

# ICC Workshop on “Intercultural communication and mediation for Italian policy makers”

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**Report prepared by**

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**Intercultural cities**  
Building the future on diversity

[www.coe.int/interculturalcities](http://www.coe.int/interculturalcities)



## 1. Why Intercultural Cities

The new migration waves occurring in recent years, both worldwide and towards Europe, have highlighted the need to review the models for diversity management, to ensure the full inclusion of migrants in hosting cities.

The various models adopted by countries in different time periods have showed their limits: from the assimilationist model, where migrants are expected to adapt and conform to the cultural norms of the host society (with the consequence of gradually abandoning their original cultures), to the multicultural one, where the original cultures are overemphasised (so maintaining a clear distinction between newcomers and the host society, with a high risk of separation), all these models have shown to be ineffective in promoting inclusion and diversity advantage, often fostering confrontation rather than dialogue.

The intercultural model, that can be summarised as “the art of mixing”, not only welcomes diversity, but it recognizes it as a positive factor for the development of prosperous and harmonious societies. Different cultures meet by enriching each other, maintaining diversity, but being transformed into new hybrid identities and cultures through exchange processes, power-sharing and participation.

In reconsidering integration strategies, cities acquire a special focus, as the places where integration actually occurs, through day-by-day interaction. Cities as protagonists of change are at the core of the intercultural approach.

The basic principles of the model are the following:

- ✓ A framework of rights and responsibilities
- ✓ A change of approach turning diversity into an advantage for everybody: from people with needs to people with talents
- ✓ Preparing citizens to accept change: an open city based on shared principles and views (sharing power, co-participation, co-creation)
- ✓ Policies promoting a feeling of belonging and cultural reciprocity (denouncing discrimination)
- ✓ Hybrid identities: while recognising differences, emphasising similarities to promote inclusion and social cohesion
- ✓ Opening up public places where different cultures can meet
- ✓ Anticipating and addressing conflicts and fears

The Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe started from these assumptions to establish a network of cities, throughout Europe and beyond, that are implementing and/or are interested in implementing intercultural policies, in the belief that policies based on the intercultural approach facilitate not only full inclusion but also the full enjoyment of human rights by the residents. Belief that is supported by recent evidence: a scientific survey conducted between 2016 and 2017 has shown a clear correlation between the quality of life index and the ICC Index, an [index](#) developed by the ICC programme, measuring a city’s “level of intercultural policies”, providing a detailed profiling.

## 2. The importance of words: creating a shared vocabulary of concepts

During the ICC workshop, participants worked in groups and discussed two key concepts: “interculturality” and “intercultural policies”, so as to provide a list of best practices.

### a. DEFINING INTERCULTURALITY

During the workshop, four groups collected key words associated to the concept of interculturality. The words that emerged within each group are the following:

- I. Exchanges, enrichment, opening, change, diversity, relation methods and practices, valorisation
- II. Interaction, richness, knowledge, dialogue, shared rules
- III. Two-way integration, respect and valorisation of differences of any kind
- IV. Communication, relation

Yet, the goal of this work was not to get a “literal” definition of interculturality, but rather to agree on some shared principles that are at the core of the intercultural approach, of “making and practicing interculturality”.

It is important to note that, notwithstanding the diversities of the groups, a common thread emerged concerning the concept of interculturality, that is “**relationship**”: making interculturality or “being intercultural” means entering in a relationship with the other, “practicing” relations, communicating, interacting recognising diversity and valorising it. This highlights the human dimension of the intercultural policy model that is concerned with the sphere of feelings and emotions as it puts people at the centre of local policies.

To easily define interculturality one could use three main key words: 1) ensuring EQUALITY in the sense of equal access to rights, duties, and opportunities; valuing DIVERSITY as an advantage for the society as a whole; promoting trust, mutual understanding, power-sharing, participation and – ultimately- full inclusion through meaningful INTERACTION.

## **b. HOW CITIES CAN IMPLEMENT INTERCULTURAL POLICIES**

The main points that emerged from the discussion can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ Importance of an explicit commitment by the city administration to the intercultural approach (for example, by joining a manifesto, embracing the principles of the ICC network, releasing a statement of intent, adopting an intercultural strategy, etc.).
- ✓ Such commitment and vision of the public administration should be continued in time (beyond a 5-years mandate) and undertaken across political silos.
- ✓ The members of the city council, the municipality’s managers and staff should be trained on the intercultural approach and skills, by introducing elements of interculturality in every area of the administration, in a cross-cutting way: interculturality is not just a matter for social services, as it is often believed; rather, intercultural competences should be applied by public officers to the widest range of services provided by cities to their population as a whole. Having intercultural skills in the human resources area, for example, enables a public administration to adopt non-discriminatory staff policies, to promote talents, to put the right people in the right place, etc. In urban planning or housing policies, an intercultural approach involves the “intercultural design” of the city, of housing, of infrastructures and their interaction or mutual location (schools, hospitals, playgrounds, cultural facilities, residential areas, etc.).
- ✓ Removing economic, social, language barriers, promoting the involvement of communities is another key factor.
- ✓ Encouraging spontaneous associationism by people with diverse background, and facilitating the empowerment of migrants in social life and in public spaces.

## **c. EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES OF INTERCULTURAL POLICIES**

Some examples emerged from the exchanges between the participating cities, including:

- ✓ Celebrating ethnic cuisine and food in schools
- ✓ Including ethnic dishes in school meals
- ✓ Involving migrant people in the revival of old crafts risking to disappear
- ✓ Network of schools to implement programmes for intercultural education
- ✓ Organising festivals of cultures open to the citizenship
- ✓ Granting symbolic citizenship to children of foreign origin
- ✓ Organising social dinners with the participation of the migrant communities

The examples above are a good start. However, an intercultural city should go beyond these initial steps and make diversity a sort of ordinary reality. For instance, the organisation of festivals is a good way to raise awareness about peculiarities or features of different cultures. Yet, interculturality is about people; and human beings are complex and can certainly not be confined into single cultures. On the one hand these events occur only once per year and do not reflect a long-term commitment to make of diversity an advantage for all; on the other hand, they may convey a stereotypical idea of the cultures that they pretend to celebrate. If organised alone, without being part of a wider intercultural strategy which mainstreams the principles of interculturality in all city policy area, they may lead to the same result as multicultural policies: a “ghettoization” of the different communities that compose the citizenry, instead of the hybrid mix of the multiple identities that compose the intercultural society.

The implementation of an overall intercultural strategy is therefore highly recommended. The ICC programme has prepared a Step-by-Step guide to assist cities wishing to implement an intercultural transformation of their society.

### **3. Introduction to interculturality and practices of conflict management**

Building on the insights generated by the working groups, cities debated with the help of experts on some relevant aspects of implementing intercultural policies. The key points that emerged from the discussion are the following:

- a) The need to consider not only the political dimension, but also the city and social dimensions, by involving citizens and the civil society in policy design and implementation.
- b) Favoring the listening, by the public administrations, of the voices of civil society and citizens, establishing a climate of mutual trust, promoting the encounter.
- c) Favoring the networking among organizations working on the same issues (CSOs networks) and their diffusion.
- d) Ensuring the regulation of the roles and responsibilities of the involved bodies.
- e) Favoring the acquisition of specific skills on how to manage diversity in a positive way.
- f) Ensuring coordination and cooperation among the most relevant stakeholders at the very start of the policing processes.
- g) Favoring the building of “concrete” projects, in order to apply a shared vision.

#### Major obstacles and risks identified:

- a) Intercultural policies may be seen as policies that benefit only migrants and/or newcomers, to the detriment of the “locals”. They should rather be designed and proposed as policies for the common good of all citizens, not just for one target group. That is the core of the “Diversity Advantage” concept.
- b) Yet, Diversity Advantage is a difficult and complex concept to explain: the key is to convince that interculturality is an opportunity for the society as a whole.
- c) Communication is a complex process but it is important to develop and invest on it, otherwise the communication space will be occupied by others, upholding contrary arguments.

- d) In the phase of planning communication actions, possible citizens' feelings such as fear, anxiety and anger must be taken into consideration and addressed, as well as perceptions of insecurity.
- e) In those cases where a conflict exists on practical issues (e.g. waiting lists for public housing with people of foreign origin at the top) the problem must be immediately addressed by proposing solutions, rather than speaking about the benefits of diversity in situations of open confrontation.

Through a role-game on the issue of the reception of asylum seekers in an imaginary, the participants have developed a discussion about the issues involved and the possible solutions, playing alternately various roles, representing respective stances towards migrants as commonly occurring in the host societies: from the most determined supporters of migrants' rights and of their inclusion in the host societies, to more moderate and neutral stances, to people who are in a political role and must account to their constituencies, to people who openly oppose inclusion and are annoyed by the presence of migrants.

At the end of the exercise, thoughts and feelings were collected, including: in some cases the empathy with those upholding opposite views; the difficulty to find shared solution when fears and lack of mutual trust superpose; frustration when decisions are made without preliminary consultation; difficulties to find positive arguments to reply to opposite emotional-based stances. But also the acknowledgement of the importance of knowing that one is not alone (referring to the theory of the Spiral of Silence), the awareness of the need to adopt an approach of understanding of different thinking, without degrading or blaming rivals.

#### **4. The Antirumours strategy to fight stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination**

The Anti-rumours strategy was presented as city strategy to promote a change of perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, combining local policies and social and citizens' movements. It has three specific objectives:

- a) To involve a wide range of stakeholders, establishing a network of local organizations.
- b) To promote critical thinking and to implement innovative and participatory actions to fight discrimination.
- c) To influence the political and social agenda.

The Antirumours approach includes 7 key elements that must be taken into consideration in the planning and implementing phases:

1. It is a work-in-progress, long-term city strategy
2. It requires political commitment and consensus
3. It requires social involvement and participation
4. It is aimed to win the "ambivalent majority" of the population (not the "extremists" of both parts)
5. It is based on creativity and innovation
6. It requires rigour in managing and communicating information
7. It must be sustainable in time

It is important to understand that statistical evidence and data are not sufficient to deconstruct prejudice and false myths; instead empathy elements must be adopted in addressing the public, working on the emotional dimension.

Intervening on the social media is certainly a priority, but the Anti-rumours methodology is designed to privilege physical contact and interaction and may require a lot of technical work before being applied

to social media. Also, actions to address social media must be carefully planned and implemented, by “stopping the pyromaniacs” while also “keeping the forest clean” as well, establishing the conditions for a wide dissemination of information and values useful to fight the spread of prejudice.

Some practical suggestions have been shared to enable the operators of local administrations to address rumours in their daily work, in face-to-face meetings with stakeholders and citizens. The main suggestions include:

1. Using questions that individualize situations, to stimulate reflection and critical thinking (e.g: when faced with a stereotyped statement, ask: what happened? Did they do anything to you?)
2. Sharing personal positive experiences
3. Identifying common grounds with the interlocutor to create empathy, accepting different opinions.
4. Providing alternative explanations, avoiding that the interlocutor is only left with his/her solution.
5. Challenging generalization and simplification
6. Applying discrimination to oneself, starting from the principle that “we can all become victims”
7. Encouraging curiosity and interest in diversity
8. Directly addressing local situations and local problems
9. Finding positive messages, transmitting the possibility to find shared solutions

The ICC has produced a [Handbook](#) and a series of videos for cities wishing to implement an Anti-rumours strategy.

## 5. Communicating interculturality

One session was dedicated to suggestions and techniques to design and implement communication campaigns to promote interculturality. A communication campaign on the issue of interculturality must have a clear target audience, clear communication channels, non-superficial messages and above all must be supported by concrete local policies and actions.

Just like any communication campaign, it must answer 5 key questions:

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|-------------|--|
| 1. Why?     | Objectives   |
| 2. To whom? | Target   |
| 3. How?     | Channels, languages, tools                           |
| 4. What?    | Message  |
| 5. Who?     | Messenger with major impact / testimonial / credible |

An effective communication campaign on interculturality should be a city-wide campaign: involving close cooperation among local authorities, communication agencies and the civil society to identify and disseminate a shared message.

Some common mistakes need to be identified and prevented (Not to do's); some suggestions to ensure the success of a communication campaign on fighting stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination can also be found below (Do's).

TO DO's	NOT TO DO's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rationalising thinking and ideas (when deciding what to write on situations in which I feel involved)</li> <li>- Asking questions that stimulate reflection</li> <li>- First of all, assessing the target audience</li> <li>- Promoting cooperation and coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blaming the target for its opinions/prejudices</li> <li>- Communicating useless things, mostly if the recipient can do nothing to solve the problem</li> <li>- Imposing a campaign without assessing the sharing rate among the stakeholders</li> <li>- Strengthening stereotypes/prejudices by</li> </ul>

<p>while still defining the message and deciding how to transmit it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicating concrete/daily life actions</li> <li>- Putting the target group at the core of the message by which you want to address the problem, making it become part of the story, making it the active protagonist of change</li> <li>- Assessing the resources available (time, money, etc)</li> <li>- Communication must be HOT – Honest, open, transparent</li> <li>- Using images and stories that remain stick in mind, basing on emotions and empathy</li> <li>- Using few concepts /messages (1/2 at a time) in a simple and clear way</li> </ul>	<p>putting them at the core of the message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing excessively direct answers to problems, that are not credible or too much simplistic</li> <li>- Listening only to minorities who can communicate their opinions with strength (“loud minorities”)</li> <li>- Providing too many contents, reducing the effectiveness of communication</li> <li>- Triggering a value conflict between different groups within the community</li> </ul>
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The ICC Policy brief on [Political communication and intercultural messaging](#) provides other useful insights for effective intercultural interviews.

## 6. Conclusions

The exchanges between the municipalities participating in the workshop provided inputs that may be of help when preparing an intercultural city strategy, consisting not in adding new policies or new specific actions on interculturality, but “rather in reconsidering what the city is already doing through the lens of an intercultural approach”<sup>1</sup>.

This should be done through 2 key factors: consultation and participation, together with the *Community-based results accountability* (responsibility towards results that are reached at the local level) that must be supported by a clear political will and commitment in the medium term, and by the involvement of the civil society in order to get the citizens aware of the advantages of diversity.

In defending the diversity advantage, it became evident that it is much simpler to find arguments against diversity and inclusion, than in favour. The reason is twofold: on the one side, the concept is very complex and requires specific communication skills and grounded intercultural competences; on the other side, the present political climate which – in some countries – may even result in aggressive propaganda against migrants and diversity, is powerfully influencing the ambivalent majority, even if at an unconscious level, making hatred or intolerant attitudes to migrants become more and more “familiar” and widespread, therefore simpler to replicate.

The awareness that implementing intercultural policies involves significant efforts, both in terms of ability to influence the masses and in economic and investment terms, is undoubtedly a deterrent for many public administrations that are tempted to adopt a short-term approach to diversity governance. Ensuring a wider visibility to the positive outcomes of implementing intercultural policies in terms of better quality of life and well-being for all citizens, as well as in economic terms (for businesses and employers), appears as a factor of fundamental importance in order to involve more cities in this challenge. This can be done both by communicating the results of scientific studies, and of exchanges and dissemination of good practices from cities that are virtuous in this sense to others, with a multiplier effect. The ICC network provides quite many examples from and of cities that are successful in making diversity and advantage for all.

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<sup>1</sup> “The intercultural city step by step: practical guide for applying the urban model of intercultural integration.”, Council of Europe, 2013

The technical and methodological aspects of communication strategies represent a fundamental factor to ensure adequate dissemination of intercultural messages, and the development of effective local strategies. Substantial investment in this sense would also be beneficial.

Recognising and disseminating the concept of *diversity advantage*, and fighting prejudice basing on emotional factors and real local experiences, must support concrete actions and policies, to ensure their effectiveness in time and favour social cohesion between groups and communities.