ENGIME

Economic Growth and Innovation in Multicultural Environments

D13- POLICY BRIEF WKS2 - Cross Cultural Communication in Multicultural Cities

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Introduction

In an era of globalisation and rapid mobility, individuals do not restrict themselves to living and surviving in one place. New social networks are continuously emerging and characterise the economic, cultural and social dynamics of the present world. In this context, the need to understand and analyse the complexity of cultural changes and the multiplicity of cultures is a pertinent discussion for most disciplines.

Understanding the role that culture and communication play in the development of social and economic networks is central in analysing the relationship between culture, communication and economic growth. There is a need to bridge different approaches and tools from different disciplines in order to find new ways of evaluating these relationships and their effect upon one another. In this respect, multidisciplinary research initiatives in the field of economics, culture and communication are brought to the attention of both scholars and practitioners of different professional areas.

In a world as complex as the one in which we now live, communication problems are inevitable. Conflicts of different nature arise in those societies characterised by multiculturalism, multiethnicity, economic and social differences. Scholars state that the problems of multicultural societies do not necessarily constitute 'cultural' problems. Nevertheless, they recognise the strong influence of culture and the need to stress the nature of interactions and communications between individuals, especially in times of social, economic or political conflict.

What kind of communication can we advocate for multicultural cities?

A first recommendation is to recognise the need to find *new forms of communication and expression.* Different actors from different disciplines and practices must recognise the advantages of multistake dialogue allowing the creation of *open systems* between different departments and institutions in multicultural cities. It is therefore necessary to provide for *tools and tricks* to stimulate effective intercultural communication. Communication professionals should be given a more active role in providing support in areas such as conflict management and mediation between culturally different groups.

These new methods of transcultural communication also play an important role in increasing awareness amongst the inhabitants of multicultural cities, making them more conscious that new forms of culture may emerge by changing communication habits.

The role of education in creating these new ways of communication is also essential: teaching about diversity and how to break down stereotypes is a necessary condition for furthering communication between heterogeneous groups. These methods have been put into practice at The Hague, a city characterised as relatively highly spatially segregated (Santhoki, 2003). The local government defined new programmes for restructuring neighbourhoods, holding office economies, supporting economic talent (for promoting entrepreneurship) and developing social education plans.

Use of communication tools, such as radio and TV, aimed at wide audiences, is also recommended for informing the ethnic or non local population on social and political events, thus providing them with the opportunity of creating their own programmes.

New creative ways of expression should be stimulated. Art as a cultural form is highlighted (Deru Simic, 2003), recognising its potential in allowing for a non-hierarchical and fluid way of expressing collective and individual cultural differences. These new forms of expression should help to bridge the gaps between different groups at city level (as, for example, the Dialogue Process introduced in the US political scene). We highlighted five points necessary for helping art, innovation and creativity in multicultural cities:

1. Providing creative individuals with favourable "working" conditions: for local authorities this might involve allowing grants, aimed at encouraging experiment, for innovation and pilot projects. For the same reasons, it may often be important to introduce skills, and, consequently, development opportunities, from outside, thus promoting more critical, imaginative ways of doing things.

2. Creating spaces: creative people need to be based somewhere. These spaces are likely to be available in urban fringes and changing neighbourhoods, such as former port and industrial areas. Cheap space reduces financial risk and, therefore, encourages experiment.

3. Building new indicators of success: this means that cost-effectiveness indicators, that go beyond traditional cost-benefit analysis, need to be developed.

4. Handling creative capacity: handling creative ideas appropriately and turning them into feasible projects. In this sense, cities need to know what art and cultural projects offer in terms of creating spaces for multiple forms of expression and for communicating cultural

identity. This is not merely a matter of administrative competence, but rather a matter of allowing for the establishment of less hierarchical processes for the development of these projects (involving artists, communities, etc.).

5. Balancing cosmopolitanism and locality: internationally oriented policies are valuable because competition and comparison with other cities provide stimulus. Cities, however, must strike a balance between cosmopolitanism and local roots. If too much local identity is lost, a city may loose confidence and its sense of direction.

A second recommendation concerns the need to identify and develop *new ways of monitoring.* New forms of *local* research and monitoring are needed to define local aspirations, needs, trends and actual and potential conflicts in local communities. Monitoring is needed in order to allow cities to share and learn from their failures and successes.

A first step could consist in distinguishing between culture change and acculturation. Culture change is brought about by internal sources within the community, whereas acculturation arises from sources external to the community. This distinction is useful in order to establish whether problems, conflicts, communication breakdowns result from inside the community itself ("us"), or from "the others".

A second step for furthering new ways of local monitoring is to work on the urban structure of the city. Indeed, research shows that communication emerges as a "delicate equilibrium", when a small core of overlapping networks between social life, work and family help to maintain an open structure of communication between different ethnic groups living in the same neighbourhood (as in the case of Battersea in London – Wallman, 2003). Policies aiming at diversifying housing are important in promoting dynamism.

Monitoring should also help to understand local community aspirations in terms of common values level: whether a community with fewer groups and more common values or vice-versa.

The way to realise monitoring should not only be based on the minority/majority framework (as in the case of choosing which language to use, for example in Bruxelles). Local government should not focus on short term projects as they now know this has not produced good results (as in the case of Rotterdam with its Antillian immigrants – Santhoki, 2003) but, rather, on long term programmes that co-ordinate projects and initiatives defined by the various minorities and aim at shortening existing gaps. Their objective, in fact, should be to narrow the gap between government services supply and the demands of minorities.

A broader and conclusive recommendation is to continue filling the knowledge gap by supporting existing research and developing new approaches.

Experimental and pilot projects that bring together different ethnic/cultural groups are necessary. There is a need to highlight how different identities can live together, creating not only market opportunities for migrants but also enhancing social mobility for individuals, groups and excluded neighbourhoods.

It is also of high relevance to encourage and *support large-scale longitudinal studies.* These studies should focus on how people, in their day-to-day interactions, define their cultural differences, and most importantly, on the process of *cultural production*.

In this way, innovation at cultural and economic level, can be linked and, eventually, analysed and measured (as for example the role of entrepreneur skills in migrant groups).

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