Building Intercultural Cities:  
From Practice to Policy and Back Again

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An international forum organized by the LABRRI, in collaboration with the City of Montreal and the Council of Europe

Cities have always been places where people of different cultural and social backgrounds cohabit and pursue common goals in spite of their differences. In this sense there is nothing new about the phenomenon of intercultural cities. In recent years, however, the intensification of cultural diversity in cities in many parts of the world has led to increasing concerns about inter-ethnic tensions, social inequality, and racial discrimination. One response to these challenges has been to focus more attention on the dynamics and potential benefits of intercultural policy and practice (Gimenez, Wood and Landry 2008).

Intercultural policy for cities has become a dynamic area of research and policy design. Some authors have even suggested that this movement represents a totally new approach to the problems of social inclusion and cohesion in an era of super-diversity (Cantle 2012, Zapata 2013). By virtue of their intermediate status—not federal, not provincial, at the same time global and local—cities are in a particularly good position to formulate policy frameworks that will contribute to the well-being of all citizens, regardless of their origins (White in press). To go beyond the promotion of «good practices», however, it is important to think about intercultural policy from an analytical and comparative perspective.

Certain cities have made significant advances in this domain, but until now very little work has been done to understand the underlying principles of these frameworks and the processes involved in their implementation. The outreach activity proposed here—an international workshop on the process of policy design for intercultural cities—will bring together policymakers and intercultural experts in order to compare intercultural policies and practices in cities that are increasingly affected by the phenomenon of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007). The primary objective of the workshop is to elaborate a series of tools that will enable policymakers and practitioners to make cities more inclusive by leveraging recent advances in the field of intercultural policy and practice (Council of Europe 2009, Rocher in press, White in press).

Overview

The outreach activity proposed here is the final event in a series of activities that will result in the production of an on-line resource for intercultural policy design and practice. Through a number of presentations, roundtables and interactive break-out sessions, participants will be asked to present recent findings on intercultural policy for cities, not only the different components of particular policy frameworks, but also the obstacles most often encountered during design and implementation and the strategies used to create alliances, both internally and externally. In order to organize these disparate forms of information, the workshop will produce three concrete outcomes:
• a series of city-based case studies about policy process and design
• a comparative analysis framework for understanding similarities and differences between cities
• a proposal of common principles for policy design in intercultural cities

The proposed activities will attempt to bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners by enabling practitioners to become familiar with new methodologies and analytical frameworks, while at the same time providing researchers and their students with valuable information about intercultural and institutional dynamics on the ground.

Description and Objectives

Background

The nature and scale of recent immigration to the large urban centers of industrialized nations has led to a series of social and political issues that have yet to be fully understood. Recent data from the city of Montreal indicates that one of every two people living in poverty is an immigrant and that the number of visible minorities will most likely double in the next twenty years (source: Montreal en statistiques). Furthermore, increasingly immigrants are from different religious and racial backgrounds than the host society where they decide to make their home. These are some of the social and demographic factors that have led a number of scholars to suggest that we have progressed from an era of diversity to one of “super-diversity”, or what might be described as the “diversification of diversity” (Vertovec 2007). Regardless of the terminology to be used, it is safe to assume that the effects of this new immigration will have an impact for years to come and this means that we need to understand the challenges posed by these changes in order to respond in politically responsible and sustainable ways (Emongo and White, in press).

With regards to national approaches to the diversity management, assimilationist models have been systematically rejected, and even multiculturalism is increasingly being criticized (Cantle 2012), especially in the context of concerns about the resurgence of nationalist and extremist political movements. The recent focus on intercultural practice and policy has been suggested as a viable alternative for cities seeking new ways to respond to these challenges (Wood 2012, Council of Europe 2009). There are many ways to think about intercultural dynamics, but some commonalities exist across different approaches, for example a clear engagement with the problem of discrimination, the analysis of local contexts from a systemic perspective (Bateson 1972) and a focus on the dynamics of interactions (Council of Europe 2008, Wood and Landry 2008, White and Emongo in press). A critical approach to intercultural dynamics assumes that the problems associated with diversity should be the concern of all citizens (Blattberg 2009)—not just immigrants—and that policy should take into account not only immigrants and minorities (Arcand et al), but also vulnerable groups that are generally associated with the majority.

By virtue of their intermediate status—not federal, not provincial, at the same time global and local—cities are in a particularly good position to formulate policy frameworks that will contribute to the well-being of all citizens, regardless of their origins (White in press). Montreal is the ideal location for a workshop of this type. In the first place, the City of Montreal has nearly
thirty years of experience in policy research and planning related to social and cultural diversity. This experience, which was recently recognized by the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities programme (Montreal placed fifth in the intercultural city index) reflects the desire of different actors and institutions in Montreal to make the city more accessible and more inclusive.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of this outreach activity is to assist policymakers and planners in their efforts to make cities more inclusive by leveraging recent advances in the field of intercultural policy and practice. In addition to this general objective, the workshop has several specific objectives:

• Bring together researchers and practitioners specializing in intercultural issues in order to mobilize knowledge about the conditions, principles and strategies that are required for the creation and implementation of effective intercultural policies in cities

• Facilitate communication between actors and institutions with expertise in intercultural policy in order to develop a comparative analytical framework that can be used to develop intercultural policy in cities that are faced with increasingly diverse populations

• Work with policymakers and planners from cities in different parts of the world to elaborate a series of common principles that will be able to guide the actions of local decision-makers, analysts and everyday citizens

Content of the Workshop

Through a series of presentations, roundtables and interactive break-out sessions, participants will be asked to present recent findings on key aspects of intercultural policy in cities, not only the different components of particular frameworks, but also the obstacles most often encountered during design and implementation and the strategies used to create alliances, both internally and externally. Activities during the workshop will emphasize the processes by which intercultural city experts have been able to go beyond the challenges of monocultural structures and paradigms by supporting initiatives that promote improved access for minorities and positive, sustained social interactions. We will ask forum participants to think about two specific aspects of intercultural policy in order to facilitate a comparative analysis: 1) examples of « knots » or systemic obstacles that pose limits on the elaboration or acceptance of intercultural models and 2) the question of « scale » or the different levels of political and social action that in some cases over-determine possible outcomes of intercultural initiatives (see White, Gratton, Allard http://labrri.net/?p=1117#more-1117).

Intended Results and Outcomes

Various types of information will be exchanged during the workshop and disseminated following the workshop: information about local innovation and initiatives, examples of “critical incidents” (Cohen-Émerique 2013), factors of multi-level analysis (Zapata 2013), experiences with regional networking efforts, methods for the analysis of interactions, descriptions of efforts to mobilize
political support, examples of evaluation tools and techniques. In order to organize these disparate forms of information, the workshop will produce three concrete outcomes that policymakers and researchers will be able to use in various aspects of their work:

**City-based Case Studies.** Each city represented at the workshop will be the subject of a short case study focusing on the process of policy design and implementation in their local context. The text for each case study will be the responsibility of a team composed of one city official and one intercultural expert. The texts will be published in the form of an edited volume that will be available both in print and in an enriched multi-media format accessible on-line.

**Comparative Framework Analysis.** Following preliminary research on the different types of intercultural policies and policy frameworks, members of the LABBRI intercultural policies working group will propose a preliminary version of this analysis in order to get feedback from forum participants and revise the analysis for future publication and dissemination through the on-line resource. By breaking down different intercultural policy frameworks into their composite elements, policymakers and planners will be able to construct new policy frameworks that respond to local needs and conditions.

**Proposal of Common Principles.** The final roundtable of the workshop will be reserved for a discussion about the possibility of identifying a series of principles that characterise effective intercultural policy frameworks for cities anywhere. In the months following the forum, this set of principles will be revised and circulated within the intercultural cities network and later through an on-line resource in order to help municipalities and researchers promote intercultural policies that are cognizant of local conditions, socially responsible and politically sustainable.

**Collaborative Research and Contributors**

In the context of these activities, we propose a novel approach to the transfer of knowledge by pairing up intercultural experts with representatives from the different municipalities that will be participating in the workshop. The city-expert model was developed by the Council of Europe in the context of their research and consulting activities for the Intercultural Cities Program. For our research in Montreal we have adopted the city-expert model but developed it in a number of important ways. One example is the establishment of a technical partnership between the City of Montreal and the City of Barcelona, which involved a series of preparatory meetings between the expert and the city representative in each city and a series of video conferences between planners which were moderated by experts Ricard Zapata and Bob White.

Experts will be paired with representatives from the cities they were assigned to as consultants for the ICC program, which means that in most cases the city-expert team has been working together over a period of several years and are familiar with each other’s institutional frameworks and methodologies. Leading up to the workshop, each city-expert team will decide upon the materials that will be used for their presentation and following the workshop they will work together to co-author a case study based on the material that they have presented. In their work with city representatives, experts are accustomed to providing specialized mentoring in order to assist in the elaboration of intercultural policy (information about particular notions or concepts, historical and comparative material from other cities, academic research on immigration and integration, methodological orientations, design of assessment tools, etc.).
As highly qualified personnel, city representatives are highly skilled at assimilating new forms of information and are in an institutional position that enables them to transfer knowledge at different organizational levels; most city representatives are heads of divisions or managers who are in charge of social programs aimed at helping ethnic and visible minorities as well as immigrants. The workshop will also include contributions from students involved in the research partnership, including the production of an annotated bibliography on intercultural cities, the recording of "hallway conversations" by a selection of conference participants, and a number of critical summaries based on the different activities taking place during the workshop. Community-based researchers will present findings produced during their involvement in the Practical Theory Workshop, an activity that involves an ongoing collaboration between a researcher affiliated with LABRRI and one of the community-based organizations involved in the research partnership. The workshop will include presentations from three such collaborations.

Participants and Partners

The municipalities and regional authorities that will be sending a representative to workshop are those that have had the most experience in terms of implementing intercultural policy: Botkyrka (Sweden), Copenhagen (Denmark), Lewisham (United Kingdom), Barcelona (Spain), Canton de Neuchâtel (Switzerland), Oslo (Norway), and Reggio Emilia (Italy). Each of these authorities will send one representative and will be accompanied by an ICC or university-based expert. The workshop will include the participation of the members of our research partnership: Division of Social Diversity (City of Montreal), Montreal Public Librairies (City of Montreal), Service du capital humain (City of Montreal), Conseil intercultural de Montréal, La Maisonnée Inc., Carrefour de ressources interculturelles, CARI St. Laurent, Diversité artistique Montréal, Groupe d'études et de recherches axées sur la communication internationale, le Centre d'histoire de Montréal et le Comité d'action interculturelle de Lasalle. The steering committee for the event is composed of the following members: François Rocher (University of Ottawa), Danielle Gratton (University of Montreal), Patrice Allard (City of Montreal), Gilles Rioux (Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine), Irena Guidikova (Council of Europe), and Bob White (University of Montreal).

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