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Policy Brief

Practicing Diversity

United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM)

Introduction

Diversity is and has long been a hallmark of cities across the world. In the context of intensifying processes of urbanization and globalization, new forms of socio-cultural diversity will continue to shape large and small cities in profound ways. The question of diversity is of primary relevance to urban governance. In October 2016, the international community will gather at the Habitat III conference in Quito to adopt the New Urban Agenda, with the inclusion of migrants and refugees in urban areas as one of the key issues.[1]

Cities bring together people of different ethnic, national, linguistic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds; people with different practices, values and beliefs; as well as those with different migration trajectories and statuses. Managing diversity is crucial to ensuring social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in cities and to harnessing the rich social, cultural and economic opportunities that a diverse urban society offers. If diversity is not acknowledged and managed as a positive force for cities, social exclusion, inequality, segregation and urban violence could pose grave challenges. The legacy in how cities have addressed diversity thus far provides an important lesson. Migration to cities over the past decades was seen as a problem rather than an opportunity; as a result, 'the generic urbanization model of the last forty years has fostered segregation over integration', with policies reinforcing the socio-economic and spatial marginalization of newcomers.[2]

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[1] 'Habitat III Issue Papers: 2 – Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas', Available at: http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-2_2_Migration-and-Refugees-in-Urban-Areas-2.0.pdf
[2] Ibid., p.3

The experience of diversity is historically and geographically located. No singular model can be applied given that each city has its own specific configurations of population diversity. In all cases, however, governing urban diversity requires a *practice-oriented* approach; discourses or narratives about diversity do not go far enough. The benefits of diversity will only truly be felt through the ingrained and grounded *practice of diversity* in different spheres of urban life: from institutions and governance structures, to schools, workplaces, health centres and in neighbourhood life. They also have to demonstrate resilience and adaptability to new forms of diversity in fast changing and dynamic conditions.

1. Incorporating diversity into urban governance and public institutions

Incorporating diversity into urban governance structures and public institutions gives space to the range of voices, perspectives and needs of diverse urban inhabitants. Giving all urban inhabitants the chance to have a say in decision-making processes and to be actors in the formulation and implementation of urban policies can empower urban communities and generate confidence. In the city of São Paulo, for example, migrants can vote and be voted into each of the city's thirty-two sub-districts, within the municipality's 'Participatory Council'. In Barcelona, one of the newly elected city councillors is a migrant woman who seeks to bring the concerns of her neighbourhood community and of migrant women more generally, directly into the remit of the city government. These examples demonstrate the diversification of voices and forms of representation in local administrations and participation in the electorate.

Practices that seek to diversify teams working in public institutions and urban law enforcement agencies will allow for a wider sense of trust across urban communities, greater sensitivity to the needs of different groups and will reduce the potential for discriminatory practices to take hold. Toronto offers a good example of diversity training programmes within public institutions and the initiative 'DiversCity on Board' seeks to diversify the governance bodies, boards and commissions of public agencies and voluntary organizations.

Inter-institutional cooperation on diversity is also crucial and a key example is Mexico City's programme on 'Hospitality, Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility' that promotes a transversal approach to giving migrants access to government programmes and services offered in the city.

2. Inclusion at work, in schools and in health services

Work, education and health constitute the key pillars of everyday urban life, yet these are often the areas where migrants face barriers to inclusion. This concerns international migrants, as well as internal migrants who may face numerous constraints to social inclusion when moving to urban areas.[3]

Practicing diversity in the workplace means providing decent wages and working conditions to all regardless of their backgrounds. It also means implementing measures that prevent

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[3] See, for example, 'Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India', June 2013, UNESCO, Available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002237/223702e.pdf

discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, socio-economic background or migration status, in order to guarantee equal opportunities to migrant newcomers, as well as longer-established urban residents of different backgrounds. As a way to overcome the specific barriers that migrants face in accessing labour markets, offering skills and language courses and reducing bureaucratic barriers to employment, will open up a wider range of options and avenues for migrants to contribute to the urban economy. This is key to reducing urban economic inequalities. A good practice of note is 'Global Hamilton Connect', an initiative to connect international students and young newcomers to resources and networks, and to local employers and organizations, so as to increase their chances of finding opportunities.

All children have the right to education and should have access to municipal schools, regardless of their immigration status. [4] Developing intercultural educational curriculums in municipal schools would help to cultivate a deeper awareness of diverse ways of being among urban youth, who also live this diversity inside and outside of the classroom. Providing easier access to lifelong learning for adults of different backgrounds will furthermore stimulate human development in cities.

While all urban residents have the right to health, migrants often face barriers to accessing health services. One key way to reduce these barriers is to train public health providers to serve multilingual populations with culturally diverse perspectives on health. Municipal agencies in the City of New York, for instance, are mandated to provide multilingual information in the city's most widely spoken languages, in order to reflect the great linguistic diversity of New Yorkers – an estimated 200 languages are spoken in the city – and to enable equal access to services. [5]

To complement the work of public services, it is also crucial to create welcome centres that assist new arrivals of migrants with documentation and information. Examples can be found at the regional level with the 'Office for New Americans' in New York State and the recent inauguration in São Paulo of the 'Centre for Migrant Integration and Citizenship'. City governments and civil society organizations can effectively work together to promote migrant inclusion on the ground, address inequalities and build empowering solidarities for urban social justice. There are also important networking initiatives connecting cities across the world, such as the International Coalition of Cities against Racism launched by UNESCO in 2004 to enable cities to share their experiences in order to improve policies to fight racism, discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion.[6]

3. Diversity in the cultural, heritage and arts sectors

Diversity thrives in the spheres of culture and the arts. Music, photography, theatre and film are areas that are inclusive of different creative traditions. They are spaces where varied forms of

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[4] 'Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development: Key Ideas', Available at: http://www.bcn.cat/novaciutadania/pdf/ca/home/MF-Obert.en.pdf , p.4

[5] Information on languages available at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/pop_facts.shtml. Another novel practice to facilitate access to services is issuing municipal ID cards to all city residents (regardless of immigration status). See 'NYC Rules': https://rules.cityofnewyork.us/tags/municipal-id.

[6] International Coalition of Cities against Racism: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/fight-against-discrimination/coalition-of-cities/

cultural expression can reach out to and inform wider publics on the enriching dimensions of diversity. The arts may also contribute to bridging divides in times of mistrust. In Johannesburg, for example, importance is given to poetry and music as channels through which to build solidarities, engage in dialogue and embrace diversity in the face of xenophobia and urban violence. In cities from Penang in Malaysia to Port Louis in Mauritius, heritage sites raise awareness about the diverse histories of immigration that have shaped their respective hybrid societies. Cities could also develop archives and collections of community oral and material histories that local councils could exhibit in public or civic spaces. The uses of public spaces for celebrations of cultural diversity in cities all over the world contribute to portraying diversity in a positive light. Initiatives to promote inclusion and diversity in cultural and creative sectors can also benefit from knowledge exchange and cooperation among different cities on their experiences in these areas.[7]

4. Practicing diversity in neighbourhood life

Everyday practices of intercultural conviviality and sociability are central to the practice of diversity. Intercultural coexistence in the long-term helps to cultivate a general disposition and openness to difference. In the case of Singapore, diversity has become normalized in everyday urban life. Food centres, for example, display certificates to indicate catering to specific dietary needs; spaces of worship exist across all neighbourhoods and this long-standing co-existence of different faiths has also seen the emergence of syncretic and multi-faith spaces. Support from neighbourhood associations can help to ingrain these practices further. In Barcelona, for example, the *Fundació Tot Raval* is a community-based foundation that seeks to celebrate the cultural diversity of the Raval neighbourhood, whilst also supporting networking between different migrant associations to develop common projects. The practice of everyday diversity also counts on safe and inclusive public spaces such as squares, parks and marketplaces that have long been vibrant spaces for a range of social and cultural encounters. In contexts of division and conflict, municipalities can make targeted efforts to develop educational and awareness campaigns that promote an understanding of and respect for different cultures, through the media for example, and to develop measures that tackle the spread of prejudice and misinformation and practices of segregation.

The path ahead

Cities are faced with the challenge of ensuring that diversity is a resilient social practice that can respond positively in periods of change, tension or rapid transformation. Conflict, disaster or climate-induced displacement that are currently affecting different regions of the world, require cities and their inhabitants to be prepared for changes in the urban social fabric and to offer hospitality and refuge. The continued diversification of urban societies is a reality that will accompany migration and mobility. In light of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda to be agreed upon at Habitat III, fostering a sense of urban belonging and citizenship among diverse inhabitants is in the best interests of cities for their own sustainable development and for the dignity and wellbeing of those who live in them.

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[7] See, for example, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network: http://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/. One goal is to 'improve access to and participation in cultural life as well as the enjoyment of cultural goods and services, notably for marginalized or vulnerable groups and individuals'.

Summary of key recommendations

Funding and resources for local governments to develop and implement policies on diversity and migrant inclusion are fundamental priorities that require support from regional and federal governments. Also crucial is the need to re-evaluate funding priorities so that resources are allocated to diversity initiatives. With this foundation in place, the following recommendations are made:

- Develop handbooks using human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to enable institutions to implement a diversity lens in employment policies and practices; and to support migrants in accessing a range of work and educational opportunities through courses.

- Support capacity development among public service providers through language training and training to counter commonly held prejudices, thus preparing them to attend to increasingly diverse urban populations.

- Support grassroots initiatives within civil society that work to build inclusive urban communities based on common projects, solidarity and trust.

- Use public spaces widely for cultural celebrations that reflect all cultures in the urban community and invest in them so that intercultural conviviality becomes a normal practice of everyday neighbourhood life.

- Organize regular public consultations with migrant groups to give them a meaningful voice in municipal-level decisions and provide equal opportunities for representation in local administrations.

- Build city identities that reflect diversity as an enriching feature of urban life, and engage the media in communicating responsible messages on diversity.

- Encourage exchanges between municipalities around the world in order to learn about different contexts of diversity, and diversity practices and policies.

Further reading

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