



PORTUGUESE INTERCULTURAL CITIES NETWORK ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2016

I

INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese Intercultural Cities Network (RPCI) was created in 2012 and currently involves twelve municipalities (Albufeira, Amadora, Beja, Braga, Cascais, Coimbra, Lisboa, Loures, Portimão, Santa Maria da Feira, Setúbal e Viseu), with four of them joining in 2016 (Albufeira, Braga, Portimão and Viseu). During 2016, the RPCI organized three meetings (March – Santa Maria da Feira, June – Portimão, December – Braga), three workshops (January – Loures, May – Lisbon, November – Amadora), one expert visit (October – Santa Maria da Feira), and one meeting with the High Commission for Migration (January – Lisbon). An Anti-rumour campaign was launched, and three municipalities (Amadora, Santa Maria da Feira and Viseu) are already on implementation phase. While several municipalities are close to deliver their ICC index questionnaires, four municipalities already did it, and now have an updated ICC index (Beja, Braga, Santa Maria da Feira, and Viseu). Finally, it is also worth mentioning that many of them also have been sharing good practices with other ICC members, through the newsletter as well as through the ICC website.

During 2015/2016, the RPCI main goals were threefold: i) consolidate the work being made in the RPCI, filling the gaps that have been identified; ii) promote new activities to develop by its members; iii) update information provided by municipalities, improving its diffusion and giving more visibility to the RPCI. With these in mind, it is undeniable that the RPCI has made significant progress in all of them, specially regarding its consolidation and the fulfilment of some of its basic tenets. Nevertheless, it is now reaching a new phase, in which the need to further stabilize the RPCI, making it viable and sustainable in the long run, becomes more pressing than ever. Ultimately, this will be the main challenge for 2017.

II ACTIVITIES

During 2016, several activities were organized by the RPCI, as was already mentioned. Next, we will briefly address the most “structural” ones, i.e. meetings and workshops, highlighting the main topics of debate and contention, the most relevant outcomes as well some of the challenges that were taken into account.

The 6th RPCI meeting took place in Santa Maria da Feira, in March 3. It was focused on the profound interrelations between cultural diversity, the economy and local development. Both Oliver Freeman (ICC expert) and Emídio Sousa (Santa Maria da Feira Mayor) emphasized the need to promote a virtuous encounter between culture and the economy, with migration and economic diplomacy operating as key dimensions, in order to trigger development processes that are more dynamic, innovative and socially responsible. Additionally, a number of RPCI members – Amadora, Braga, Cascais, Lisbon and Loures – had the chance to share some of the initiatives that were taking place at the time. The debate about the constitution of the RPCI into an Association of Municipalities was also addressed, and a clear consensus emerged suggesting the need to postpone this possibility to a mid-term future, as the necessary conditions to materialize it have not been achieved yet.

The 7th RPCI meeting took place in Portimão, in June 21. Ana Fazenda (Portimão Deputy Mayor) presented the Plan for Integration of Immigrants of Portimão as well as the Intercultural Week of Portimão, both initiatives that seek to illustrate how the intercultural idea can be translated into political and social actions implemented at the local scale. On the other hand, Mostafa Zekri and Elsa Vieira, both experienced scholars in intercultural issues, shared some thoughts about interculturality, cultural difference and diversity, from a more conceptual point of view, although some empirical evidence was provided by the latter presenter about the Algarve regional context, the impacts and dynamics of cultural diversity in the economic sphere. The regional framework was considered highly relevant, since Portimão was the first RPCI member coming from that part of the country, and there was a need to further understand its own dynamics. In this meeting, the results of an evaluation of the RPCI coordination (very good global quality) were also presented and discussed.

The 8th RPCI meeting took place in Braga, in December 13. Ricardo Rio (Braga Mayor) highlighted the importance of the RPCI to Braga's local development strategy, namely regarding the immaterial, subjective transformations that are required to achieve social inclusion. Isabel Viana (Minho University) contributed to the discussion with a critical reflection about intercultural issues, education and urban change. According to her, education is the central tenet of any sustainable plural (intercultural) and diverse urban space, within the current smart city paradigm. Next, Amadora, Santa Maria da Feira, and Viseu presented a diverse set of activities that are under development within the scope of the RPCI anti-rumour campaign. Finally, Cristina Palhares (Braga Municipality) and Daniel Pereira (Project team) presented a highly innovative, long-term, whole encompassing project - (Re)write our neighbourhood - that is being implemented in three public housing neighbourhoods located on the outskirts of Braga's historical centre.

The 1st RPCI workshop, January 25, Loures, was focused on the refugee issue. At the time, it was considered to be a very harsh and disturbing reality that was emerging before us, and the RPCI should deal with it accordingly. Both integration and communication processes in relation to refugees were discussed. Furthermore, Mónica Farinha (Portuguese Council for Refugees legal advisor) shed some light upon the legal solutions available to the different intervening actors in welcoming, relocating and helping to mitigate the impacts of the undergoing humanitarian crisis. The possibility of adjusting an anti-rumour strategy to this specific problem was also discussed.

The 2nd RPCI workshop, May 10, Lisbon, was led by Dani Torres (Spanish Intercultural Cities Network coordinator) and revolved around anti-rumour strategies. Dani provided a step-by-step framework, aimed at helping different RPCI members to devise and implement a strategy that while being context-sensitive is also capable of establishing links between different municipalities, hence having a more coherent strategy. In this sense, it was very important to acknowledge the existence of an already consolidated methodological framework and a wide array of anti-rumour practical experiences. A brainstorming session was also conducted. Not surprisingly, roma people were identified by most participants as the single most challenging socio-cultural, one that obviously

requires a nuanced approach, to which the anti-rumour strategy could provide some significant contributions.

The 3rd RPCI workshop, November 3, Amadora, was pretty much oriented to further intensify interpersonal relations within the RPCI, and further promote bilateral articulations between different municipalities. As such, and despite the fact that it included an interesting presentation brought by Susana Rosa (High Commission for Migrants), it was focused on a number of group exercises, that put members in contact and dialogue with each other. By the same token, the theatrical performance, involving all participants in the workshop, was also a rather ecumenical moment, highly relevant for the continuous process of consolidation of the RPCI that has been undergoing throughout 2016. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that António José da Silva Moreira (Amadora Deputy Mayor) expressed Amadora's willingness to assume further responsibilities regarding the RPCI coordination, in case a change in the orientation about its legal registration as an association takes place in a near future.

III

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This year has been highly successful, as it continued the trajectory of development that started in 2015. The last section of this report begins with a critical evaluation of the extent up to which key actions inscribed in the contract signed between the current RPCI coordinator and the Council of Europe were materialized. Afterwards, we put forth an exploratory prospective exercise for 2017 based on a SWOT matrix. This will help us to identify main lines of strategic thinking and action for the next year.

Five key actions were considered relevant for the work conducted by the RPCI coordinator during 2016. First, the finalisation of the legal registration of the network as an association. As was already mentioned above, this action still has not been concluded. This issue was directly addressed at the 6th RPCI meeting, and participant municipalities have decided to postpone the debate. Apparently, both the statutes and the (relatively low) number of RPCI members play an important role in this position. Nevertheless, this is seen by the current RPCI

coordinator as a top priority for 2017, and some initial steps have already been taken in that direction.

Second, organisation of the filling by member cities of the Intercultural cities index questionnaire and expert visits in some of the member cities. In this regard, the outcome has been very rewarding, as updated index results were made available to Beja, Braga, Santa Maria da Feira and Viseu, and various other municipalities will soon deliver their questionnaires. Furthermore, Santa Maria da Feira organized an expert visit, while Braga and Cascais already scheduled their visits in 2017.

Third, coordination with the ACM. In the beginning of 2016 (January), a meeting with Cláudia Pires (Local Policy Support Office coordinator) took place, in which the 2015/16 RPCI Action Plan was briefly presented, and the need to find a common ground between the RPCI and the ACM network highlighted. It was agreed that the RPCI needs more time to consolidate itself as a municipal network, before any further steps towards a more fruitful dialogue can be taken.

Fourth, organisation of network meetings during the year. This goal has been fully achieved, as the short descriptions provided above clearly demonstrate, as well as the more developed summaries that have been made available online at the ICC website on a regular basis. The possibility of having the 9th RPCI meeting in May 2017 is currently being discussed. Fifth, preparation of an annual progress report of the network. This document materializes the last action. All in all, four out of five actions were already concluded or are currently under development, and it is expected that this trajectory continues during 2017.

Through the use of a SWOT matrix, it is possible to identify some possibilities for 2017, as follows:

i) strengths - the acknowledgement that the RPCI is a unique network in the Portuguese context, allowing its members to share, learn good practices and experiences at the European level, and further explore the increasingly relevant dimension of interculturality in terms of public policies and strategies / the general consensus that the RPCI adds value to its members understanding of interculturality and diversity advantage at the local level / the implementation of

an anti-rumour campaign in various RPCI members (with or without ICC funding), thus strengthening the anti-rumour “brand” in the Portuguese context / a significant enlargement of the number of RPCI members during 2016, thus enlarging its territorial coverage;

ii) weaknesses – for a number of different reasons, a few RPCI members seem to have lost interest in its initiatives, progressively distancing themselves from a more engaged and committed stance / the bureaucratic nature of municipalities, generating very slow processes that become challenging in terms of coordination and management, as the filling of the index clearly illustrates / somehow the RPCI “model” seems to be reaching its zenith, as it no longer seems feasible to maintain the level of engagement and active participation of municipalities without reducing the number of initiatives that are organized every year;

iii) opportunities – Lisbon will held the ICC Programme 10th Anniversary Milestone Event, and this can be very important for the RPCI future, in the sense that it may create significant media buzz around it and attract municipalities that are not members / the continuation of a new cycle in Portuguese political life, arguably more friendly towards initiatives such as those promoted by the RPCI / an open call for the STEPS project may stimulate a further engagement of RPCI members;

iv) threats – the rapid expansion of xenophobic and racist political projects all over Europe may create an adverse atmosphere to the kind of intercultural agenda that is put forth by the ICC Programme as a whole, and the RPCI in particular.

In sum, all things considered, 2016 has been a very good year for the RPCI. Next year, will be mainly focused on continuing the trajectory of consolidation, with the legal registration of the RPCI coming to the fore as a priority, just like the organization of expert visits. At the same time, the RPCI also intends to actively contribute to the Milestone event by the end of the year. Furthermore, its members will continue to be encouraged to participate in ICC activities, as they have been doing since 2015, as well as sharing good practices and innovative activities with other ICC community members.