



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## THE ASSETS OF URBAN DIVERSITY

City policy agendas are much more geared to the assets of diversity than national agendas. Careful city planning can link diversity policies to spatial interventions and stimulates the inclusion of new groups, such as refugees. A hopeful sign for cities is that younger generations are more at ease with diversity than older ones and tend to focus more on what unites us than what separates us. This policy brief, therefore, calls for a positive approach to diversity and presents cities as spaces of hope.

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## INTRODUCTION

The DIVERCITIES project has undertaken significant research in 14 cities over a four-year period at a time when European cities are becoming more diverse than ever before. Growing levels of immigration, socio-economic inequalities, spatial segregation, and a diversity of identities, activities, mobilities and lifestyles pose significant challenges and present opportunities for urban policy-makers and institutions. The mission of the DIVERCITIES research was to provide evidence of the positive outcomes on social cohesion, social mobility and economic performance that may emerge from greater urban diversity and to document and highlight the significant role that local urban policy initiatives can play in developing and stimulating those positive outcomes. We believe that we achieved this target by introducing a new policy approach, hyper-diversity, which suggests a shift away from policies that target standard social categories. A hyper-diversity approach suggests a broader look at diversity in cities beyond standardized categories of residents and a move away from neo-assimilationist integration efforts, by focusing on the activities, actions and dynamics of diverse groups of people, which define the actual needs that exist in the city.

We disseminated our research findings in 14 City Books and provided recommendations for policy-makers in our previous policy briefs on how to create cohesive, liveable and harmonious urban neighbourhoods, inspire innovation and creativity, and stimulate local and national economies while

addressing systematic issues such as racism and social, economic or spatial inequalities. In this policy brief we chose, rather than to give an overall summary of the project, to discuss a number of themes that emerged at our end conference in Rotterdam (8-10 February 2017). This conference was designed to create a dialogue between academic researchers, policy-makers and practitioners and to act as a platform for the dissemination of new findings and concepts on the theme of diversity in contemporary European cities. We address three themes that follow from our DIVERCITIES work: (1) Diversity and education; (2) Hyper-diversity, spatial planning and place making; and (3) Diverse cities as spaces of hope. Furthermore, we identify two themes for further research: (i) Refugees and diverse encounters; (ii) Diversity and young people.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### (1) Diversity and Education

As part of the DIVERCITIES project we developed the Educational Program Diverse Cities, based on two pedagogic principles: **community based education** and **enquiry based education**. The program consists of a range of assignments that are aimed at students aged 12-15 and which give them the opportunity to learn about different aspects of diversity. Students design and conduct research in the classroom and within their school's neighbourhood about how apparent diversity is. Based on their own research, students propose an initiative that aims to make the neighbourhood more liveable and harmonious. The inspiration for this assignment comes from examples of governance arrangements and initiatives from our DIVERCITIES case studies. The programme is available in 11 different languages and has been implemented in a wide variety of schools. It has led to positive results.

Under the direction of the program **children acquired a much greater knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural backgrounds of their fellow pupils**. In some of the cases, where we implemented the program in a school where parents came from many different parts of the world, some students even found out during the assignment that they were from the same country as other students. For teachers, the programme gave an opportunity to build a different connection with their pupils, grounded in their daily lives.

In the assignment on the diversity within the classroom, students were not emphasizing their differences. Instead, they focused mostly on their similarities concerning their everyday hobbies, the places that they hang out in the neighbourhood and their religion. **By broadening the concept of diversity** (which fits very well in our hyper-diversity approach) we shift away from the traditional focus on ethnic and socio-economic diversity and **focus more on what unites us than on what separates us**.

The Educational Programme also **raised awareness about the different characteristics and diversity of the school's neighbourhood and contributed to a process of active place building**. Many students overcame their initial hesitancy in approaching members of the public and most reported a high degree of excitement in asking local residents about their thoughts about the neighbourhood and the diversity within it.

Additionally, pupils **came in contact with social science and scientific methods** probably for the first time. They appeared curious about the working of social research, and showed good autonomy and insightfulness in observing their neighbourhood. The pupils also enjoyed the opportunity to imagine new projects with classmates and **claim improvements in their local daily life**.

The Educational Programme will remain available at [urbandivercities.eu](http://urbandivercities.eu) so that future pupils can learn and profit from it. Importantly, these school children will one day be able to cast their own vote,

have their own say, and perhaps understand the value of a diverse society, thereby benefiting each and every individual socially, culturally and economically.

## (2) Hyper-diversity, spatial planning and place making

The DIVERCITIES research linked social and spatial dimensions of planning by focusing on the wide range of **collaborative efforts**, which aim to **turn spaces into meaningful places**. These efforts in the form of local, bottom-up policy initiatives function as bridge-builders between public authorities and target groups and fill important niches in public service provision. In this respect they are very important tools for urban policy and planning institutions dealing with the organisation of urban spaces. A hyper-diversity approach allowed us to understand spatial processes through daily life actions, activities, and dynamics of people in the city. From this perspective we highlighted the need to meet **the actual needs and social realities of people living in the city** by focusing on activities in urban space.

City planning, in this respect, can serve as a locus of governance arrangements and local initiatives, and **link diversity policies to spatial interventions** such as urban revitalisation, community development and neighbourhood planning activities. For instance, spatial organisation and community/social planning can add another dimension to integration policy by linking newcomers to neighbourhoods via **places of encounter** like community centres, libraries, public spaces, etc. Creating inclusive neighbourhoods with accessible and flexible community spaces are usually separated from the social policy frameworks but included in spatial planning efforts. Within this framework **place making provides potential solutions to issues confronting local communities**, particularly those experiencing high levels of economic and social disadvantage. Place making unites planning and social policy activities by linking spatial organisation efforts to community needs as local bottom-up arrangements. They are interesting policy tools for stimulating positive socio-economic outcomes which emerge from greater urban diversity. However, real-life situations are complex and transforming spaces into **meaningful and functional places for hyper-diverse communities** is a challenging task.

One of the challenges we encounter is how to turn a **low-income deprived neighbourhood into a mixed community without adequate capital budgets**. The lack of public funding leads to the involvement of private sector actors, which in turn requires new forms of policy and regulation in order to avoid the displacement of residents and gentrification effects. Our research shows that strong **involvement by community groups and residents from the beginning to the process of place-making** helps policy-makers to define actual needs, activities and dynamics in the neighbourhood. Additional involvement and encouragement by **socially oriented/sensitive private sector** agencies also makes a difference on outcomes. **Increasing rents and corporate gentrification** were also indicated as the main challenges during the place-making process. These dynamics can be prevented by including **community-based approaches and instruments** (such as community land trusts) in the planning process. In this respect, tailor-made policy interventions **such as action plans and policy recommendations of the community on how to share generated wealth and develop the neighbourhood in an equitable way** can be encouraged by place-making efforts at the local level. And finally, the availability of **accessible and affordable physical space** is a very important challenge for bottom-up initiatives to not only allow the operation of community hubs to meet their needs and to provide local responses, but also to create platforms for exchange or interaction for meaningful encounters among the residents.

## (3) Diverse cities as spaces of hope

Our research shows that cities are simultaneously both the locations with the greatest levels of social and economic diversity in the EU, and also the places in which the most progressive and innovative policies towards diversity can be found. City policy agendas are consistently **more positive towards diversity** than prevailing narratives found in national policies and media reports.

In many cities a more **pragmatic** approach to diversity is emerging that promotes the positive relationships between the presence of diversity and economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

This is often underpinned by a strong **ideological commitment** on the part of many city leaders to promote inclusion and growth through active social policy interventions. Those cities with the highest levels of diversity are represented by the most committed and progressive policy-makers. The presence of diversity can, therefore, act as a **unifying force for social cohesion**, rather than a source of division. An active programme that highlights the experiences of successful cities should be used to counter the growth of reactionary and anti-diversity policies across Europe.

The research also found that there are dangers for policy-makers in their search for the best ways to **represent** the presence of urban diversity. Cities are simultaneously sites of vigorous economic growth and also sites of the greatest inequalities. Minority social and cultural groups are often excluded from the opportunities that are emerging in economies fuelled by the growth of new creative economic sectors. There are also challenges in finding the best ways to **curate** urban diversity to the outside world. There has been a tendency to **commodify** diversity and highlight its economic potential, rather than its social dimensions. Policy-makers should pay attention to this tendency and ensure that diversity is not used as a label that justifies the promotion of divisive forms of growth or programmes that lead to gentrification and exclusion.

In a context of growing diversity, **mixed communities** policies in cities still have an important role to play. They must not be used to justify programmes that expel marginal and ethnic groups from particular neighbourhoods in the name of regeneration or renewal. Genuine mixed communities policies need to prioritise a diversity of spaces for residents, city-users, and business communities of different types. Diversity awareness should be a key element in the formulation and implementation of welfare and planning policies. Planning policies should also be used to protect the diversity of the **economic** base of cities, to ensure the presence of wide-ranging opportunities.

Finally, **diversity policies have been most effective in cities in which there has been a carefully managed devolution of powers and resources at the local scale**. At the local level community organisations and local governments have to address day-to-day concerns with diversity, which can generate innovative and entrepreneurial policy arrangements and innovations. The principle of **subsidiarity** should therefore be carefully thought-through and implemented in contextually sensitive ways in order to provide strategic management and tailored support for diverse groups and interests. Where appropriate, clear funding streams and legal and financial powers should be used to provide long-term support and security for local actors.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

### (i) Refugees and diverse encounters

Most asylum seekers arriving in Europe are housed in camp-like housing structures. These Asylum Centres are often closed off and hard to access. This goes both ways; these spaces form barriers for outsiders to get in, but also make it difficult for asylum seekers to access goods and services in urban areas. As activities are offered on site, and not in the neighbourhood or city, asylum seekers are discouraged from integrating in the host society. Fortunately, there are also fascinating new initiatives that are popping up in response to the refugee crisis in the field of housing. These initiatives range from people taking asylum seekers into their private houses to flexible and alternative types of accommodation where various groups of people are housed together, for example, students and refugees or artists and refugees. What these initiatives have in common is that they offer more opportunities for encounter than closed types of accommodation.

An important element in stimulating encounters is the **physical design of the space**. In contrast to the prison-like asylum camps, asylum accommodation should be accessible and people should be able to drop-in easily. There needs to be enough spaces in the vicinity of the accommodation for encounter that are accessible to a diverse set of people and offer opportunities for low-key, everyday interaction. Furthermore, it is helpful if the space **accommodates different groups**. For instance, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in the city centre of Augsburg (Germany) is a hotel where tourists,

asylum seekers and artists live and work together. Another example is Riekerhaven, a project where refugees and students live together in Amsterdam. One of the success factors of this project is the **inclusive approach**, meaning that refugees are treated as active participants (which prevents hierarchal relations with students developing) and who are, together with the students, responsible for organising the space themselves. Finally, another way to stimulate encounters is to **make activities** (for instance an English language course) **for refugees also open for people living in the neighbourhood**. This may help to alleviate the worries of residents over competition for resources when an accommodation centre for refugees or asylum seekers is established in their neighbourhood.

A complicating factor in the planning of accommodation for refugees is the insecure status of those who are still in the asylum procedure. It has a huge impact on the atmosphere if asylum seekers run the risk of being deported. For some asylum seekers these daily worries and struggles are also an obstacle for encounters taking place, in the first instance because they do not have the capacity or right state of mind to meet with others. It is therefore important to **recognize that encounters are more difficult for people in challenging situations and to adjust our own societal expectations of 'integration'**.

## **(ii) Diversity and young people**

The residents of our research areas take diversity more or less for granted (see Policy Brief no. 4). This is even more apparent for young people. Young people spend much more time than adults in public spaces such as streets and plazas. There they meet and make friends with neighbourhood children from diverse social backgrounds. More often than adults, young people develop friendships across differences. And they are less likely than adults to perceive ethnicity as the main social divider in the area. Instead, young people distinguish groups based on their school, sub-neighbourhood, or subculture. Even more than adults, they tend to see diversity as an ordinary part of their everyday lived experience. If this reflects a generational effect (and not just an age effect), their general acceptance of diversity is a hopeful sign. If a new generation is more at ease with diversity and has more open and dynamic networks, social divisions may be broken down. Political discourses should adapt to this trend by **reconsidering the use of old terms such as multiculturalism and assimilation and to stress diversity as the 'new normal'**.

One of the reasons why diversity is 'normal' for young people is that they grow up in much more diverse environments compared to their adult counterparts of the past. However, segregation forces outside the domain of housing may impede the trend towards bridging across differences. **Therefore, policies should be aimed at curtailing segregation tendencies in the fields of education, labour market and leisure.**

Moreover, young people expressed a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods, more so than to the city or national contexts. In their neighbourhoods young people had the feeling that they were not judged on the basis of their race or ethnicity, where this was often the case outside their neighbourhood. Moreover, local belonging was influenced by the feeling that they were all 'in the same boat' – namely living in one of the most stigmatized neighbourhoods of the city and struggling with the same issues such as poverty and social exclusion. Within the confines of their neighbourhood, and in relation to their peers, diversity seemed to serve the youth quite well. For the youth, their diverse neighbourhood largely provided them with an area in which they could be themselves and where they could claim their multiple identifications with confidence. This seems a positive thing, but we need to be aware that the appreciation of the neighbourhood and its diversity could be a reaction to not being granted belonging in other parts of society. Sharing the fate of living in a stigmatized area may forge a bond, but it also hinders social mobility opportunities. Therefore, **innovative forms of place making should be stimulated to overcome the negative reputation of deprived neighbourhoods.**

For certain groups of youth there is an additional problem: lack of trust in the police. There are experiences of ethnic/racial profiling and in some of our research cities (such as London and Paris), there have even been riots. Racism and a one-sided focus on repression stand in the way of a better

relationship between the youth and the police. Therefore, efforts **should be made to develop community policing with more emphasis on prevention and establishing relationships with the local residents**. This would not only be helpful for the local youth, but also for the wider community.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Our multi-method research deploys an interdisciplinary approach, which draws on urban geography, political science, organisational studies, law, history, urban planning, economics and sociology. It aims to provide a comprehensive approach to the governance of complex urban dynamics and understand the case-specific characteristics of diversity in different contexts, to analyse new policy approaches that recognise and manage hyper-diversity, and to suggest instruments that can work in a range of contexts. Field research has been conducted in 14 cities by 17 teams, which make up the project partnership. The authors of this report are Dr. Gideon Bolt, Dr. Tine Beneker, Dr. Ilse van Liempt, Dr. Kirsten Visser, Marielle Zill, M.Sc. (Department Human Geography & Spatial Planning, Utrecht University), Johan van Driel (University of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam), Prof. Dr. Mike Raco (Bartlett School of Planning, University College London) and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuna Tasan-Kok (Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development, University of Amsterdam).

## PROJECT IDENTITY

### PROJECT NAME

#### **DIVERCITIES**

Governing Urban Diversity: Creating Social Cohesion, Social Mobility and Economic Performance in Today's Hyper-diversified Cities

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**BUDGET**

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**WEBSITE**

<http://www.urbandivercities.eu/>

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**FOR MORE  
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**FURTHER READING**

- Towards Hyper-Diversified European Cities. A Critical Literature Review
- Urban Policies on Diversity (14 city reports)
- Governance Arrangements and Initiatives (14 city reports)
- Fieldwork Inhabitants (14 city reports)
- Fieldwork Entrepreneurs (14 city reports)
- City Books (14 city books)
- A Handbook for Governing Hyper-diverse Cities

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