



INTERCULTURAL CITIES POLICY BRIEFS

Language policies for the intercultural city

While in many countries local authorities do not have competence over the educational content, and sometimes over the recruitment of teachers, there are many actions they can take to foster the role of schools as intercultural spaces. This is an important element of local strategies for diversity and inclusion.

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 relation to language, the intercultural approach focuses on promoting multilingualism as a resource for education, business, tourism, cultural life etc. The provision of courses and other facilities for migrants to learn the host country language(s) is important, but it needs to be supplemented with activities which highlight the value of migrants' languages, and enable them not only to preserve and transmit these languages to their children and other members of the community, but also take pride in them as a heritage enriching the community.

The value of multilingualism

Language policies are never neutral, they often legitimise ideological choices and power relations. It can be difficult to convince people of the educational and economic power of exploring and valuing multilingual repertoires, especially in contexts where a monolingual mindset is dominant and where some versions of multilingualism continue to be viewed as a deficit rather than an asset. Cities should contest ineffective monolingual policies and reconstruct monolingual beliefs from grassroots examples of projects which make clear links between the languages spoken by citizens: home languages, host

languages, regional and minority languages and foreign/world languages. Whilst it can be difficult to 'sell' multilingualism as a resource outside of prestigious, employer-oriented contexts, it can often start by a commitment to effective host language learning for newcomers, and, once acquired, to use this basis as a means of exploiting the plurilingual repertoires of adults and children.

It is important to try and change erroneous perceptions regarding some forms of multilingualism as a deficit: a 'good' multilingualism (related to a few rich country languages) is deemed to be advantageous for mobility, jobs and learning, and a 'bad' multilingualism (related to languages of developing and emerging economies) is seen as an obstacle for second language acquisition and where parents who refuse to speak the official language at home are seen as preventing integration.

Such wrong perceptions foster persistent ethnic segregation and inequality (in Flanders for instance, 70% of pupils from a migrant background are the secondary education vocational track, and similar figures can be found for Germany). Badly informed ideas, contradicted by research, that practicing the mother tongue at home impedes the acquisition of the host country language(s) are the basis of restrictive educational policies regarding language use which underpin the denial of linguistic capital. Research also indicates that monolingual attitudes amongst teaching staff correlates with decreased trust placed by teachers in their pupils. This lack of trust negatively impacts on expectations of cognitive outcomes. Language asymmetry – giving superior value to some languages – is an important source of divides, conflict and undermines the feeling of belonging and cohesion in the diverse city.

Therefore it is important that the intercultural city develops specific city language policies which mobilise both the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of language. In particular, the city should:

- Make efforts to underline the value of all languages present in the city, for instance by giving opportunities of diverse language speakers to speak in their languages in public and cultural events, organising language cafés and other opportunities for linguistic exchanges.
- Multilingual speakers (including children) bring vital linguistic resources. We need to learn how to share these resources and move away from the assumption that the teacher 'has' to be in 100% control. Raise language awareness in mainstream classrooms. Create peer teaching and buddy schemes to support language learners. Involvement of parents is crucial for intergenerational language transmission. It is vital to communicate to immigrant communities the necessity and importance of maintaining, learning and using home languages. Giving visibility to immigrants' mother tongues helps achieve this, for instance through celebrating the European day of languages or organising "days of the mother tongue". Languages are the biggest step to ensuring integration and engagement. Lack of language competences poses serious difficulties for integration.

Les arTpenteurs are a multidisciplinary theatre company from Lyon. Working within a diverse neighbourhood, the theatre company approaches the languages of their area as an undervalued resource. The company's poetry project places languages in the public space. They start with workshops with autochthonous residents and migrants where people are encouraged to find poems or other texts in their language, and helped translate them in French. Individuals are trained to perform, and recitals

filmed (recordings available online). The experience forges links between participants, and fosters an increased sense of well-being and pride in the visibility of languages hitherto ignored. The website allows visitors to select poems, to hear it in its original version as well as in French, and to read both the original text and translation as well as biographical and linguistic information.

- Encourage schools to adopt multilingualist attitudes, supporting the acquisition of the mother tongue as well as the host country languages, as well as other languages, creating general interest among students in language learning and using creative learning methods making use of the mother tongue to support the educational role of parents and enhance subject learning even though fluency in the language of schooling may be limited. It is no longer useful to approach language learning in a compartmentalized fashion (first/second/foreign languages etc.), within a native speaker model which aims at full proficiency, but rather to foster transculturality, partial competences and pragmatic multilingualism in addition to specialist language learning.

Good practice from the city of Ghent was presented, where teachers were trained to exploit the multilingual repertoires of their pupils as a tool for learning. A five-year study in Ghent found that: children in the experimental schools scored equally well in the Dutch reading tests as those in the control schools; self-confidence of children in the experimental schools was markedly higher; teachers with a monolingual mindset before the study developed positive attitudes to multilingualism in the classroom.

The association DULALA based in Montreuil, near Paris (D'une langue à l'autre³) supports bilingual families and those involved in plurilingual education, home language maintenance and multiculturalism. Focused actions include work with kindergartens, school staff and parents, rolling out training for educators and child-minders. The association promotes bilingual storytelling and multilingual resources.

The Story Sack project is being carried out in Geneva, in a context where there are some 160 nationalities represented in public schools, and some 184 nationalities in the canton. The Story Sacks, which grew out of a British literacy initiative, provide a portable resource for children where children's books are available in multiple languages as well as resources which support general language awareness across multiple languages through a colour-coding system. The project engendered much voluntary support, and has positively contributed to the cognitive development and reading proficiency of children.

- Promote and diffuse good practice, which media can relay, e.g. by asking enterprises, cultural organisations for success stories. International co-operation based on the competences and connections of citizens with linguistic skills creates a compelling story where multilingualism is seen as an asset for local companies. Gathering data on languages and cultures is important for evidence-based policies. Cities should recognise the reality of data of linguistic diversity, and

allow the various services to access and use these data. Enhance cooperation between associations and local authorities. Try to hire staff with migrant languages; maintain a language database of employees. Encourage libraries to stock resources in multiple languages; Celebrate world and European heritage days.

LUCIDE is a network seeks to develop ideas about how to manage multilingual citizen communities. Through building up a picture of how communication occurs in multilingual settings across the EU and beyond, it aims to help institutions (councils, schools, hospitals) and local and national economies make better productive use of diversity as an economic resource and to strengthen social cohesion by fostering better communication and mutual understanding. The LUCIDE network has conducted extensive primary and secondary research on multilingualism in Europe's cities, as well as running seminars and workshops. It has published a series of city reports and toolkits on multilingualism which are available to download (www.urbanlanguages.eu). The toolkits are designed for use by all stakeholders in multilingual cities, and provide tips and examples of good practice in a variety of sectors of city life (e.g. health, education, economy).