

Thinking Culturally About Place and People: The Diversity Agenda

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The Challenges

General concern, in Western societies, that cultural policy as a nation-state project is in decline mostly because of globalisation processes.

Economic and political power is increasingly transferred to international commercial networks existing in a global “space of flow (Castells, 1989) thus creating a *legitimization problem*.



Cultural and Urban Policies for Diversity

Uneasy coexistence of policy rationales from different historical periods:

- ▶ The neo-neo-neo- liberal city
- ▶ Cultural policy top down
- ▶ In some cases 'corporate multiculturalism'



Historically

In the post-war era, European discourses about cultural diversity tended to focus on the liberal principle of equal respect for all, in favour of a universalistic idea of justice. “Equal dignity of all citizens”.

More recently...

“Differences instead of being undervalued should be prized and cultivated as empowering forces that deserve public recognition”.

(Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition, Charles Taylor, 1994)



Understanding Cultural Diversity Today

“Difference needs to be considered as the constant intersection of many features where none of them can claim importance over another”.

(The Coming Community, Giorgio Agamben, 1993)



Understanding Cultural Diversity Today

Homi Bhabha in 'The Location of Culture', 1997, advocates the intrinsic hybridity of identities. A condition of 'in-betweenness' that presupposes an acceptance of differences and sees them in a constant flux of definitions and re-definitions where nobody belongs completely to one identity.



Understanding Cultural Diversity Today

“Today cultural diversity is increasingly replacing vertical and hierarchical policy models with a fragmented patchwork of different ethical orientations, and urban cultures are characterised by ‘affinity-based’ social groups”. (*French sociologist **Michel Maffesoli**, The Time of the Tribes, 1996*)



Cultural Diversity – The Challenges

“Cultural diversity, in all its forms is posing a profound challenge to traditional formulations of cultural policy, and to our understanding of the public interests served by this policy”.

(Tony Bennett, Differing Diversities, 2001)



Beyond Multiculturalism Policies

This ideal of infinite cultural translation radically challenges traditional top down interventions, which have attempted to keep 'differences' within the narrow constraints of multiculturalism (see multicultural policies adopted in Western Europe and outside since the 80s).



Current Cultural and Urban Policies

Pluralist multiculturalism enfranchises the differences between groups along cultural lines and accords different group rights to different communities.

Commercial multiculturalism if difference is recognised in the marketplace then problems of difference dissolved through private consumption.

Corporate multiculturalism seeks to manage cultural differences in the interests of the centre.



Is Interculturalism the Answer?

Culture cannot be understood as static, essentialist, but always evolving out of necessity. All cultures contain multiple differences that are continually being re-negotiated.

Cultures grow through the everyday practices of social interaction.

Interculturalism can be a tool to deal with the challenge of difference in contemporary cities. HOW?



The Intercultural City Project

Comedia and Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2004.

At the core of interculturalism two rights: the right to difference and the right to the city (recognising the legitimacy of minority or subaltern cultures, and the right to presence and to participate as an equal in public affairs)

A sense of belonging in an intercultural society cannot be based on race, religion, or ethnicity, but needs to be based on a shared commitment to political community (such a commitment requires an empowered citizenry)



The Intercultural City Project

Focus on diversity advantage for neighbourhoods, cities and nations rather than the diversity deficit.

Provided case studies of the creative potential of interculturalism in different fields:

Economic (ethnic entrepreneurs)

Urban (intercultural urban spaces, mixed housing schemes)

Social (intercultural festivals and diversifying the airwaves)

Cultural (libraries, intercultural public art projects)



Implications for Ostrava

Focus on diversity advantage rather than the diversity deficit.

Map the diverse constituents of the local community (community, place and cultural profiling).

Establish open and transparent mechanisms for public engagement in the planning of future initiatives (including EU COC).

Mix professionals, practitioners, policy makers with local community representatives.

Think creatively about your resources (e.g. diversity) and be creative in the way you jointly prepare your programme (or action plan).