



Stakeholder workshop on governing urban diversity

Information sheet

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Dear Participants,

Welcome to the Divercities stakeholder workshop on governing urban diversity. With these stakeholder workshops, we aim to bring together civil society representatives, policy makers and academic experts to discuss how urban diversity can positively affect social cohesion, economic performance and the social mobility of individuals and groups. In September, we are organizing a big stakeholder conference in Antwerp, with representatives of 13 European cities. This smaller event in Toronto is organized solely for the Toronto stakeholders, but has the same aims and set-up (albeit much shorter).

During the stakeholder workshop, we will briefly present our findings from four years of research on social cohesion, neighbourhood attachment and everyday life in diverse neighbourhoods, on the perceptions and approaches of diversity amongst residents, policy-makers and civil society actors and on the ways in which diversity promotes or hinders social mobility, economic performance and entrepreneurship in diverse neighbourhoods in Toronto and Antwerp. You can find more research findings, including full reports, here: <http://www.urbandivercities.eu/partners/researchers/>.

What we aim to do during the stakeholder workshop is to present and discuss with you a range of statements on the implications of our research findings for urban policies and civil society interventions on diversity. This will give you an insight in the dynamics of urban diversity in 14 (mainly European) cities and help us to refine our conclusions and make our advice to policy makers and civil society representatives more robust.

In this document we list the statements that we would like to discuss with you. During the workshop we will illustrate these statements with interview quotes or examples. We invite you to read the statements before the stakeholder workshop. We would like to thank you in advance for participating.

Kind regards,
Stijn Oosterlynck

Session 1: Approaches of diversity amongst policy-makers and civil society actors

- 1) National governments across Europe are adopting an increasingly hostile tone towards ethnic and cultural diversity. At the same time, many cities, sometimes supported by the European Union, are adopting a more pragmatic and celebratory approaches, highlighting how diversity contributes to economic competitiveness and a renewed sense of social cohesion. Can cities be the drivers of a new culture of diversity recognition in Europe?
- 2) Policy-makers need to publicly recognise the value of living in diversity and facilitate peaceful co-existence in disadvantaged and diverse neighbourhoods, for example through staff and volunteer training, assistance regarding financial and organisational planning, providing networking possibilities and the establishment of community centres to support intercultural exchange.
- 3) Local governments have a role to play in organising a platform for the exchange of experiences between local bottom-up initiatives around urban diversity, while local initiatives should invest in their role as bridge-builders with public policy makers and service providers.
- 4) 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. Because 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. Funding for and contacts with urban diversity initiatives should be organised across specific policy sectors.

Session 2: Social cohesion, neighbourhood attachment and everyday life in diverse neighbourhoods

- 1) Residents of disadvantaged and diverse neighbourhoods chose to live there mainly for reasons of location and low housing prices. Cultural diversity is not an important factor for residents to locate in these neighbourhoods. Although specific groups may be attracted by diversity ('diversity seekers'), policy-makers should not have the general expectation that diversity is an important factor of attraction for these neighbourhoods.
- 2) Although diversity is not an important factor for attracting people to locate in diverse neighbourhoods, residents often still appreciate diversity for a variety of reasons or do not see it as particularly relevant to their everyday life. For policy makers, the relevance of diversity for housing policies is that for a significant part of the population diversity is not a factor that stops them from locating in particular neighbourhoods.
- 3) The perceptions of diversity of residents vary widely according to the place where one is confronted with diversity. We observe that residents tend to be more sensitive to diversity in schools than to diversity in consumer places such as shops or restaurants and are more ambivalent about diversity in public spaces. This may have to do with the role of schools in the reproduction of people's position in society. Policy-makers and civil society representatives should provide more support to places and situations in which diversity is seen as threatening, particularly schools.
- 4) The dense social networks that often develop amongst immigrants in diverse neighbourhoods can both provide protection against the pressures and social exclusions from mainstream society as well as impose social control and push down expectations of its members. Policy-makers and civil society organisations should be aware of the temporary benefits the spatial concentration of ethnic-cultural minorities in certain neighbourhoods offers to newcomers, but should attend to its negative effects when social integration in the broader society is not happening.

Session 3: The role of diversity in promoting social mobility, economic performance and entrepreneurship

- 1) We found little evidence for the idea that diversity might support social mobility and out-of-poverty trajectories in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The social support provided to newcomers is an exception. When developing anti-poverty strategies, policy-makers and civil society organisations should not focus on diversity per se, but on direct investments in the poor (e.g. education, job creation, etc.).
- 2) Whereas most creative enterprises and high skilled entrepreneurs perform well economically, the ‘non-innovative’ immigrant enterprises often generate just enough money to make ends meet. Nevertheless, local governments primarily focus on the high skilled, creative or innovative enterprises. Local policies can become more effective by taking into account the full variety of entrepreneurship.
- 3) Although small and wide-spread enterprises such as retailers, pubs and restaurants play an important role in the neighbourhood by providing affordable and specialised goods/services and employment opportunities for disadvantaged people, they feel underappreciated by government (both national, regional and local). Smaller businesses expect more from local (urban) policies than larger enterprises, amongst others because they feel the impact of taxation and regulation more than larger enterprises. They expect local governments to provide legal and general advice, organise ‘single points of contact’ and foster connections with them.
- 4) Local and central governments only seldom use diversity as an asset to foster entrepreneurship. Local governments and civil society organisations should reflect on the potential of diversity for entrepreneurship and economic performance of the neighbourhood economy.