

Integration of Immigrants into Cities through Culture: The Case of Barcelona

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As a centre and economic motor of the Euro-Mediterranean area and aware of the importance of the integration of immigrants into the economic development of the city, Barcelona has become a model of intercultural policies at a European level. Intercultural Cities and the Interculturality Plan 2009 are a good example of the use of culture, soft power, as an element capable of influencing the social and economic sphere to promote, in the urban field, the integration of immigrants through the recognition of cultural diversity. Without seeking to completely solve the problem of social marginalisation, mainly in the political arena, these cultural strategies are an alternative to the failure of previous classical models. The main objective is to fuel the social dynamism in cities with a high level of immigration and to establish a starting point for new research.

Diego had never seen the sea. His father, Santiago Kovadloff, took him to discover it. They went south. The ocean lay beyond high sand dunes, waiting. When the child and his father finally reached the dunes after much walking, the ocean exploded before their eyes. And so immense was the sea and its sparkle that the child was struck dumb by the beauty of it. And when he finally managed to speak, trembling, stuttering, he asked his father:

“Help me to see!”

Eduardo Galeano, *The Function of Art*

Public institutions have a wide range of tools to foster the integration of immigrants into the cities, including culture. This article, comprising a theoretical framework and a case study, offers insights that demonstrate that culture in the cities responds to interests that go beyond its intrinsic value; that is, it adopts the form of soft power by giving a marketable brand to these spaces.

Identity

In multiculturalism, “the parts in question are juxtaposed in space and time without really meeting” (Dasseto, 2006: 30). Meanwhile, interculturalism seeks to place identities on the same level. For García Canclini (2001), interculturalism requires a policy with fixed conditions for dialogue.

Immigrant Integration Policies in Europe

Through integration, an immigrant becomes active in the economic, civil and cultural life of the “host” country. However, we should not forget that this process is only possible in determined circumstances, as it depends, among others, on a range of social and legal elements.

These integration policies have been criticised as some consider that they conceal the incorporation of immigrants into a culture different from their own and contribute to maintaining the hegemony of the source culture. Thus, true cultural diversity involves making the base identity of all communities explicit; in other words, not seeing cultural diversity as incompatible with the creation of a shared feeling of community and hoping that a foreigner wishes to continue feeling as such with everything this implies from a cultural point of view. Chantal Mouffe (2007) suggests transforming antagonism into agonism, explaining that, despite the existence of a “real confrontation between adversaries, there is also a common symbolic space.”

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Understanding integration policies in Europe means adopting a historical perspective on immigration. Southern European countries acted as exporters of labour for almost the whole of the 20th century, until 1973, with the oil crisis. It was from then that they gradually became receivers of immigration. In the case of Spain, this trend, which began in 1980, considerably increased with the arrival of the new century, reaching the level of European countries with a long tradition in immigration (Moreno Fuentes, 2007). This means that Spain is not a pioneer in integration initiatives and, therefore, can build upon

the experience of other countries and apply a new model: interculturalism.

Cities

Given the decrease in power of nation-states as a regulating force of the global economy, cities are playing a new strategic role in it (Degen, 2008). In our post-industrial society, cities are the places in which the knowledge economy is based and are increasingly taking on a more influential role. As for cultural policies, after the Second World War, there was a move from the nation-state model to multilevel management, in which local institutions have acquired a more visible role (Barbieri, 2009).

Moreover, big European cities are, and have traditionally been, the physical space that brings together the largest number of immigrants. In this way, social interactions are more visible and frequent, and the outcomes of the policies are more perceptible. The main actors in the cities, aware of this leadership, are designing their initiatives in keeping with such a reality.

The Role of Culture as Soft Power

Culture today is especially recognised for its symbolic potential; that is, as soft power. This concept, coined by the American policy scholar Joseph Nye, is opposed to hard power, which sees military and economic capacities as the most genuine expressions of power in a state.

Culture plays a primordial role as it has the capacity to influence the social and economic spheres. Thus, there is a commodification of this resource, as it is recognised not only for its use value but also its exchange value (Gray, 2007). So new proposals are generated that transform the cultural landscape, both in terms of habits and values. In the case of in-



Activity on Migrant Day, Barcelona 2008 (Oriol Costa).

terculturality in the cities, culture contributes to the construction of a social identity and to the creation of its corporate image.

Evidence of the growing relevance of culture is the evolution of cultural policies throughout the 20th century. With the implementation of the welfare state, culture became a political affair and emphasised its capacity for influencing other fields, such as the cultural or social (Barbieri, 2009).

Barcelona: Interculturality Plan 2009 and the “Barcelona Model”

In our case study we will firstly set out a comparative framework of two intercultural strategies: Intercultural Cities and the Barcelona Interculturality Plan 2009. We will next consider the so-called “Barcelona Model”, which is the result pursued with the implementation of the intercultural programme in Barcelona

and is clearly linked to the concept of culture as a tool of soft power.

Planning and Regulatory Framework

Intercultural Cities is a joint action by the Council of Europe and the European Commission launched in 2008. Its origin is marked by two initiatives that laid the political foundations, the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (2008) and the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008). At the same time, the British think tank Comedia produced the concept of Intercultural Cities based on a research project. This, moreover, cannot be understood without the EU diversity strategies, firstly promoted in the meeting of Tampere (Finland) in 1999.

In Barcelona, the launch of a series of projects served as a transitional bridge towards the Interculturality Plan, firstly defined in 1997: the Barcelona Inter-Religious Centre (1999), the Intercultural Mediation Service (2002) or the adoption of international programmes

such as the Agenda 21 and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). But, undoubtedly, the major momentum came with the programme Barcelona Intercultural Dialogue (2008), framed within the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (Barcelona City Council, 2009).

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With the implementation of the Interculturality Plan in 2009, Barcelona was one of the first European cities to adopt a programme wholly and precisely devoted to this issue. In fact, the Council of Europe cites the Barcelona Interculturality Plan as an example of intercultural city to be followed. However, the linking of Barcelona in Intercultural Cities is, for the moment, limited to being assessed through indicators and providing advice.

Approach of the Discourse

The Council is aware of “the crisis situation of classical models, which makes it necessary to find other alternatives to avoid the same mistakes” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). For this reason, it has before it the possibility of committing to a third way: interculturality. Barcelona has become a kind of laboratory, in which interculturalism has few and imprecise prior experiences at a European level. We see that it is an option recently implemented in Europe and which has become the following stage of multiculturalism. Interculturalism in Barcelona rests on three principles: equality, awareness of diversity, and positive interaction. As argued by Intercultural Cities, the work focuses “on everyday life ... and dialogue” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). Moreover, the 2009 Plan pursues cultural democratisation through

interculturality, based on fundamental values shared by all which avoid the danger of “falling into a cultural relativism” (Barcelona City Council, 2009).

Objectives

The concept of Intercultural Cities is based on the thought of Richard Florida, who demonstrated that cultural diversity is an essential condition for creativity and urban growth, as human capital fosters innovation and accelerates the information flow. It is considered that immigrants contribute new knowledge and links with the markets of their countries of origin, along with being people with strong motivations to improve their standard of living.

Although much of the bibliography defines Barcelona as a city which has historically received immigrants, what characterises this phenomenon is that there have not been “really serious conflictive episodes of coexistence” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). This shows that Barcelona City Council recognises that immigration can impede the smooth running of society. In this respect, we are approaching the concept of soft power, insofar as the integration of immigrants can involve important effects at an economic level. The introduction of the Plan notes that: “Barcelona, one of the main economic motors of Spain in the Euro-Mediterranean area ... cannot afford the luxury of neglecting the potential that diversity represents in a context in which the circulation of ideas, creativity and innovation applied to all fields are true factors of attraction and competitiveness within the context of globalisation and greater interdependence at all levels” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). In fact, section ten of the Plan – entitled “From Difference to Excellence” – argues that “in the context of globalisation, cities also compete in global markets to foster their economies” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). Here we see the full synchronicity of the intercultural discourse

with the economic dimension, as well as the central role of cities.

Design

The Intercultural Cities programme features a series of initiatives on political commitment, political assessment, education, public space, social services, housing, neighbourhood, policy, economy and business, arts and sports, mediation, language, the media, international policy, research, intercultural competence, reception of new arrivals, governance, and access to information.

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The structure of the Interculturality Plan is wide and exhaustive: it comprises 10 thematic issues (city and democracy, opportunities for social mobility, education, language and communication, cultural diversity, housing and town planning, coexistence, rumours and stereotypes, social vitality, and development), 30 objectives and 90 measures. The Plan not only provides for its implementation without excluding any city district but also considers the public space a fundamental field in the different issues.

Assessment

Intercultural Cities provides a questionnaire comprising 69 questions and 14 indicators on all the thematic issues. Data is quantitative (mainly demographic) and qualitative (contributions). In contrast, the Barcelona Interculturality Plan 2009 features 118 specific indicators and each thematic issue is assigned at least 10 of them. These mainly comprise quantitative and, to a lesser extent, qualitative data. It should be noted that in both plans there is a lack of timelines, both in the long and short term.

The Stakeholders

One of the selection criteria of the pilot cities in Intercultural Cities was the “availability of a strong network of civil society organisations” (Wood, 2009: 18). Barcelona does not prioritise the partnerships with organisations located outside the city. In contrast, it provides for the creation of the Barcelona Intercultural Network (Barcelona City Council, 2009), with the participation of stakeholders from the private and public spheres. In relation to the issue of cultural diversity, the public cultural institutions (mainly the Barcelona Arts Institute, ICUB) have the priority of contributing to “fostering the cultural heritage of the city, promoting the dissemination of and access to culture and ensuring creation and cultural industry in Barcelona” (Barcelona City Council, 2009).

Culture: Art and Festivals

Culture acts both as a focus point and an indicator for Intercultural Cities. Moreover, a set of specific activities are suggested, such as tours and festivals, the creation of art study centres, the promotion of organisations featuring works from different cultural contexts, the use of the creativity of the local community to reach new audiences, the use of non-cultural venues (buses, parks, hair salons), fostering partnerships between local organisations and artists to avoid the diaspora, treating people as subjects rather than objects of policies, and so on.

The Barcelona Plan 2009 considers that cultural heritage is crucial in the creation of citizen dialogue, an unarguable proof of the importance of cultural policy within the Council. This is why the objectives include “encouraging cultural programmes and routes that take into account diversity in fields such as the performing arts, music, design, audiovisual creation and public festivals, as well as regular cultural events; and fostering the management of cultural heritage with a plural vision” (Bar-

celona City Council, 2009). Specifically, the aim is “to make visible the contributions throughout history by people and groups from diverse origins” (Barcelona City Council, 2009). In this context, festivals play a key role.

The “Barcelona Model”

The history of Barcelona is characterised by the use of cultural events for the development of the urban landscape: the 1888 World Fair, the 1929 International Fair, the 1992 Olympic Games and the 2004 Forum of Cultures (Kaplan, 2005). It was particularly after the 1999 Plan when culture became a key driver of the economy (Degen, 2008: 13–21). Intrinsic factors of a political, social, historical and economic nature (such as the lack of a financial centre) in the city mean that culture is an appropriate mechanism for promoting the model of excellence brand known as “Brandcelona” (Muñoz, 2008).

Some authors criticise the image of a cosmopolitan and modernised city from a town planning point of view as they consider that it conceals contradictions. In the case of interculturality, they argue that not everything lies in culture but it requires, for instance, recognition of the right to vote involving the political participation of immigrants (Degen, 2008).

Conclusions

The objective of our work has not been to assess the effectiveness of the strategies of integration of immigrants through culture but rather to detect its exploitation. These types of programmes reveal their aim of achieving the active participation of immigrants. However, under this pretext, they can also seek to shape the economic and social sphere of the cities and neglect their true integration.

The intercultural approach is at a construction stage. Few cities incorporate an intercul-

tural strategy into their municipal policies and those which do, do so in a rudimentary way. Although the Barcelona Plan 2009 is one of those which best reflects the perspective of Intercultural Cities, it still needs to improve some of its aspects. In this respect, it should be noted that the strong historical influence of multiculturalism in Scandinavian countries has meant that these regions are not pioneers or current leaders in the discourse of interculturality, despite their consolidated experience in migration policies.

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Post-industrial capitalism has introduced relevant transformations in European cities, both at an economic level and political and social level. Insofar as goods and services have become the basis of the economy, there has been an effervescence and magnification of the symbolic power. The relation between culture and economy has been especially clear after the analysis of Intercultural Cities and the Interculturality Plan 2009, which manage the integration of immigrants through the intercultural discourse and cultural policies with the objective of creating a more open image of the city. This brings us closer to approaches such as the so-called hypodermic needle theory, which showed that it was possible to directly intervene in public opinion through propaganda. Likewise, our case study has allowed us to see that culture is a powerful factor of social invigoration: it is linked to community creation, collective identity and social inclusion (capable of overcoming the obstacles to cultural diversity, such as discrimination).

Moreover, the present article has sought to open doors to future research focused on issues such as the reception and perception of public cultural policy by immigrants.

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