

Intercultural City Project

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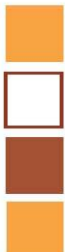
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Aims & Target Group

The international Intercultural City project, undertaken between 2005 and 2007 explored: the institutional barriers and opportunities to maximizing economic benefits; considered the urban planning needs of cities with culturally diverse demographics; and aimed to provide guidance for future policy on diversity and wealth creation in cities. The aim was to draw conclusions which would both support policy makers at the local level and to contribute, through comparative analysis, to wider understanding of these complex but vital issues.

- The project considered the extent to which cultural diversity is a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship and how this is a positive force releasing new energy and resources for the development of cities.
- It sought to understand how the combination of different cultural skills and attributes leads to new and divergent thinking and what are the conditions that most encourage this.
- It explored the extent to which increased intercultural dialogue, exchange and activity is the catalyst for this process.
- It sought to understand the role of intercultural networks and intermediary change-agents, finding out who they are, how they work and what are the conditions which either encourage or hinder them.
- It explored the relationship between diversity and the built environment and the potential of urban planning through an “intercultural lens”.





Project Description & Components

Are mixed societies more creative than homogeneous ones? Is there a diversity advantage for cities?

If so what are the practical ways of helping communities to realise their advantage through living and working together rather than apart?

Throughout the world, migration is rendering communities more diverse and complex than ever before. This poses one of the great challenges of our age and how we respond as individuals and societies will have far-reaching implications. Is diversity a threat to be resisted, a potential problem to be resolved or an opportunity to be realised? The Intercultural City study believes the latter is true and calls for a change in mindset particularly in the way our urban communities are planned and managed.

Many local and international businesses have established the value of “productive diversity” but there is little evidence that city governments have reached the same conclusion. Indeed the research evidence suggests that few have yet thought about whether this logic reads across into the complex arena of the metropolis. The Intercultural City project was a serious investigation into this fascinating phenomenon. Comedia lead an international programme of research and policy development with the aim of providing advice and practical tools for cities seeking to benefit from the diversity dividends.

The conclusions so far are that we need to look afresh *through an intercultural lens* at the way our towns and cities are run, because a greater emphasis on interaction, bridging and the exchange of ideas can release a *diversity dividend* of social and economic benefits for our communities. The catalyst can often be remarkable individuals or groupings who transgress cultural and social boundaries, but local authorities often know little or nothing about these *intercultural innovators*. Cities can come to grips with this new way of working by the introduction of a toolkit of quantitative, qualitative and documentary methods: the *indicators of interculturalism and openness*.

Process

The project involved both research into international trends and a series of city case studies in England, Norway, Australia and New Zealand. The Australian and NZ case studies involved Logan City Council, QLD and Auckland City Council. The research employed a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches in recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of the subject, including:

- Analysis of secondary data on demographics, economics, labour market, migration, and innovation at national and regional levels
- Semi-structured interviews with key individuals
- Community focus groups involving a “Listening and Learning Cycle” technique





- Case studies of key intercultural actors employing a life history approach, based on in-depth interviews, highlighting key influences in a person's education and employment trajectory.
- Mapping of networks
- Mapping and analysis of settlement and clustering patterns
- Focus groups with network members.

Outcomes

The project provided insights into questions such as:

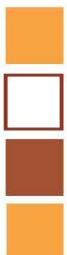
- How do new ideas and innovations emerge when people of diverse cultures interact?
- How are these formed into new products, services, styles and ways of doing things and how do these then spread?
- What kinds of individuals, groups, networks and background conditions help to make this happen more frequently?
- What city planning decisions can assist in developing a creative milieu in which intercultural dialogue can flourish?

The findings will provide policy makers in city development, business, urban planning and innovation management with evidence and a toolkit of techniques with which encourage greater intercultural innovation.

It will also highlight the practices and conditions which are like to act as a disincentive to intercultural innovation.

The deliverables of the project include:

- Case studies and a final report with locally-specific recommendations on each city within the project
- Reports of thematic studies on key cross-cutting issues by experts in the respective fields
- A detailed final report that aggregates the findings of all the city and thematic studies with practical recommendations for policy-makers
- A knowledge network enabling practitioners in all the participating cities to exchange experiences
- A series of Intercultural City publications:
 - Book 1: "The Intercultural City Reader", by Phil Wood
 - Book 2: "Planning for the Intercultural City", by Jude Bloomfield and Franco Bianchini
 - Book 3: "More than just a Bridge: Planning and Designing Culturally" by Richard Brecknock
 - Book 4: "The Road To Interculturalism: tracking the arts in a changing world" by Naseem Khan
- A closing international conference in Liverpool, England from the 1st-3rd May 2008 to launch the project findings and to trigger further research in the subject. The conference is part of the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.





Challenges & Obstacles

The intercultural city approach necessitates a commitment to “think, plan and act culturally” in a way that acknowledges and appreciates the city’s multicultural diversity and supports cross-cultural interaction and engagement. To maintain this is a real challenge because a number of factors are involved in its maintenance but especially the financial resource which is often scarce.

Funding

The Intercultural City was an initiative of the UK urban think tank Comedia. The overall UK project and research funding was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and individual city authorities provided funding for each of the city case studies.

Images

