present their cultures to the people in Patras.

The potential of culture as a vector of diversity and catalyst for intercultural communication is not yet fully recognized in Patras. Strategies for inclusion and opening to the local community – prominent in the field of education – are not yet sufficiently present in cultural policy.

Volunteer work and civil society

Patras has an extensive network of volunteer organisations – around 25% of the population have been volunteers at least once. Volunteer work especially in the context of the Olympic games and the Patras Carnival is often open to migrants (although some organisations find them often unqualified for their purposes). The municipality has set up a special office and a database to co-ordinate volunteers. The co-ordinating officer does this job also on a voluntary basis, on top of her other duties.

Organisations like the Red Cross, Scouts and “Young Artists” care for migrants, especially for the asylum seekers, sometimes they include migrants while they recognise that people in a precarious situation have little incentive for civic engagement.

Neighbourhoods and public space

There seem to be in Patras specific enclaves organized around ethnic origin while it was also clear that there was no reporting or evidence that conflict and or tension between the various groups was a problem. It was evident from the municipal office on integration and migration issues that much was being done to involve NGO’s, volunteer organizations, other municipal offices and services like the school system in working towards offsetting possible interethnic tension.

Having met the leading representatives from the majority of minority populations in Patras (Afghan community, Romanian community, Albanian community, Bulgarian community, Nigerian community- the Roma community was not present) it was not evident that there was any serious question of isolation and exclusion within the legally resident population of migrants.

On the other hand the same cannot be said for the illegally present population which had previously been perceived as a real problem as many of these people congregated within the old port area which is in the centre of the city. Such persons were seen as a source of conflict but this situation had been supposedly resolved. The method of ‘resolution’ was to move the whole estimated 2000 persons to the area of the new port which is about 2 km. out of town and therefore the ‘problem’ has been resolved because it is not visible. That this question has not yet found the appropriate solution.

Another question that needs still to be addressed in a concrete way is the great lack of cultural/linguistic mediators within the health care system. The regional representative for the ministry for health and welfare actually declared that no plan of action for the preparation and introduction of such persons within the health care system has been seen as necessary. In fact there appeared to be a substantial difference between the importance and effort being put into the immigration and intercultural issues by much of the public services sector but this same effort on the part of the health system does not appear to be present.

Possibly one of the most effective initiatives taken within the last year with respect to breaking down possible neighbourhood barriers has been the opening up of school grounds and premises

therefore producing many new open spaces for public mixing, playing together and developing intercultural projects within the artistic, musical, theatre spheres of action, sporting events therefore involving all persons within this newly found space which was never before available for civilian activities.

Such actions have developed the need for cultural mediators for facilitating the development of relationship building in particular within cultural activities and it is the university which helps to prepare such professionals.

The coordination by the above mentioned municipal offices there appears to be a good level of intra organizational understanding and support with very little apparent overlap and waste of resources.

Media and public perceptions

ESIEPIN (Association of Daily News Editors) is well aware of the role that the media has with regards to possibly influencing and or shaping the opinion of local citizens on intercultural and migration issues. Under pressure from public opinion, a Greek media took a decision to seek balanced reporting. For instance, when reporting on a offence or crime, they do not publish the nationality of the offenders to avoid nourishing xenophobia.

The journalists met indicated that they are doing their best with that regarding the reporting of news concerning migrants, refugees and migrant issues but sometimes their deontology conflicts with the requests of editors. There was evidence of this effort to address the problem illustrated above by the fact that they do have an internal code of regulation dedicated to journalists on intercultural themes. However, they consider that journalists are not always 'left free' to comply with this code of conduct.

One of the many projects set up to work within this above field is the project entitled [Sparda](#) - (Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes to realise the Diversity Advantage) mentioned above, and another is Praksis (Programs of Development, Social Support and Medical Cooperation) as well as others as indicated above basically for what might be seen as a new coordinated approach to the whole migration question originating from the municipality and its supporting and funding strategies which aim at involving those associations and so on that are demonstrating an active role within the intercultural and migration field.

After a research project carried out a few years back where Patras resulted being one of the cities with the most negative attitude towards migrants and of not having a correct understanding of the migration question within the area.

The Sparda association has set up its 'Media Cultural Workshop' with the aim of disseminating the correct data on migrant issues within the local population of Patras. The project hopes to involve all aspects of local life so that no inappropriate information on migration questions continue to circulate.

Within this project migrants are seen as co-workers and not as the target group therefore the project has seen the participation of migrant associations and NGO's to the media workshop indicated above and to other activities.

Another project to promote intercultural mixing and to fight inappropriate information capable of disturbing public life and creating discrimination is the 'Portrait of the City', and a photographic exhibition on the different citizens and aspects of life in Patras. The same group of associations are in the process of producing a documentary with the name 'We are all together'.

To further consolidate the activities to encourage intercultural mixing the municipality through its own offices and through the associations that it finances holds a yearly intercultural dance festival and other ongoing intercultural manifestations within the cultural and musical field.

Praxis puts into place interventions dedicated to the empowerment of socially and economically excluded and disenfranchised persons. Their interventions are extended to all groups, local and foreigners and it also includes the homeless, the Roma, victims of trafficking and street children as well as the illegally present persons.

The Praxis team in Patras is present from 2011 and has now become an important ally of the local municipality with regards the handling of the above category of persons and has set up, with municipal support, a drop in centre for health and social issues as well as free legal aid and temporary shelter. An outreach activity is present for food, clothing and other essential life support necessities most of which are principally utilized by the illegally present persons.

Business and labour market policies

In a frank discussion with the director of the Patras region Chamber of Commerce it was clear that this official organization was quite aware of the constant difficulties created by Greek law on migration which indicates that migrants must demonstrate precise monthly earnings to be able to remain in Greece. The director demonstrated that they are active as an organization in involving migrants within there organization, and companies are being encouraged to utilize the 'added value in language and culture' brought by migrants in an attempt to open new markets within their countries of origin. It was also declared that legal migrants work so well that the building industry in particular is very please to involve them and is actively sponsoring these persons to open up there own businesses within the trades and construction sectors.

The director indicated that they have no evidence or signs of intercultural conflict with the regular migrants and do put out written information on intercultural cooperation, signage in other languages as a way of safeguarding jobs and job security.

The chamber has not set up an office to monitor possible conflict situations but they do keep the question under surveillance as part of there normal official work. The charter which outlaws discrimination in the workplace still stands but 'now we have much closer collaboration with the municipality and this is a further help within the community on this question'.

The same cannot be said with regards to irregular migrants that were seen, by the chamber of commerce, as a point of present and future difficulties and problems because ‘these persons cannot find jobs, are not insured and cannot get residence status’.

Safety and policing

A number of stakeholders in Patras with regards to the intercultural cities program make a clear distinction between regular migrants, irregular migrants and the Roma population. The chief of police indicated that they do not have any problems or conflict situations involving the regular immigrants but do have within some of the 22 shanty towns occupied by the Roma populations some difficulties and presumably ‘dangerous’ areas to monitor especially between the Bulgarian and Greek Roma people. The rest of the city is a ‘normal place to live’ with people freely mixing.

The police department does not utilize third party mediators because they themselves are trained in mediation methods starting from their official entry during the national police training academy and do in service training on conflict management as well. On the other hand the department has an organized intervention program where 3 days a week the department is involved in taking care of the irregular migrants while they are within their local territory.

Conclusions and recommendations

A comparison with the last intercultural cities index analysis applied to Patras does illustrate the very interesting positive developments and changes basically right across the relevant indicators that have already taken place, are in the action phase at the moment and are in the planning and development program already accepted by the local municipality as a course of action within the near future.

With the last municipal elections held in 2011 Patras has openly adopted a clear commitment to the intercultural cities program. It has made more than one public statement on the question and adopted a public position statement as well as allocating a budget of 30.000 euro for the 2011 period and another 30.000 euro for the 2012 period for the implementation of its intercultural cities program and action plan which now involves a series on NGO’S and other community associations.

The municipal authorities have established a centralized service for migration questions within the city centre and have supplied a congruent number of staff to take care of all relevant questions as well as the development and maintenance of the official webpage on migrant issues.

The city has launch and is supporting a number of cultural, musical, festive, artistic and other activities that foster intercultural initiatives by honouring and financing acts that encourage interculturalism. A specific indication of this is the setting up of a dedicated body which has the mandate on intercultural and immigration issues.

The Patras education system has continued to elaborate and develop a number of initiatives within all levels of the system, including the involvement of the university in projects that aim at involving

and supporting migrant origin children but in particular their families within the school and in official education bodies. The university is also completing a research project aimed at understanding the intercultural capabilities and needs of teachers.

The opening up of school premises, after hours for the use of such children and their families has markedly increased the places and times where intercultural mixing has become possible. The municipality has also encouraged the private associations in the activity of offering language courses in Greek and in minority languages for both students and adults which has improved the opportunities available for learning.

The municipality has also encouraged the interaction between the various neighbourhood groups though encouraging each group to function as intercultural neighbourhoods to develop intercultural projects together. The municipality has adopted interculturalism as a criterion for the allocation of funds in support of such community based activities such as art festivals, sporting events, cultural events.

Many specific actions have been put into place by the municipality and sponsored associations with respect to being an 'active citizen' via encouraging the development of culture and language learning programs not only for migrants with regards to the Greek language but also for Greek nationals who desire to learn other languages.

The ADEP agency, as well as other financially supported associations, are part of the municipality's coordinated effort on the issue of interculturalism and migration and is a clear indication of the intention and motivation of Patras to continue with this intercultural cities building program.

Recommendations

It might be an important step to allocate a specific budget to this program not only for the 2011 and 2012 financial years but to have some sort of ongoing guarantee of financial support.

Patras city council might also want to invest some of this newly found motivation, effort and energy in developing a strategy able to get the quite large Roma population more involved within this new phase of the intercultural cities development. We suggest that the Roma populations are not approached as a separate entity but all efforts in this regard become just another aspect of the work towards the development of an intercultural city.

We would also like to encourage the municipality's intercultural services to develop stronger links to the health and welfare system which appear to be approaching the intercultural program of development at a different pace 'slower' than other agencies and associations which is clearly evidenced by the virtual total lack of cultural and linguistic mediators. The health system appeared to have a serious lack of statistical evidence of the use that immigrants make of the health care system and the difficulties that both system and clients are having within this intercultural interface.

November 2011