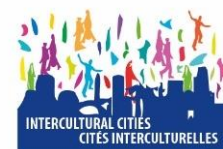


DESIGNING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN INTERCULTURAL CITIES

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Translated from the Spanish original

Diseño de una estrategia de comunicación
en las ciudades interculturales

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Written by Dani de Torres

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#01. Introduction

The number of cities committed to promoting policies from an intercultural perspective is still on the rise. More than 160 cities in different countries worldwide are now involved in the Council of Europe's [Intercultural Cities \(ICC\) programme](#). Spain's network of Intercultural Cities: [Red de Ciudades Interculturales \(RECI\)](#) includes more than 20 cities, with more joining every year.

These cities share a number of challenges on their "journey" to becoming more intercultural and inclusive cities. One fundamental issue that the majority find particularly difficult is communication.

How can interculturality, and why it is important, be explained more effectively? How should narratives be developed in order to reach different audiences, effectively translating the values and objectives of interculturality? Which communication actions can be promoted to help strengthen the impact of local policies and the numerous initiatives driven by civil society to improve coexistence, combat discrimination and harness the opportunities arising from diversity?

The elephant in the room cannot be ignored: how can the impact of populist discourse - which aims to generate fear, reinforce prejudices, stigmatise certain people or groups, or directly spread hate speech - be countered or reduced?

In recent years, both the ICC programme (through the publication of materials, training and workshops, etc.) and RECI have been working on generating content, resources and practical tools to help cities construct effective narratives.

More recently, various cities have signalled a more specific issue, relating to the process of communicating narratives rather than creating them. In other words, knowing how to create content and messages is key, but so is improving the way an organisation transmits the messages: its communication actions.

As such, this guide aims to go beyond an in-depth examination of the criteria for creating content (although this will be covered to a degree). The ultimate goal is to provide ideas, recommendations and practical proposals to help design a communication strategy. The strategy seeks to improve local governments' capacity to construct - and above all better communicate - intercultural narratives.

#02. From a commitment to interculturality to the need to construct intercultural narratives

The significant efforts intercultural cities have put into designing and promoting various policies have come to the fore in recent years. But in contrast, little time or energy has been spent on creating intercultural narratives, and even less on communication strategies.

This is not to say that cities have failed to create stories on social media, write press releases or give public presentations sharing their policies and initiatives. Rather, it refers to dedicating some degree of time or resources to creating an appropriate narrative; one that is adapted to the context as well different municipal departments. Specifically, this means defining objectives and different audiences, and constructing key messages from different fields and contexts that help promote interculturality. It ultimately involves designing communication strategies that can serve as a framework for defining objectives, a methodology and actions - both internally and externally - to take a quantum leap into a theme that has not been given the prominence it deserves.

Unfortunately, the evidence of toxic narratives is clear: they act as kindling, sparking outbreaks in certain cities. Social media stokes the fire, spreading the narratives and giving rise to discrimination and racism in all its forms. This makes it more important than ever to influence narratives and citizens' perceptions; shifting towards a discourse based on alternative values and objectives.

Before examining more specific content on how to design a communication strategy, it is important to remember some of the more salient aspects of constructing effective intercultural narratives. The best way to do this is to look back over previously published materials from the ICC programme:

- [Daniel De Torres \(2020\) 10 criteria for the creation of effective alternative narratives on diversity](#)
- [Ophelia Field \(2021\) Policy brief "Migration and integration: which alternative narratives work and why?"](#)
- [Carla Calado \(2021\) Policy brief "Inclusive communication".](#)

What does the term “narrative” mean?

In the context of a communication strategy, the concept of “narrative” can be defined as a way of presenting and interpreting events and/or realities (either existing or potential). The aim is to promote a viewpoint or particular approach based on specific values and ideas.

Ophelia Fields’ paper refers to the [“narrative initiative”](#) project, which defines a narrative as “a collection or system of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief.”

The narrative is based on a conceptual framework communicated through stories, messages and words. Together, these elements convey values and ideas; and in order to successfully capture the attention of the intended audience, they must also provoke emotions.

In the context of intercultural cities, narratives - in the form of stories and messages - are a particularly important tool, drawing from specific values and principles. They serve to frame and define (and also reinforce) the set of policies being implemented to promote interculturality.

Narratives are created, developed and adapted through policy, the media, education, art and culture – and now also algorithms. Narratives are everywhere, and they all influence us in different ways. Some attempt but fail to capture people’s attention; others have an intense yet isolated impact and rapidly disappear; and some will have a stark impact on millions of people’s way of life, lasting decades.

The role of cities in creating narratives

Many cities believe they lack the capacity to create narratives, or even have an influence on existing narratives. This stems from the idea that a narrative is principally disseminated by the mainstream media, social media and other online spaces, for the most part by people or actors with a strong political, social, cultural, and above all economic influence.

But cities in fact have more of a capacity to influence narratives than is often thought. There are notable differences between the perceptions of residents in cities within the same country (and even between those closer geographically) on various themes including coexistence and diversity.

Obviously, the context, history and profiles etc. of a city’s residents give rise to different perceptions, but the policies being implemented also play their part, as do ‘unconscious’ narratives created by institutions and the media, as well as proximity. This could be daily life in different parts of a city, in educational, cultural, sport or health centres, markets and town centres, bars and businesses, or the work of a number of entities, organisations and associations among other actors, as well as the local media and other influential local people or actors.

Indeed, cities are a hotbed of different narratives. They are where influential values and ideas from fields beyond the local intermingle with other, more locally rooted values and ideas.

Generally speaking, from an intercultural perspective, cities are home to several realities, experiences and

initiatives which can contribute incredibly valuable stories and testimonies to create and reinforce intercultural narratives and these stories have the power to have a much greater impact on more people's perceptions than they do at present.

Converting these realities into intercultural narratives requires work. The reasons why this work may not be carried out are diverse: from scepticism that any real impact can be achieved (which in turn dampens interest in investment) to a lack of knowledge or skills. And in many cases, a lack of any real desire to construct and communicate narratives that a considerable number of political (and advisory) staff believe could create more problems than opportunities.

This latter belief is in fact one of the worst strategic mistakes cities can make. When there is no investment in creating and communicating narratives that reinforce the values, objectives and actions deemed necessary and the entire 'narrative' space is left open to others, sooner or later, it will be necessary to communicate - reactively - to counter the other stories. The issue lies in not knowing how to do it effectively. Messages are received, but they are distorted, and if there is no known available narrative frame (to define them or make them meaningful) the impact is lost.

This is why it is so important that intercultural cities champion the strengthening of communication, seeing this as another responsibility embedded in the commitment to promoting interculturality. Without considering aspects of communication and perception, can cities even be considered intercultural?

#03. Key aspects of creating intercultural narratives

This section provides a brief review of the content found in more detail in other documents published by the ICC programme and RECI. Prior to entering into the communication strategy design process, it is important to recap certain aspects that should be considered when constructing narratives.

Why is it important to refer back (albeit briefly) to these key aspects? The idea (and recommendation) is that prior to embarking on communication strategy design, the "narrative frame" (as referred to in this document) of our intercultural city must be well defined.

The narrative frame can then serve as an umbrella for the set of narratives and content of our communication actions. The narrative is what explains - generically - why it is important to promote interculturality; what are the challenges; which values and principles the actions promote; and the imagined shared future which makes this "journey" worthwhile.

It is crucial that each city defines its own narrative frame. This is because whilst values and principles may be shared, and the majority of challenges may be similar, the narrative must be connected with the people who live in the city. Copying and pasting a narrative from one city to another may sound appealing. But it simply does not work. Another city can undoubtedly serve as inspiration, but the impact of a narrative stems from the way it connects to a city's specific and unique context and residents. As such, nothing is more important than

building the narrative on the foundations of the experiences, ideas, values and emotions etc. of a variety of people and social actors in the city.

Lastly, it is important to stress that many types of narratives exist. Some aim to reinforce a pre-existing - as yet consolidated - narrative, whilst others start from scratch. Some are clearly what are known as counter-narratives, which principally aim to dismantle or lessen the impact of another pre-existing narrative.

Intercultural narratives are a blend of all these things. Some cities will have an existing narrative on interculturality (though it may not be the majority view), whereas in other cases there will be a need to start from scratch, taking an approach to communication that reaches further than an aligned audience. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases there is a clear motivation: to attempt to counter toxic narratives and prevent them from becoming entrenched and influencing the perceptions of the majority of the population.

The following list includes some of the criteria that should be considered when creating narratives. The list is by no means exhaustive, and the items are not obligatory. A more in-depth examination of the content in the aforementioned documents (as a minimum) is crucial.

- **The importance of knowing how to listen**

One of the most important elements of the design of any communication strategy is knowing how to listen. Not listening well from the start represents a barrier to effective communication. Which issues are people concerned or anxious about? What steps can be taken to ensure that people who find it difficult to make their voices heard are listened to? This is precisely why it is important to dedicate time and energy to developing spaces and channels where people can be heard effectively – beyond voting periods (for those in a position to do so).

- **Starting from an appropriate frame of reference**

If a strategy for responding to the spread of populist anti-diversity or anti-immigration narratives consists of reacting on the defensive or only complaining and arguing the point from the perspective of the posited conceptual framework, the results will be two-fold: not only will the message have less of an impact, but it could actually reinforce said framework. Starting from a new frame of reference means adopting a proactive, leadership-based attitude, setting the agenda with a new value-based focus and alternative ideas.

- **Inclusive, proactive and positive focus**

Narratives will be more effective if they are inclusive and will not be perceived as being intended for certain groups or minorities only. This also means paying close attention to the reality and contribution of people who are more direct targets of negative narratives. On the other hand, these narratives should offer positive and stimulating proposals; ones which do not further reinforce polarisation or an us-them perspective.

- **Honesty, coherence and complementarity**

Narratives should be in line with actions, that is the policies implemented, actions carried out, and the way things are done. Narratives are understood as an important complement to policies. Without this level of coherence narratives will be weaker, and honesty is sacrificed. This may seem an obvious point to make but it is still very necessary to underline.

- **Aggregate, cooperate and gain a consensus**

If narratives are constructed on the basis of aggregation, cooperation and consensus between different social agents, the impact will be stronger. In times of polarisation and a tendency towards fragmentation, developing spaces and processes for dialogue and collaboration is fundamental. This way, a basic consensus can be reached on certain concepts and simple shared objectives, which anyone can then use to develop their own strategies.

- **Defining objectives and target groups**

The most decisive factor in creating effective narratives (and subsequently designing communication strategies) is having clearly defined objectives and a clearly defined target audience. In the absence of a clear definition of the hoped-for changes, or the intended audience/stakeholders to reach, it will be impossible to evaluate the impact (or not) of the narrative.

- **Content**

This guide is not intended to provide in-depth examples of content: other documents providing a significant amount of information on this are available (see the aforementioned references). Rather, it aims to highlight how important it is to invest energy and resources into the creation of content. Because even with the best of intentions, it is possible to make things worse. The main recommendation here is training. This is fundamental to learning about the criteria and tools and developing skills in effective content creation.

- **Critical thinking, emotion, interaction and the visibility of diversity**

Making an impact requires more than data and rational arguments. Content must be stimulating and persuasive. This means it should also evoke emotions, awaken curiosity, question stereotypes, or focus on common or shared features, amongst a host of other potential criteria. It is particularly important to look beyond the media impact and be aware of the importance of promoting critical thinking (on prejudices, discrimination, the concept of culture and identities, etc.), as well as spaces of interaction, dialogue and cooperation. Narratives can be created, or be given impact, in a number of ways; one of which is directly experiencing and creating them.

- **Effective communication channels and voices**

The impact a narrative has on the various pre-defined audiences will also depend on the profile and legitimacy of the person conveying the message. To target young people for example, it is important to think about which profile type will best capture the attention of this particular audience and effectively transmit the message. The same is true of different channels, spaces and communication tools. The message should be adapted to the channel: it could be transmitted via social media, a press conference, or in a participatory workshop.

- **Repeat and repeat**

The only way for a narrative to achieve a definite impact is to ensure at least some of the audience is familiar with it. This requires two fundamental elements: the message must have the capacity to capture attention in the first instance; and it must be repeated several times. A narrative may well be effective, but if it only reaches the audience once it will be forgotten after a few days. On the contrary, the toxic narrative strategy is based on repeating messages which may seem simple but have in fact been crafted and analysed specifically to make an impact.

- Evaluation and impact

Creating narratives with an impact is complex enough and demonstrating whether they have indeed had an impact is even harder. Evaluation is not always a priority, but it is important to go beyond counting the number of “likes”, media references or event attendees. Devoting resources to designing an evaluation system (and the relevant indicators) helps to assess results and impact (albeit indirectly); for example, by observing shifts in attitudes.

#04. From creating narratives to designing a communication strategy

Focusing efforts on creating narratives and communicating them well are equally important in ensuring the messages reach the intended audience in a manner tailored to them. This is where strong skills in effective communication comes in. It is therefore necessary to devote time and effort to designing a communication strategy. Failure to do so will result in improvised, reactive communication, which for the most part will not achieve a positive impact. It could even result in the intervention having the opposite effect, actually making things worse.

Interculturality is a complex and sensitive subject. Perceptions play a vital role because they have an impact on important issues such as equality, human rights, coexistence, identities, discrimination and social cohesion, among many others.

From the concept of interculturality to principles; and from principles to narratives and messages

It is important not to ignore the fact that the concept of “interculturality” in itself communicates little. The majority of people will not recognise the deeper, more complex meaning behind it, instead understanding the concept at a superficial, limited and distorted level.

For this reason, it is recommended that the interculturality concept should not appear in the majority of narratives and messages. This should not be seen as admitting defeat. Conversely, it is a case of opting for a pragmatic approach, adapted to the audience. In certain contexts, the concept of interculturality (or interculturalism) will indeed be necessary and relevant, but in others not.

Fortunately, what we are most concerned with is what we understand by interculturality, rather than the concept in itself. This is why it is important to focus on the principles of interculturality, because they form the core or basis of our narratives.

With the exception of some variations and nuances (there is in fact no single agreed definition of interculturality) there is a certain level of consensus (at least under the ICC programme and RECI framework) on the principles that better explain and clarify what interculturality is all about.

Notwithstanding an emphasis on three or four principles, there is broad consensus on the following: interculturality relates to promoting equal rights, duties and opportunities for all people; respecting, recognising and valuing diversity; developing spaces and opportunities for positive interaction and creating shared links and a sense of belonging; and promoting dialogue and participation.

The concept may also be continually adapted through identifying what interculturality attempts to prevent or tackle: discrimination in any form (based on origin, ethnicity, religion, physical traits, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), segregation, exclusion, homogenisation, etc.

The definition of interculturality can further be refined through the examination of what various concepts mean to us, such as diversity, culture, identity, coexistence, citizenship, etc.

Finally, (and this point is particularly relevant to audiences) the opportunities and benefits of interculturality from a social, cultural, linguistic and economic perspective, etc. can be highlighted.

The objective here is not to develop the concept of interculturality, given the number of existing documents from the ICC programme, RECI and other countries worldwide (in the academic field, from cities themselves, and various civil society organisations, etc.) providing such content, enriched with different viewpoints and nuances. These nuances are sometimes as much to do with each one's interpretation as intercultural principles, and also the relevance or priority given to each, which undoubtedly has an influence when it comes to prioritising which policies to promote.

All the same, it is important to highlight the sheer plurality of potential messages and stories that can help to transmit and communicate one or several key concepts of the intercultural approach.

Key elements to consider prior to designing a communication strategy.

Before taking an in-depth look at the communication strategy design process, three premises considered to be fundamental to success should be highlighted:

- The level of political commitment required to launch a communication strategy on an issue is rarely considered (from a communication perspective). In other words, there may be a political commitment to implement policies from an intercultural perspective; but not to support the design of a communication strategy. Why? Because it is seen as something which is “better to do, without much explanation”. This attitude is in fact more common than often thought, with little awareness of how contradictory it is to be in favour of interculturality, but against explaining what it is and its benefits. It is also clear that the decision to not support communication on the subject may stem from an erroneous or superficial understanding of the concept of interculturality.
- Another important criterion is having previous experience in the design and implementation of policies promoting interculturality and inclusion. This is not to say that communication should not be taken into account from the start – far from it. Rather, that if communicating interculturality is already a complex task, it will be all the more so if there is a lack of experience in policy practice. In such cases, it would be a good idea to pause before designing a strategy, starting with training and a reinforced commitment prior to designing a city's intercultural plan or strategy.
- Lastly, it is important to have devoted some time to building a “narrative frame” for the intercultural city, identifying the challenges faced in the present, and envisioning a better future. This narrative should propose solutions based on intercultural values and principles and can be used to inspire and encourage actions from local public policy as well as other social actors.

#05. Main stages and actions of communication strategy design

The communication strategy design process should begin when: experience has been gained in designing and implementing policies promoting interculturality; the required level of political commitment has been reached; and an initial “narrative frame” on the importance of promoting interculturality in the city has been established.

This should be done in stages. The following schedule is proposed, including the different phases and actions included in the design of a two-to-three-year communication strategy. This is a generic proposal based on both the logic of communication strategy design and the specific context of intercultural policies. It should ultimately be adapted to each context. Each local authority will have varying levels of commitment, and different resources, professional profiles and social contexts.

The guide aims to provide a useful starting point, giving an idea of the set of variables which should be taken into consideration, thus acting as a stimulus and inspiration to trigger actions.

Phase 1 Preparation and building momentum

This stage involves decision-making and implementing the actions required to ensure the core elements of communication strategy design are in place.

The implementation team: a driving force

Whenever a strategy is being designed, there should be a team ultimately responsible for leading, driving and coordinating the process. Drawing on experiences (especially negative) from different cities, the implementation team should (at the very least) include people from the department(s) responsible for driving the intercultural agenda, as well as staff member(s) from the local authority’s communication department.

One thing is clear. If the communication department is part of the process but is not committed, it will be difficult to achieve the desired impact of the strategy in future. The level of political commitment is key here, as well as the dynamics and working culture of the local authority at a technical level.

The size of the communication department will vary based on the size of the city and its municipal structure (from 1 to 20 people, for example). It will also depend on its position within the governmental structure (generally linked to the council, but in some cases more disconnected or decentralised). In certain local authorities, the press team may be quite distant from those working on more strategic or institutional communication.

Either way, it is recommended that the people in the communication team (who are part of the strategy implementation team) have close links with the council office, with responsibilities for both strategic communication policies and working directly with the media.

It is envisioned that this implementation team (subject to variation across different cities) could be made up of

around 5-7 people:

- Management from the department chiefly responsible for promoting the intercultural agenda
- Intercultural department technical expert
- Communication department management
- Communication department technical expert (from the intercultural department, if this role exists)
- Technical expert from central communication/council
- Technical expert from the press office (if this role is separate from communication)

This implementation team will be supervised at the political level by both the councillor leading the intercultural agenda, and the communication manager or council office itself. People in this team will have a different level of involvement in the day-to-day running of the strategy design. The implementation team are the driving force. This is where developments in the strategy design process will be shared and agreed.

Strategic training

Part of the complexities of this process is making sure that the total sum of narratives and messages (and the way they are communicated) are effective and achieve positive results. This is not an easy task. Above all, because the subjects are so complex and sensitive that minor nuances can make the difference between achieving a positive or negative impact.

Generally speaking, the people working in the department leading the intercultural agenda will not be communication specialists, and vice-versa, though some larger cities may have a role encompassing these two knowledge areas.

It has been observed that some campaigns, in spite of the best intentions, have resulted in a reinforcement of the very stereotypes or prejudices they wanted to dismantle. There have also been instances of communication actions where, in a context of no pre-existing media “noise”, messages have ended up triggering the most toxic of media storms.

This is why it is crucial to provide initial strategic training to the “extended” implementation team, which includes other profiles who will be very much linked to the communication strategy design process. Staff working in communication can be immersed in interculturality, and intercultural staff can be likewise immersed in communication. It should be noted that this is not an exchange but relates to training on the criteria for communicating content through an intercultural lens. In the absence of training, subsequent work may well fall short of the required level of rigour.

There are differences to be expected between local authorities. Some will need only one-off training sessions, whilst others may require more intense assistance and support. The recommendation is, at minimum, a 4-6-hour training session.

Defining a plan of action for strategy design

Once the implementation team (charged with the strategy design) has been established and received initial training, it is time to move on to a definition of the methodology for the strategy design. This will result in the approval of a plan of action, including:

- Defining a schedule for the various phases of the process (for example, 4-5 months for the drafting and approval of the strategy)
- Identifying the key actors who will participate in the process
- Identifying the different actions and tools required to design the strategy

Lastly, a point which could have been included in the first section but has been included here because the implementation team will need to make an important decision: Is any external support needed for this process? This may be training for a few hours, but may also go as far as defining actions, methodologies, approaches and content. Some local authorities may not require any external support (or may only need it on an ad-hoc basis) but for others, it could be an essential part of developing the strategy.

Phase 2 Diagnosis: What is the starting point?

When embarking on the design of a strategy intended to achieve change, it is strange how little concern is given to something as fundamental as knowing the starting point. If the situation is unclear at the start, how will it be possible to discern any changes?

Before starting on the design, it is important to have an in-depth understanding of four fundamental questions:

- Citizens' perceptions in general, and specifically those of different profiles and groups (above all groups who find it difficult to have their voices heard) on issues related to coexistence, diversity and the principles of interculturality.
- A critical review of current communication from the local authority with an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of communication from an intercultural perspective. This should answer the following questions: Where, and from whom, does communication come from? Who are the targets of communication actions? Which content is being communicated, and which is not? This includes everything from the formats, content, languages and channels used for communication, to the capacity to reach different audience profiles and groups, etc.
- An analysis of the current social context (along with a modest forecast of potential future scenarios). The analysis should identify key challenges from the perspective of interculturality and communication, meaning the strategy can be framed in a particular context (e.g. the existence of significant media noise on certain subjects; an increasing "normalisation" of populist discourse from certain political representatives and media outlets which influence the population's perceptions; or an increase in discrimination in certain contexts such as access to housing or for reasons of ethnicity and origin, etc.). Ultimately, this is about mapping the social context in question.
- The key actors involved in the design of the strategy, both internally (different municipal or national departments) and externally (actors with the profile, experience and knowledge of the process involved). A particular emphasis should be placed on identifying actors who should be considered because they have until now been under-represented in communication actions.

A definition of the different ways this diagnosis can be carried out is not required here, as it depends on the context of each local authority as well as the information available (or not). Some cities, for example, have data available from periodic surveys of citizens about their perceptions of such issues. Others do not, but may well have information available on different levels (province/county, autonomous community, etc.), or information from other research organisations (universities, civil society organisations) that could be complemented by more qualitative data obtained through work in neighbourhoods, municipal services, institutions, educational centres etc.

This type of diagnosis should in fact be part of an ongoing process. Contexts are constantly changing, whether due to local factors or external, more global circumstances. Actors who can help gather more information may be added (a collaboration with a university, for example) and existing spaces from various initiatives can be used to debate or reflect on coexistence with service users, neighbours, young people, older people, immigrants, Roma population, etc.

What is important is to have an initial diagnosis which provides a fuller picture, without negating the need to actively listen to the population and critically analyse the messages being communicated.

Phase 3 Defining objectives, audiences and communication channels

The importance of objectives

Undoubtedly, the most important factor for a successful strategy is having well-defined objectives. Uncertainty leads to objectives being defined in an overly generic or ambitious way. This will then run through the whole process, affecting coherence, motivation, and ultimately the impact of the strategy.

First, there should be an analysis of the results of the diagnosis. From there, an evaluation of, and agreement on, the priority actions derived from the analysis. This question is key: What are the desired changes to be achieved and within which timeframe?

It is advisable to define the objectives to be implemented based on dialogue and consensus between different actors. The implementation team's initial proposal should be used as a starting point, leaving space for debate, adjustments and final approval.

The best way to do this is to make a rough list of all the objectives expected to emerge from the diagnosis, which can then be refined and prioritised in the final proposal. This list may differentiate between:

- The potential overall or generic objectives of the strategy (e.g., better communicate the principles of interculturality in order to reach a broader, more diverse audience)
- Potential, more specific objectives based on the priorities which emerged from the diagnosis (e.g. raise awareness among certain profiles such as homeowners to prevent discrimination; improve access to information on services and other key issues for certain groups; and the need for improved collaboration with certain media outlets to make them aware of some realities, offering a more positive image in line with the actual reality of coexistence and diversity, etc.).

It may also outline potential objectives based on whether the desired changes relate more to:

- Internal aspects of the organisation (e.g., the need for training for different professional profiles, mainstreaming intercultural narratives in different departments, etc.).
- The external impact, meaning the changes hoped to be achieved through communication actions among the target audience.

Using this initial brainstorming of the potential objectives of the strategy as a starting point, ideas can then be ordered, categorised, grouped, adapted or ruled out. Then, in the end, it will be possible to specify a smaller number of objectives: all clear, and aligned with the schedule, resources and level of commitment gained.

The link between objectives and defining an audience.

The definition of objectives is directly linked with identifying the desired target audiences. All objectives should have an intended audience; therefore, these two processes should be carried out simultaneously.

In all likelihood, the diagnosis will lead to the emergence of a group of audiences considered to be a priority in achieving the desired objectives. There are a number of potential audiences, and they can be categorised in different ways. Audiences could be segmented according to whether they are native to the country or have a migrant background, or defined based on age, gender, place of residence or professional profile, etc.

Another important way of categorising audiences relates to people's perception of (or position on) diversity and interculturality. For example, different groups may be classified based on their level of alignment (or not) with intercultural narratives and values:

- ✓ **Aligned and motivated:** this would be people and actors with whom there is some level of contact, who are part of the same networks and collaborative spaces and as such are aware of the city commitment to interculturality. They may be professionals from different organisations, entities or facilities, etc. or even other municipal departments.

In general, this profile is aware of – and shares – the narrative. As such, these people or actors can, from the outset, be counted on to share and actively transmit the messages from communication actions and campaigns.

- ✓ **Allies:** Unlike the previous group, this group will not have direct knowledge of the policies or city's commitment to interculturality. However, their values and ideas are aligned with those in the narratives, and it is therefore more likely that the narratives will be shared and disseminated.
- ✓ **Ambivalent or undecided:** The position of this group is less clear because they do not share the narrative and values as a whole. However, depending on how the message reaches them, they may become more or less aligned. This audience is likely to be the majority, and it plays a key role in narratives' capacity to have a more or less meaningful impact.
- ✓ **Adversaries:** This refers to people or actors who do not share the narrative and will not contribute to

disseminating it. Or if they do, it will be done in a critical (but not radical) manner. In some cases (depending on the message type) they may find some common elements or values, and in others they may hold a more critical or opposing position. It is important to include this audience profile, adapting and working on content that could have some level of positive impact.

- ✓ **Opposition:** This group does not share the same view and is actively waiting for the smallest opportunity to position itself on the opposite extreme, doing so in an antagonistic way. In some cases, this audience will be directly motivated by populism and hate speech.

Lastly, once the target audiences have been decided upon, it is important to not only identify them, but also check where they are and the most effective way to reach them.

How to ensure the message reaches different audiences

It is not possible to use the same media or channels to communicate a narrative intended to reach a diverse and transversal majority of citizens, as the one used to target a very specific profile (young people, allied social actors, journalists, businesses, etc.).

Once the audience for the message has been defined, an analysis should be carried out to identify the most effective channels to ensure the message reaches its intended recipients.

In some cases, one sole medium may be chosen (for example, the media) but in the majority of cases, a mix of different strategies and tools should be used (media and social media, direct communication in different places or in-person meetings with specific profiles from that audience, circulating materials or communication resources produced, etc.).

For the time being, the following is proposed: make a list of potential channels and resources and identify people or social actors considered to have greater legitimacy and influential capacity. This will yield an improved impact.

In the future, when defining the specific actions to be implemented, elements can be chosen from this list for the various audiences, channels, resources and/or messengers deemed most suitable for each action (campaigns, awareness-raising activities, presentations at events, interviews in the media, etc.).

Phase 4: Content

The communication strategy is not the place for defining the content of the various actions that may be implemented in the coming months or years. Objectives and priority audiences should be outlined, along with any actions linked to the process, which should make clear the required framework, skills, criteria and resources. This can subsequently be used to draft the communication actions decided upon.

In this sense, it is crucial that the communication strategy includes some criteria for the design of narratives and messages. Other resources and documents are available which could be helpful here.

Preliminary work to create the “narrative frame”

Some content is considered essential for the strategy. Specifically, the narrative frame on interculturality in the city in question. In other words, the frame is the story used as a starting point, in some way summarising the values and principles – as well as the challenges and the future envisioned through an intercultural lens, outlining the “journey” towards achieving the desired objectives.

As mentioned at the start, prior to designing the communication strategy there should be preliminary work on defining the narrative frame for the city in question. This does not mean the narrative must be present in the actions implemented; but it should serve to inspire and be used as a reference. This ensures that the key ideas and starting point do not get forgotten. Consequently, the set of messages and content created for future actions should be in line with the narrative frame. They should to some extent reinforce, enrich, complement and ground the narrative in different fields and settings.

The narrative should be worked on internally and also externally. The starting point is dialogue and collaboration with different actors and profiles, and it should have a significant level of consensus so that numerous people and actors identify with it, question it, and are committed to it.

Drawing on the content of the narrative frame

Before designing a communication strategy, an initial exercise is recommended, consisting of establishing and adapting the narrative frame to different audiences. This will identify the actions, channels and tools required to ensure that the narrative reaches these audiences effectively.

This exercise should be done later, when the different communication actions to be implemented have been established (e.g., awareness-raising campaigns for certain profiles). This is why it is crucial to do the initial exercise, providing a succinct answer to the question: How can the narrative frame be communicated effectively to different audiences?

Doing this exercise results in being better prepared to implement the set of actions specified in the strategy in the near future.

This is a question of specifying what the content of the narrative frame will be in three different documents:

- **Content developed from the narrative:** A one or two-page document containing: a clear explanation as to why the city is championing interculturality; the challenge or challenges it aims to tackle; the values and principles underpinning the intercultural narrative; and what the process or “journey” towards interculturality entails and which actors it involves (in some cities, this text may be found in the introduction to intercultural plans or strategies).
- **Story summarising the narrative:** A text document (maximum half a page) in the form of a story, summarising the content of the previous document. Key values and ideas will be identified, and it will have an emotional component, grounded in the context of the city (this should not be a copy and paste exercise from another city, and should include elements linking it to the local reality).
- **Glossary of concepts linked with the intercultural narrative:** The final recommendation is to work on a document with a list of key concepts linked to the narrative frame (e.g., diversity, culture, identities, coexistence, citizenship, inclusion, discrimination, intersectionality, racism, segregation, assimilation, multiculturalism, interculturality, transversality, narrative, etc.)

This glossary, which can be added to and enriched with new concepts and nuances on an ongoing basis, means that the narrative can be complemented by definitions of concepts. This in turn can be useful for creating and developing narratives and messages for actions. But above all, it serves as a tool for reaching agreement on, and sharing, the meanings given to concepts from an intercultural perspective. Concepts which are often used by people or organisations – without really being sure of their meaning. This is in fact one of the main barriers to effective communication. What exactly do cultural diversity, equality or segregation mean? If the answer is not clear, there is little point in discussing the issue, given that the audience may have a very different viewpoint to our own.

Adapting the narrative frame to different audiences

The second step of this exercise on communicating the narrative frame proposes adapting the narrative to different audiences. For example, it may be adapted to groups previously identified as “allies”, “undecided” or “adversaries”; or to potential audiences such as “young people” or “journalists” from the general media. (Obviously, audiences can be further filtered by other characteristics by the profile of young people, the type of media, etc.).

This exercise entails filling in a table, as shown below:

| Narrative frame | Allies | Undecided | Adversaries | Young people | Journalists |
|--|--------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Content of the initial narrative frame | | | | | |

In the table, the initial narrative used as a starting point can be adapted to the different audiences. It is important to consider the values, interests and concerns, etc. of each audience, and carefully choose the key messages to be communicated. That can then be used to choose the stories, experiences, references, metaphors etc. considered to be the most effective in communicating the messages to each audience.

In this exercise, it is a good idea to first identify three key messages for each audience and leave the process of working out how to “translate” these key messages into a narrative format for later.

[Grounding the narrative frame in different municipal areas](#)

The next step in the exercise is one of the most necessary and most important and should be done when designing the communication strategy: grounding and adapting the narrative frame to the different municipal areas and departments.

If there is a strong commitment to making the intercultural approach more mainstream, investing time in the capacity to communicate is crucial. This means generating narratives that explain interculturality from the perspective of sport, culture, education, city planning, sustainable development and human resources within local authorities, amongst a host of other spheres.

An example would be the department of culture deciding to implement a policy to tailor the libraries’ stock to reflect the city’s cultural diversity. If this policy is accompanied by an effective narrative explaining the core reasons and objectives to different audiences, it will have a much greater impact.

However, if there is no narrative frame adapted to cultural policy available for the city, it will be harder to create effective communication actions and reinforce the impact of the initiative. This could, for example, contribute to raising awareness among different actors (for example, other facilities believing they do not need to adapt to the sociocultural diversity of the city).

It is important that the population is familiar with the narrative frame and the key values and ideas it is based upon. If familiarity is lacking, this specific communication will not chime with the overall frame and could also be incoherent to a degree. Cities with a disparate or incoherent approach in communication from different departments on issues related to diversity are not uncommon.

The communication strategy should outline the methodological approach to adapting the narrative frame and building what could be termed “initial” narratives for each area. These narratives could explain what incorporating the intercultural perspective into sport, education and city planning policies actually consists of.

“Initial” has been stressed here because the construction of narratives is not a static task, carried out at a certain time and considered final. Narratives that help to explain the importance of promoting intercultural principles through education or culture will be very diverse. Over time, more narratives will be created from different fields and actors, based on the specific themes and aspects relevant to each. Nevertheless, there needs to be a “starting point” for the exercise in grounding the narrative frame in each area.

To summarise, it should be possible to explain different departments’ policies based on the answers to the following questions:

- To what extent does it improve equal rights and reduce or prevent discrimination?
- How does it give recognition to, and place value on diversity?
- In what way does it encourage positive interaction and coexistence?

In order to ensure the narrative frame is grounded in different departments, it is recommended that the department leading the intercultural agenda facilitates the process of creating transversal narratives: offering support to other departments, creating shared spaces of reflection, and providing examples of other cities with the collaboration of social actors, experts, or other profiles with experience in the same.

The process of grounding the narrative frame and creating different initial narratives for each department could include:

- ✓ A document for each department (maximum two pages) describing what incorporating intercultural principles in this field (education, culture, sports, communication, etc.) involves.
- ✓ A document (maximum half a page) with the “initial” narrative highlighting three or four key messages in story form, to communicate the intercultural lens of this field.
- ✓ A document with a list of examples of the impact of policies and projects related to interculturality in the field, with experiences, stories and personal testimonies.

The library examples

The libraries example can contribute to a better understanding of the importance of working with initial or transversal narratives. In our example, a city has decided to implement a policy to adapt library stock to the sociocultural reality of the city and its various neighbourhoods.

Imagine there is an existing narrative frame on interculturality, which has not yet been internalised or grounded in the cultural sphere. The initiative is presented to the media, and the person charged with explaining it (for example a councillor and the library programme technical management) explains how crucial the policy is because a number of migrants have arrived in recent years and resources must be made available “to them”.

This would be one way of justifying the policy, but it would not be rigorous, and would be far from intercultural. Here is the alternative. Work has been done on grounding and adapting the intercultural narrative to the different departments, and the initiative is presented by making reference to its importance in terms of improving: equal rights and opportunities to all residents, placing value on linguistic pluralism and the city's cultural diversity, the richness it represents at many levels, and highlighting the role libraries play in coexistence and cohesion in neighbourhoods. This can be explained with reference to a story or personal experience, using a metaphor that draws on historic memory and providing an interesting fact to complement the narrative.

Lastly, imagine it has been a number of years since the initiative has been launched and the time has come to present the results at a press conference. The way in which results, and impact evaluation data are presented will reinforce one narrative or the other.

For example, the percentage of people with migrant or foreign origins tripling could be highlighted, emphasising the increase in different profiles, etc. As such, the information provided may well reinforce an existing narrative in the city, in which it is believed that the local authority does more for migrants than they do for the population as a whole.

Now imagine another scenario where the desired key messages have been worked into the press conference content and linked to the narrative frame of the intercultural city. This includes concrete examples, and personal stories with an emotional component to help grab journalists' attention and convey the ideas to be highlighted more effectively.

Emphasising some specific facts and creating a narrative based on the facts can also sometimes help in this regard. This example is based on factual information from the city of Barcelona and relates to loans over the course of 2021 in the city's public library network of over 40 libraries. The information could be reported with a question: Do you know how many different language books and other resources were loaned throughout 2021? Journalists may think about it, and offer numbers such as: 10, 25, 40, etc. Eventually, you give the correct (factual) answer of 131 different languages! This way, the journalists' attention is captured from the start, by using a topic they are interested in. They will be genuinely surprised by the answer, and the point will have been explained well.

This is because based on this single fact it is possible to construct a narrative with several key messages. First, that this is a diverse city in which a number of different languages are spoken, adding richness to the city. Second, that if the library does not have varied content, many people who speak another language would not be able to access resources in their mother tongue; nor would those people who speak a number of languages be able to get them in those languages.

Third, it also highlights how libraries have not only adapted to diversity by adapting content, but this change has implemented to great effect, because local residents (not "migrants") are making good use of the resources made available to them (a person borrowing a book in Arabic may be of migrant origin, or may have learned Arabic, or both of these). Lastly, the data also reinforces the concept of libraries as key spaces for interaction, coexistence and cohesion in neighbourhoods.

To summarise, if the focus had been solely on promoting the policy – without reinforcing it with a narrative in line with the narrative frame, and without forcing anyone to think about the key messages, ideas and facts to improve the delivery of the message – the impact of the initiative would have been significantly lower.

Having done this exercise and stressed the need to confront some of the main challenges the process entails, progress should move on to designing the different lines of activity that should be included in the strategy.

Phase 5: Working lines and actions in the communication strategy

Achieving the goals defined in the strategy requires the implementation of a set of very diverse actions. For example, prior to embarking on the design of a communication campaign, organising a press conference or creating a new website, attention should be paid to internal coordination, working methodology and strategy monitoring, among other issues.

There will also be some actions to be carried out periodically, and others more regularly. Some will pursue a media impact, and others will be more qualitative, targeted at a smaller but more specific audience.

Another important distinction is between communication actions that are more proactive, versus those of a more reactive nature. An example of a reactive action would be when an unforeseen situation or event or other crisis creates a stir, prompting media statements.

Bearing in mind the different types of actions and based on the cities' own experiences, the following categorisation of actions to consider when designing a strategy are proposed.

Action line 1: Coordination, skills and monitoring

Irrespective of the more specific objectives of the communication strategy, two key aspects should be invested in to ensure the strategy's success: both relating to management and rigour.

Internal coordination

Whilst it has been agreed that the implementation team will be responsible for recording progress on the strategy, strong coordination should be ensured by:

- ✓ Establishing a leading “expert” in intercultural communication.
- ✓ Specifying interlocutors from different departments to deal with matters relating to intercultural communication.
- ✓ Defining the methodology for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

Training

Within a local authority, a number of people will be responsible for communication, and this goes beyond the communication department itself. Policymakers, leaders, people with a public-facing role, social media and web content managers, newsletter/leaflet writers (who may well be external) and more.

Training in intercultural communication skills (adapted to different profiles) is key to guaranteeing the efficacy of the actions chosen to be implemented. Based on the defined objectives, the first step is to prioritise certain profiles.

For example, training sessions could be planned on the following themes:

- ✓ Media communication in a crisis context (for policymakers and leaders)
- ✓ Engaging in dialogue with citizens on an everyday basis, avoiding stereotypes, prejudices and rumours (public-facing roles, politicians etc.)
- ✓ Managing social media communication through an intercultural lens

Action line 2: Reviewing institutional communication as a whole

All local authorities communicate and disseminate all types of information through various channels and tools. From communication campaigns, press conferences, publication of action plans, to announcements, presentations at events, and social media/website communication or physical signage, etc.

The whole institutional communication policy should be examined through an intercultural lens. Prior to promoting anything new, there should be no doubt that existing content incorporates the intercultural approach and contributes to achieving the objectives proposed.

One of the first issues to tackle is the image of the city conveyed by institutional communication. As such, the following questions are important parts of the review process:

Do the images used in the communication reflect the city's true diversity? Does content contribute to the reinforcement of certain stereotypes? Have the different profiles, interests and needs of the population as a whole been taken into account? Has value been placed on cultural and linguistic diversity etc. in the communication? Are the channels used the most efficient in reaching this specific audience?

Ultimately, this is a question of checking through communication to ensure that they contribute to reinforcing equality, the recognition of diversity, coexistence and inclusion.

Line 3: Keeping the diagnosis alive

As previously mentioned, the initial diagnosis should not be considered as a static or finished product. It should be possible to identify shifts and trends quickly, on an ongoing basis, in order to adapt actions to the context and priorities that may arise over time.

Consequently, making tools and resources available to monitor these two trends is paramount:

- ✓ How the population's perceptions on issues related to diversity, coexistence and interculturality evolve over time (through actual surveys or analysis of other sources, for example)
- ✓ How the different media tackle these issues, and the evolution and nature of toxic or populist discourse, hate speech via social or mainstream media etc. and how this could affect the city.

Line 4: The narratives lab

It is clear that, in terms of creating intercultural narratives and better communicating the desired message, some types of content are much more effective than others. However, many cities fail to place sufficient weight on working on generating this content.

This does not mean becoming a communication agency. Rather, it means incorporating the process of identifying and gathering some of the many stories, realities and experiences of daily life in the city into our working dynamics, as they can be very useful in creating intercultural narratives.

The intercultural communication lead (and other department leads) should have network "antenna" – both internally and on the ground (this could include profiles such as educators, mediators, technicians from facilities and other entities, community leaders, etc.). This network could then provide inspiring content, which can be used to feed the intercultural narratives on an ongoing basis.

Line 5: Proactive communication actions

These actions are particularly important. These are the ones which have been proactively set out in order to achieve the objectives. There are numerous types of proactive actions, and it is important to stress that the strategy should not contain all the actions to be implemented. This is because some actions will arise based on the success of policy implementations or context, etc.

What will need to be defined in the strategy is the set of actions deemed "strategic" which we want to promote within a certain time frame (for example the next two years). Imagine a city is designing its intercultural communication strategy, and the implementation team needs to put forward an initial proposal of actions.

The following steps could be taken:

- ✓ Identify one of the strategy objectives (for example, “help to break down stereotypes on cultural diversity in the city”)
- ✓ Identify the desired audience to reach (e.g., citizens in general, the media and young people)
- ✓ Choose one audience, for example young people.
- ✓ Brainstorm ideas to identify the possible fields and communication channels deemed most useful in reaching the audience.
 - Education
 - Sport
 - Culture
 - Social media
 - Audiovisual
 - People or lead actors
 - Etc.
- ✓ Assess who should be involved in making decisions on possible actions, given that when promoting transversality, it is important to have actions which can be promoted from different areas (education, culture, youth, etc.) or in a shared manner.
- ✓ Identify the opportunities of the context
 - Special days or events known to be happening in the next two years. Examples:
 - International days (for cultural diversity, against discrimination, etc.) which could be used to our advantage with certain actions
 - Upcoming sports tournaments or music festivals
 - Projects being promoted by the team in question or other social actors in the youth field (it is important to make use of existing spaces)
 - Sociocultural initiatives in different educational centres
 - Teacher training sessions
 - Informal education spaces in youth centres
 - Projects linked to sport and social cohesion in specific neighbourhoods.
 - Audiovisual or hip-hop workshops in civic centres
 - Youth theatre school
 - Etc.

- Allies with the potential to become messengers to reach young people should be identified.
 - Singers, actors, artists or local sportspeople known to be committed to social issues, and some with diverse origins.
 - Young role models with diverse origins
 - Educational centres with a leadership team or teaching staff who are motivated and active in this area.
 - Certain local businesses (comic or gaming shops, hairdressers, bars, etc.) with significant youth footfall
 - Etc.

✓ Make a list of potential actions

This section will attempt to further define a set of potential actions.

- Launch a communication campaign featuring stories from different young people on social media, with videos created by the young people themselves.
- Organise a competition in different educational centres to come up with slogans and messages for the campaign.
- Promote awareness-raising actions against racism at sports events specifically targeted at families.
- Offer specialist training for teachers and other entities offering workshops for young people to develop the skills and tools required to tackle such issues.
- Create lyrics for a song that places value on cultural diversity, adapted to different musical styles reflecting the city's cultural diversity, with the support of local musicians from diverse backgrounds, etc.
- Organise a press conference to present the campaign.
- Etc.

At the end of this exercise, the actions to be implemented should be agreed with the key actors in question.

✓ Creating content

Once the actions to be implemented have been agreed and scheduled, in-depth work on the focus and content should follow. Importantly, there should also be clarity on the various processes involved, based on the type of the action:

- The need to create content for a campaign or specific materials to be assigned to external experts based on the relevant objectives and audience.
- Train certain key actors (teachers, other entities, etc.) so that they can work on more qualitative, less media-focused actions with young people directly.

- The need to coordinate with other local authority departments (youth, sport, education, culture, etc.) and gain agreement on the content of actions.

✓ The overall vision of the set of actions in the strategy

The process followed in this example should be carried out to define the set of actions to be included in the strategy in order to meet each of the objectives. It is likely that, having specified all the actions, some will in fact meet more than one objective. This is normal and should be highlighted on the sheet for each action.

However, prior to approving the set of planned actions for the strategy, some space should be dedicated to checking through this set from an overall perspective. This way, it will be possible to identify any potential mismatches, overlaps or imbalances between the planned actions. An example would be noticing that several actions have been proposed for one audience type but would in fact be suited to other types; or identifying a failure to take advantage of opportunities to connect our actions with other key actors in the city or link them with other planned projects or events which had not been taken into account.

This review should be done whilst recognising that new opportunities will arise in everyday work to promote new actions which were not initially foreseen in the strategy. For a strategy to be proactive, with the necessary resources planned and enough time to work on content, it is important to plan it sufficiently in advance.

✓ Implementing and evaluating actions

Lastly, a crucial part of planning actions is identifying the indicators which can be used to assess the impact of each action. This is a key point to consider, and unfortunately one which is often not given the level of prominence it deserves.

Evaluation is a complex task, and one that will most likely require some level of external support (for example at the start, when defining key indicators and an evaluation system).

Whilst the final impact of the strategy as a whole must be evaluated, it is also important to progressively add the results of each of the actions. This makes it possible to determine which have had the largest impact (or not), which can help with designing the next actions moving forward. The evaluation should not be seen as something to be done at the end of the two or three-year period; rather, it should be done alongside the implementation of the various actions.

Line 6: Media relations

It was decided to dedicate a working line specifically on relationships with the various media types, as they are a fundamental aspect of successfully meeting objectives related to any type of media impact.

In the past for example, it has been observed that if one of the general objectives of a strategy is “to help to break down stereotypes on cultural diversity in the city”, the media is a key audience in achieving this goal. Why? Because of the significant impact the media has on people’s perceptions.

When it comes to cultural diversity – and especially topics relating to migration or how certain minorities are treated – media relations are not straightforward.

Generally speaking, the prevailing view is that the majority of the media (to varying degrees) tend to emphasise the more problematic aspects of coexistence in diversity, in a bid to capture the public’s attention. It is not that they fail to communicate the more positive side of diversity or reality; rather, the more negative aspects are always highlighted, thus distorting people’s perceptions. Which is why people end up believing that situations and cases which are in the minority are the general rule. Or, that the root cause of certain issues lies in factors or variables (origin, culture, religion) which in fact bear no relation to the actual causes, which are really more closely linked to economic or social issues.

The media has the capacity to reinforce many stereotypes and prejudices: this is something the strategy must address and attempt to improve with rigour (not with good intentions, but with news that is more in line with reality). It is also true that there is a great deal of difference between various media outlets, with some offering a more rigorous, less stereotyped analysis of reality.

It is essential to tread carefully in this regard, in order to avoid any of the attitudes observed in a number of cities, such as:

- Criticising all the media in general.
- Believing that there is little that can be done to influence the media, especially more generalist or national media.
- Failing to have a proactive attitude towards communication actions with the media, out of fear of saying something that will yield more negative results than saying nothing.
- Not placing sufficient value on the importance of local media or news at a community level, both of which better reflect the city’s cultural diversity.

Certain consequences stem from this attitude, which do nothing to combat the sense of inertia, such as:

- Not engaging in training to better communicate messages in the media.
- Not investing in a community approach to messages and content in order to adapt it to the various media types.
- Not developing links and collaborative relationships with journalists and the media. Given the complexity of media relations, they can be important allies, both on an ad-hoc or more ongoing basis
- Failing to include professionals from different backgrounds in media relations networks or offer sufficient support to the media at the community level which can have a significant impact.

Having said that, some cities have had interesting experiences working with the media. For the most part, however, there is no well-defined strategy available. The following are potential actions to develop:

- Media diagnosis

- ✓ Make a list or map of all the media believed to have an impact on the perceptions of the city's population.

From the outset, this should be approached with recognition of the fact that it is likely some areas of the media are unknown. Undoubtedly as work continues, media resources will be discovered which, though previously unknown, in fact have a notable influence on people or groups in the city.

- ✓ Make another list of journalists from different media who (generally speaking) tackle themes related to issues of interest, such as diversity, coexistence, immigration, etc.
- ✓ Analyse how the different media treat these themes, identifying the media outlets and journalists who tackle the issues more rigorously, as opposed to coming up with easy populist headlines that only contribute further to the proliferation of stereotypes and rumours.

- Internal training

The importance of internal training has been highlighted previously. It develops skills and competencies in communicating messages via the media, especially in the case of political leaders and management.

One such example with practical results was a training session organised by the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities programme for mayors and policymakers from cities from different countries. Aside from working on the construction of narratives, time was dedicated to developing media interview skills on themes related to diversity, immigration and interculturality.

The key concept here is recognising that there is little use complaining that messages are not conveyed by the media in the desired way, if people are insufficiently prepared to disseminate them in a way that achieves the desired objectives.

- Adapting messages to the media

It is sometimes observed that many cities insist on organising press conferences on content related to their intercultural policies but fail to offer content that sparks the desired media interest. It is important to think of it from a journalist's perspective, and question whether the information being conveyed does in fact have media interest.

On other occasions, it becomes clear that the way a message is communicated does indeed spark media interest, and – oddly enough – not in a negative, controversial or crisis situation. In which case, what exactly has been done to attract the attention of the media?

At the core, it will be because the content conveyed is interesting, attractive, intriguing, original and different. Plus, it will have contributed:

- ✓ Information on concrete things that are going to happen
- ✓ Some interesting information journalists were not previously aware of
- ✓ Concrete examples of the impact that it may have on some people
- ✓ Backed by reports

Thinking beyond press releases and conferences, a little-used strategy which often yields very positive results is to propose reports on themes, policies or issues of interest. Themes that are highlighted because they either put forward a positive view of diversity, better explain a policy, or help to break down stereotypes.

Being proactive is key here. An in-depth approach to content should be taken, for example providing interesting data and personal testimonies that can add a more human, emotional slant to the story.

- o [Creating collaborative links](#)

Media relations may be complex, but that does not mean neglecting to create spaces to relate and collaborate. Some cities have successfully set up spaces that could be deemed 'neutral' because their aim is not to disseminate anything in the media. Rather, they aim to engage in dialogue and identify opportunities to collaborate with the media.

One particularly positive strategy is to attempt to facilitate work with the media, for example:

- ✓ Provide them with contacts of profiles from different groups of people in the city. This enables the media – who often end up turning to the same people – to broaden and diversify their contacts, thus getting more representative viewpoints and sharing a richer, more diverse perspective on an issue.
- ✓ Organising events such as “working breakfasts” with journalists where the aim is simply to explain certain issues, without expecting them to subsequently report it in the media. This might be because it has been noticed that the data they are using is out of date or incorrect; they refer to a policy or project and miss out key information; or there is a will to tell them about a certain development in a process being promoted.

This is not the place to inform journalists that they are communicating a poor message, but instead to offer rigorous information which can help them create content as and when required.

- ✓ In some cases, training sessions on interculturality matters have been drafted especially for journalists, which have helped them gain a deeper understanding of the approach the city promotes. This is not a simple task, but with the right level of focus and time, it can yield excellent results among certain profiles.
- ✓ Lastly, if spaces for “constructive” media relations are developed (excepting media which are solely interested in pursuing their anti-diversity or anti-immigration agenda), this can also come in useful when a media outlet publishes a story.

seen to reinforce stereotypes, allowing it to be discussed and highlighted (there must be no naivety here)

- o Take better advantage of local media and support those with a community focus.

The significance of working with local media is particularly noteworthy here, as they, in theory, will offer more opportunities. Being proactive is key, proposing reports and specific spaces targeted towards valuing and raising awareness of diversity, breaking down stereotypes etc.

Audiovisual content can also be produced for use online, paying attention to the ways in which this media type can be used.

Lastly, the opportunities the community media offers should be emphasised. The Council of Europe recently published an article entitled [Community media: contributions to citizen's participation](#) which stressed the importance of contributing to community media (organised from the top-down) in order to diversify the local media landscape and reflect on the sociocultural diversity and plurality of existing identities.

Whilst existing research demonstrates the positive contribution of community media in terms of democratic participation, diversity and social cohesion, it is still difficult to access grants and guarantee it remains financially sustainable.

The study analyses the way in which community media provides spaces of dialogue and cohesion by asking the following questions:

- How do community media support and facilitate debate, dialogue and public participation both at the local level, and across different generations and communities?
- How do community media, both in rural and urban contexts, facilitate the involvement of the youth and elderly and how can community media claim its role in local networks of civil society?
- How can policymakers support the long-term viability of community media and what are the positive experiences and promising practices in different national contexts that we might learn from?

In this vein, cities committed to interculturality should have the significance of community media at the forefront of their minds, as this media constitutes an initiative to promote and communicate the principles of interculturality.

#06. Summary

Communication is a particularly significant aspect of the intercultural “journey” that many cities worldwide have embarked on. The Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities Index includes a section on communication and media relations, questioning and assessing whether cities implement the actions required to promote intercultural principles from the perspective of a communication policy. The number of cities with strong results in this section is low, and consequently many of them have expressed an interest in having tools available to help them improve in this area.

On the other hand, given the rise in populist narratives and discourse pushing anti-diversity and anti-immigration messages, some cities are starting to adopt a more proactive attitude in terms of communication topics and the creation of intercultural narratives.

Resources, materials and training have been developed in recent years covering the criteria required for effective narratives, practical examples of cities, and their relationship with the media.

Nevertheless, some cities raised the case for process-driven rather than content-driven resources. Clearly, the department or municipal area promoting the intercultural agenda cannot possibly have an influence on all local authority communication to make them more intercultural. For this to happen, there would first need to be political commitment, and there would then also need to be a process enabling the design of an internal communication strategy. This would define the objectives, secure resources, and above all define the coordination, key actors and transversal perspective of the strategy.

This guide shines the spotlight on precisely this issue. The aim was to create a resource which could in some way help cities take the decision to design a communication strategy enabling them to better plan actions and take that (inarguably necessary) qualitative leap.

The following table summarises the different actions proposed for the strategy design process, to be used for inspiration and reference, with a sufficient level of flexibility for it to be adapted to the context and needs of each city. Crucially, it should help encourage and motivate cities to take the decision to design their own communication strategy, giving them a helping hand on their journey towards more inclusive, intercultural cities.

DESIGNING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN INTERCULTURAL CITIES

| # | PHASE | DESCRIPTION | DEVELOPMENT | OBSERVATIONS |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| 1 | PREPARATION AND BUILDING MOMENTUM | This phase involves making decisions on, and implementing, the actions necessary to ensure the essential elements of designing a communication strategy are in place | <p>Implementation team to coordinate and implement the strategy design process (based on collaboration the interculturality and communication departments)</p> <p>Strategic training for the 'extended' implementation team and developing communication-based competences and creating content with an intercultural perspective.</p> <p>Defining an action plan for the strategy design (schedule, key actors, methodology and actions)</p> | Assessing whether any external support is required for this process, beyond ad-hoc training. This will vary across cities, based on the profile of teams, resources, etc. |
| 2 | DIAGNOSIS | It is important to gain an improved understanding of the starting point before embarking on the strategy design, above all taking four fundamental questions into account. : | <p>Citizens' perceptions on coexistence, diversity and interculturality.</p> <p>Critical review of current communication. This entails viewing the communication policy through an intercultural lens,</p> | Making an initial diagnosis available will enable priorities to be identified, and effectively define the strategy objectives. However, it is important to keep |

DEFINING OBJECTIVES, AUDIENCES AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The success of a strategy rests primarily on having very well-defined objectives (general and specific) and a well-defined target audience (including how to reach it)

analysing how, from where and at whom our communication is aimed at.

Analyse the social context and look ahead to the future to identify challenges from the perspective of interculturality and communication.

Key actors in the strategy design
(internal and external)

the diagnosis “alive”, making tools available that enable ongoing active listening and analysis of communication

One way of classifying potential audiences is to do so based on how aligned they are (or not) with values and narratives on interculturality:

- **Aligned and motivated**
- **Allies**
- **Undecided**
- **Adversaries**
- **Antipodal**

For each audience, the potential channels, spaces and communication resources with potential for the strongest impact should be identified (along with the “messengers” seen as having the highest level of legitimacy and influence)

CONTENT

The strategy should define the process and criteria to be followed to create the content of actions. To do so, it will be necessary to check resources and materials on how to construct effective narratives and content. It should define, and start from, a “narrative frame” for the intercultural city.

Include the “narrative frame” on interculturality, defined and agreed on the basis of dialogue and collaboration with various actors and profiles (both internal and external)

Adapt the narrative frame to different audiences (e.g., allies, undecided, adversaries, young people or journalists)

Ground the narrative frame, and adapt it to, different areas and municipal departments (sport, culture, education, city planning, economic development, human resources, etc.)

Proposed documents:

- The content developed from the narrative.
- The summarised story of the narrative
- A glossary of key concepts related to interculturality.

In order to ground the narrative in different areas, question how each one contributes to promoting the intercultural principles of equality, recognition of diversity, interaction and participation.

WORKING LINES AND ACTIONS IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Successfully achieving the strategy objectives entails promoting a set of very diverse actions, which can be classified and grouped under 6 lines of action:

1. Coordination, skills and monitoring
2. Reviewing institutional communication as a whole
3. Keeping the diagnosis alive
4. Narratives lab
5. Proactive communication actions
6. Media relations

It is not possible to incorporate all the actions to be carried out because some will depend on the context and policies being implemented.

Dedicating time to analysing the schedule, identifying opportunities, and above all planning the proactive communication actions expected to yield the strongest impact, are all crucial. Evaluation is not something to do at the end but should be done alongside the process on an ongoing basis.