



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

## GOVERNING URBAN DIVERSITY: WHAT CAN POLICYMAKERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY LEARN FROM DIVERCITIES?

This policy brief describes the governance and policy implications of the large-scale DIVERCITIES research project on urban diversity in 14 cities in Europe and beyond. It is based on a mutual learning exercise between academics, policymakers and civil society representatives and a comparative reading of the research results for the 14 cities. How can urban policies and actions improve social cohesion, neighbourhood attachment and everyday life in diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods? What needs to change in the discourses, perceptions and approaches of diversity amongst policymakers and civil society actors in order to govern urban diversity in a more productive way? How can the potential of diversity for promoting social mobility, economic performance and entrepreneurship be enhanced?



In this policy brief we show that a plurality of tailor-made policy arrangements and actions is required to turn diversity into an advantage for neighbourhoods. These arrangements and actions aim to counter negative portrayals of the neighbourhood, build trust among residents and policymakers, and provide migrant entrepreneurs with access to finance. We further call on policymakers and civil society representatives to engage in mutual learning and to develop a division of labour on the basis of their respective strengths. Finally, we argue in favour of policy support for the full range of entrepreneurship in diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the combination with inclusive labour market policies and direct investments in social mobility.

15 December 2016

## INTRODUCTION

The DIVERCITIES project focuses on the effects of hyper-diversity – the diversification of the population in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities – on city life. This policy brief focuses on what policymakers and civil society representatives who are active on different levels (European, national, urban, neighbourhood), and are working in often very different contexts, can learn from the results of the DIVERCITIES project research on urban diversities. This policy brief aims to highlight how **using diversity in a positive way** can enhance the policies and actions of policymakers and civil society organisations.

The report is based on a cross-evaluation exercise, which was set up as a dialogue and mutual learning process between DIVERCITIES scholars and policymakers, civil society representatives and experts from a range of cities and countries. A cross-evaluation workshop brought together a broad array of expertise and knowledge, with the academic research results providing the basis for discussion. The cross-evaluation compares and discusses findings from different neighbourhoods and cities in order to learn about tailor-made arrangements that have an eye for hyper-diverse cities and communities in Europe.

The cross-evaluation addressed three related themes, namely: (1) social cohesion, neighbourhood attachment and everyday life in diverse neighbourhoods; (2) discourses, perceptions and approaches of diversity among policymakers and civil society actors; and (3) social mobility, economic performance and entrepreneurship. For each of these themes the policy and governance implications were formulated as a range of statements, which were then discussed with reference to the academic research results as well as the experience and expertise of the involved stakeholders.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The DIVERCITIES project investigates the question: Under which conditions can urban hyper-diversity **positively affect** the social cohesion, economic performance and social mobility of individuals and groups suffering from socio-economic deprivation? This policy brief focuses on what policymakers and civil society organisations can do to create these conditions through tailor-made policy arrangements and actions.

The first set of policy recommendations is concerned with **social cohesion** (strength of internal bonds in neighbourhood), **neighbourhood attachment** (pride, commitment and identification of residents within the neighbourhood they live in) and **everyday neighbourhood life** (routine ways of acting as residents in the neighbourhood). One of the critical lessons is that more awareness of, and insight in, neighbourhood level diversity is necessary to inform public policymaking and social action. A dynamic knowledge base on the diversity of neighbourhood populations and their differing needs and habits, drawing on scientific research as well as hands-on practical experience, is a pre-condition to govern urban diversity in a positive way.

The reasons that motivate people to live in a diverse neighbourhood is one example of where public policies may be ill-informed. Following popular writings on the creative city, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population is often identified and promoted as a factor that makes cities an attractive location for creative professionals to work and live in. The gentrification of neighbourhoods is also frequently explained on the basis of the lifestyle preferences of new urban middle classes, which are said to be more tolerant towards ethnic and cultural differences and often actively seek to live and spend time in places where these differences can be experienced. However,

our research shows that housing prices and location, rather than cultural diversity, are the main reasons why most people choose to live in diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, even for groups that are associated with the creative class profile such as artists, students and young creative professionals. Policymakers should therefore not work with a general expectation that diversity is an important factor of attraction for these neighbourhoods and focus on the affordability of housing and accessibility instead. However, as the presence of diversity may be a factor that stops people from moving to diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, policy arrangements and actions that present diversity as an asset are required, for example, the promotion of multicultural shopping streets, cultural festivals, and publishing stories about living in diversity that generate local pride.

People may also choose to live in diverse neighbourhoods out of habit or because of the presence of family and friends. Especially when parts of society are hostile to migration, the presence of members of the same ethnic group in the neighbourhood provide ethnic minorities with higher levels of physical, psychological and social security. In addition, some people end up in diverse and/or deprived neighbourhoods because they cannot afford to live elsewhere. Policymakers and civil society organisations should take this into account when criticising the concentration of ethnic minorities and people living in poverty in certain neighbourhoods. They should be aware of the temporary benefits the spatial concentration of ethno-cultural minorities in certain neighbourhoods offers to newcomers, and support the specialisation of these neighbourhoods as gateways for newcomers into their city and the broader society through the establishment of 'arrival infrastructure', for example neighbourhood centres, supportive school environments, and self-run organisations. Simultaneously, they should attend to any negative effects when social integration in the broader society is not happening. Negative effects concerning spatial segregation should be countered through further measures to support social integration through labour market, education and housing policies rather than through spatial desegregation policies.

Of all places found in diverse neighbourhoods, it is in schools that diversity is most frequently seen as threatening. Schools are highly meaningful, and often contested, sites to neighbourhood residents, mainly because they involve children and constitute the most important channel for social mobility and social reproduction. Although schools may provide opportunities for sustained encounters between children and parents from widely different backgrounds, people also fear that diversity in schools may affect the future life chances of their children. However, it is important to note that school choice is as much, or even more, about socio-economic status than about ethnic background as middle-class migrants often also send their children to schools with a lower percentage of migrant children.

Both mixed schools and group-based approaches in which teaching approaches can be adapted to specific cultural, linguistic or socio-economic groups have specific advantages and disadvantages. While the latter strategy is said to increase the self-confidence and empowerment of pupils from marginalised groups, the former strategy is often chosen to avoid the creation of 'parallel societies'. As a policy recommendation, one could say that mixed schools require investments of resources, both from governments and civil society organisations, to make the social mix work to the benefit of all pupils, and that group-based approaches are justified if and when relations between groups in terms of educational performance and power or status are markedly unequal. Public investments in schools in diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods also send a strong signal to parents, particularly those from a middle class background, that the quality of education is guaranteed and may therefore reduce fears that diversity threatens the life chances of children.

One of the threats to social cohesion is the negative perception of the neighbourhood. Negative images of these neighbourhoods are mostly spread by outsiders and often do not match the experiences of the residents of these neighbourhoods themselves. Policymakers and civil society organisations are advised to act against territorial stigma because they have an impact on the life chances of the inhabitants of a neighbourhood regardless of their individual characteristics, and may fracture the social cohesion of a neighbourhood as inhabitants attempt to blame other (groups of) residents for the stigmata of the neighbourhood. To improve the capacity of the neighbourhood population to speak for itself and to counter negative images of the neighbourhood, policymakers and civil society organisations should support attempts by residents to influence media coverage of

the neighbourhood, to invite well-known and well-regarded people (for example, members of the royal family, writers, high-level politicians) and to attract corporate headquarters to the neighbourhood. To (re)build trust between the residents in stigmatized neighbourhoods, policymakers and civil society organisations should avoid the deployment of stigmatizing language and images about neighbourhoods and use a more positive framing. Policymakers should be aware that (de)investing in the neighbourhood is interpreted as (de)valuing the neighbourhood and its residents. Investing in the refurbishment of public space (planting trees and flowers, installing benches) may contribute to local pride and trust among inhabitants of diverse neighbourhoods, while a lack of investment in the neighbourhood's infrastructure (closing down neighbourhood centres or public transport lines) and public spaces have the opposite effect.

Neighbourhood representatives may also play a very important role in creating a more positive view of the neighbourhood. Policymakers should support them with training programs, logistical support and even financial support if they are living in a precarious position. Although these representatives can never represent the whole community, they do have the power to open doors, represent people in their attempts to improve their living conditions and position in society, or support residents in their collaboration with other groups and/or with policymakers. However, since working with neighbourhood and community representatives may strengthen the social control of elites over all members of minority groups, policymakers and civil society organisations are advised to use this only as a transitional strategy. When minorities and communities become fully socially integrated in society, working with community representatives is less necessary.

Overall, living in diversity-rich areas is easier when everyone has access to basic social services and welfare. This requires governments to invest in a universally accessible social infrastructure already present in the neighbourhood. When neighbourhoods are treated equally in terms of service provision, relationships of trust within the neighbourhood as well as with the city council are enhanced and living in diversity-rich areas becomes easier. Fears over gentrification are a case in point. Although the inflow of new urban middle classes is positively assessed by some neighbours as it may improve the neighbourhood image, it also invokes fears of higher housing prices, overcrowded services and the marginalisation of established lifestyles and activities. This concern is, however, much less when access to housing for low-income groups is protected. In the case of gentrification, policymakers should invest in equal access to basic social services and not just focus on intercultural tensions or the behaviour of people in poverty.

As far as the **perception and approaches of diversity by policymakers and civil society actors** are concerned, there are two important policy suggestions: (1) coherent and integrated diversity policies should be organised in such a way that there is a good division of roles between different layers of governments and civil society actors; and (2) initiatives should be taken to organise and strengthen communication channels and mutual trust between different partners.

Local initiatives that are concerned with urban diversity often work at the intersection of various policy domains, such as integration, culture, youth, sports and economic policies. As local governments organise their contacts with other actors and their funding instruments mainly according to policy sectors, local initiatives often encounter difficulties when contacting local governments and applying for funding. Local governments should take responsibility for the issue of urban diversity and engage in coordination of the relevant local initiatives. They should also try to minimise bureaucratic fragmentation and simplify procedures when it comes to contacting local administration and applying for support.

Governments on various levels can support local diversity initiatives in a variety of ways. Although direct funding is seen as the most efficient form of support, the provision of attractive public space, logistical support, funding and supporting supra-local networks, and the availability of legal frameworks that enable the activities of local organisations, is also very important. Providing systematic regulatory frameworks, as well as data, research and analysis on immigration and diversity issues is one of the main strengths of national governments. The strength of city councils has more to do with their 'local knowledge' and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The EU, together with umbrella organisations, can play an important role by empowering and scaling up local bottom-up diversity initiatives through funding and supporting networking activities.

It is important to guard the independence of local initiatives from (different levels of) government. We have already explained how government support is often necessary for bottom-up initiatives to sustain themselves, but we should not ignore how government involvement may also create a situation in which bottom-up initiatives can no longer speak on equal terms with government organisations. Policymakers should be careful when imposing strict policy priorities and leave sufficient space for local actors to develop their own approach and to respond to local needs. Still, the importance of government support is highlighted in the experiences from countries in which civil society initiatives are increasingly asked to be self-supportive, or to receive fewer resources to carry out the same tasks.

We advise both policymakers and civil society representatives to engage in mutual learning. Policymakers can learn about the positive potential of diversity from the wide variety of approaches of diversity explored by bottom-up initiatives, for example, language conversation groups, urban youth culture initiatives and ethno-marketing companies. Additionally, these initiatives can teach how to build bridges with various sections of the local community. Bottom-up initiatives may learn from top-down policies about the conditions that are required to make living with diversity beneficial (for example, integration courses and language requirements).

Aside from how diversity policies are organised, the existence of strong communication channels between the diverse actors involved in the governance of urban diversity is crucial. As different actors have their own agendas and approaches towards initiatives, there is a clear need to structure the dialogue between civil society organisations, government and local populations in a transparent way. City administrations must explain their policy goals and approaches towards diversity clearly and should take an active role in establishing contact and communication channels with all actors involved. The establishment of trust between policymakers, civil society actors and the various constituencies of the local community is highly important in enabling effective communication and dialogue about diversity policies. Creating relationships of trust is possible in a variety of ways, including the identification of gatekeepers and the integration of members of various communities in the city administration, for example, through positive discrimination or outreach campaigns targeting specific groups.

Policymakers and civil society organisations should especially build trust and communicate more with residents of disadvantaged and diverse neighbourhoods about what they are doing in the neighbourhood. We observe a clear disconnection between large parts of the population of diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods with the urban public institutions and policymakers that are officially governing these neighbourhoods. The increasingly diverse and rapidly changing population in these neighbourhoods challenges public institutions and policymakers in establishing effective contact and communication and building solid relationships with the diverse constituencies in the neighbourhood. This leads to a situation in which information about the policies and interventions of urban policymakers and public institutions does not reach significant parts of the neighbourhood population.

To bridge this gap, policymakers and civil society organisations should not underestimate the role of informal relations. These can be established through being regularly present in the neighbourhood. Establishing trust may also require communication in a range of languages and forms. Another way of establishing trust and contact with the neighbourhood population, especially its low educated and poor sections, is working with (volunteer) gatekeepers, who are trusted by (groups of) residents and operate as intermediaries with public institutions and policymakers

Attempts to generate trust at the local level may be severely undermined by negative national political discourses on diversity. This creates distrust towards public institutions and policymakers at the local level, which makes it more difficult to establish contact. In neighbourhoods where a lot of segregation and distrust between residents exists, establishing trust between different groups in the neighbourhood may be a pre-condition for establishing trust in policy.

Increasingly, policy concerns are focused on individual aspirations and responsibilities and downplay structural explanations for social and economic inequalities. This creates a bias towards the

'successful' aspects of diversity in cities, for example, successful migrant entrepreneurs, while other parts of the urban diverse population are less valued by policymakers. To build trust with all sections of diverse urban populations, policymakers and civil society initiatives should pay more attention to segments of the diverse urban population that are currently undervalued because they are economically less successful; such an approach can go hand in hand with a renewed policy emphasis on equalities of outcomes rather than just an equality of opportunities.

The third theme of the cross-evaluation is **social mobility, economic performance and entrepreneurship** in diverse neighbourhoods. Social mobility refers to movements up and down the social ladder, while economic performance refers to how well individuals and groups are doing as entrepreneurs in certain neighbourhoods. One broadly shared observation is that many local policies have a one-sided focus on the highly-skilled, creative or innovative enterprises and disregard the many 'non-innovative' immigrant enterprises, which are often struggling to make ends meet. These numerous local enterprises includes small retailers, pubs and restaurants who play an important role in diverse neighbourhoods by providing affordable and specialised goods and services as well as employment opportunities for disadvantaged people, but they often feel underappreciated by governments. Policymakers are advised to develop policies that support all kinds of entrepreneurship in diverse neighbourhoods, perhaps with extra attention and support for those enterprises that are important sources of income for vulnerable families and/or have an important social role in the neighbourhood.

This can be done, for example, in the context of urban regeneration plans for deprived neighbourhoods. The inflow of creative entrepreneurs often leads to gentrification, resulting in higher costs of housing and living with original residents and small and migrant businesses being pushed out of the neighbourhood. Policymakers should recognise the displacement of these business as a problem and policy priority. They should develop policies to prevent their displacement (for example, by maintaining a stock of smaller and cheap business spaces, and support local business associations).

Smaller enterprises feel the impact of taxation and regulation more than larger enterprises and therefore expect more from local government in terms of the provision of legal and general advice, the organisation of 'single points of contact' and the fostering of connections with them. For example, migrant entrepreneurs often experience problems accessing finance. Micro-credit and financial advice are important to them, especially in the start-up phase. Local governments can also promote and support intermediary local organisations, such as training bureaus, consultancies and business associations to strengthen migrant entrepreneurs. Many small entrepreneurs also call for taxation regimes that differentiate between large and small enterprises and thus make small businesses more viable.

Migrant entrepreneurs in small business often lack trust in public institutions, banks and other formal organisations. This results in a lack of knowledge of governmental support programmes. Therefore policymakers should pay special attention to generating trust with, and creating accessibility for, migrant entrepreneurs. Policymakers can do this by investing in solid communication channels, minimising bureaucratic procedures and developing outreach initiatives. In order to avoid dependence on public institutions or banks, migrant entrepreneurs often lend resources from friends and family. There are ways to counter this, for example, by setting up micro-credit agencies, employing migrant employees to gain the trust of migrant entrepreneurs or replacing the filling in of administrative forms with oral interviews (and having a functionary complete forms on the basis of that). The same problems exist for business organisations. A more proactive approach to involve migrant entrepreneurs in business associations is necessary, one which also requires them to be more sensitive towards diversity, for example, when organising activities around festivities. Another strategy can be to 'deformalise' business associations (by appointing buddies for new members, developing outreach strategies and lowering formal entry barriers such as membership fees) so that asking advice from these associations feels more like asking advice from a friend.

Local governments and civil society organisations should reflect on the potential of diversity for entrepreneurship and the economic performance of the neighbourhood economy. This requires the building of trust between people from various backgrounds through pro-diversity and anti-

discrimination policies. Although creative and high-tech enterprises receive substantial attention and support from local governments, and often improve the image of deprived neighbourhoods and attract new customer groups, they are mostly not well connected to the diversity of the neighbourhood. Local authorities and local business organisations can undertake several initiatives to connect them with the local population more effectively, for example by developing initiatives that take entrepreneurs to local schools and establish platforms of exchange and dialogue.

As for the impact of diversity on social mobility, little evidence was found that diversity supports social mobility and out-of-poverty trajectories in diverse and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. When developing anti-poverty strategies, policymakers are advised to prioritise direct investments in people living in poverty (education, job creation, etc.) over policies that aim to create a higher residential social mix. Recognising migrant entrepreneurship as a valuable and often necessary source of income for migrants and newcomers, and highlighting the social role their businesses often play (in terms of access to information, social networks and informal mobility ladders) should not distract from the actual reality that, for many migrants, entrepreneurship is a survival strategy and in itself will not solve structural labour market problems. Policymakers should therefore, in no way see entrepreneurship policies as a replacement for inclusive labour market policies. Policymakers should focus on fighting discrimination in the labour market, the creation of jobs for the low-skilled and provide more flexibility in the recognition of foreign degrees.

## 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 and the lead partner for the Work Package 'Cross Evaluation' are Prof. Dr. Stijn Oosterlynck ([Stijn.Oosterlynck@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Stijn.Oosterlynck@uantwerpen.be)), Prof. Dr. Gert Verschraegen, Prof. Dr. Danielle Dierckx, Drs. Ympkje Albeda and Drs. Arne Saeys from Centre for Inequality, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City (OASeS) at the University of Antwerp.

## 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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es and Humanities – Collaborative project Activity 2 – Combining economic, social and environmental objectives.

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**DURATION**

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**BUDGET**

EU contribution: M€ 6.5

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**WEBSITE**

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

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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)

All available from our website [www.urbandivercities.eu/publications/](http://www.urbandivercities.eu/publications/)