



## INTERCULTURAL CITIES POLICY BRIEFS

### Urban policies for intercultural centres and community engagement

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed an [intercultural approach to diversity and inclusion](#) (including migrant integration) which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to migration and cultural diversity. Its key elements are:

- Creating spaces and opportunities for deep interaction and co-creation between people of different cultural origins and backgrounds to build trust and realise the creative potential of diversity;
- Power sharing – involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in urban institutions - political, educational, social, economic, cultural;
- Fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil society organisations;
- Embracing cultural pluralism and multiple identities through leadership discourse and urban pedagogy actions;
- Managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for local development;

In the context of intercultural cities, this policy paper aims at giving methods and examples of good practices for promoting citizens' engagement, community empowerment and intercultural conviviality at local level. Cities require policies and projects that ensure the practice of equal rights for all, combat discrimination and racism, and actively promote constructive interaction between individuals and groups of different backgrounds, cultures and generations.

#### 1. Designing intercultural community engagement strategies

When designing such strategies, there are *common principles and features* that must be considered. They are related to the goal(s) of the strategy, the needs assessment process - which should include the analysis of the key stakeholders - the intended outcomes and results, the indicators for measuring the effectiveness and sustainability.

The key goals of intercultural community engagement strategies are:

- Promoting participation and dialogue;
- Giving voice to all members of the community, in particular the most isolated and underprivileged;
- Promoting trust among community members through spaces for relation;
- Empowering both the group and individuals.

The strategy design process should involve the following steps:

- Identification of communities' and peoples' needs;
- Development of an intervention methodology and impact evaluation;
- Targeting of concrete results to keep the engagement and the sustainability;
- Using professionals as facilitators of the process;
- Gaining support, leadership or involvement of the local government on the process.

The impact and effectiveness of the community engagement strategy can be measured using indicators as:

- Increased levels of participation and degree of decision-making (voting processes, participation in municipal processes, in local community activities, in associations of parents, neighbours, local businesses etc.);
- Reduced social tension or conflict; Decreasing isolation; Improving social conditions and reducing poverty; Improved access to services and resources; Peaceful coexistence and stronger intercultural relations;
- Sustainability and autonomy of the process, not depending on “external” support and professionals.

## 2. Forms of engagement– connecting to local diversity

There are different degrees of community engagement: the approaches may range from consultations on communities’ issues to engagement in finding solutions together and partnership in implementing the agreed solutions. The chosen strategy for community engagement should be appropriate for its goal and should take into consideration the cultural context.

- *Outreach strategies to draw in marginalised groups:* mixing and matching age, ethnic, cultural, social groups and sexes on cultural projects; cross-subsidising of commercial and community rates of charging for participation in events; door-to-door leafleting in minority languages.

Paris, France - Voisin Malin (Smart neighbour) is a social project that aims to help people living in poor and disadvantaged areas. The organisation *Voisin Malin* offers a peer-to-peer network of trained citizens whose aim is to help their new neighbours throughout the social integration process, and help create interpersonal connections. The “*Voisins*” or “neighbours” are selected for their communication and language skills, trained and remunerated. They have different cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins and many speak several languages, making it easy to approach recent migrants with limited knowledge of French. They work by knocking on doors, trying to reach everyone in the neighbourhood to give out information about various projects and services, and raise awareness about residents’ rights and opportunities. They provide information about housing, transport, recycling, access to education, social benefits, health, and cultural activities. At the same time, they enquire about people’s needs and feedback to the different agencies and companies in order to help adapt the services to the needs.

- *Partnerships, engaging local communities from early on to ensure ownership; building relationships with other civic organisations and social institutions, across sectors:*

Mondinsieme, Reggio Emilia, Italy was originally established as a directly city-funded centre which is now seeking to diversify its funding sources and move towards independence. It takes an eclectic approach including economic, social and civic inclusion, particularly of young people denied citizenship, as well as cultural activity. It has a particular expertise in intercultural dialogue, conflict management and mediation. Mondinsieme also fosters intensive dialogue among different sectors through making videos, disseminated via social media and DVD. It works transversally to disseminate intercultural practice in the city – through schools, museums, the health service, the media and business, seeking to influence and shape inter-cultural policies in the city. It has also taken a leading role in establishing Italian networks of intercultural cities and centres.

- *Working across issues applying a broad understanding of interculturality* to include marginalised social groups, the young and elderly, those with mental health problems, gay people, the politically persecuted etc.

Axis, Ballymun, Ireland is a regeneration-funded arts and community resource centre in a very impoverished and culturally barren area, which is de facto intercultural because it is socially rooted and based on democratic participation and ownership. It acts through high quality arts in partnership with social institutions and civil society – schools, the Youth Service, the council and marginalised groups. It has developed outreach strategies, concessionary community rates for hiring facilities and multilingual publicity to reach the widest range of people, traditionally excluded from the arts. The space has multiple uses and is cross disciplinary, including a theatre, dance, studio, music rehearsal rooms, a *creche*, conference centre, and drug rehabilitation. It also serves as a meeting place or place of worship for groups without their own space. Through mixing and matching diverse groups, who differ in age, gender, place of origin as well as ethnicity and culture – it also produces innovative cultural hybrids e.g. crossing traditional rural older women storytellers of the ‘Shanos’ tradition with young urban male hip hoppers.

- *Canvassing the local population* to change perceptions about the diversity of the area and need for services

*Neuchâtel* Multicultural Integration Service comprises many services within the Neuchatel Canton which are part of a nationally funded integration service. It provides a comprehensive service across the territory, which includes many intercultural centres. These fulfill social and cultural roles, offering information and advice and unified social services. Although part of a national network of state-run offices, the Integration Service is institutionally separate from the Immigration Office and so is happy to work with clandestine, as well as regular migrants, gaining their trust. It builds on a longstanding Swiss democratic tradition, of incorporating newcomers and giving foreigners voting rights, guaranteed by the Citizenship Charter dating from 1848. The office has run a campaign on identity (Neuchatoi) “What does it mean to live in Neuchâtel?” to make citizens aware of the diversity of the area and ensure their support for the service.

- *Canvassing migrants* to gather their stories and images to change their representation in the culture

Donostia-San Sebastian - Gipuzkoa Solidarity V. Bizilagunak / The Nextdoor family: The project gathers migrant families and Basque families together around a meal, in one of family’s house, in their private area; an incredible opportunity to exchange stories, experiences and get to know each other in a relaxed environment. These intercultural connections fight prejudices and stereotypes, while bridging the gaps between foreign-born people and natives. Simultaneously, this project fosters social inclusion among neighbours, leading towards a harmonic cohabitation.

- *Ethnographic research* involving local residents to engage in debate with the academic world, and inform policy

Mångkulturellt Centre, Fittja, Sweden is a multicultural centre, but its primary orientation is to the world of research and academia, although it is half funded by the municipality it sees its role as producing knowledge and instigating debate around its research findings and themes, disseminating ideas widely through professional training, conferences and seminars and exhibitions and library. It has also developed a national and increasingly international role through the municipality’s European networks and programmes.

### 3. Development of intercultural spaces and centres as agents of intercultural community engagement

An intercultural centre is any space where there is an underlying philosophy that cultural mixing is more desirable than separation, and a deliberate and sustained practice designed to bring this about by various means, and a determination to make cultural mixing and co-operation a higher priority than the integration of the minority into the systems and norms of the majority.

- *Highly structured and amply resourced intercultural centres initiated by local government*

This type of centres may include: professional centre with a large permanent staff and core-funded; a statutory service for inclusion across a territory; regeneration-funded arts and resource centre; a municipally-funded centre that promotes economic, social and civic inclusion across the city.

- *Informal intercultural spaces and centred arising from civil society initiatives and supported by local government*

This type of centres can take the form of a sectoral think-tank, an autonomous project-financed centre that seeks democratic participation and partnerships with migrant and other civic associations:

The Danish Centre for Arts & Interculture (DCAI) changed its statute during time from a public funded NGO supported by the Capital County of Copenhagen and by the Ministry of Culture, to a private NGO financed by project support from mainly public organisations and institutions. DCAI aim is to create a national platform which reflects the diversity of Danish society in the cultural sector, by building intercultural competence. The means to do this are through working with partners to make the presence felt of a new generation of Danish artists of immigrant background, who have grown up on the periphery of the five major cities. DCAI is seeking to change the structures of representation so that the life experience of the migrant suburbs is fully reflected in the culture which remains dominated by rural popular or urban high culture.

Artistically driven centres which seek to create a more pluralistic, post-colonial culture:

La Maison des Passages, Lyon was founded by a multi-ethnic cultural association which set up the centre as an autonomous space of cultural production with and for local people. Their interest was in researching 'hidden history': the colonial past, collaboration in the Second World War, racism and torture in the Algerian War of Independence, racism towards gypsies - subjects which have prevented second generation immigrants from learning of their parents' history and from which French school children have been kept in ignorance. So the collective seeks to challenge collective memory and change it, making it more critical and inclusive.

Centres promoting migrant artistic production and economic inclusion or learning of minority:

Associação Centro Interculturacidade, Lisbon is a self-managed, autonomous centre derived from a cultural association (ETNIA). Its focus is neighbourhood activism, and creating an intercultural economy by renting out workspaces on the premises for artists of migrant background, showcasing, and selling and touring their work, that enables them to build independent livelihoods. It also runs an art gallery, workshops and language classes in both Portuguese and Cape Verde Creole to foster reciprocal cultural learning/two-way integration and hosts diverse community dinners, celebrations and anniversary events.

The Lantern Centre, Dublin is a spiritual intercultural centre which seeks to create a community of compassion, by bringing together people and groups of different faiths and beliefs. Housed in an old Catholic school, it is a voluntary funded body, supported by Christian brothers in India and public donations, as well as rental income from letting out some of its rooms. It builds on the biblical tradition of hospitality to strangers and openness to people of any faith and none. Rather than forcibly confronting conflicts, it seeks to attenuate them by creating a 'third space', a safe place for encountering and fostering respect for difference and the gradual growth of awareness of common humanity.

#### 4. Engaging together in preparing and implementing intercultural integration strategies

Below are some examples of innovative actions where cities are actively supporting and working together with communities of all backgrounds in the implementation of intercultural strategies and actions.

Tilburg, Netherlands - "Enrich your Neighborhood": a genuine bottom-up approach to governance - *Migrants' participation in the community projects*

Tilburg municipality' strategy is to organize diversity when it is really necessary, when it is unavoidable and expects that the residents take the initiative. In this spirit, instead of going directly to migrant organisations when an issue arises, Tilburg prefers the bottom-up approach: when there is an initiative by one of the residents, the city immediately looks for possibilities to support it. In the context of the "Enrich your neighbourhood" scheme residents can receive some money for special activities in their own neighbourhood. This could be related to a barbecue in the street, a multicultural cooking evening, flower-boxes in the street, an extra swing in the playground, a neighbourhood party, etc. The neighbourhood committee will decide about approval. The city council has 39 seats, and only 4 of them can be regarded as migrant representatives. In Tilburg there are many projects related to diversity: Centres for migrant mothers, the Antillean platform Perspectiva, second hand shops for migrants, youth work for (migrant) youngsters without diploma and without a job, the network of Turkish academics, the Youth Ambassadors, the Volunteer of the Year, the language coaches, neighbourhood prevention teams, the Moroccan platform *Tadamon*, etc.

London Lewisham, United Kingdom - Local Assembly Programme - *Actions to support the community*

This programme started in 2008 and consists in a forum during which the Council talks to the residents, community organisations, police and businesses in order to create a sense of ownership and improve areas and neighborhoods (the 18 wards). The local planning groups organise the meetings, deciding time and venue. Meetings are usually held in community centres, for example in sports grounds. Positively, the attendance is going up, the forum is getting more and more popular and nowadays it counts 8 officers for the 18 local assemblies. The borough pays the charges of some services provided, such as housing, welfare and the officers need to monitor the quality of services. This service has given great results and seven years later, the community is much more active in the integration process and in offering assistance to newcomers.

Furthermore, community leaders and activists aim to engage people of underrepresented backgrounds in the social life and in the decision making process.

Each assembly has a budget of 15000£ to spend on projects which benefit the area. The assemblies are chaired by a counselor and they come up with a set of issues such as facilities for older people, programmes for younger people etc. and anyone can apply for the money as long as their initiative meets objectives and priorities.

This paper it is based on the following resources, which should be further consulted for more information:

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016803009c3>

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016803009cb>

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/sso/SSODisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680596a31>

<http://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/good-practice>