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Dealing with diversity in **European cities**



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Dealing with diversity in European cities¹

Introduction

Today, cities in Europe are more diverse than ever before. Immigration, socio-economic inequalities, spatial segregation, a diversity of identities, activities, and lifestyles, are all contributing factors. This hyper-diversity poses significant challenges for urban policymakers and institutions.

On the one hand, there are positive discourses on urban diversity. The European Union sees diversity as a driver for growth and social progress and many city authorities are inspired by Richard Florida's work and see diversity as an asset in attracting the creative class. On the other hand, increasing diversity engenders fears among a substantial parts of the population. The election victory for Trump, Brexit and the rise of populist movements across Europe are all related to increasing anxieties about immigration. Many national governments react to the perceived threat to social cohesion by enforcing stricter immigration policies and adopting an assimilation agenda.

The shift to a more assimilationist approach at the national level is not necessarily reproduced at the local level. City authorities tend to adopt more inclusive forms of integration policies and employ a more positive discourse towards diversity. On the basis of a comparison of 14 cities Raco et al. (2014a) perceive a clear trend towards a more pragmatic approach to diversity in which positive aspects of difference for competitiveness and social cohesion are stressed. The local pragmatism can be related to the fact that it is the cities where the consequences of immigration are most visible. For city authorities, diversity is a given that has to be accommodated.

In this contribution, I aim to give insight into how cities deal with the (hyper-)diversity of their population and what policies they execute to strengthen the social cohesion within the city. My analysis is structured along the three principles of planning diverse cities, as identified by Fincher and Iveson (2008): recognition, encounter, and redistribution.

This contribution is based on the **DIVERCITIES research project**². The four-year DIVERCITIES (Governing Urban Diversity: Creating Social Cohesion, Social Mobility and Economic Performance in Today's Hyper-diversified Cities) project, which began in March 2013 and ended in February 2018, explored the value of diversity in cities. Coordinated by Utrecht University's Faculty of Geosciences, the principal aim of DIVERCITIES was to examine the ways in which Europe can benefit from diversity. The research for this project was undertaken in 11 EU cities: Antwerp, Athens, Budapest, Copenhagen, Leipzig, London, Milan, Paris, Rotterdam, Tallinn, Warsaw; and 3 non-EU cities: Istanbul, Toronto, and Zurich.

Recognition

Recognition is about defining the attributes of groups of people so that their needs can be met. The question is on what basis the groups are defined. Critics of multiculturalism argue that people of a certain ethnic background should not be automatically treated as groups (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013). In the context of an increasingly diverse population it is not feasible anymore to protect the heritage of different cultures and to communicate with community representatives to do so (Van Breugel et al., 2014). There is no one who can claim to be the spokesman of a community, when that community is fragmented and when identities become increasingly hybrid. Advocates of interculturalism argue that it is necessary to move beyond depictions of bounded communities differentiated along ethnic and cultural lines as it leads to essentialising of ethnic differences, while overlooking other differentiations on the basis of class, lifestyles, attitudes or activity patterns (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013).

Therefore, a shift is needed from the recognition of collective identities to that of individual competences. Consequently, mainstreaming is advocated as the best strategy for addressing a hyperdiverse society (Van Breugel et al. 2014). Collett & Petrovic (2014, p.3) describe mainstreaming as "the effort to reach people with a migration background through social programming and policies that also target the general population, rather than

through specific immigrant integration policies alone".

Mainstreaming implicates that diversity policy is not the responsibility of a single department in a municipality, but that diversity-related efforts are integrated into the core services of all administrations in the municipality. Mainstreaming should not be seen as a colour-blind universal policy (which would fit in an assimilationist approach), but as diversity-sensitive policy that does not treat people solely as a member of an ethnic group. Toronto, a city which has adopted 'Diversity Our Strength' as its motto, has a very broad understanding of diversity, including categories like seniors, youth, women, LGBTQ people, the urban poor, ethnic groups, disabled people, newcomers and immigrants, aboriginal peoples and the homeless. In the UK mainstreaming is formalized in the Equality Act 2010 in which a duty was placed on all public bodies to consider how their practices and policies impact on the equality of different groups. The legal framework requires local authorities and the Mayor to address the specific needs of diverse groups. The so-called 'protected characteristics' included in the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity (Raco et al., 2014b, p. 13).

Redistribution

The principle of redistribution is about the diminishment of differences between the rich and the poor. However, there is an unwillingness in most of our research cities to accept structural explanations for the growing social and economic inequalities that exist between groups and individuals (Raco et al., 2014a). The emphasis, instead, is on the social mobility of citizens and the role of policy in mobilising them to overcome the everyday problems that they encounter in urban life.

This trend is particularly strong in cities like London, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Zurich. In cities such as Copenhagen and Paris, on the other hand, there is still a strong attachment to by the (assumed) achievements of the welfare state. The most

pronounced example of neoliberal policy is probably London. While there is a lot of diversity policy in London in the areas of encounters (see below) and recognition (see above), there is little scope for redistribution. Some London NGOs also have trouble with the whole diversity discourse because they are seeing it as an attempt to derive attention from the “real” issues in London, such as racism and increasing inequality. Redistribution is primarily pursued by asking individuals to take more responsibility (higher education, strengthening social capital) in combination with fairly non-binding agreements with commercial and public institutions.

Under the influence of EU policy, we encounter such agreements in almost all of our research cities. For example, Paris has two policy instruments aimed at counteracting discrimination in the workplace. (1) The Charte pour la diversité en entreprise (2004): Companies that sign this charter commit themselves to promote awareness of diversity in staff members involved in application procedures. In their annual report, they should also include a chapter in which they address the measures they have taken to stimulate diversity. (2) Label Diversité (2008): This is a joint initiative of the national government and the national organization of human resource managers. Companies and organizations in the public and private sectors can get a label after an audit of their human resource activities. This label is valid for four years. An example of a local initiative to counter discrimination is the Anti-discrimination Plan prepared by the Association for the Prevention of Site Vilette (APSV), a NGO in the 19th arrondissement aimed at combating youth unemployment. The plan consists of anti-discrimination training for employment agencies and human resource managers. Anti-discrimination courses are paid for by employers themselves. The success of the plan is mainly due to the fact that employers and recruitment agencies have come to the conclusion that discrimination is a problem. However, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the plan, as the monitoring does not look at the ethnic origin of young people. In line with the Republican principle of equal treatment, no distinction is made between race, origin or religion. This fits in the French tradition of redistribution without the recognition of diversity (Escafré-Dublet & Lelévrier, 2014).

Encounters

One element of an intercultural approach is to stimulate encounters with others in urban space. Fincher and Iveson (2008, p.145) plea that city life should enable “our capacity to explore different sides of ourselves and to craft new identifications through encounters with others as strangers”. Therefore, zones of encounters should be created, as interaction will not happen automatically.

One way to create these contact opportunities is to stimulate mixed income housing. With the exception of Athens and Warsaw, these area-based policies represent an important source of intervention in our cities. However, these policies do not always have the expected result as different social groups tend to live parallel lives. In many mixed projects, there is a physical separation between affordable and commercial homes because real estate investors assume that this improves the marketability of more expensive housing (Raco et al., 2014b). In some cases, mixed housing projects further fuel the gentrification process exacerbating the shortage of affordable housing.

Cities like Paris and Zurich acknowledge the risk that mixed housing can lead to rising inequalities. Paris aims to expand the proportion of social housing in the rich southwestern part of the city to get a better balance of the various social groups. To this end, the municipality (mostly empty or partially used) buys private buildings in the city (Escafré-Dublet et al., 2014). With state support, these buildings are refurbished and the management is being outsourced to Paris Habitat (with 124 thousand homes the largest player in the social housing market in Paris). Zurich also pursues an active policy to keep the city accessible. At present 25% of the rented houses belong to the social sector. The policy is now to increase that percentage to 2050 to 1/3. In this way, the city tries to counteract the trend of gentrification (partly reinforced by past mixing policy) (Plüss & Schenkel, 2014).

Conclusions

Our research shows that it appears to be difficult to find the right balance between the planning

principles recognition and redistribution. London and Toronto are often praised for their recognition policy and tolerance, but from interviews with policy makers in the field, it appears that the positive discourse about diversity sometimes obscures our gaze and does not show what is really going on in certain neighbourhoods. Diversity is primarily used as symbolism, as a marketing strategy for cities, but there is insufficient attention to the issue of inequality. In Paris, the situation is reversed. There is a lot of attention for redistribution, but diversity is a sensitive theme within the republican French tradition. The French reluctance to accommodate the specific needs of immigrant groups may hinder the incorporation of these groups into the French society. Additionally, choosing not to collect statistics by migrant status makes it impossible to assess whether the policy of redistribution (such as anti-discrimination and job subsidization) is also effective. Zurich is one of the few cities in our research where recognition and redistribution go hand in hand. Every effort is made to make migrants feel at home and at the same time there is also an eye for the danger of increasing inequality.

With respect to the third planning principle, encounters, there are more similarities between our research cities, especially with respect to the emphasis on mixed housing policies. These policies are intended to attract middle-class residents and entrepreneurs to settle (or remain) in deprived areas. While middle-class neighbourhoods of creative people are constantly held up as the ideal, the role of people with other lifestyles and opportunities is underestimated. It is a discourse that negates the diversity of city life. If policy-makers want to encourage social cohesion, they need to invest in programmes that bring together the diverse groups of the neighbourhood. 'Soft' actions, which foster encounters and interactions between people with diverse backgrounds, can be used to positive effect. Examples of 'soft' actions are organizing festivities, helping residents start up activities and manage and run community halls, and getting residents to participate in social programmes.

¹ This is a shortened version of Bolt, G. (2017) *Governing diversity and social cohesion in European cities* (Adjacent Open Access e-book) <http://www.adjacentopenaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Faculty-of-Geoscience-ebook-June-17-v2-WEB.pdf>.

² This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement No. 319970. SSH.2012.2.2.2-1; *Governance of cohesion and diversity in urban contexts*.

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Further reading:
<https://www.urbandiversities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/DIVERCITIES-Handbook-Digital.pdf>

Mid-sized cities: The key to inclusive growth in the UK

Cllr Peter Box, Chair of Key Cities takes the stance that mid-sized cities are key to inclusive growth in the UK

The UK faces a number of demanding economic challenges over the next decade. Stagnant productivity growth, unaffordable housing, inequality between regions and ageing infrastructure must all be addressed while continuing to navigate the unsteady waters of a post-referendum UK.

Any successful response to these challenges is dependent on a united country, with cities – beyond our major population centres – that can provide the skills, investment and opportunity to reinvigorate Britain’s economy. There is no shortage of innovation and dynamism across these cities but for such resources to be effectively tapped, decision-making must be brought as close as possible to people and businesses across Britain.

That’s why during the summer of 2013, we officially brought together the Key Cities Group, a cross-party initiative comprising 20 of the UK’s cities middle-sized cities. For Key Cities, policy and delivery must be more integrated and tailored to the diverse needs of the country, particularly given growing evidence that smaller cities often play a highly significant role in driving a nation’s economic performance.

Our mid-sized cities, ranging in population from approximately 100,000 to 700,000, deliver a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £133 billion to the UK economy (equivalent to the GVA of Scotland) and play a key role in their regional economy: some are centres of innovation, some are centres for production, whilst others may be the focus for trade. There is a wealth of opportunity that will only truly flourish once longstanding issues of economic imbalance and exclusion are addressed and they are equipped with the tools to attract inward investment.



Image: © Matthew Page Photography

Cllr Peter Box, Chair of Key Cities

Unblocking barriers to productivity

Indeed, these cities, which include some of the poorest and most economically challenging parts of the UK and voted overwhelmingly for Leave in the referendum, represent a vital conduit through which national policymakers can hear from and reach the heartlands of Brexit Britain. With the necessary voice, the councils of these cities can play a central role in connecting Leave voters with the big decisions on the economy and wider society from which those voters have clearly felt so alienated.



For a country that now lags 26% behind the United States and 15% behind the average of G7 countries, it is essential that we ensure the development of policy and practice that enables all cities to identify and unblock barriers to higher productivity. A number of our mid-sized cities are already performing well across industries from digital to advanced manufacturing, but strong productivity and associated measures are far from being universal across mid-size cities in the UK.

The key to an inclusive country

Addressing underinvestment in key sectors, inadequate housing, limited infrastructure and poor skills in these cities, is a vital step towards inclusive growth. It is also important that their unique strengths, such as their greater agility and capacity to focus on very specific areas of competitive advantage, can be deployed, and the barriers to seizing opportunities removed. This in part, requires Key City councils to deepen democratic engagement within their own places but also having the necessary freedoms, powers and resources to make that democratic engagement meaningful.

A united, productive and inclusive future for the UK cannot be achieved without these key cities. The size of their collective populations, importance to the economy and high concentration of Leave voters means they must be at the heart of any effort to deliver change.

The attributes of these cities are by no means uniform, but the diverse nature of the individual cities' heritage and assets, when brought together, offers a significant combined presence. The UK works best when it works together, and Key Cities will continue to create a unified voice and an alliance of shared interests that can ultimately meet the UK's biggest challenges.

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