

URBAN ENVIRONMENT OF INTERCULTURAL  
DIALOGUE IN EUROPE: WHY CITIES MATTER  
IN BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC «URBAN CIVITAS»

ABSTRACT

*Cities are increasingly seen as economic, political and social assets in the changing European societies. They are hubs for diversity, integration and intercultural meetings and are of vital importance to mobilise citizens. Being the closest level of governance to citizens, cities have an important responsibility to put in place structures and mechanisms that allow citizens to actively participate at all levels of democratic life. Cities' experiences and (innovative) practices of democratic processes are therefore very relevant when developing a new (plural, democratic) citizenship. Within the emerging new urban environment, culture and intercultural dialogue are mobilising sources in building a democratic «urban civitas».*

*The working hypothesis of this paper is the importance and relevance of the creative urban edge of cities in developing active citizenship. Cities are seen in today's Europe as major vehicles to create an «urban civitas», representing local communities of diversified values and practices at citizen level. They are changing places where tradition is continuously confronted with modernity. They may offer inclusive and democratic environments for practising intercultural dialogue. The natural environment for intercultural dialogue is the city and the inclusive city should provide the ground for its achievement.*

*In a first part we present the broad conceptual context in which cities operate as meeting places, confronting past, present and future in various aspects of material and immaterial societal life. In a second part challenges and opportunities of cities in building creative and sustainable urban realities in Europe are analysed. The last part deals with policy conditions of urban democratic governance, conducive for citizens' participation and intercultural dialogue practices. It is suggested that interconnecting cities on European*

*cultural itineraries may create a borderless environment for intercultural practice between people.*

INTRODUCTION: THE CREATIVE URBAN EDGE

In today's Europe we experience a transformation in the perceptions of the role cities can play in developing sustainable communities of common interest and shared values. Cities are increasingly seen in a wider societal context, linking place, territory and scale with governance, inclusion and participation. They are perceived as economic, political and social assets in the changing European societies. Within this emerging new urban environment, culture and intercultural dialogue are mobilising sources in building a democratic «urban civitas».

Cities are hubs for diversity, integration and intercultural encounters and of vital importance to mobilise citizens. Being the closest level of governance to citizens they have a crucial responsibility to put in place structures and mechanisms that allow citizens to actively participate at all levels of democratic life. Their experiences and (innovative) local practices of democratic processes are therefore very relevant when developing a new (plural, democratic) citizenship.

The working hypothesis of this paper is the relevance of the creative urban edge of cities in developing active citizenship. Cities can be seen in today's Europe as major vehicles to create an urban civitas, representing local communities of diversified values and practices at citizen level. They are changing places where tradition is continuously confronted with modernity. Today they may offer inclusive and democratic environments for practising intercultural dialogue. The natural environment for intercultural dialogue is the city and the inclusive city should provide the ground for its achievement.

This policy research paper is divided in three parts. In a first part we present the broad conceptual context in which cities operate as meeting places, confronting past, present and future in various aspects of material and immaterial societal life. In a second part we analyse the challenges and opportunities of cities in building creative and sustainable urban realities in Europe. The last part deals with the policy conditions of urban democratic governance, conducive for citizens' participation and intercultural dialogue practices.

## PART I. CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT: THE URBAN CIVITAS

*A. Key Concepts: Inclusion, Integration and Diversity<sup>1</sup>*

Urban civitas addresses the combined and overlapping themes of inclusion, integration and diversity. This paper suggests that integration cannot be achieved without inclusion and that a society that exhibits respect for diversity and dialogue needs both integration and inclusion. The concept links the «demos» with the «polis».

*1. Inclusion*

Inclusion is defined as people's capability to participate fully in economic, social and political life. The growing interest in the inclusion of wider social, cultural and environmental concerns into all areas and levels of policy-making has led to the adoption of the now fashionable term of mainstreaming. As a consequence, policies have moved from a narrow basic human needs approach to a wider view of an inclusive and cohesive society.

Such inclusive policies can be promoted through the participation of public bodies, social partners, NGOs and other relevant actors. Partnerships of community leaders and elected municipal politicians are emerging with the aim to strengthen the capacity of cities to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people and to ensure that community voices of diversity can be recognised.

*2. Integration*

In the framework of this paper integration refers to a variety of processes by which individuals and groups of people are incorporated into various social arenas and segments of society. Therefore, the essence of integration is the acceptance and tolerance of and respect for other people possessing different values and beliefs and behaving differently, while at the same time being committed to and working towards a common future, in which all will have a fair share.

Living with differences in societies requires the management of differences. Two areas of management are fundamental: the cultural field and the field of material resources, or rather access to resources. In order to live together in a cohesive community with different cultures, synchronisation in public space is necessary in

order to prevent open conflict and promote cooperation and the sense of belonging to the community. We perceive integration therefore not as a flattening process of assimilation but as a two-way process, based on a framework of basic values, i.e. the human rights paradigm, in which equal opportunity, cultural diversity and mutual tolerance are respected.

Furthermore, the European context implies that integration is understood from within its existing multicultural environment. Multiculturalism advocates that society allows and include distinct cultural groups with equal status but differing cultural identities. A useful reminder in this perspective is the distinction Amartya Sen's makes in his recent book *Identity and Violence* between the idea of cultural liberty, which focuses on freedom either to preserve or to change priorities, and that of valuing cultural conservation<sup>2</sup>. In reality multicultural practices sometimes lead to entrenchment of cultural identity, «ghettoisation» of particular groups or a policy of separate development of ethnic minorities.

### 3. Diversity

Diversity is a much more nebulous concept than inclusion or integration. Within the context of this paper diversity is defined as recognising, appreciating, valuing and utilising the unique talents and contributions of all individuals regardless differences in values, beliefs and life styles culture, language, religion, etc. Diversity means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. The Human Development Report 2004 of the UNDP refers to a set of conscious practices that involve<sup>3</sup>: «a) understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; b) practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; c) understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing; d) recognising that personal, cultural and institutionalised discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and e) building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination». The Report concludes that an enriching effect of the recognition of diversity for democracy and progress can be obtained through building multicultural democracies and various forms of advanced democracy<sup>4</sup>.

## B. Conceptual Responses

### 1. *Moving from Multiculturalism to Interculturalism*

In accepting «urban civitas» as the underlying vision for linking intercultural dialogue with citizenship we follow Stavenhagen's anthropological definition of culture as capital, creativity and way of life<sup>5</sup>. He distinguishes three main functions of culture:

- the conservation of culture: culture as an asset, tangible or intangible and a carrier of local identity. Its protection against territorial and market trends shapes the urban context;
- the production of culture: culture as a commodity which needs to be re-produced not only to reconstitute the cultural capital but also as a source of economic development insofar it is embedded in production processes;
- the valorisation of culture: culture as a set of norms and capacities which enrich the local communities and may be used as bridge builders and carriers of good relations for social and economic exchange.

A dynamic and interactive process between these three functions of culture implies not only peaceful coexistence of different cultures within society but also a mutually influencing and open dialogue between cultures. Such a conceptual change from multicultural coexistence to intercultural dialogue may avoid the trap of cultural relativism and provide the base of a democratic process of citizens' participation.

### 2. *Recognising Multi-Faced Identities and Cosmopolitan Citizenship*

The debate concerning identity and citizenship is crucial for understanding the role of intercultural dialogue in developing advanced forms of democracy. Identity-building is not a constant and invariable process, but changes over time according to criteria such as birth, family, language, religion, territory, etc. This process has turned even more complex and more disturbed by the growing individualisation, intolerant and distrustful behaviour as well as by the vagueness of the moral norms within society. In short, identity is becoming more and more a relation identity with no exclusive characteristics in modern societies.

The inclusion of a European dimension as an added (enriched) value to our relation identity reinforces our conceptual point of

departure. Multiplicity is therefore the basis of European identity, shaped by a community of shared values (such as solidarity, the rule of law, respect for diversity, attention to the person and the human dignity). This enriching effect is certainly true for the cultural identity, which binds and unifies countries, regions and groups of persons by shared memories and expectations. The political meaning of the recognition of multi-faced identities lies in the mutual respect for the uniqueness of the person. It constitutes the basis for more and certainly better dialogue and solidarity within and outside Europe and may finally lead to a cosmopolitan citizenship within a European context, rooted in the universal human rights paradigm<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. *Humanising Globalisation*

A process of humanising globalisation, defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon and process, can give another response. This mainly economically dominated process has led to a commodification and depersonalisation of economic and social relations, a radical decrease of the power of states in managing socio-economic activities and an increasing control of democratic societies by transnational networks. Europe is however not an exclusive economic space, but in the first place a community of shared values, which is forced to re-visit its premises in a newly emerging geopolitical and economic setting.

Dealing responsively with the various consequences of globalisation is based on a common pattern of values and mutual respect of differences. A more «compassionate globalisation»<sup>7</sup> (or a cosmopolite humanism) is required against any cultural relativism. Structures are needed to create both zones of common interests and shared values, as structures for civilised confrontation and disagreement. At the same time, different cultures need to re-examine their own realities in the context of globalisation in order to re-locate themselves in this new reality. This implies the emergence of a global consciousness and the acceptance of multi-faced identities and multiple modernities<sup>8</sup>. The role of education is herein fundamental through the introduction of learning processes that replace a culture of competition, distrust and fear for a culture of cooperation, peace and mutual respect.

#### 4. *Revalorising the Role of Cultures in Europe*

In accepting an anthropological definition of culture we identify European culture(s) as a dynamic interaction of historic, spiritual, intellectual, material, artistic characteristics and attitudes. These characteristics illustrate the multiplicity and wealth of European cultures, cultural expressions and traditions. These diversified but shared cultural expressions finally make up Europe's social, cultural and human capital. This cultural multiplicity is also a source of inner strength and outer pride. Not any culture can be missed in the European cultural landscape.

Although Europe is pre-eminently a space of cultural diversity, respect for cultural diversity should not lead to ethnic reflexes and exclusive attitudes. The binding role of an internal and external open culture approach is to be a guarantee for further European integration and a renewed cooperation with other cultures. As a consequence, we conceive culture in the first place as a source of inspiration for social integration, socio-economic development and societal inclusion. It certainly may give an impulse to greater commitment and participation of the citizen to the European project.

#### 5. *Stimulating Intercultural Dialogue*

The term «intercultural dialogue» is strongly normative and is seen as a pathway towards the goal of attaining ways of living together. Regardless the various interpretations Ray Isar's definition<sup>9</sup> of intercultural dialogue as an inherently normative and voluntaristic practice of «learning to live together»<sup>10</sup>, very well suits the purpose of this paper.

In this perspective it is important to recall different uses of intercultural processes. Intercultural dialogue can be instrumental to soften and avoid the (negative) consequences of the globalisation process (i.e. the issue of minorities, migration, poverty, etc.). A dialogue between peoples and cultures can also be constructive if it is based on common and moral values. In the current tension between (economic) globalisation, need for internal and external solidarity, and respect for different cultures, such a dialogue can be a vehicle for conviviality in which cultures influence each other without destroying each other or to clash with each other. It may certainly lead to a more active and consensus-building citizens' participation.

As to the specific European intercultural dialogue, it is clear that Europe as a global actor has an important responsibility in enabling and facilitating intercultural dialogue<sup>11</sup>. Europe should be a communicative bridge builder and a boundaries-breaker in such a dialogue. The specificity of the underlying characteristics of the European model is much related to mutual understanding and learning in open dialogue. Within this context initiatives have been taken and policies developed to reinforce the dialogue between peoples, cultures and civilisations<sup>12</sup>. As such intercultural dialogue is an integrative force of (re)creating the urban civitas.

Crucial in this perspective is the role of education. The learning processes to intercultural dialogue, active citizenship and civic education are based on integral human development. These are to be organised at multiple levels of democratic governance in which cities have to play an increasing role. Places for educational and cultural encounters are crucial for practicing Europe.

PART II. CREATIVE URBAN REALITIES IN EUROPE:  
WHY CITIES MATTER IN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

In the second part of the paper we focus on the urban environment that is needed to favour actual intercultural dialogue. Urban realities are increasingly playing a role in stimulating creativity for economic, social, political and cultural development. Cities are breeding grounds for inclusion, integration and diversity. Our working hypothesis is that the «urban civitas», as explained in the first part of the paper, is a major shaping factor in the promotion of active European citizenship at the ground by introducing innovative democratic processes.

*A. The Urban Context*

An understanding of the context is crucial in any process of urban development that includes both a transformation of the physical fabric and a consideration of culture as a transforming power. The specificity of the urban context is further determined by the various governance levels that move from hierarchical to networking relations.

In the White Paper *The Century of the City*<sup>13</sup>, a Urban Policy



Project of the Flemish Community, urbanity is characterised by four main shaping dimensions: sustainable development (including cohesion, integration and time quality); density (including scale and scope); diversity (including multi/interculturalism, cultural pluralism and complexity); and democracy (including participation and good governance between the various stakeholders). Urbanity presents then the appropriate context for the «urban civitas» that might lead to locally rooted urban democracy in which authentic intercultural dialogue can develop.

Conditions of urban policies that respond to this renewed role of cities as reference frame in economy, polity, society and culture are manifold. They may vary from the need to develop glocal strategies, to master spatial cohesion, to propose qualitative density in space and environment, to stimulate innovating and creative power, to create urban diversity and flexibility within multi-faced identities and to guarantee urban solidarity, social justice and cultural diversity. The creation of such a favourable environment presupposes an active investment in strong development coalitions between public, private and civil society stakeholders at territorial level and issue level.

### *B. Urban Challenges*

The challenges of urban realities in creating a favourable urban context vary. For some cities, the challenges are increasing population, rising house prices, a lack of available land, traffic congestion and overstretched public services; for others, depopulation, degradation, lack of jobs or low quality of life. At least four key issues require attention in urban policies. They create the (pre)-conditions for citizens' participation to sustainable and creative urban development as well as to intercultural dialogue.

#### *1. Transport, Accessibility and Mobility*

Problems of social inclusion, education, housing and public space can be addressed through innovations in transport. Less cars often means more civic space and civic resources for people. Many cities are trying to reduce the negative effects of urban transport by providing high quality public transport and better management of traffic. Affordable access to public transport is a key component of such a strategy. Another is increasing the opportunities for cycling

and walking, which is not only a contribution to sustainability but also to public health. Moreover, a lot of European cities have made a substantial investment in tram or light rail systems. Successful management of urban transport often requires the city and its surrounding region to coordinate transport planning, construction and land use. They all form part of an integrated transport strategy for the urban area and may provide the necessary conditions for increased citizens' involvement into local processes.

## 2. *Access to Service Facilities*

Well-working and affordable services related to health, culture, education, training, retailing and public administration are vital to the quality of urban life. They make a city and its neighbourhoods more attractive and liveable. An unconventional and innovative solution to this challenge is to create city-wide amenities in deprived areas. It creates services, reduces isolation, stimulates encounters and improves the image of the area within the broader urban context. Another innovative solution to greater inclusion and integration of citizens into public life can be the creation of easy online access to public services such as eGovernment, eHealth and eLearning.

## 3. *Natural and Physical Environment*

People want to live and work in cities with a distinct identity, where both natural and built environment provide a good environmental, living and housing quality. This requires coordination between various disciplines and competences involved in urban developments. Therefore cities need to grow the infrastructure that can enable this emergent energy to scale up across the whole city by capitalising on their distinctive assets and stories.

Activities to launch urban renewal or improve the urban quality require long term and integrated redevelopment plans that are citizens-based. In particular, housing-related programmes (such as the rehabilitation of common spaces; the construction of social housing; security measures and crime prevention; efficient energy and water supplies; etc.) will need proper financing if increased citizens' participation in local democratic processes is to be successful.

## 4. *Culture*

Culture and the management of its diversity often challenge

urban realities by creating opportunities as well as hindrances for dialogue. Cultural amenities are a key determinant of the attractiveness of a city. In particular, a vibrant and diversified cultural offer may be an important locational factor in attracting people and creative industries. It may provide the conditions that encourage individual as well as business creativity. Moreover, local pride and identity and the image a city presents to the outside world are in large part determined by the quality of its local cultural scene.

Culture is important for all cities, but particularly in changing the image of a deprived city. Its role often determines the success or failure of regeneration projects of urban areas. Festivals, exhibitions and cultural events are especially important in forming the brand image of a city. Culture can also be a valuable tool for intercultural dialogue – a cultural centre where communities meet or a local cooperation project between various neighbourhoods offer space for true encounter between peoples from different cultures. Cultural diversity can also be a source of innovation and entrepreneurship, and can become a positive force in the socio-economic development of cities.

### *C. Urban Opportunities*

If positive answers are given to these urban challenges, cities can be the main actors for creating the «urban civitas» in Europe, in particular for providing the environment for intercultural dialogue.

#### *1. Cities: Sources for European Identity, Imagination and Integration*

Throughout history cities have always been driving forces of culture, civilisation and development in Europe<sup>14</sup>. They express the richness of Europe, its cultural and spiritual memory and its creative will to make history. Cities are the meeting places on the roads to intercultural dialogue<sup>15</sup>. The spirituality of the place can be a driving force for city planners and local decision-makers in rediscovering the European identity<sup>16</sup>. Cities are the stories they tell about themselves. Pride, confidence and identity come from the collective imagination of people across the city. The opportunity is to reconcile the past and to realistically link that to different possible futures through encouraging public participation.

This is why policy at regional, national and European level needs to have an urban dimension: to exchange experiences and best

practices, to help overcome urban (social and cultural) ruptures and finally to bring forward new investment in social capital development. An imaginative city-based approach may help the urban areas to design principles that allow for creativity and experimentation and favour citizens' participation from the grass roots level.

## *2. Cities: Engines for Sustainable Growth, Social Cohesion and Urban Quality*

Cities have also often been engines of economic and social development, creating growth, innovation and employment. Economic and social sustainability is in this perspective a key concept in urban policies<sup>17</sup>. Economic, social and urban policies are mutually reinforcing: economic growth is sustainable when it goes hand in hand with efforts to reduce poverty, fight social exclusion and tackle urban problems. However, significant disparities in economic, social and urban opportunities as well as contradictory developments between Northern and Southern European cities exist. They often necessitate diversified urban policies and different types of urban action.

With increasing powers cities today have the political opportunities to realise their objectives of sustainable growth and social cohesion within an increasing urban quality context. People want to live and work in cities with clean air, green and secure spaces, attractive architecture and high quality services, including cultural and recreational amenities. When cities have the structures and means to create urban quality they provide the conditions of an inclusive and democratic urban civitas for the multicultural composition of their inhabitants.

## *3. Cities: Facilitators for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the Knowledge Society*

Cities often provide a stimulating environment for creativity<sup>18</sup>, innovation and businesses. In the emerging European creative urban reality cities can stimulate the creation and development of SME's micro-enterprises and social economy enterprises, set up business incubators, provide access to finance and other business services. In addition, experiences and practices illustrate that cities can simplify administrative demands, improve education and training opportunities, facilitate networking between education and enterprises and stimulate the cooperation between companies,

research institutes and universities. Being laboratories of innovative democratic initiatives, they fully contribute to the development of sustainable knowledge societies and obtain more easily a new equilibrium between change and tradition in a stimulating urban environment with citizens' involvement.

#### *4. Cities: Contributors to Achieving a Better Territorial Cohesion across Europe<sup>19</sup>*

Apart from the two mega-poles of London and Paris, Europe is characterised through its history, by a unique polycentric structure of large, mid-size and small cities. Many of these cities cluster together to form metropolitan areas; others exist as single urban centres of a region. However, the creation of sustainable urban communities within a context of global competition and multi-level governance needs to build on the actual resources of urban areas, regardless of size.

One tool for balanced development is policy coordination, including developing strategic alliances and coherent decision-making processes. One example is intra-city coordination between different neighbourhoods/districts or between city authorities and those of the wider region. Another example is strategic alliances between neighbouring small and medium-sized towns, or between similar cities in the EU. Such alliances may create a city effect and maximise the economic and financial advantages through increased collaboration and exchange of best practices. Important is the recognition that the urban component requires a national, regional and often European setting to make strategic choices at the local level.

#### *5. Cities: Promoters of Social Inclusion, Equal Opportunities and Security for Citizens*

The urban reality often reflects disparities between neighbourhoods, a problem that confronts Europe's large and medium-sized cities. The urban audit shows that almost all cities where unemployment is at a level of 10% or higher, have certain areas within which unemployment rates are at least double the city average. Within such deprived neighbourhoods, high unemployment is linked to poor housing, poor environment, poor health, poor education, few job opportunities and high crime rates.

Alongside these obvious disparities, certain groups within cities experience further disadvantage. Cities should therefore pay special

attention to integrating immigrants, and preventing the social exclusion of young people. In short, they can favour social inclusion through measures of security and facilitate professional, social and cultural integration of fragile communities.

Social exclusion is at odds with the European social model that guarantees opportunities for every citizen. It has consequences on local business (less customers), on the living environment (less security, vandalism) on the inhabitants (lack of «positive thinking», creativity and enthusiasm at work) and on the growth potential of the city (which is less attractive). Tackling social exclusion is therefore crucial to sustainable urban policies. Connected to the promotion of social inclusion is also the need to guarantee citizens' security. Urban safety, and, just as important, the perception of safety, has become a vital issue in urban policies. Cities are at the foreground for creating favourable urban environments to social inclusion and security, and consequently, to genuine intercultural dialogue.

#### *D. Sustainable Urban Development in the EU*

In the European Union over 60% of the population lives in urban areas of over 50,000 inhabitants. The growing interest in urban issues as well as the actual policy debate on sustainable urban development in the EU is very much linked to the increased role of cities in the European cohesion policy. In the Commission Staff Paper *Cohesion Policy and Cities: The Urban Contribution to Growth and Jobs in the Regions*<sup>20</sup> the agenda for the promotion of a more integrated and strategic approach to urban development is set out. More responsibility is given to cities in the development and elaboration of urban actions.

Various other EU policy documents and initiatives illustrate the growing importance of the urban dimension in European policy<sup>21</sup>. An interesting development has been the Bristol Accord, proposed by the UK presidency in December 2005. It sets out the characteristics of a sustainable community with full attention to good practice case studies. Also the more structured work on urban issues within the European Commission<sup>22</sup> and European Parliament<sup>23</sup> show the importance of the EU context in providing a substantive contribution to sustainable urban development.

The URBAN Programme, the EU Community Initiative of the

ERDF, which has shaped the European urban environment in the last 15 years, presents the major policy instrument of sustainable urban development. Sustainable economic development and regeneration in the most deprived urban areas of the EU have been the main targets. The decentralist approach has allowed for synergies with the priorities set by the national urban policies. Within the URBAN Programme, URBACT was set up as a European network for exchange of experience<sup>24</sup>. The development of integrated partnership linked to area-based regeneration programmes have been effective in creating new infrastructural elements and in linking economic and social environment issues at the local level<sup>25</sup>.

The urban actions proposed in the new Structural Fund regulations of the budget 2007-2013 focus on mainstreaming measures and action-oriented guidelines (i.e. focus on Community strategic guidelines that are linked to the Lisbon Agenda, the importance of National Strategic Frameworks and operational programmes, the integrated approach to urban development, and the follow-up of URBACT). In short, cities are active partners in the implementation of the Lisbon Agenda.

The urban dimension becomes an integral part of the participatory principle of involving all relevant stakeholders in political, economic and social developments. Moreover, it may facilitate the integration of the Lisbon and Göteborg strategy into the content of the new EU programmes and consequently favour intercultural dialogue at local level.

PART III. URBAN GOVERNANCE:  
URBAN DEMOCRACY TO INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The challenges and opportunities of the emerging urban realities stress traditional forms of representative democracy. Moreover, the conceptual context of the urban civitas and its new (active) citizenship dimension ask for new forms of democratic governance in which a dialogic stage of interculturality can develop within growing diversity.

As a concept governance refers to the complex set of values, norms, processes and institutions by which society manages its development and resolves conflicts, formally and informally. It does not involve only the state, but also the civil society at the local,

national, regional and global levels. It comprises the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations. A governance process involves by definition a complex set of public and non-public actors and is based on flexibility, partnership and voluntary participation that represents diverse social and cultural interests<sup>26</sup>. In such a multi and interdisciplinary perspective, the human rights paradigm is assumed as a powerful universal facilitator to intercultural dialogue.

Good governance assumes participation, transparency and accountability. It is also effective and equitable and assures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad societal consensus. It further means that the voices of all are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. In recognising cultural pluralism cities are often laboratories for developing advanced democracy practices. Therefore, good democratic urban governance<sup>27</sup> should take into full account a number of policy considerations to realise our initial working hypothesis that cities matter in intercultural dialogue.

#### *A. Conducting Multi-Level Territorial Governance*

The governance of territorial and urban policies is the capacity of actors from the public, private and third sector to build an organisational consensus and to agree on a fair contribution of each partner, depending on the issues at stake. What is required is flexible cooperation between different territorial levels. Currently increased efforts are made to devise arrangements that allow cities to work together more efficiently, partly to manage internal issues and partly to market their areas externally. It is a particular challenge to reconcile all these issues at the (inter)cultural interface.

Relationships between different territorial levels tend to be formal. Some cities or metropolitan areas have indeed created formal institutional or constitutional sub-regional collaborations (e.g. the *Metropol-Regionen* in Germany and the *Communautés d'agglomération* in France). However many cities are attempting to work informally with partners on issues where they can. The goal is to create genuinely sustainable communities at the appropriate spatial level and in particular to pursue the strategic goal of the inclusion of individuals and groups in the city.



### *B. Adopting an Integrated Approach*

The analysis in part two clearly illustrated that urban development is a complex and long-term process. Cities therefore need a long-term vision for maximising the success factors (i.e. challenges and opportunities) of innovative democratic interaction and authentic intercultural dialogue. Such a policy vision requires an integrated approach across different fields with a clear long-term vision, an operational action plan and a critical mass of financing. In fact, successful urban development will almost always draw on the different strengths of a wide range of partners and on a mixture of measures. The subsequent urban coalitions need to be developed and maintained over the long term.

The URBAN Community Initiative has stressed the integrated approach. It targets social and economic cohesion in parallel, removing barriers to employability and investment at the same time as promoting social and environmental goals. The concept of sustainable communities and inclusive cities implies that cities will succeed best when they integrate economic, social, environmental and physical dimensions, alongside public services, leadership and quality of place. Local strategic partnerships need to ensure that citizens are fully involved in local democratic processes and may fully participate in intercultural dialogue.

### *C. Stimulating Citizen Integration and Participation*

A third policy consideration of renewed urban democratic governance refers to the way citizens are integrated in local communities and participate, in formal and informal ways, to democratic life. Integration of different communities is one of the basic requirements in the construction of a cohesive, prosperous and democratic Union. It is the common responsibility of all citizens, inhabitants, institutions and authorities concerned. Their specific roles and contributions to the process of integration and dialogue, however, are different. A certain degree of capacity building and empowerment is therefore required.

As a logical consequence a unified European approach to common integration policies and their implementation has to take into account the diversity of the local urban experience<sup>28</sup>. The practical process of integration and inclusion is essentially a local

affair between residents of diverse origin. Authorities, institutions and NGOs have primarily a supporting role, which may range from steering, advising, coordinating and monitoring activities, to delivering the necessary resources and instruments to enable residents to live and work together to realise a cohesive, prosperous and fair community.

Citizen participation is a democratic imperative. Moreover, the engagement of local residents and civil society in urban policy and community life can give legitimacy and effectiveness to government actions<sup>29</sup>. It can even stimulate innovative democratic processes to intercultural dialogue. Those citizens may bring local knowledge as well as specific talents to local community life. They are best placed to organise actions in the local context and to cross formal institutional boundaries by their personal knowledge of local issues and key players. Important therefore is the existence of meeting places in cities to stimulate greater citizen participation as an aspect of empowerment. Markets, squares and public spaces should regain their original function of meeting places and agoras and not be reduced to an exclusive economic function.

Women often play a crucial role in urban development. They are key social and cultural mediators, intervening between service-users and institutions. Whilst they are often well represented in community groups as drivers in local projects, they are sometimes underrepresented when it comes to decision-making positions. Similarly, young people are a vital element in community action. Facilitating their active participation at local level is a key political priority and an element of good governance.

One of the strengths of the URBAN Community Initiative is the strong focus on local partnerships. This is the case with the URBACT Programme with its focus on learning through exchange of experience and identification of good practice. The result has been the acquisition of development skills and the building of integrative capacity at the local level. An interesting side-effect was the mobilisation of local development partnerships beyond the URBAN Programme.

#### *D. Developing Networks and Exchange of Experience*

Because of different historical, legal, political and social contexts in cities, good practices do not always translate directly from one

city to another. Still, cities need mechanisms for exchanging experience on lessons learned in the field of urban democracy and intercultural dialogue. Such an enabling learning cycle is one of the key sources of added value at the European level. Over 200 large, medium and small cities that participate in the existing URBACT Programme have drawn major benefits from exchanging experiences, skills and knowledge between urban policy actors. For the period 2007-2013, the Commission is proposing a new framework programme for the exchange of experience and good practice that would extend URBACT to cover all cities across Europe as well as the experience gained under individual national networks and the European Urban Knowledge Network. In sum, the scope of the Commission's proposals is very much focussed on the concept of integrated urban development including the broad objectives of the Lisbon and Göteborg Councils.

The mainstreaming of integrated urban policies however presents opportunities and risks. There will be an expanded eligibility with more emphasis on capacity-sharing and stronger links to operational programmes. Moreover, the programmes for mutual learning and capacity building among European cities will put higher importance to motivation of partner cities and impact on local policies. This implies greater attention to the formation of: local actors; awareness of the specific territorial contexts; and focus on the development of concrete action plans.

#### CONCLUSION

Cities are important sustainable and living sources for building and experiencing the multi-faceted identity of the citizens of multi-cultural Europe. Throughout history they have been shaping actors for promoting and facilitating creativity, imagination and integration. They always have been places on the roads of dialogue. Today they are laboratories and breeding places for innovative democratic processes in which intercultural dialogue can be an important vehicle. They provide learning places, built and non-built environment and meeting spaces for daily experiencing intercultural dialogue and encounters for conviviality.

In sum, cities may, on the basis of some conditions, provide a favourable, attractive and creative environment for citizens'

participation in (formal and informal) democratic processes of active citizenship. Roads of dialogue interconnect cities through the creation of occasions and areas of interchange and encounters<sup>30</sup>. Interconnecting cities can, as history has proven, create the environment for intercultural practice between people.

<sup>1</sup> We refer to Peter Ramsden's conceptual introduction to the UDIEX-ALEP thematic network, which brought about an exchange of experience regarding urban regeneration and inclusion in 24 European cities; see at [http://urbact.eu/en/udiex/synthesis\\_prospects](http://urbact.eu/en/udiex/synthesis_prospects), September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> A. Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> R. Stavenhagen, *Cultural Rights: A Social Science Perspective*, in *Culture Rights and Wrongs*, Paris, UNESCO, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> A. Papisca, *Droits de la personne et démocratie - Les cultures à la source de l'universel*, in European Commission DG AEC, *Intercultural Dialogue*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission, 2002, pp. 132-140.

<sup>7</sup> R. Falk, *Realizing the Copenhagen Vision: The Political Imperative*, in J. Baudot, *Building a World Community: Globalisation and the Common Good*, Copenhagen, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000, pp. 156-166.

<sup>8</sup> S. Eisenstadt, *The Dialogue between Cultures or between Cultural Interpretations of Modernity - Multiple Modernities on the Contemporary Scene*, in European Commission DG EAC, *Intercultural Dialogue*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission, 2002, pp. 59-68.

<sup>9</sup> Y.R. Isar, *The Intercultural Challenge: An Imperative of Solidarity*, in European Commission DG AEC, *Intercultural Dialogue*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission, 2002, pp. 169-183.

<sup>10</sup> This concept was used by the Delors International Commission on Education for the 21st century, in *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Paris, UNESCO, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> L. Bekemans, *Culture vs. Globalisation in Europe: Actual Tension or Possible Dialogue?*, in L. Anckaert, D. Cassimon and H. Opdebeeck (eds.), *Building Towers. Perspectives on Globalisation*, Leuven, Peeters, 2002, pp. 191-211; and id., *Globalisation and Solidarity: Europe's Duty in Intercultural Dialogue*, in European Commission DG AEC, *Intercultural Dialogue*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Commission, 2002, pp. 152-168.

<sup>12</sup> L. Bekemans, *The Idea and Practice of Europe in a Globalising World: Reality and Responsibility*, in «Pace diritti umani / Peace Human Rights», n. 1, April 2004, pp. 121-133.

<sup>13</sup> G. Decoster (ed.), *The Century of the City. City Republics and Grid Cities. White Paper*, Brussels, Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2005, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> An excellent overview of the role of cities in history is given by P. Hall, *Cities in Civilisation. Culture, Innovation and Urban Order*, Phoenix, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998, p. 1169.

<sup>15</sup> The programmes of cultural routes by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the European Union relate to itineraries that connected people. They very much focus on practising dialogue of cultures and civilisations as a factor in the creation of a culture of peace.

<sup>16</sup> B. Flanagan, *The Spirit of the City. Voices from Dublin's Liberties*, Dublin, Veritas, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> See S. Giradet, *Creating Sustainable Cities (Schumacher Briefings)*, London, Green Books, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> C. Landry and F. Bianchini, *The Creative City. A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, London, Demos Publishers, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> *Territorial Cohesion in Europe*, Brussels, Committee of the Regions of the EU, 2003, p. 112; and *In Search of Territorial Potentials*, Luxemburg, ESPON, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/consultation/urban/contri\\_urban\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/urban/contri_urban_en.pdf), 25 November 2005.

<sup>21</sup> The most important Communications are *Towards an Urban Agenda* (1997), *The Sustainable Urban Development in the EU: A Framework for Action* (1998) and the Communication on *The Programme of the Structural Funds 2000-2006: An Initial Assessment of the Urban Initiative* (June 2002).

Relevant initiatives are: a) the European Spatial Observation Network (ESPON) ([www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)), it supports policy development to build a European scientific community in the field of territorial development in the EU; and b) the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) ([www.eukn.org](http://www.eukn.org)), its primary aim is to connect European cities and facilitate the provision of sustainable urban knowledge, cross territorial learning and the development of good practices.

<sup>22</sup> The European Commission created recently an Interservice Group dealing with urban development to facilitate coordination of a European policy of urban affairs.

<sup>23</sup> A significant development has been the creation of a EP Intergroup on Urban Policy and Housing.

<sup>24</sup> URBACT ([www.urbact.org](http://www.urbact.org)) is the Community Initiative Programme that facilitates the networking between (216) cities from the EU member states around three main objectives: 1) develop transnational exchanges between URBAN I and URBAN II cities; 2) draw lessons from the analysis of their experiences, policies implemented locally and propose innovative approaches to those difficult issues; and 3) disseminate towards the actors in all European cities the experiences in those different areas, the lessons learned and the resulting proposals for approach.

<sup>25</sup> An assessment of the URBAN I and URBAN II Programmes is given by H. Saad, *EU Policy and Programmes. An Overview of Key Policy and Programme Areas Covered by the UDIEX-ALEP Network*, August 2006, p. 56, available at <http://urbact.eu/newsimages/29549/EUpolicyandprogrammes.doc>.

<sup>26</sup> J. Farinos Dasi, *Governance of Territorial and Urban Policies from EU to Local Level* (ESPON Project 2.3.2), Luxemburg, ESPON, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> The European research programme *Urban Governance, Social Inclusion and Sustainability* (2002-2003) identified successful factors for urban development, based on the experience in 9 European countries.

<sup>28</sup> J. Niessen and G. Oude Engberink, *Integrating Cities: European policies, Local Practices*, October 2006, p. 7, available at [www.integratingcities.nl](http://www.integratingcities.nl); and *Eurocities Response to the Communication on a Common Agenda for Integration: Cities Make the Difference*, February 2006, p. 10, available at [www.eurocities.org](http://www.eurocities.org).

<sup>29</sup> An excellent example is given by LUDA, a research project of Key Action 4 (City of Tomorrow & Cultural Heritage) of the 5th Framework Programme of the EU. It presents a community-based approach to sustainable regeneration, see [www.luda-project.net](http://www.luda-project.net).

<sup>30</sup> The *Routes of al-Andalus: Spiritual Convergence and Intercultural Dialogue* project by UNESCO seeks to highlight the heritage of dialogue that gradually developed in medieval Spain and study and promote the creation of areas of dialogue between cultures and civilisations.

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