Mediterranean City-to-City Migration

Dialogue, Knowledge and Action

Sub-Regional Event

Communication on Migration: An Issue of Local Governance

18-19 September, Municipality of Tunis

Background paper

This paper introduces general concepts and provides a basic framework for discussion of the theme of communication on migration at local level. It has been drafted on the basis of work conducted by Kelly Miller and Sophia Burton, Co-Founders of Migration Matters e.V., for the purposes of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration project (MC2CM) sub-regional event to take place in Tunis, Tunisia on 18-19 September 2018.

The concepts introduced will be further developed and expanded during the meeting discussions.

INTRODUCTION

At the local level, migration is often conceived of as underpinning diversity, with diversity seen by many as an opportunity and asset for cities. Misguided and ill-informed public perceptions can become a barrier for cities to capitalise on migration. In fact, whether or not local communities perceive more diversity as a potential opportunity and asset also depends on people's values, socialisation and education. These can result in anti-immigrant and thus anti-diversity sentiments and attitudes, which are difficult to address and hard to overcome. Such anti-immigrant sentiment and attitudes among local populations can create tension and pose a threat to social cohesion and, if left unattended, escalate and negatively impact local communities and their integration.

Due to their size, economic might, and proximity to citizens, cities are in a unique position to foster a pragmatic, evidence-based debate on migration. Moreover, given that migration will continue to be a reality, an opportunity, and a challenge faced by cities, communicating on migration becomes an imperative to sensitizing local communities and enacting effective local policies.

Building upon the work of the MC2CM project, this paper provides a glimpse of the topic of local communications, offering some points and illustrations to serve as the basis for further discussion and development.

1. THE DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE

How can diversity be an asset for my city?

In the local context, diversity can represent a tool for growth. Inclusive societies are better positioned to achieve the gains in productivity required to sustain economic growth for a growing population. According to findings from McKinsey & Co.'s Global Infrastructure Initiative, the cities in which residents interact the most with each other on a social and economic level are the places that experience the highest levels of productivity and the highest levels of more equally distributed economic growth.[1]

Moreover, by nature of attracting migrants, cities can address skills shortages and harness the particular skills, innovation and global connections that these populations bring to city economies. This can translate into a comparative advantage in trade and attraction of investment in an era of global economic competition.

But migration is not a panacea. The fact that migration represents an opportunity for cities does not exclude the fact that it can also represent a hurdle for social cohesion - in particular when the nature of this migration is forced, unregulated, or sudden to a concentrated territory. [2]

2. APPROACHES to communications

There is no one-size-fits-all or blueprint of how a city should organise its communications. The AMICALL[3] project on "Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership" in six European countries offers a useful typology of communications activities of local authorities, which places these into three main groupings:

1. **Communications campaigns** include awareness-raising activities, media engagement and other public relations activities. They range in aims from increasing tolerance, preventing discrimination, to promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and migrants.

The #farbebekennen ('seeing colour') campaign by the Berlin city government displayed a series of posters with the caption 'typical German' and photos of newcomers, challenging notions of homogeneous German society and raising awareness about positive contributions of immigrants.

Image source: MigrationMatters

2. **Intercultural communications activities** seek to celebrate different cultures in one community and thus improving acceptance.

The *Migrants Arts Festival (Festival des Arts des Migrants)* organised in the city of Tangier with the support of the city administration in 2017 and which offered public space and platform for migrants to showcase their art to the wider community[4]

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[1] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure/our-insights/inclusive-cities-are-productive-cities

[2] For more information on social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, refer to
https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/20_social_cohesion_and_dialogue_lisboa_june2016.pdf

[3] EU-funded project concluded in 2012 and led by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford
https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/attitudes-to-migrants-communication-and-local-leadership-amicall/

[4] For more information see https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/1_2018/MC2CM/MC2M_case_studies/EN/CaseStudies_Tangier_Print.pdf

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3. **Face-to-face communications activities** aim to bring together different sections of the community as individuals. This can be done through public fora, informal and formal dialogue, classes or mediation.

> The Anti-Rumour Network is an initiative of the Barcelona City Council to fight negative perceptions of migrants. Volunteers are trained to enable them to spread information and dispel myths and stereotypes about migrants among their own networks face-to-face.[5]

A strategy or strategic approach is an essential element of successful communications that can make an impact. Both internal (within the administration and among different levels of government) as well as external (vis-à-vis wider public) dimensions of communications need to be considered for the strategy development as they can and often need to be addressed and engaged differently. The following are some considerations to take into account for cities in addressing communications on migration:

- Wherever possible, the development of a communications strategy – preferably involving various stakeholder groups - should form part of the approach of a wider communications or city development or branding strategy

- Communications includes external and internal dimensions and must be adapted according to the audiences; typically, a communication strategy proposes a variety of activities geared towards engaging and addressing different target audiences. Examples of target audiences for communications on migration include:

  o migrant groups
  o non-migrant population
  o local public service providers
  o media and opinion leaders

- Knowledge of the local context (including history, attitudes, and perceptions) helps set out an informed communication strategy and predict potential hurdles, and how to overcome/address them.

3. TOOLS

Cities inherently have at their disposal a range of tools that can be used to achieve communication objectives. These are diverse and include a wide spectrum of instruments ranging from public discourse (political speeches and policy documents), front-line service provision (including housing, transport, preschool education, language courses, among others), training opportunities (for citizens, migrants and city officials), and education and information activities and campaigns (on a wide variety of themes). Furthermore, as the government closest to citizens, cities possess the unique advantage of being able to implement structured dialogue with citizens which can become a particularly critical tool in building trust and creating a sense of community and belonging.

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[5] For more information see http://interculturalitat.bcn.cat/bcnacciointercultural/en/the-anti-rumor-network

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EXAMPLES

The table below presents a non-exhaustive list of the types of communications activities that can be implemented[6]:

Press releases or media conference
Stand-alone information campaigns
• Information about migrants
• Information for migrants
Web presence
Multimedia communications strategies
Media engagement
• Sensitising journalists
• Promoting positive coverage
Diversity training for officials
Intercultural festivals/celebrations
Physical spaces for intercultural dialogue (long-term)
Dialogue processes
Conflict resolution/mediation
Network development
• Between local/regional authorities and migrant organisations
• Between communities
Neighbourhood regeneration strategies
City branding strategies
• Integration focus and general public

Below are a number of illustrations on how some cities set out to communicate on migration.

➢ *Meeting participants are asked to bring examples from their own contexts as input to the mapping of case studies on communications.*

Bologna: challenging prejudices about migration	The *Welcoming Bologna* project encourages intercultural dialogue and cooperation amongst different communities within the city. Amongst other initiatives, the project has developed effective communication tools to combat the climate of fear and distrust towards "the Other".
	Two tools are mainly used in the interest of successfully changing stereotypes and misunderstandings towards newcomers. "Positive storytelling", a method that counters hate speech, is set out to change perspectives on immigration. Emotions are targeted in order to create empathy and understanding, and inclusive language is used, excluding distinctions of "us" and "them". Secondly, visualisations through pictures and videos are made available through social media platforms. They highlight positive storytelling and introduce it to public debate, making it available to a wider audience. Both tools are thought-out to shed light on the positive aspects and opportunities brought by newcomers, in enriching the city culturally, socially and economically.

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[6] From https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/PR-2012-AMICALL_Transnational.pdf p 16

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Madrid: right to the city for all	The Madrid Strategic plan on human rights (*Plan Estrategico de Derechos Humanos del Ayuntamiento de Madrid*), aligns with the concept of right to the City for the inhabitants of Madrid. Amongst a detailed list on rights relating to several urban issues, the Plan specifically addresses migrants' rights. In this context, migrants living in Madrid are being granted a Neighbour Card (*Trajeta de Vecindad*) as way to foster belonging and social cohesion.
Genoa: using city's emigration history to reflect upon its migration present	Funded in part by the city, Genoa's Galata Maritime Museum[7] includes as part of its permanent exhibit, the emigration experience of city residents. The exhibit compares this trajectory with that of current immigrants to the city – setting out a reflection on what it means to have transformed from a city of emigration and transit to a city of destination and integration of immigrants.
Berlin: bringing migrant women's voices to the public	Migrantas, a Berlin-based non-profit organisation, transforms simple pencil-and-paper sketches by immigrant women into pictograms. These pictograms are displayed around the city on billboards, free postcards, and via ads on public transit. The language of the pictograms is universally legible, and each image shares both unique and relatable experiences, drafted by immigrant women themselves. Depicted are women working in jobs for which they feel overqualified, struggling to learn a new language, or making new friends. Many echo common themes, such as the feeling of being voiceless or unable to properly communicate, through an image of a woman with an 'X' over her mouth, one with a knotted tongue, or a speech bubble filled with gibberish. *Image source: Ruben Gonzalez Escudero/Migrantas (provided by MigrationMatters)*

3. CHALLENGES to communications

Provided that migration is, particularly in the local context, a very emotional topic, and an intrinsic reality of cities and that communication is thus unavoidable - what are the challenges faced in effecting communication at local level and balancing the narrative on migration?

- **Politics** and interplay between local and national politics and media

- **Confirmation bias** describes the phenomenon in which we believe facts or statements that confirm what our social and institutional circles, personal experiences, beliefs and opinions have taught us to consider as true. In other words, 'what is said is not always what is heard'.[8]

Image source: MigrationMatters

- **The 'halo effect'**, in which segments of an urban population at the city limits may entertain radically different political positions and often express more fears of immigration and newcomers than their inner-city neighbours

- **Democratic and participation gap** including lack of trust in public institutions
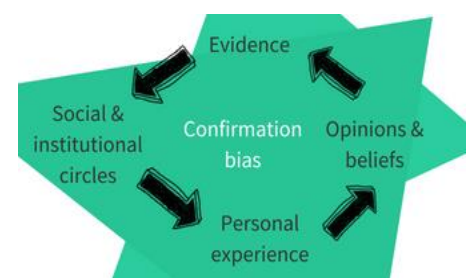
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[7] See www.galatamuseodelmare.it. Case study extracted from EUROCITIES Integrating Cities toolkit on Enhancing public perception of migration and diversity
[8] https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Building-an-inclusive-city-narrative-briefing-note-final.pdf

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- **The individual vs. the common good** are not always mutually reinforcing

- **Promoting long-term advantages vs. short-term gain**

- **How to address fears and concerns of citizens?**

CONCLUSION

A 2018 British Future study shows that people 'view immigration, positively and negatively, through its impact on the place where they live'.[9] If a city communicates the realities and experiences of migration and diversity on the local level, this can activate a more informed and inclusive experience for its residents. Cities are also in a privileged position to emphasise the place-based right to belonging of its residents, regardless of their origin.

Actions taken by cities and influencing day-to-day experiences of residents can pave the way for the development of informed and evidence-based migration and integration policies at the local level. This includes addressing fears and concerns of citizens and attending to social cohesion and inclusion and contributing to the public debate to ensure more accuracy and depth on issues of integration, and migration, to better reflect experiences on the ground. Ultimately, a public debate and continuous dialogue that are set out in a respectful manner, even if controversial, can do more for social cohesion than avoiding open communication or ignoring concerns altogether.

Communicating openly on migration by involving citizens and addressing their concerns is necessary for sensitizing various audiences of any city; without it, the danger of misunderstandings and social conflict is likely to increase. In order to fulfil the potential for diversity as a lever for social capital and economic development, as well as address challenges to social cohesion, cities need to address the challenge of communications. Only then can this diversity serve to boost social transformation, innovation, local development and long-term prosperity.

RESOURCES

Ben Gidley, Elizabeth Collett, 2012, AMICALL Final Transnational Report

British Future, 2018, National Conversation on immigration

COMPAS Oxford University, 2018, Building an Inclusive City Narrative

Council of Europe, Communication for integration project

EUROCITIES, Integrating Cities toolkits

Mediterranean City to City Migration, 2017, Social cohesion and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

Mediterranean City to City Migration, 2018, *The place of culture in migrants' inclusion at local level*

UNHCR Lebanon, 2017, Media and communications campaign to secure continued hospitality of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

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[9] http://www.britishfuture.org/publication/national-conversation-on-immigration-interim-report/

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