



*ENGIME*

*Economic Growth and Innovation in Multicultural Environments*

## **D08 – Policy letter**

*Workshop I: Mapping diversity*

*Understanding the dynamics of multicultural cities*

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### **Diversity as a consequence of globalization and localization**

The current wave of globalization has led to a society in which people may encounter people, products and images coming from all parts of the world. This wave is unique in scope and impact because of the “growing capital-intensity of manufacture, the accelerating momentum of technologies, the emergence of a growing body of universal users; and the spreading of non-protectionist pressures” (Brenner, 1996: 19). Its consequences are an increasingly more rapid exchange of lifestyles, consumption patterns and other forms of cultural expressions between more and more locations.

Central in understanding these effects is the paradoxical relationship between globalization and localization. Globalization and localization constitute and feed each other. While the increasing globalization creates conditions for all sorts of forms of particularization and localization, the characteristics of each particular identity have to be understood within the framework of the world as a whole (Friedman, 1995). On the one hand, the emergence of a transnational system seems to imply the rebirth of nationalism, regionalism and ethnicity. On the other hand, local happenings are shaped by events happening many miles away. As a result, some group boundaries are fading but other boundaries are articulated and defended more strongly. A world is being created in which variety, diversity and ambiguity are fundamental. This plurality can give rise to conflicts, controversies but also to attempts to live peacefully together, to coordinate activities and to balance interests.

The existence of these new types of experiences and social relations implies that individuals and groups are confronted with many existing identities, worldviews and moral frames of references. An individual's or group's identity can no longer be directly linked to the social category to which they belong to on the basis of individual or group characteristics like gender, race or ethnicity. This static conception of diversity is best discarded. Identity and diversity are dynamic notions implying that individuals and groups construct their identity in relationship to other individuals and groups (Nkomo & Cox, 1996). It is then characteristics of the relationship between individuals and groups that define diversity and identity. Important characteristics to understand the construction of identity are the power relationship (dominant/submissive) between the parties; the socio-economic and historical context

of the relationship (labour market position; past intergroup experiences); and the geographical distance (the more distant the relationship is, the broader the identity is being constructed).

### **Ways to deal constructively with diversity**

Suggestions to deal constructively with diversity can be formulated at two levels: diversity needs to be coordinated rather than 'integrated' and coordination needs to be complemented by local institutions.

- A first recommendation is that policy making needs to *build a coordinative model*. In a coordinative model, the assumption is compatibility instead of communality with regard to cultural values and actions. The challenge is to aim at plurality rather than uniformity. A coordinative model aims at structuring the differences in a non-hierarchical way instead in a hierarchical way. Structuring means here coordinating in the form of a network instead of creating a hierarchical order by deciding which values and practices need to be integrated in the dominant cultural form. Establishing (often reinforcing) a social hierarchy between the differences needs to be avoided. A coordinative model places less stringent and hence more realistic demands on the groups living together within a nation state.
  - The role of policy makers in this coordinative model is to act as a facilitator. In a fastly changing and divers society, the effects of a policy are no longer predictable since effects are non-linear. Instead of deciding on the content of compatible actions, policy makers need to create the conditions that stimulate compatible actions among citizens.
  - Within this framework of compatibility, the goal that needs to be achieved needs to be decided and formulated in an interactive way by the parties involved. Institutions and governments can no longer govern through means of top-down formulated policies and regulations because no government has a comprehensive knowledge of the changes in progress and moreover it leads to a lack of responsibility.
- Second, policy making needs to *stimulate the functioning of complementary, local institutions*. In order to restrict the costs of the coordinative model, policy making

needs to focus on local actions that correspond to the main principle of the coordinative model e.g. structuring the differences in a non-hierarchical way. Two important local institutions are space and arts.

- Policy making needs to focus on the important role of space in creating the (im)possibility of diversity. The way space and public fora are being structured influences where and when diversity is allowed. Diversity flourish only in democratic conditions and it needs instruments and tools like planned and organized public spaces. Public domains like a square need to be designed in such a way that not only the common values and beliefs are being expressed but that there is also space for differences. Decisions on housing and creation of neighbourhoods need to reflect a possibility for differences instead of creating homogeneous segregated clusters.
- Policy making needs to focus on art as a cultural form in which differences are being expressed in a non-hierarchical way. Often, experiences of differences are being evaluated in terms of which cultural form or action is the best way. This hierarchical way of thinking is inherent to dealing with diversity. Policy making needs to focus on institutions in which this tendency to think in a hierarchical way is not or less present. Art can be such a local institution since experiences of different art forms are more put next to each other instead of above/under each other.

## **References**

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