

DGIV/CULT/IC(2008)05

25 March 2008

INTERCULTURAL CITIES

Joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission

Lyon, France

March 2008

Background

The city participating in the Intercultural cities programme is Lyon “intra muros”- the heart of an agglomeration including over 50 other local communities and almost 2 million inhabitants. Lyon is the administrative centre of the agglomeration, with “only” around 500 000 inhabitants. It is this smaller administrative unit that involved in the Intercultural Cities pilot.

This precision is important, because some of the biggest concentrations of immigrant population are to be found outside of this territory. These suburbs have played an important role in the urban history of France, but they are not part of the present project. Nevertheless, the “small Lyon” has also an interesting history and its own “immigrant neighborhoods”. It has 9 official districts, comprising vast housing estates in the western outskirts of the city and a fascinating inner quarter, the “Guillotière”, which has always been known as the “gate of the city” where newcomers traditionally arrived, and which is today a lively, colorful, cosmopolitan neighborhood.

Like in most French cities, the majority of the immigrant population is of North African origin, but this is difficult to judge by official statistics which remain silent about the origin of people holding French nationality. Nevertheless, the integration of second- and even third generation immigrants is a major public concern, especially since France became well known in the world for its suburban riots. In the absence of specific minority integration policy, integration is being taken care of by “urban policy”¹. In practice this means the public management of the most “sensitive” areas through urban regeneration and the development of a dense network of social services.

¹ <http://www.polville.lyon.fr/polville/>
<http://www.gpvlyonduchere.org/>

In the Duchere neighborhood of Lyon, after several decades spent on dealing with the problem of degrading suburbs, a new policy has been put in place aiming at the partial deconstruction of giant house-blocks and the construction of smaller housing units and public spaces in the hope of attracting middle class families and restoring the social fabric. The policy of “social mixity” is not really a revolution, it has been the target of many initiatives at least since the 70ies. It has always been a failure so far. The novelty of the present approach in Lyon is the dismantling of the large concrete housing estates and the intention to re-build the neighbourhoods as social entities, not as sets of buildings, through the provision of cultural and educational activities². The City Council is very optimistic about the future outcome of the “urban policy” in Lyon.

Although it would be exaggerated to say that the urban policy explicitly embraces and promotes cultural diversity as a resource for the dynamism and growth of the city, it is based on an intercultural approach acknowledging diversity as a fact and managing it through deliberate cultural mixing, in a positive way.

The intercultural outlook can also be found in the candidature of Lyon for the title “European Capital of Culture” in 2013³ based on the notion of Lyon as a city of confluences – cultural mixes over the centuries – which have created its unique spirit and heritage.

Projects and initiatives

The “Lyon – intercultural city” project benefits from a high-level political support involving several Deputy-Mayors with different areas of responsibility⁴. It has thus been conceived from the start as a transversal, interdisciplinary project.

There are very few NGOs in Lyon organised on the basis of a specific ethnic culture. Awal Grand Lyon – Association Berbere is an exception in this respect, carrying out a range of educational and cultural activities promoting Berbere culture but targeting people beyond the Berbere community.

The place of media

In the framework of a meeting with the press we had the chance to meet with numerous representatives of local media. Most of them represented small, alternative, often web-based structures⁵ and confirmed the lack of interest of big Media in intercultural issues. Despite the lack of resources - which was a general complaint – and the overall concentration of the media in the hands of a few societies, they seem to do an interesting and valuable job. They promise to be a strategic partner in the project if, as it is to be hoped, one

² <http://www.gpvlyonduchere.org/>

³ <http://www.lyon2013.eu/>

⁴ Adjoint a la Culture et au Patrimoine, Adjoint aux événements et animations culturelles
Adjoint Delegeue a la Politique de la Ville et de l’Habitat, Président du GIPIV (Groupe d’initiative pour l’Intégration dans la Ville)

⁵ Radio Pluriel, Info Carabien, Cap Canal, Réseau Banlieus d’Europe, Ecomundi
Traces etc.

of the main axes of work focuses on public perceptions of diversity and the development of an assertive pro-diversity political discourse.

The concept of interculturality

In Lyon there is a tendency – as is often the case – to classify “intercultural” work under the “cultural” heading. This is an ambiguous proceeding, since the term culture covers two realities that are seen still as distinct, despite of many years of intellectual efforts to bridge the gap. Institutional culture and popular culture are conceived, organised, promoted and experienced separately, although there are efforts to find linkage points. The “Cultural co-operation Charter”⁶ is one such attempt to encourage prestigious cultural institutions such as the Opera, the House of Dance, the Theatre etc. to open up to new art forms inspired by urban subcultures and to reach out to new groups beyond the usual middle class audiences. This approach, which has been active for around two years, has already yielded, albeit slowly, some results.⁷

Another image of intercultural is linked to immigration, a word which clearly evokes social problems today. “Sensitive urban areas” involving ghettoized suburbs, violent youth culture, drug problems, unemployment, and – the latest phenomenon – radicalizing identity claims, mark this side of the picture. Lyon city is not an exception, although it is in a relatively better situation than the Eastern Suburbs where huge housing estates are concentrated. These problems are not denied, nor exaggerated, they are seemingly treated as “normal” elements of reality.

There is an interesting change going on in the political culture, as attested by the transformation of the vocabulary. During many years, the only available word to address cultural diversity was “integration”. Today, partly because of a sensible deception with the results of the assimilationist policy, partly because of the pressure of the European Union, diversity, equal chances, and even antidiscrimination have become legitimate elements of the terminology. But the fight against ethnic or racial discrimination is still difficult to imagine in a country where ethnic and racial considerations officially do not exist. And diversity is perceived an interesting new concept, however void of content yet.

Strengths

The principal strength of the project is that it is strongly backed up by the political leadership. The leaders of the city have apparently realized that there is a huge potential there to be exploited and to work on. This is not an opportunistic choice, it is coherent with the city’s candidature for the title “European Capital of Culture” in 2013. Some previous acts and documents also prove that there is a long term engagement in this direction. Some examples: The creation of “Groupe d’initiative pour l’Integration dans la ville” and the service of “Mission Egalité”. Lyon was also the first city to have signed the “Diversity Charter” for non-discrimination in employment⁸.

⁶ http://www.polville.lyon.fr/polville/sections/fr/les_thematiques/culture/la_charte_de_coopera

⁷ http://www.polville.lyon.fr/polville/sections/fr/les_thematiques/culture/les_journees_nos_cu/

⁸ http://www.lyon.fr/vdl/sections/fr/vie_democratique/promotion_de_legali/charte_de_la_diversi

There are also promising signs to treat differently the problem of segregation, by re-building the suburbs and dispersing social housing within inner districts.

The city illustrates well the excellent French tradition of centrally organised social services. It has got strong, well organised and competent community services, ready to experiment and to innovate. It can also be assumed that there is a network of local grass-root associations, and it is also possible to build on their initiatives.

Weaknesses

Although poverty and social problems are not predominant – compared to other Western European contexts – it is clear that there is an issue there. Social services give account of growing radicalisation of immigrant youth and it is not certain that this new phenomenon can be fought against with the “old arms”. The strategy of trying to solve social problems with recreational activities, have showed its limits in the past, and there is no reason that it proves more efficient in the future.

At the same time officials speak about the gradual pauperisation of the inner districts. While social housing is actively promoted in these districts, more and more people living in privately own flats are obliged to leave their home because they cannot pay the increasing rent. The housing aid has been increased by 20 during the last 7 years. There is a danger that opting on the “intercultural image”, rather dull and not diversity related social difficulties will be forgotten, even veiled by big scale cultural projects. This might turn to be particularly counterproductive from the point of view of integration combined with a newly set up anti-discrimination agenda.

Opportunities and challenges

The candidature of Lyon for the title “European Capital of Culture” in 2013, the slogan of which “Lyon, land of confluences” proves that the choice of participating in the intercultural city program is not an accident. At the same time, as “intercultural” is easily equated with “cultural” it will demand a special attention and additional political will to transform cultural politics intercultural – and not the other way round.

The many interesting initiatives, programs and missions need clearly be channeled in a transversal “intercultural politics” that could serve for monitoring the transversal “intercultural outcomes” of the different projects.

The terminological changes denote a potentially interesting conceptual switch in French integration policy. The introduction of new expressions, like “equal chances” and “diversity” could be an opportunity to refresh mindsets. But so that it happens simply new words might not be enough. Diversity is still somehow a non issue, accommodating in a difficult way with the French republican tradition which describes the citizen as an abstract individual without gender, age or cultural routes. To change this situation, additional efforts should be made. The diversification of the 7000 City Council employees could be a start.

The intercultural project of Lyon could chose to address some of the economic challenges or opportunities related to diversity. “Place du Pont” and its environments in the Guillotiere district is famous for its “ethnic trade” not only in Lyon but well beyond, linking the city not

only in regional, but also into global business networks. This is certainly a potential, provided there is no ideological reluctance to associate the “commercial” with the “cultural”.

Finally, during our visit we heard a lot of interesting examples on new and innovative ways of exploiting the potentials of new and old forms of the media to support the diversity issue. However, we had the impression that journalist and militants of associations working in this domain are feeling pretty much alone in their fight against concentration and purely commercial approach of the media. These organisations could become strategic partners, on the condition that the partnership is real, i.e. based on common interest and not on dependence. The openness to diversity issues and media ethics of the school for journalism in the city is a big chance to grasp.

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerted action between three Deputy Mayors (equality, culture, festivals and events) - Clever use of the “Politique de la ville” – a policy instrument involving an integrated approach and targeted funding for the development of poor neighbourhoods - The innovative cultural co-operation contract with major cultural institutions encouraging outreach to poor areas, targeted access and participation measures, as well as interaction between “high” and popular culture - The innovative urbanism project at the “Duchère” could become an example for a new type of diversity-friendly urban development - Positive experience with mixed housing which has made this policy fully accepted - Existence of a network of community centres with a key role in intercultural education, communication and interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lyon’s candidature for European Cultural Capital will benefit greatly from a credible pro-diversity, intercultural strategy - Following the March 2008 elections the new city administration might wish to propose a more comprehensive, brave and innovative approach to integration and cohesion, based on intercultural governance and policies - Local associations, community media and journalism school are very eager to develop an intercultural co-operation platform - The operators of neighbourhood cultural/education centres lack international networks and broader perspectives: the project could provide useful support in this respect
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited presence of ethno-cultural associations whose function is to support the preservation of cultures of origin of migrants/minorities - for the “republican” tradition issues of multiple identity and diversity are still taboo - community and alternative media almost extinguished due to excessive media concentration - ethno-cultural composition of local authorities and administration non-reflecting the population diversity - very limited affirmative action in the fields of culture and education - limited financial capacity for intercultural projects: 99 % of the cultural budget of the city is “tied” in major cultural institution, with only 1% remaining for grassroots neighbourhood culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interculturalism is controversial in the context of the French republican tradition and may therefore fail to become a unifying term/platform for politicians, civil society and media and could fail to deal with governance issues (political representation of diversity, cultural rights) - the project may not be a priority for the new administration/coalition following the March elections (despite the fact that the Mayor and a part of his team remain) - if the partnership with civil society is not strong, the project could remain the exclusive “property” of the administration and fail to mobilise society in a broad and lasting way