



MEETING OF THE INTERCULTURAL CITIES COORDINATORS

Lisbon, 30 November 2017

Meeting Report

Summary

The annual meeting of the ICC coordinators took place in Lisbon on 30 November 2017 and brought together the representatives of the cities that are member of the International ICC network, including non-European cities such as Ballarat (Australia), Montreal (Canada), and Haifa (Israel).

Participants got updated information on the development of the ICC national networks, as well as on the progress towards the setting-up of new regional and national networks (in Quebec and in Australia).

Moreover, they discussed the outcomes of the ICC Milestone event and, more particularly, the following topics:

1. The conclusions of the assessment study carried out by MPG to measure the impact of the Intercultural Cities approach on community cohesion. The study has identified – within the INDEX - a set of 14 reliable indicators that are considered to be the most reliable indicators of local intercultural policies. It further finds that: there are strong links between high ICC index scores and local well-being; local intercultural policies emerge as a significant driver behind local well-being and attitudes towards immigrants; correlation analysis shows a moderate positive link between national integration policies and local intercultural policies as cities have slightly more developed intercultural policies in countries with inclusive integration policies; finally intercultural policies do not public opinion or alienate voters. The study provides a good basis for co-operation among the local and national level on diversity management.
2. The proposal contained in the paper on “Bridging the equality, diversity and inclusion agendas”, suggesting to contemplate an expanded narrative for applying the intercultural cities policy model to the decade ahead.
3. The ICC programme of work for 2018.

Finally, coordinators gathered in working groups to identify ways for improving the visibility and impact of their work, planning common initiatives for policy innovation, and defining their programme of work for 2018.

1. MAIN PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL NETWORKS

- The Norwegian network is made up of six cities which work on diversity at the community level. They have a common mandate thanks to the fact that cities' political leaders meet regularly to exchange ideas, put in place cross-cooperation, shape a common agenda and pursue dialogue with state institutions. For the next meeting of the Network, it is planned to organise a gathering of political representatives a day before to define joint actions. Strengthening the links between the intercultural model and the human rights agenda remains a priority.
- The *Città del dialogo* in Italy has adopted its strategy for the coming biennium. However the main challenges concern: the emergency situation which has shifted the focus from a long-term approach to an urgent and scattered response; and the polarisation of the issues related to migration through media and political discourse. The result is a shrinking of resources for integration, and a fragmentation of institutional competence. Cities' cooperation (or lack of it) on properly receiving and welcoming asylum-seekers is crucial. The priorities for future work are: enhancing intercultural competences of municipal officers, beyond the specialised staff; moving funds and resources from safety concerns to intercultural dialogue; promote cooperation between local and national authorities. Among the topics that should be addressed by such a multi-level cooperation there are: housing policies, school desegregation, a frame for the recognition of places of worship, and access to citizenship rights.
- The ICC-UA (Ukrainian network) has significantly progressed in 2017, with all six members completing the ICC Index and strengthening their relations with the international ICC network through the participation in joint initiatives or activities. A guidebook on the ICC model for Ukrainian cities is being prepared and two dedicated workshops for the UA members were organised. The main challenge ahead is the political and administrative situation in the country which makes it difficult to put in place a meaningful dialogue between state authorities and the local level, at least on topics related to migration and diversity. Moreover, there is a general instability in cities' leadership, and thus the ICC UA members would benefit from increased interaction with the international network, as well as from training (for instance on anti-rumours) and exchanges.
- The RPCI (Portugal) has not increased in size but progress were made in increasing the number of cities completing the ICC Index and undergoing their first ICC expert visit. Moreover, discussions were held for the organisation of a national policy lab next year and cities identified both what could be the main topics for multi-level dialogue and the working methods. Among the main challenges, Roma inclusion has been highlighted by most cities as a field where knowledge, good practices and mediation could help improving the situation.
- The RECI (Spanish network) continued its steady growth with at least three cities joining every year. The network is now made of 19 members and, this year, it became a legally registered association to which member cities contribute financially to ensure its sustainability. Moreover, the setting up of an association enables the cities to present joint application for grants from both the public and private sectors. Besides, following the organisation of the Diversity Advantage Challenge, the RECI is now creating an inspiring library of replicable diversity advantage projects or initiatives that will be put at the disposal of all members. For next year, the network will work on the following priority topics: the development of intercultural strategies and their implementation; participation and inclusion; and a national policy lab.

Moreover, the network will continue work on the ICC Index as most cities are finalising the third wave of evaluations. Finally, cooperation started with other networks, namely with Quebec, with which work is focussing on finding the most effective arguments to enhance political communication on the value of interculturality, and engage Mayors and political leaders in this endeavour.

Other networks are under development, namely in Australia and Canada:

- Australia: following the membership of Ballarat in the ICC programme, a meeting of seven city councils was organised this summer and several cities that have not yet officially joined are filling their index questionnaires. This is a revised benchmark report compatible with the ICC Index, so to enable cross-evaluation of replies. It is thus realistic to expect to have around ten or eleven cities scored in the ICC Index for 2018.
- Quebec: a network composed of twelve cities has been already set-up in 2015 and is currently working on methods and organisational structure, before considering officially joining the ICC network. For the moment, Montreal is in fact the only Canadian representative in the ICC programme. Still, the network holds two meetings per year and this year it further organised three study visits. The main issues are xenophobia and religious diversity. But next meetings will certainly deal with ways to build stronger relationships with the Quebec provincial government, following the example of the Policy Lab.

2. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NETWORK

The ICC programme is certainly among the core actions of the Council of Europe in the fields of diversity management and migrant integration. Still, there is a need to make this work (and its outcomes) much more political and visible. Besides, cities also feel that a strong political support is key for greater impact and thus the support of political leaders – from both the local and national levels - seems crucial. Based on that, the coordinators made the following proposals/decisions, to be implemented with the support of the ICC team:

- Cities that join the ICC network in future should, among their first steps, work on engaging with politicians. Ensuring strong political commitment and leadership are – as a matter of fact – among the requirements of the ICC programme and indeed elements that are evaluated through the ICC Index. Therefore, especially new member cities, should be reminded to inform their political leaders about their membership and organise an intensive political information session across all departments, to raise support for the city intercultural action and ensure its sustainability.
- Moreover, cities are invited to regularly organise small working sessions for politicians to discuss concrete issues around a well-structured agenda, and deliver results. Also, wherever possible, it would be good to appoint a committee within the City Council to partner and support politically the work of the technical staff involved in the implementation of the intercultural strategy of the city.

- When it comes to the national level, it seems important that cities try to engage with state authorities to gain support for their work in the field and de-polarise public debate. The Policy Lab formula is certainly useful for cities that are part of ICC national networks. For the other cities, a possibility could be to use existing national platforms or *fora* that bring together local and national authorities, and use those opportunities to build relations and partnerships.
- Finally, the ICC network should help cities increase their impact and make their voice better heard, both at national and international levels. Cities should thus appoint some political leaders to be “ICC Ambassadors” and use any opportunities for intercultural messaging. Politicians could also deliver public statements on behalf of the network (eg. during international days, or on specific topics) and/or prepare articles for national media on specific themes, or comment on issues of interest for the public opinion, to provoke and cultivate public debate.

3. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF ICC TOOLS

At their 2016 meeting coordinators already engaged in a reflection on the effectiveness of the ICC tools in light of the continuous growth of the ICC network. The strong participation of cities and political leaders in the Milestone event is certainly an evidence of progress in this field, showing that the ICC programme is both relevant and useful.

Yet, the work on expanding the intercultural integration policy model, as well as the focus on cooperation with the national level, raise new issues that needs to be addressed:

- The ICC Index: in ten years the ICC programme evolved and expanded globally; the index has also undergone revision and has proved to be an effective evaluation tool. However, it does not always mirror the differences of national frameworks and it is not adapted to certain specific context (eg. Australia), which reduces its potential to be a true learning tool for cities. Moreover, work on an ICC expanded narrative raise the question of whether the set of indicators should be enriched to measure progress in fields such as gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, human rights etc. The ICC will thus set up a technical working group of a reduced number of cities and experts that will work at enriching the ICC Index with indicators that take account of new issues, and make it adaptable it to specific national situations. Besides, the Index questionnaire should also enable an external assessment (by citizens and/or NGOs) so that the overview is truly objective.
- ICC Activities: the general feeling is that quality should be privileged against quantity. Moreover, the focus should continue to be on international events that benefit the whole network rather than on supporting specific actions in a given city. It was recommended that ICC organize thematic seminars when the need arise, but that it rather privileges study visits, as these proved to be extremely useful for cities both in terms of knowledge, interaction, and inspiration. In order to make them even more effective, it was suggest to test a slightly different format that would combine i) meeting time for introductory remarks on the context; ii) on-the-spot visits; iii) and a last slot for a joint discussion to exchange, debrief and decide on follow-up.

In addition, the ICC should instigate and support projects implemented by cities in tandem or in small groups and that stimulate co-creation and co-action, with a potential to deliver results replicable at regional or European level.

- On working methods: i) Cities feel a strong need to agree on clear definitions for concepts like interculturalism, diversity advantage, etc., as their meaning may differ from an interlocutor to another, depending on his/her level of knowledge and expertise. In general, there is a need to “standardize” those concepts and messages, concentrating to their core meaning, and avoiding labeling. ii) Also, cities should make a wider and better use of existing regional and country networks to preach for interculturalism and increase its influence in policy making. The ultimate goal would be mainstreaming interculturalism in the whole spectrum of local policies. iii) Besides, on technical issues, it is recommended that the ICC programme set-up working groups made up of a restricted number of cities, backed-up by a pool of experts, with the task of proposing actions and recommendations.
- On Good practice: the new template for reporting has improved delivery from cities, both in terms of quantity and quality. Still, there are some issues that need improvement. For instance, good practices should be inspirational examples for other cities to replicate. To ensure that, the ICC Team should make a selection after checking that submitted practices constitute real examples of successful intercultural actions and/or of diversity advantage. A simple evaluation system through a check list could be prepared and used already in 2018. In addition, cities should be encouraged to also report on practices that didn't produce the expected results, so to compile those in a collection of lessons learnt.
Finally, some cities have not yet reported on any practice; in this respect, there is a recommendation that was made already last year but that was not implemented yet. It seems important to recall it as they will be implemented in 2018:

“It is essential to ensure good two-ways communication between the Strasbourg team and member cities. Cities are strongly encouraged to regularly send information about new initiatives, meetings, impact and any other relevant information, including official one (eg change of Mayor, etc.). Each city is expected to provide a short annual report or the compilation of good practice prior to the coordination meeting. The fulfillment of this obligation will be a condition for receiving financial sponsoring for the participation in the coordinators' meeting. The information flow should also improve within the member cities, with regular feedbacks on outcomes to be provided by the participants in ICC events to their colleagues in the municipality.”

4. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND MAIN TOPICS FOR 2018

A long discussion took place on expanding the ICC concept to other fields. There is a general agreement on the fact that interculturalism is a mechanism for enforcing human rights and reaching full equality at the local level. Yet, cities feel important to stress that their interpretation of the notion of human rights is not necessary a legalist one, but rather one linked to the concept of social justice, as the ultimate goal of human rights policies.

Priority topics: In this framework, the topics that appear as being a priority for future work are: intersectionality, inclusive participation, myth busting and fight against stereotypes, intercultural competence, and urban citizenship. The latter may however need to be re-defined in some countries

where the language as it stands would tend to exclude rural areas and small towns from its scope. Moreover, there is agreement to include a gender mainstreaming perspective in intercultural policies and activities, building on practice already engaged by some cities that adopt inclusive language and angle in intercultural policies. However, gender equality does not necessarily need to be spelt apart as it is already encompassed in the work around human rights.

On preventing radicalisation and refugee policies opinions differ. Cities *de facto* work on preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, but they do so using interculturalism as a tool for promoting inclusion and cohesion. It's about long-term actions for a goal, rather than against a feared effect.

On refugees, most ICC cities confronted with their arrival have adopted policies and measures to properly welcome them and promoting their integration. Still, this does not seem to be the core of interculturalism, which addresses rather the whole society. Perhaps it would be better to have first a theoretical reflection on how does the intercultural approach help deal with refugee inclusion, and use that to support the intercultural integration model.

Moreover, cities showed increasing interest in the methodology developed under the STEPS project on heritage mapping for community cohesion and proposed to explore further the concepts of cultural heritage in the intercultural city.

On knowledge and intercultural competence, there is a strong need for cities to put in place tools that enable virtual exchange, as well as libraries and databases accessible by all, and online forum of discussion. Besides, it is important to ensure that new member cities receive an intensive "induction" course to be able to start work on good basis. Both issues could be addressed by the ICC programme, depending on available funds. The ICC team is already preparing applications for two calls for grants in this sense, as well as another call for grants to continue work on anti-rumours, following the growing demand from cities. Cities with longer experience in the ICC network are however invited to volunteer for "mentoring" and supporting and less experienced cities.

On communication, cities found the Storycities project extremely interesting in terms of direct and indirect outputs. The project has been implemented in 2017 as a pilot in six cities and it has not only provided audio-visual material to promote their intercultural work, but also stimulated community cohesion, sense of belonging, and a clearer idea of diversity advantage. Besides, participating cities emphasized the importance, for the actors engaged in the field, of receiving the visit of the Council of Europe team as it encouraged them to continue their actions. The Council of Europe has also enormously benefitted from this project, as it has enriched its audio-visual database and increased its visibility within the participating cities as well as at major international events where cities presented their own Storycities trailers. It was recommended to continue this project in 2018, subject to the availability of funds.

Finally, cities expressed strong support to the continuation of the Policy Lab format to encourage dialogue among local and national authorities. National Policy Labs are already in preparation in Italy (Jan-Feb 2018), Portugal (second half 2018), Spain (May/June 2018) and Norway (dates to be confirmed).

Below the list of main events agreed upon:

- Tenerife volunteered to host and co-organise – in April 2018 - a Thematic Seminar on building inclusive democracies through intercultural participation, that would address also specific issues such as the inclusion and participation of Roma citizens;
- Geneva proposed to host and co-organise, a study visit on Intersectionality in the intercultural city, based on the relative long-standing experience of the city in this field. The visit would take place in October 2018;
- The cities of Oslo and Botkyrka volunteered to propose an activity on urban citizenship, for the second part of 2018; the event would also address the interrelated issues of social justice and human rights, and would be a political meeting;
- Haifa volunteered to host and co-organise, in the second part of 2018, an event on cultural heritage;
- Rijeka informed that – together with the Croatian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (May-Nov 2018) it has volunteered to host the next ICC coordinators' meeting. It will take place in September/October 2018 and be related with the Rijeka 2020 agenda.