



# Intercultural Place-Making

*A Symposium was held at Università Iuav di Venezia in Venice, Italy on 21/22 June 2012  
It was attended by practitioners, academics and policy makers from 14 European countries as well as  
Canada, Japan, and the United States.*

## Summary Conclusions

*“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they  
are created by everybody.”*

*Jane Jacobs*

The role of intercultural place-making is the creation of spaces which enable easier and make it attractive for people of different backgrounds to find encounter, and to minimise those which encourage avoidance, apprehension or rivalry.

Intercultural Place-making is not about planning and built environment professionals being ‘nice to minorities’. It implies a much deeper recognition and engagement with all forms of difference in our cities, and a preparedness on the part of all who conceive, build, manage and use urban spaces and places

Multicultural planning practice established important principles such as the requirement of equality for all in the face of planning law; and for equitable and just treatment of all in its application. However the Intercultural City demands more of the people, the professionals and the politicians.

Whilst multiculturalism is predicated upon static notions of group identity, interculturalism expects a dynamic and constantly changing environment in which individuals and collectives express multiple, hybrid and evolving identities and needs.

In such a complex environment the place-making professionals need not only a new skillset but a new mentality, based around three themes:

- Principles
- Awareness and Skills
- Knowledge and Practices

which can be summarised as the learning of CULTURAL LITERACY in order to achieve a state of INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE.

## Principles

- Diversity of people, places, usage and ownership is not a problem to be managed but an advantage to be nurtured.
- Our object should be not to have spaces that belong to people but people who belong to spaces.
- Good design enables, bad design disables.
- Place-making professionals alone cannot realise change – they must cultivate inter-disciplinary collaboration as a matter of course.
- Inherent to interculturality are the ingredients for conflict. The art of good place-making is not to ignore or avoid them, but manage and mediate them as a creative process.
- Identity as the basis for the occupation and ownership of space is a short term expedient, but in the long term is a source of fragmentation and reductive contestation
- It is not to ask ‘what is the cost of doing interculturally-competent place-making?’ but ‘what is the cost of not doing it?’
- Good intercultural place-making should reach beyond issues of migration and ethnic diversity to embrace all aspects of difference in contemporary urban communities.
- The two most frequent barriers to new forms of place-making are prejudicial responses: “It cannot be done” and “It is too expensive”. The first is an error in design thinking. The second is an error in accounting practice

## Awareness and Skills

- The human brain is capable of multiple intelligences and sensory perceptions and requires rational and affective stimulation in equal measure. Traditional approaches to planning and building have denied most of these traits, thus excluding the majority from participation and reinforcing the power of the few.
- The most important skill for place-makers and planners is to listen to people, to their stories, to the way in which they use space and live their lives, and their aspirations. To then work with them to translate this into expert systems.
- The professional must always be aware of the biases inherent in their own education and training, and regularly seek to review and transcend them.
- Recognise that people express their feelings about their environment through very many means, but rarely will they use the language of the professional.
- Whilst the professional cannot become expert in all the languages and cultural traits of a diverse community, they can become expert in recognising the key ‘intercultural moments’ when communication is being sought and offered, and in selecting the appropriate medium.

- Don't take everything at face value – always seek out the hidden skills, resources and connections in a place.
- Preparing intercultural competent citizens and professionals cannot begin too early, and should be considered in early school curricula.
- The greatest gifts that professional place-makers can give to cities are neither plans nor physical structures, but their skills as facilitators and mediators of opportunity.
- Many of the best intercultural spaces emerge organically and unplanned and the art of a good place-maker is to know when to intervene and when to leave well alone.

## Knowledge and Practices

- Good intercultural place-makers cannot know the answer to every question but they usually know where to look or who to ask.
- They have the humility to recognise the limitation of their knowledge and the curiosity to challenge it.
- Engagement with people is not a one-off event but a constant process of listening, learning, designing, acting and re-listening – not a means to an end but the end in itself.
- Professional place-making teams, in municipalities and elsewhere, should constantly seek to enhance the diversity of their membership through training, recruitment and collaboration.
- They have no fear of a mistake or of reversing out of a wrong direction – place-makers are human too and good place making is based on empathy not infallibility.
- Place-making is an act of co-creation between citizens and professionals. They ask each other three questions:
  - What do you do already for your place?
  - What do you dream for it?
  - What do you pledge to do for it?

## Opportunities

The European Commission used the meeting to announce a number of new opportunities for intercultural place-making:

- It is in the process of negotiating the future of the Structural Funds. Presently there are strict categories of expenditure - infrastructure, heritage and services. In the future, funding for cultural infrastructure will be supported only if it is linked to strategic territorial development projects;
- There will be a future focus on cities There will be a quota of funding for urban development.
- There will be new urban development platform and a new of 'Erasmus programme' for city administrators.

- The EC will adopt new indicators for urban development which will include human development and cultural values.

## Good practices and further reading

- A selection of place-making project reports and practice guidance notes from the formative years of Intercultural Cities can be consulted here: <http://tinyurl.com/75bsd7n>
- The UNESCO Chair in *Social and spatial inclusion of international migrants: urban policies and practices* at the Università Iuav di Venezia (Italy) <http://www.unescochair-iuav.it/>
- *Sense of Place*, an example of the co-production approach to urban place-making in a multi-ethnic district of Birmingham, UK <http://tinyurl.com/blhfh67>
- *Surrey Canal*, a comprehensive, inner-city, private sector-led development project founded upon intercultural principles <http://surreycanal.com/>
- Designing an Intercultural Park in Melitopol, Ukraine. Project by an intercultural team led by Stadslab, NL <http://tinyurl.com/7ghvfau>
- *Intercultural Urbanism*, blog by Dean Saitta from Denver, USA <http://www.interculturalurbanism.com/>
- *What is this thing called Multicultural Planning?* By Mohammad A. Qadeer. A useful document for making comparisons between the Canadian multicultural method of planning and other methods <http://tinyurl.com/6t5tafw>
- *Design for All* is the intervention on environments, products and services with the aim that everyone, including future generations, regardless of age, gender, capabilities or cultural background, can enjoy participating in the construction of our society, with equal opportunities participating in economic, social, cultural, recreational and entertainment activities while also being able to access, use and understand whatever part of the environment with as much independence as possible: <http://www.designforall.org/>

## Further information:

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