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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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"Community empowerment and mediation from an intercultural perspective"

Barcelona on the 28-29 of September 2015

REPORT

1. Context

This workshop was the result of a collaboration between the "intercultural cities" programme of the Council of Europe and "la Caixa" Foundation and it focused on existing experiences with the aim to promote community empowerment under the intercultural framework.

The Intercultural Cities programme promoted by the Council of Europe since 2008 has focused since then on the development of the intercultural theoretical framework, and supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realize the diversity advantage.

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.

On the other hand and since 2010, "La Caixa" Foundation has been promoting the *Intercultural Community Intervention Project* that was set up to define and apply a shared model of community intervention in Spain, employing intercultural mediation strategies and key lines of action to generate innovative and sustainable social practices in the management of cultural diversity.

The ICI project is being implemented in 40 neighbourhoods of Spanish cities using a very specific methodology. The ICI cities that participated in the workshop are all members of RECI (the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities) part of the Council of Europe ICC program and also supported by "la Caixa" Foundation.

2. Approach and goals of the workshop

Fostering citizen's engagement and community empowerment through innovative approaches to better face the daily challenges of more diverse urban areas is a common challenge shared by many cities.

When we look at the practical experiences implemented in many European cities that are committed with the intercultural framework, we find a great diversity of approaches and methodologies. There is obviously no "a unique way" to work in order to promote community empowerment and intercultural conviviality at local level.

However, the goal of the workshop was not only to review good practice. As Bob White from Montreal University pointed out, good practice is great but might give the false impression that all we need are good ideas/ Indeed the problem is that:

- Not all best practices travel
- They do not address problems from a systemic point of view
- They also don't give us a method or a set of principles

So we agree we need best practices but we also need to identify key principles, common features and ideas on how to deal with issues like assuring the intercultural perspective, measuring the impact or how to gain political influence. This is why during the workshop there were some working groups discussing on these topics.

This report doesn't pretend to summarise the main content of each experience, but to highlight some of the main ideas from both the practices and the work of the groups that might be useful for any city or organization interested on promoting community empowerment under the intercultural framework.

Finally we have decided to add a brief annex on the XEIX project in Barcelona which was presented at the workshop, for two main reasons: a) It was the winner project of the Diversity Advantage Challenge of the Council of Europe and b) We had the opportunity to do a visit field around the neighbourhood and know some of the businesses involved in the project.

3. Community empowerment?

In defining the content of the workshop we didn't start from a unique and academic definition of what "community empowerment" means. To begin with, the concept of "community" has different connotations depending on the context, the country etc. If we use a quite general definition we could say that "communities" are groups of people that may or may not be spatially connected, but who share common interests, concerns or identities and could be local, national or international. In the context of the workshop, community was used to designate the residents of a particular city or neighbourhood.

The same definition challenge applies to "empowerment". We could say it refers to the process by which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives. Rappaport's (1984) definition includes: "Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives."

But who can be empowered? People? Communities? And who has the capacity to empower? Can someone empower others?

It is interesting to point out the action of "enabling", that implies that people cannot "be empowered" by others; they can only empower themselves by acquiring more of

power's different forms (Laverack, 2008). It assumes that people are their own assets, and the role of the external agent is to catalyse, facilitate or "accompany" the community in acquiring power.

But who are these external agents? What profile, skills and role do they have?

We can say that community empowerment is more than the involvement, participation or engagement of communities (whatever we refer for them). It is a process of re-negotiating power that explicitly aims at social and political change. Power is a central concept here. It recognizes that if some people are going to be empowered, then others will need to share their existing power (Baum, 2008)

But these are just some general ideas that might help us to fix a little bit the frames. But our goal was to see what cities and other actors understood by "community empowerment" and how this concept related to the intercultural approach.

An interesting thing about the workshop was the possibility to contrast some international experiences with the ICI project which has the ambitious goal of providing a specific methodology to promote community empowerment and intercultural *conviviality* in several Spanish cities. It is an intervention model based on the combination of two approaches:

- Theoretical Framework: the intercultural approach
  Promoting intercultural living together, equal rights and respect for differences, emphasising what people have in common (Prof. Carlos Giménez)

- Methodological framework: Community intervention
  Community Participation involves the three main agents of the local reality (local authorities, professionals and citizens) in shares of the "common interest" to improve the quality of life in a territory (Prof. Marco Marchioni)

The first day of the workshop focused on presenting different international experiences and the second day was dedicated to learn about the ICI project and its practical implementation in some Spanish cities. At the end of the two days there was specific time for working groups in order to debate and discuss on specific questions and to identify key ideas. The following is a summary of some of these debates and ideas.

5. Goals and targets of "community empowerment"

From the experiences that were presented at the workshop, we could see the diversity of approaches but also of objectives related to community empowerment from an intercultural perspective. This is why it's important to make a first classification of the practices depending on their main goals and targets.

On one side there are initiatives that focus on empowering "communities" understood as the residents and key players present in certain territories, mainly neighbourhoods that often share some specific characteristics: underprivileged areas with many social complexities and high level of socio-cultural diversity.

This is the "area" or working for the ICI project but also for some of the international practices presented during the first day.

Let's see examples of concrete goals of some of these practices:

- "To restore a positive dynamic in underprivileged neighbourhoods and to foster interactions and bonding between people as well as with local institutions and services"

- "Empowering inhabitants in underprivileged neighbourhoods and to build trust"

- "Celebrate and promote the local area"

- "To engage residents on solving issues that affect their local area and influence decisions on issues that are important to them"

- "To prevent situations of social conflict"

- "To promote intercultural *conviviality* and shared social development"

Then these projects have different methodologies and approaches, but they share a common "target" by focusing on specific and diverse neighbourhoods with social complexities.

On the other hand we find projects whose target is primarily a specific group (usually the immigrant population, ethnic minorities...) which is to be empowered to ensure their equal rights and opportunities (social, economic, political..)

Some of these projects also emphasize the importance to target the whole population to facilitate the "integration processes" and to promote interaction, mutual understanding and generating spaces of trust to "empower" the community to prevent fragmentation and segregation processes.

Let's see some examples of specific goals of these experiences:

- "To support immigrant associations and empowering migrant residents to know and make use of their participation rights"

- "To balance a democratic deficit: under-Representation of migrant inhabitants in decision-making structures"

- "Empowering migrant interest groups to work more effectively and get attention for their concerns on a community level"

- "To foster migrants' active participation in their local communities and the general society"

- "To involve people of social and institutional relevance in reducing social prejudices and stereotypes and to build an inclusive neighbourhood with the normalized coexistence of people from diverse backgrounds"

- "Increasing awareness in the host community about integration also meaning political inclusion"

We see this main difference regarding the experiences presented at the workshop, but we could also separate them regarding other criteria. For example depending on the leadership: there are strategies that are public policies led and managed by municipalities; there are projects led by NGOs or private organizations that might get some municipal support; there are projects that have a combination of different active actors like the ICI project (a private foundation, an academic team and local government)

However, we prefer to focus on the common principles, challenges and obstacles of these experiences, and try to identify key ideas and aspects from the debates that took place at the workshop that can be useful for other actors.

6. Common principles or features

What common principles and features we can identify from the experiences and the debates on the working groups? We can say that community empowerment is almost always linked to:

- Access to information and knowledge
- Identify community and peoples' needs
- Give voice to everybody, reaching the most isolated and underprivileged
- Promoting participation processes and dialogue
- Promote trust among community members through spaces for relation based on horizontal links

- Gaining influence on decisions about important issues
- Empowerment of both the group and individuals
- A concrete methodology and impact evaluation
- A need of professionals as facilitators of the process
- A consciences' of process and visualize it emphasising its symbolic aspects
- Mapping and taking into account what already exists and proper diagnosis
- Capacity to keep long term and sustainable processes
- A need to see concrete results to keep the engagement and the sustainability of the process
- Some simplicity is really desired as complex processes are enemies of engagement and sustainability
- The support, leadership or involvement of the local government on the process

Finally, communication plays a vital role in ensuring community empowerment. Participatory approaches in communication that encourage discussion and debate result in increased knowledge and awareness, and a higher level of critical thinking. Critical thinking enables communities to understand the interplay of forces operating on their lives, and helps them take their own decisions.

7. Challenges and obstacles

Many of the obstacles of the community empowerment strategies identified at the workshop are related to the complexity to fit some of the key principles and conditions for their success.

- Lack of time to reach the long term goals of the process
- Lack of clear methodology for working together that can lead to distrust and a difficulty to channel energy within the group
- Communication between different languages (not just language but conceptions and terminology) don't allow proper empowerment
- Professionals and community leaders might create dependency because when they disappear back to square one
- Resentment because some groups feel left out
- Creating too high expectations that are hard to meet
- Too much focus on specific and a small number of activities makes very difficult to reach a social change
- Complexity to prove or feel the results and when these are too "soft" and not related to some crucial needs (employment, housing, education, health etc.)

One final comment as a curiosity: many people pointed out the obstacle of not having enough time to consolidate the process, but nobody mentioned the lack of resources.

8. Measuring community empowerment

As always, a key challenge is how to measure the impact of these strategies. First of all it will depend on the initial goals we had. It is not the same to focus on improving needs like unemployment or housing than if we focus on other issues like participation, integration, sense of belonging or the level of trust within community members. This is why is so important to be clear from the beginning about what are the specific goals of these strategies. At the workshop, some of the general indicators that were mentioned were linked to:

- Decreasing isolation
- Increasing 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.)
- Reducing social tension or conflict
- Improving social conditions and reducing poverty
- "Normalisation" of diversity in public spaces and higher levels of positive interaction among residents with different cultural backgrounds (in squares, libraries, popular festivities etc.)
- 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

Some projects have specific indicators adapted to their goals and methodology. Sometimes indicators are too focused on the "process" and less on the real impact on people's lives. There is an obvious complexity to find clear indicators that allow proving and sharing in a direct and simple way the concrete benefits of some strategies. This is somehow "normal" as we are dealing with very complex issues that are not easy to measure. Sometimes people "know" and are sure about the positive consequences but are not able to measure and communicate them properly. More efforts should be done on this in order to confirm the positive results and to reach the supports to guarantee the sustainability of the projects.

9. The intercultural perspective

Participants at the workshop discussed about the intercultural perspective of these strategies to promote community empowerment. What does it mean to take into account the intercultural approach? What factors are crucial to assure we are promoting interculturality? The key principles of empowerment actions:

- Promote spaces for mutual recognition and to look for what unites us or brings us together (common objectives, interests, needs)

- See k to "Normalise" diversity (understood as the process to adapt spaces and resources to fit everybody's needs and profiles and to avoid exclusion)

- Focus on universal principles to assure equality of rights and responsibilities through a citizens approach

- Celebrate the common aspects should not mean not to talk about the differences when they are relevant, and basically to identify "what differences make a difference"

- Emphasise that everyone has a role to play on the community development

- Promote the important role of bridge-building or mediators

- Create spaces for mutual understanding, to foster intercultural interaction and incentivise the participation of some specific groups

- Focus on what kinds of spaces work (so they are intercultural) and which ones don't

- Involve media in providing an accurate image of the social reality, including all the members

- Giving people an opportunity to participate in activities outside their neighbourhood to help them acquire a feeling of belonging to the broader city.

There was an intense debate on the need to reach a complex equilibrium between differences and equality and when and why it is relevant to focus on them. Recognition of diversity and emphasising the common elements is always a tricky process and not everybody agree on how to do it. In any case it was clear that to ensure we are taking into account the intercultural approach is important to have clear goals and indicators that help us to know if we are promoting interculturality or not, as it happens with all the policies and local strategies.

10. How to influence at political level? What should be done to guarantee the intercultural approach has an impact on public policies?

There was an intense but short debate on the workshop so we came up with more questions than answers. But it was clear, once more time, that we should invest more energies to better "sell" the intercultural message by promoting a stronger link between professionals that are confident about the positive aspects of the intercultural approach and politicians and other key players who are not easy to convince.

Firs thing would be to achieve more recognition and interaction between professionals and politicians. There was a proposal to provide some kind of vertical mediators between these two groups to break the barriers.

Another usual point is to emphasise the need of a scientific approach that could validate the positive results interculturality, for example by showing its positive results when solving specific conflicts. Then it would be easier to get more interest and political support.

There is also a general agreement about the need to engage more referents and to build networks to reach higher impact.

There is also a need to have a more a more pragmatic approach by defining a policy message to generate a policy position. People on the ground don't necessarily think in policy terms.

Another option is to influence policies through mainstreaming innovation. But you have to be able to tell your story well with a convincing clear message, in a pitch or snapshot. A special skill to communicate in this way is really important (for example organising a two hour seminar to listen to your story and what have you achieved)

The need to engage all levels and departments of government to influence those areas that have the competences was also pointed out. However we know that Intercultural "contamination" always starts from one part of the body. It may start from the head, or the arm. The ICC tries to support those already contaminated within the local governments by providing useful tools, methodologies, an international perspective etc. On the other hand, the ICI project start contaminating from the grassroots. How do we connect between both approaches? Conditions can happen spontaneously but we can also push them along.

In any case, this workshop was a really useful experience to keep building a wider network of the "contaminated", but also to identify strengths and weaknesses and come up with lots of inspiring ideas to improve our work and keep on "contaminating" more and more key players.

Examples of community empowerment initiatives:

Paris, France - Voisin Malin (Smart neighbour) – An intercultural social enterprise in disadvantaged neighborhoods, a network of neighbours to promote cohesion

VoisinMalin is a social project that aims to help people living in poor and disadvantaged areas. It gives residents the possibility to build a better future, and to deploy their abilities in order to improve their lives and the neighbourhood's conditions.

This project was born in October 2010 and now runs in ten cities in the greater Paris area. The project's philosophy stresses the fact that inhabitants of disadvantaged areas have abilities and competences, which are not sufficiently recognised by the city and other organisations.

The organisation VoisinMalin 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 feed back to the different agencies and companies in order to help adapt the services to the needs.

For example, one of the missions is to enhance the cooperation with the city of Ris-Orangis. Here, Voisins malins encourage people to use the free cultural facilities, such as the media library and the cultural centre. Another mission is to spread information about the discounts of the "solidarity transportation pass". This pass has improved people's mobility in their daily life. Yet another mission is to help people understand and use the complex energy saving systems coming with the new social housing.

VoisinMalin aims to connect citizens and local services by using the local social and linguistic capital of residents themselves. The project encourages people to change perspective and to abandon the feeling of being second rate citizens; on the contrary, it helps people to rebuild trust in themselves, in their neighbourhood and in the institutions.

Since the beginning, VoisinMalin has launched 6 branches in 9 underprivileged neighbourhoods in Paris region and Lille. In 2014, 25 door-to-door missions were conducted on key issues for inhabitants: fuel poverty, living expenses and financial vulnerability, housing and neighbourhood environment, health, education, access to social rights, use of proximity services, etc. Nineteen operating partners helped us building those door-to-door missions, among which: social housing companies, utilities

companies and local authorities. 10 000 households (about 30 000 people) were met at their homes over the past 4 years; 4 500 households only in 2014.

Currently, VoisinMalin is at a turning point in its development. In the coming years they aim to:

- Operate in 20 underprivileged neighborhoods in the 6 main French urban regions.
- Put Smart Neighbors in a position to meet the 20% of the 4.5 million people who live in French underprivileged neighborhoods.
- Open 150.000 doors in the next 5 years (500.000 in 10 years).

The business model of the project is a guarantee of sustainability – the Voisins Malin are mostly funded by the commercial or social organisations offering services to the neighborhoods.

The main challenge is to be present in the 20% of the popular districts in order to have the legitimacy to weigh in the debates (concerning political issues in the popular districts) and also to operate new innovations that would strengthen the action of VoisinMalin on a local level. However, in order to achieve these goals, financial support is needed. Financial support, in fact, would assure us a proper study to select the various opportunities while considering the opening of a new branch. Moreover, financial support will considerably reduce the risk of a lack of starting investment.

In parallel, VoisinMalin is working hard on gathering multiple partners in order to spread the risk. Also by consolidating our economic model, this will help us gaining autonomy and independence.

There are several areas in which we would like to get better. For instance, we've identified a need to improve our IT systems as well as our communication tools.

Lastly, VoisinMalin project is not only improving "new" neighbours' lives, it is also enhancing VoisinMalins'. In fact, this project appears to be of great benefit on people's life both on a social level and on a professional level. On a social level, people can foster their social and intercultural skills, meeting new people and learning about their culture. These interactions foster intercultural and multi-lingual skills, which will benefit their professional career.

This project is an example of Diversity in Action, where inhabitants themselves build a new dynamic that creates links between the neighbourhoods and the services. Results are visible and tangible.

Donostia-San Sebastian - Gipuzkoa Solidarity V. Bizilagunak / The Nextdoor family

A meal: a way to create connections

The project "Bizilagunak: La Familia de al lado" started in 2012, inspired by a Czech organisation. The idea is to gather migrant families and Basque families together. The project operates on a local area, focusing on building relations among families within the same neighbourhood; the final goal is to build a net of connections that will strengthen the feeling of belongings, encouraging acceptance and social cohesion.

"The Nextdoor Family" project offers a perfect excuse to gather 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 Everyone can take part in this project, not necessarily a traditional family. In the enrolment process, families state whether they want to host or to visit; moreover one has to indicate the language spoken, food preferences, allergies, pets etc. After the enrolment process, families are paired and mediators inform the families about each other. During the paring process organizer takes care to pair similar families.

On the day "de la comida", the host family will cook a meal and will welcome the guest family. A mediator will be present and will coordinate the reunion until everyone feels at ease. Once the ice is broken, children will play together while parents will get to know each other's culture and habits. However, the mediator will monitor the gathering, possibly giving language support in case of misunderstandings.

The Gipuzkoa Solidarity conveys the idea that we are all Basque citizens. 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. In a word: equality.

The project has been a great success throughout the years; for instance, in 2012, 65 meals took place, whereas in 2014 already more than 230. More importantly, families continue to see each other even after the meal, this willingness to keep the relationship going is the witness of the success of this project.

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 group**s 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.

There are different **approaches** to the **budget**: from small grounds initiatives to strategic commissioning. It is the Community's job to include events is the area with biggest spending. It has been observed that this is the best way of bringing the community together and celebrating diversity and shared values.

In the following paragraph there are a few examples of **successful actions**:

- **Evening parents' forum** is linked to the assembly and it reaches out disadvantaged and isolated parents. In the forum, people meet and talk about their concerns which are then brought to the local assembly.

- **Online engagement** – an online platform, similar to an online forum, has been established. People log-in with their post code and talk to their neighbors, people living in the same street or area, and local area managers and councilors respond.

- **Festivals** are used to reach out minorities and those communities that are usually the hardest to reach. Organisers have tents to host people and they often use the word of mouth to spread the initiative, going around polling people.

- **Community consultations** are meetings where organisers talk about waste, recycling, or about which services should be cut.

L**ocal assemblies** and other tools are a fabulous way of creating supportive communities for people who would have been on their own in the past, struggling with issues such as urban planning or services.

Berlin-Neukölln, Germany Have a Say in Neukölln! – Nachbarschaftsheim Neukölln

An extremely diverse neighbourhood

Neukölln's objective is to empower residents to participate in political live. A community centre run by an NGO in Neukölln offers a wide range of activities for children and adults, sport, culture, education. One of the projects is "Have a say in Neukölln". They work on politics and democracy - topics in which most people are not interested in but they know the community centre because they participated in some activities.

42% of the residents or one of their parents were born abroad. Half of them have a German passport.

Migrants are underrepresented in decision-making, for instance in resident council there are only 20%migrants. Migrants vote 10% less than the indigenous people.

Two political scientists, one ethnologist and one educationalist take part in the programme. Since 2010, between 50 000 and 85 000€ have been allocated per funding period (three years).

The programme consists in inter alia:
- Basic training for participation rights. For instance, in each school two parents are elected as parents' representatives, they are told what they can do with this mandate
- Explaining to residents about the election procedure in community centres and various groups and talking about the practicalities of voting
- Advising migrants' interest groups to become more effective at the community level, to become local political stakeholders
- Campaigning for the extension of voting rights for non-nationals, at least on the local level
- Organising a Photo portrait exhibition "we are Neukölln" to counter the negative image of the neighborhood
- Raising awareness in the host community that integration also means political inclusion

The results are encouraging: 28 new members in the local decison-making bodies.

Still, obstacles remain: some of the host society members prefer that migrants are not empowered (eg headmasters), they think people should first assimilate and then be empowered, that they should not be told about their rights but about their duties.

Stavanger, Norway - *INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL NETWORK*
Events and Activities strengthen the sense of belonging

The **International Cultural Network** (INK) is an organization running in Stavanger whose main goal is to encourage social cohesion and integration while assisting newcomers. INK has been founded in 1982 and it initially counted 5 organisations, even if it has been growing (reaching today almost 80 organizations) INK has kept the focus on two objectives. First objective is to make **Stavanger more attractive for businesses** in a country where the culture is not very open to newly-arrived. Second goal is to help people with different backgrounds in the **integration process**. Minorities are encouraged to join the boards of different cultural institutions. To pursuit this goal, INK emphasizes the richness their diverse cultural background brings to the Norwegian community rather than stressing the differences.

The idea hidden behind the IKN's philosophy is to use **cultural diversity** as a way to bridge people from different countries into Norway. Stavanger, in this perspective, represents the international "capital of Norway", a city that welcomes refugees and migrants from all over the world. In fact, Stavanger's population is composed of 130.754 **inhabitants**; out of the total, 27.531 are immigrants. The percentage of first and second generation immigrants is of about 23%; whereas the national average is of 14.9%. This means that Stavanger has a higher percentage of diverse population compared to any other Norwegian city.

The network, composed of about 80 **organisations and associations**, represents minority groups and stresses the importance of establishing a sense of community through the organisations of events and activities. In fact, it would appear that the network organises about 700 **events** a year; some events run annually, whereas other activities are scheduled on a weekly/monthly basis. Some events are:

- On a weekly basis an **International Cultural Café** is organised. This event has been going on for 30 years now, and it is getting extremely popular, it gathers together people with different minority backgrounds as well as locals. During the event several activities are carried out and often the public library plays a fundamental role in promoting international books translated in several languages.

- The **language café**, instead, takes place in the public library, it runs twice a week and each session lasts two hours. This activity attracts many foreigners and newcomers who wish to learn Norwegian. Teachers are usually volunteers, for example retired teachers willing to teach Norwegian language. In order to take part in the language class, it is not necessary to sign up, all participants have to do is to show up. However, in order to attract a wider target group, classes are not theoretical but rather practical; for example, mock dialogues with a doctor, or general cultural aspects of the Norwegian society. Interestingly, the language café is perceived as a social event, a good way to meet and get to know people. The event is getting more and more popular; for example, the organisation expected 30 people for the first event, instead they

gathered 70 people. Nowadays, the café hosts between 100 and 110 people every time. The biggest ethnic groups that usually join the café are Polish, followed by Spaniards and Lithuanians.

- The **Children's World Day** is an annual appointment that gathers together children from 3 to 11 years old and their families. Usually it happens in March and it is always very crowded. During this day several activities take place, it is possible to hear music from exotic countries, taste any kind of food, make handcrafts, women can get henna painted, kids can get face paint while singing songs etc... This event gathers together people from all over the world and encourages minorities to keep their traditions and habits alive.

- Every year a **Seminar about youth** is held. In this occasion, experts talk about the risks young people run when they fall outside the society. Last year, for instance, the topics discussed were linked to what happened in Paris and Oslo: radicalism, new-Nazi groups and the extreme right wing. As a result, the international community, especially Muslim, experienced some kind of prejudices, stereotypes. Experts aimed to answer these questions: how to make our society safer? How to reach people that are falling out? What are the processes to bring them back? Ms. Deeyah Khan took part as activist in the fight to radicalism; she explained how extremism works and how it is possible to get out of it.

- During the **elections**, the IKN gave people leaflets to teach how to vote. In fact, after 3 years one has the right to vote but newcomers rarely know that. The flyer was translated into several languages to make it more understandable. The Venezuelan organization was very active in the election process, to the extent that several political debates were held in Spanish and not in Norwegian. Intercultural mediators' job is to introduce foreigners into the Norwegian culture and society. An obstacle is to get people engaged in cultural and **political institutions**. In fact, it is necessary that institutions mirror the ethnic variety of the population they represent. Instead, there is a lack of participation and cultural diversity in several fields: work force, marketing, in the decision making process etc. it is not possible to make a programme able to suit ethnic minorities if the representatives have the same Norwegian background.

- Upcoming events: the **carnival** will take place in February and the Venezuelan community will play music and children will play the piñata. In summer the **kite festival** and **kite workshop** are a highlight of the Stavanger's events season.

These events are extremely helpful in the integration process, insomuch they encourage and strengthen the relations between people from different countries. This is particularly important when some ethnic groups are facing problems with other specific groups. Such conflicts are often based on prejudices that have been inherited from their home countries and, as a result, migrants brought them in the host country;

for example, conflicts between Russian and Polish. Here, in Stavanger, organisers help each other to overcome the original barriers making the community stronger.

Barcelona, Spain - XEIX project for Diversity Advantage
A project to pursued social integration

The project is about fostering intercultural relations through the city Retail Associations that, together with other cultural and social organizations, become a vehicle of economic and social promotion of small businesses in their neighbourhoods.

The project was first implemented in 2012 in Fort Pienc, a neighbourhood with an important presence of Chinese families (18% of foreign population) where local businesses were closing down and taken up by Chinese family businesses. The city impulsed the setting up of a Retail Association to help revitalise the neighbourhood and manage community relations. In collaboration with the association, a strategic plan was prepared. It allowed the incorporation of the figure of intercultural mediators and interpreters in public services, initially, one expert in Chinese language and culture and, later, another working with the South Asian community.

They went door to door in the shops. In the beginning, it was hard to convince the shop owners that if they engaged this would benefit them, as well as the community. Little by little they became aware that joining the association can be a way of accessing first-hand information, and a way of improving the community image as persons who work and, most important, live in the neighbourhood and care about the place. Another challenge was to achieve interaction between them as well as with the local residents. To overcome these challenges the association organises activities for its members (annual and members of the Board meetings) as well as public events (fairs, festivals, etc.).

Originally, the goal was to bring together into the Retail Association diverse shopkeepers of different backgrounds to foster local development. Now the partners are also other kinds of organisations such as local immigrant organisations (Chinese language schools), institutions (Casa Asia, the Confucius Institute, Universitat Autònoma, etc), cultural facilities (National Theatre) non-profit organisations (ACCEM-refugees) and private enterprises. There has been an organic process of federating the local actors to foster initiatives, ideas and collaborations. The Retail Association has now become a catalyser of all the local initiatives, both economic (fairs, shopping campaigns) and cultural (local festivals, exhibitions). The social and cultural activities carried out in the neighbourhood involve all communities (e.g. the health fair involved ayurveda, acupuncture, blood donation and herbalist's stands) and promotes participation, interaction and mutual acknowledgement in public spaces.

The Retail Association is a place where all local shop owners can find useful information (in different languages), develop advocacy for common interests vis-a-vis the administration, and train to keep their business up to date with new technology (web sites, e-commerce).

The project works with various city departments and services. It aims to apply intercultural principles to areas beyond immigration, such as economic activities. It is a

challenge because there are more and diverse people involved in the project, and sometimes it is hard to reach an agreement but then it is powerful and innovative.

Bergen, Norway - EMPO Multicultural Resource Centre
The method and goal of empowerment

Empo-Multicultural Resource Center is a resource center for young adults and families with immigrant background living in Bergen. It is under the Church City Mission and is led by a team of 14 staff and 6 volunteers with a multicultural and interdisciplinary and broad knowledge and experience in promoting diversity, dialogue and participation in Norway's multicultural society. 10 of the 14 staff members have immigrant background. In 2014 Empo had 550 participants, and 67 children representing all 52 nationalities.

Empo started in 2005 as a platform for women with children to meet and practice Norwegian. It has since then developed into a resource center with 10 year experience of cross-cultural work with and for people of immigrant background

Empo is an abbreviation for «empowerment», which is both goal and method for the resource center. Methodically, Empos work is based anthropological knowledge such as cultural understanding and cultural analysis, combined with the practical approach of health and Social work. It offers several meeting arenas, courses, individual counseling, work in groups with role-play, discussions and parental guidance as well as social, cultural and professional activities.

The offers depend on the needs expressed by participants. Through sharing practical and theoretical knowledge, they assist and enable participants to use and develop their own resources, expand their networks and experience a sense of mastery and greater control over their own lives. They encourage participants to learn Norwegian and engage in other activities to meet local people and families. They also provide participants with information, networks, and a chance of taking initiative and becoming active in the local communities. They help migrants understand the codes of the society and the keys to the functioning of schools and other environments.

Empo collaborates with the Bergen municipality, the Introduction Center for refugees, schools, health stations, schools and other public and private sectors. It also acts as a link between the different migrant groups and the public sector, sharing experiences and expertise on issues in regards to integration, community empowerment etc. A good example is a collaboration they had with a hospital that once wanted to raise awareness on diabetes through offering courses to immigrants, as Diabetes was prevalent among migrants. They had challenges getting people to register for the courses and took contact with Empo for a collaboration and help on how to plan the course. Together they organized the course at EMPO with a very good turn up. The multicultural staff played a very important role to pass on the information.

EMPO initiatives such as women's groups, men's gatherings, courses, theme days and seminars, counseling, parental guidance, language and work practice, social networking across cultures - create space for dialogue, mutual understanding and change. And promote greater inclusion and integration into the society.

Logan City, Queensland, Australia – Building trust between police and ethnic minority communities
Opening Doors: The Logan Police/Ethnic Communities Partnerships Project.

MultiLink Community Services is a not-for-profit organisation in Logan City, Queensland, Australia which provides a range of settlement services to people arriving in the city as migrants or refugees.

There was a need for the project as Logan City was growing rapidly and overseas migration, coupled with the relatively young age of migrants, led to a low level of trust between Police and young people from emerging communities.

After some public conflict, parents and ethnic community elders asked MultiLink to facilitate a meeting between police, young people and parents/elders. This started a partnership between MultiLink, Logan Police District and people from more than 30 ethnic communities. In total, more than 700 people were involved. On average there were 20 community members and 10-15 police in attendance.

In some cases communities that had been in conflict in their country of origin were involved in the same workshop. However, at no time was that conflict brought into a workshop and an intercultural opportunity was created for people from those different ethnic groups to meet and form meaningful, long term relationships. Generally, running the meetings in a cross-community way would leave little time for each community to tell their story and bring diverse perspectives within the community.

The participation of high-ranking police was important to reinforce the Police hierarchy's commitment to fairness and non-discriminatory community policing and to get approval to pay police officers to attend as part of their usual working hours.

The project's results were a greater focus on community policing via relationships, stronger interaction between young people and police, stronger reliance on police and elders for knowledge and community intelligence. The same methodology and results occurred in the areas of child protection, education, health and family services.

How did they do it?
Sessions were held between 6pm and 9pm during which:

- the community provided information about their country of origin and migration history;
- a dinner took place so community members and police could build networks, exchange phone numbers etc. so that an ongoing relationship could be developed;
- The Police provided information about laws, domestic violence, driving, emergency services;
- Final Q&A are raised, announcements of initial plans of specific projects are made such as Police-Polynesian rugby games, police attendance at multicultural festivals,

community members involvement in police activities like sports and remembrance days etc;

- Some sessions took place in mosques, football clubs, churches, which was a critical tool for reducing barriers and offering opportunities to Police who usually would not have that experience;
- Cost – approx 3 000€ x 2 years for casual staff to promote the workshops and to pay for the food prepared by community members.