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5 Article

6 **Constructing the European Ideal of “Inclusive City”:** 7 **Interculturalism and “Good Social Practices” in Barcelona**

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11 **Abstract**

12 Within the contemporary debate about what could be broadly called the “challenge of inclusion” three major
13 interrelated trends can be identified. First, a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional approach known as
14 “multiculturalism,” which in Europe led to the emergence of “interculturalism” as a new approach to
15 managing cultural diversity. Second, the shared acknowledgment that the concept of diversity must be
16 reconsidered in terms of “super-diversity” and properly understood through intersectional lens. Third, the
17 emergence of cities as pivotal new players in a multi-level framework. Notwithstanding the growing interest
18 in the topic of inclusion, the theoretical level is still limited by strong barriers among different disciplines, and
19 the practices of promotion of social inclusion often result in a few specific projects characterized by an
20 “episodic” nature and, consequently, by very limited impact in the middle-/long-term. This paper is aimed at
21 critically analyzing the ways in which Barcelona is re-conceptualizing and developing its understanding of
22 interculturalism as the basis for building its self-image as a European model of “inclusive city.” After a brief
23 overview on the formulation of interculturalism as a contemporary approach to managing diversity at the city
24 level, I analyze the development and implementation of interculturalism in Barcelona. Finally, by focusing on
25 some initiatives selected in the project *Bones Pràctiques Socials*, I critically discuss some of the main
26 opportunities and challenges for the promotion of social inclusion stemming from the cooperation between
27 municipal institutions and social actors in Barcelona.

28 **Keywords**

29 city governance; cultural diversity; interculturalism; social inclusion

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36 1. Introduction

37 It is widely accepted that, in consequence of the increasing circulation of people and information, cultural
38 diversity is by now structurally embedded in the economies and societies of most countries (Pécoud and De
39 Guchteneire 2007, 5). However, at the same time, the phenomenon of diversity carries with it a disruptive
40 potential, driving tensions and conflicts, often related to discrimination, power imbalances, and various other
41 forms of exclusion and inequality. Accordingly, societies are required to deal with what can be broadly called
42 the “challenge of inclusion:” that is, the challenge of finding social and political solutions enabling people
43 with different socio-cultural backgrounds and worldviews to live together as equal members of the same
44 community.

45 At least since the end of WWII, most countries – especially Western democracies – abandoned traditional
46 assimilationist approaches, embracing what has been defined a “differentialist turn” (Brubaker 2001): in
47 contrast to the ideal of a quick disappearance of minorities in the social “melting pot,” this perspective was
48 grounded in the recognition of the value of cultural diversity and the implicit commitment to protect and
49 promote it. In this context, multiculturalism progressively emerged as the new paradigm for social cohesion
50 and inclusion in the contemporary era of diversity.

51 Nevertheless, although to this day it can be still regarded as the main alternative to political assimilationism,
52 multiculturalism has been subject to an increasing deal of criticism. At the beginning of the 2000s, propelled
53 by what can be considered a rhetorical narrative of a general “retreat from multiculturalism” (Orgad 2015,
54 114), a new approach to cultural diversity emerged which – especially in the European context – was proposed
55 as the solution to the various flaws of multiculturalism and the remedy to its failures: that is, interculturalism,
56 which, since the early 2000s was officially embraced by the European Union.

57 Interculturalism is characterized as a city-based approach, grounded on a re-conceptualization of the concept
58 of diversity, and focused on the promotion of positive interactions between individuals from different cultural
59 groups. As a result, cities have become real laboratories for the construction of the European approach to
60 diversity management and promotion of social inclusion. This is especially the case of the city of Barcelona,
61 which, against a typical “episodic” nature of most cities’ commitment to promoting cultural diversity, has

62 officially embraced interculturalism, pioneering its implementation as an institutional paradigm for long-term
63 city policies.

64 The present paper is aimed at contributing to the discussion about the formulation and diffusion of the
65 European ideal of inclusive city as an “intercultural city” by analyzing the case of Barcelona. In particular, on
66 the one side, I am interested in the ways in which Barcelona has been transforming the theoretical tenets of
67 interculturalism into a basic resource in order to develop long-term policies for the governance of cultural
68 diversity and to promote itself as a European model of “inclusive city.” On the other side, by focusing on what
69 the city’s institutions have identified and promoted as Barcelona’s “good practices,” I critically discuss the
70 role, challenges, and opportunities, that in this process is played by social actors.

71 In the next section I trace a brief overview of the ways in which, in the context of the narrative of general
72 crisis of multiculturalism, interculturalism successfully emerged as the new European approach to managing
73 diversity. Then, I move to discuss the different steps through which Barcelona progressively built its long-term
74 and sustainable commitment to interculturalism. Finally, by focusing on the concrete case of the project *Bones*
75 *Pràctiques Socials*, I consider the concrete experiences of those social actors working for the promotion of
76 social inclusion in Barcelona, critically discussing the role of the civil society in this context, and of the main
77 opportunities and challenges emerging from the field.

78 As concerns the research methodology, the paper is grounded both on secondary sources in English, Spanish,
79 and Catalan, and on a five-month qualitative fieldwork carried out in Barcelona from November 2021 to
80 March 2022. In particular, some of the information provided in section 3 are grounded on semi-structured
81 interviews that I conducted with some of the key persons working at the formulation, development, and
82 implementation of the two Barcelona Interculturality Plans – namely: Dani de Torres (former Commissioner
83 for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue), Khalid Ghali (current Commissioner), and Ramon Sanahuja
84 (municipal government official and interculturality policy expert who worked at the formulation of the first
85 Plan with de Torres, and continues to be currently engaged in the promotion of interculturalism in Barcelona).
86 Finally, section 4 is grounded on semi-structured interviews with a representative number of coordinators
87 (kept anonymous for privacy concerns) of Barcelona’s “good social practices” and on a series of participant
88 observations during the working routine and the implementation of such practices.

89 **2. The Crisis of Multiculturalism and the Rise of European Interculturalism**

90 By the 1960s, a major shift took place in most of immigration countries. On the one side, it become clear that,
91 contrary to what many theorists of assimilationism had been promising, the dissolution of cultural diversity
92 in a social “melting pot” was not something that would be achieved – if ever so – in a short period of time.
93 On the other side, the general “human rights revolution” following the end of World War II progressively

94 brought to the rejection of racist ideologies traditionally motivating illiberal relations towards given cultural
95 groups and minorities, in favor of the affirmation of an ideal of equality of races and peoples (Vertovec and
96 Wessendorf 2010, 34-35).

97 In the context of this so-called a “differentialist turn” (Brubaker) – multiculturalism progressively emerged
98 both as a normative theory and a political discourse. As concerns its theoretical foundation multiculturalism
99 is ultimately grounded on the following two core assumptions: a) each culture must be acknowledged a
100 certain kind of “value” and, accordingly, be protected; and b) members of minorities can be part of the society
101 while maintaining their distinctive collective identities.

102 Since its formulation, multiculturalism has not only attracted predictable opposition from illiberal
103 perspectives nostalgic of the old coercive assimilationism, but it has also been the target of “friendly fire”
104 from those who agree on the recognition of the value of cultural diversity and on the need to include
105 minorities on an equal footing. In general, criticism has focused on the “groupist tilt” intrinsic to
106 multiculturalism (Joppke 2017, ch. 5). Indeed, in order to preserve, protect, and enhance cultural minorities,
107 multiculturalism seems to be bound to cultural essentialism and it may foster a perilous tendency to submit
108 the interests of individuals to those of cultural groups.

109 As concerns more empirical criticisms, standard anti-multiculturalism arguments claim that, by focusing on
110 intergroup difference and enhancing the rights of minorities against majority this approach a) reinforces a
111 dualistic discourse opposing minorities to majority, b) hinders intergroup interactions and the development
112 of shared commonalities, thus c) fostering tension, conflicts, segregation, and the creation of parallel
113 societies; all this, in turn, e) deepens socio-economic inequality, and f) creates fertile grounds for the rise of
114 extremism and terrorism (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 12-13). Notice that, despite their intuitive and rhetoric
115 appeal, many of these points have not been supported by sufficient research. For example, as concerns the
116 connection between multiculturalism and segregation, it has not been proven that the latter has been the
117 result of multicultural policies rather than, say, the failure of education, housing, or labor policies (Vertovec
118 and Wessendorf).

119 Nevertheless, criticisms have continued to escalate both in the political and academic context, to the point
120 that, by the turn of the millennium, many took for granted that multiculturalism had failed its promises, and
121 that we could not but accept the “death” of multiculturalism and salute the dawn of a “post-multicultural”
122 era (Zapata-Barrero 2017; 2019). Although the rhetoric scope of these claims has been convincingly
123 underlined (e.g., Joppke 2017; Kymlicka 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf), it is undeniable that, at the rhetoric
124 level a general “multicultural backlash” (Vertovec and Wessendorf) did actually take place, in particular in the
125 European context. Notably, in the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* the Council of Europe declared that
126 “what had until recently been a preferred policy approach, conveyed in shorthand as “multiculturalism”, had

127 been found inadequate” (Council of Europe 2008). Similar views were expressed in the UNESCO *World Report*
128 *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* (2008). A few years later, in 2011, important state
129 leaders such as David Cameron, Angela Merkel, and Nicolas Sarkozy declared the failure of multiculturalism
130 in their respective states (Bowen 2011).

131 It was in the context of this (at least rhetorical) crisis of multiculturalism that interculturalism as a sort of *deus*
132 *ex machina*. To be true, the concept of interculturalism was not new: already since the 1970s the term was
133 used in Quebec to oppose the multiculturalist approach of the Canadian federal government. However, while
134 this contraposition was ultimately grounded on political reasons connected to the rise of Quebecois
135 separatism against Anglophone Canada (Chiasson 2012), the scope of the European understanding of
136 interculturalism – at least in the intention of its advocates – was aimed at reaching a whole other level.
137 Indeed, interculturalism was intended to be nothing less than a “Copernican revolution” for diversity
138 management (Meer et al. 2016, ch. 4), thus representing the ultimate approach to effectively promoting
139 social inclusion.

140 In order to directly address and overcome the main criticisms flawing multiculturalism, interculturalism is
141 proposed as an approach grounded on the three following core assumptions (Zapata-Barrero 2015; 2019):

- 142 1. Diversity categories are self-ascribed, dynamic, and not ethnically based.
- 143 2. Positive intergroup and interpersonal contacts at the local level are the main way to achieve social
144 inclusion.
- 145 3. Well-managed diversity represents an advantage for societies and can generate public benefits.

146 To be sure, many doubts have been raised about the actual scope of interculturalism as a revolutionary theory
147 for diversity management. In fact, contrary to multiculturalism which can be considered a fully-fledged
148 political theory, interculturalism suffers from some relevant flaws both at the theoretical and empirical level
149 – as its own advocates recognize (e.g., Meer et al., 2016; Zapata-Barrero, 2015; 2019). Among other things,
150 interculturalism still relies more on intuition than on rigorous research: for example, notwithstanding the
151 central role that interaction has in the interculturalism account, no theory of intercultural contact has been
152 formulated, nor interculturalists have dealt with the vast literature concerning, the so-called “contact theory”
153 (see, for example, Pettigrew, 1998; Vezzali and Stathi, 2017).

154 Nevertheless, despite these theoretical limitations, the European Union enthusiastically embraced
155 interculturalism, which has become an important resource for the promotion of an approach – so to say –
156 “made in Europe.” Such an “intercultural turn” must be understood in connection with the consolidation of
157 three crucial trends in the contemporary debate about diversity management:

158 1) The widespread reformulation of the concept of “diversity” in terms of “super-diversity”
159 (Vertovec 2007), which crucially contributes to move the focus from the “groupist” perspective to the
160 individual level. Indeed, in this new sense, the scope of diversity is no more limited to the traditional
161 categories of ethnicity and nationality, connected with large, identifiable, and organized groups, but
162 it is extended to include many other interconnected diversity categories (sex, gender, sexual
163 orientation, age, social class, etc.) which must be understood from the individual perspective.

164 2) A renewed focus on *integration* in explicit rejection of assimilationism but also of cultural
165 essentialism, cultural relativism, and the general *laissez-faire* approach which has been typical for
166 societies after the differentialist turn (Joppke 2017). Specifically targeting migrants, this dimension
167 usually refers to the promotion of a shared language and of some principles, requiring, in general, a
168 commitment to the core values of liberalism.

169 3) The emergence of cities as pivotal new players, in opposition to the traditional emphasis on
170 the role of the national government. In particular, cities – as the actual loci where diversity is
171 experienced – are considered the real stakeholders for diversity management. In fact, given their
172 concrete proximity with the phenomenon of diversity, as well as their competences over “softer”
173 policy areas (such as health, housing, and social services), cities – meaning both institutions and civil
174 society – are in a vantage point to take action.

175

176 In order to actively promote the diffusion of interculturalism and its implementation at the city, in 2008 the
177 Council of Europe and the European Commission launched the “Intercultural Cities Programme” (“ICC
178 Programme”), a platform aimed at giving “support to cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural
179 lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies” (ICC Website). In this framework, an ICC-Index
180 was developed, allowing – by means of different indicators – to measure and rank cities’ level of
181 interculturality. Once joining the network, cities commit to the tenets of interculturalism, to collect the data
182 for getting ranked the ICC-Index, and to promote and implement intercultural initiatives. In this way, cities
183 become the real laboratories for the construction of the European intercultural approach. The success of the
184 intercultural narrative is testified by the extraordinary expansion of the network of cities taking part in the
185 program – the number of which increased from the 11 cities of 2008 to the actual 157 cities.

186 However, despite this success, it is difficult to disagree with criticisms remarking that all this enthusiasm does
187 often result in nothing more than an empty and *do-gooder* rhetoric. In fact, most intercultural practices seem
188 ultimately to consist of a few specific projects characterized by an “episodic” nature and by a very limited
189 impact in the middle-/long-term.

190 Nevertheless, in this context Barcelona stands out for a steady and explicit commitment to setting the
191 challenge of inclusion at the center of its political agenda by embracing interculturalism and striving to
192 institutionalize an intercultural model of governance on a long-term basis. Progressively emerging as a widely
193 recognized model for inclusive policies (Peña-López, 2019; Bazurli, 2019; Triviño-Salazar, 2020) Barcelona is
194 becoming one of the main drivers of the intercultural discourse.

195 **3. The “Firework” of Barcelona Interculturalism**

196 Barcelona is the capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia and the second-most populous
197 municipality of Spain with a population of 1.664.182 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). The city
198 stands out for its high levels of cultural diversity: indeed, about the 27.8% of its population is represented by
199 foreign-born residents, coming from 183 different countries and speaking no less than 300 different
200 languages. (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2021, 4).

201 The theme of cultural diversity was explicitly set in the city's political agenda as early as 1997, when the City
202 Council approved a first, pioneering, *Municipal Plan for Interculturality*. Few years later, in 2002, due to a
203 sudden increase in the arrival of international migrants, a first *Municipal Immigration Plan* was formulated.
204 Very interestingly, this Immigration Plan was approved with the unanimous consensus of all the political
205 groups represented in the City Council: as we will see, this political legitimation is one of the most important
206 characteristics of the Barcelona approach to diversity management, crucially contributing to its sustainability.

207 A turning point was marked in 2007 with the elections of the mayor Jordi Hereu (social-democratic/federalist
208 party). Hereu immediately set immigration and social inclusion at the center of his political agenda. In the
209 very same year of his election, he created the political role of “Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural
210 Dialogue” with the mandate to elaborate a new immigration plan and, secondly, a plan for the promotion of
211 cultural diversity and social inclusion.

212 Once again, in order to secure the sustainability of the immigration plan, the Commissioner Dani de Torres
213 negotiated the unanimous consent of all political groups. At the same time, thanks to the contribution of the
214 philosopher and anthropologist Carlos Giménez – one of the most prominent theorists of interculturalism –
215 the city's first theoretical framework for the implementation of intercultural practices was created. In this way,
216 some time before the official formulation of European interculturalism, Barcelona was already pioneering the
217 adoption of this approach paving the way for the “intercultural turn” of European cities. Barcelona’s
218 interculturalism was grounded on the following three principles (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010, 11-12)
219 which clearly already resembles the basic tenets of the European interculturalism:

- 220 1. *Principle of equality*, conceived as respect for the equal rights, obligations, and social
221 opportunities of all citizens against situations of exclusion and discrimination.
- 222 2. *Principle of recognition of diversity*, referring to the need to recognize diversity “understood
223 in a broad sense.” In this sense this principle translates the re-conceptualization of diversity
224 in terms of super-diversity which is at the core of European interculturalism. At the same time,
225 this principle also emphasizes the opportunities represented by socio-cultural diversity
226 “linked to cultural enrichment but also to the economic and social spheres,” thus
227 incorporating also interculturalism’s core assumption of “diversity advantage.”
- 228 3. *Principle of positive interaction*, specified as “the one that defines the interculturalist
229 approach and differentiates it from other philosophies such as multiculturalism,” which states
230 that coexistence can only be achieved through day-to-day contact and dialogue among all
231 citizens. Also in this case, it is clear the resemblance with the remaining principle of European
232 interculturalism, i.e., “positive contact.”

233 The formulation of these principles has been the spark that ignited the *firework* of Barcelona’s
234 interculturalism. In fact, these principles provided a general, uncontestable, framework which could compose
235 the various interests of different stakeholders: on the one side, the civil society was reassured about its central
236 role both as the target and as the agent of the intercultural transition, seeing the potential for space and
237 opportunities; on the other side, the political and institutional representatives could get a clearer idea about
238 the directions which the ideal of Barcelona intercultural city was aiming at, and could find motivation in
239 engaging with it in order to strengthen their ties with the civil society. In this way, since the beginning, the
240 intercultural narrative revealed its potential as a precious resource and driver of socio-political changes.

241 By sheer coincidence, the year 2008 was declared the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue,” thus setting
242 the theme of cultural diversity under the spotlight at both national and transnational level and reinforcing its
243 appeal. In this context, de Torres elaborated the *Barcelona Intercultural Dialogue Programme*, calling the civil
244 society to cooperate for the organization of hundreds of activities and debates in the city. It was in this context
245 that de Torres had the chance to get in touch with representatives of the ICC Programme – which was about
246 to be launched. In this way, Barcelona got involved in the Programme from its very beginning, actually helping
247 to shape it.

248 In October 2008 the City Council unanimously approved an *Immigration Working Plan 2008-2011*. Among the
249 specific measures set forth, one referred to the “drafting of a Municipal Plan for Interculturality” which should
250 have become the framework of reference for strategies and practices concerning cultural diversity
251 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010, 14).

252 The *Pla Barcelona Interculturalitat 2010-2020* is the result of an intense and complex work carried out from
253 late 2008 to 2010. The strategy for the official implementation of interculturalism as a city policy was
254 grounded on two pillars: namely, *participative methodology*, adopted both during the Plan's formulation and
255 implementation; and *transversalization*, that is, the engagement of all the different areas and departments
256 of the municipality both in the formulation and implementation of the Plan. The basic idea was to make
257 interculturalism a "lens" for driving a process of re-thinking of the city in its whole.

258 In order to implement the participative methodology, representatives from all the areas and departments of
259 the municipality and from the civil society, as well as experts and scholars, were directly involved in the
260 drafting process. After a long work of survey, interviews, working groups, and data collection, the findings of
261 this participatory process were analyzed and used for the final drafting. In 2010, the ten-year Plan was finally
262 approved, once again, with the unanimous consensus of the City Council.

263 Centered on the three core principles of Barcelona's interculturalism, the Plan specifies a detailed
264 "Interculturality Decalogue", consisting of ten strategic linchpins representing guidelines for the
265 implementation of initiatives aimed at fostering social inclusion and coexistence in diversity. Soon after the
266 publication of the Plan, a team was organized under the name of *Programa Barcelona Interculturalitat (PBI)*,
267 whose members were responsible for the different concrete actions to be implemented.

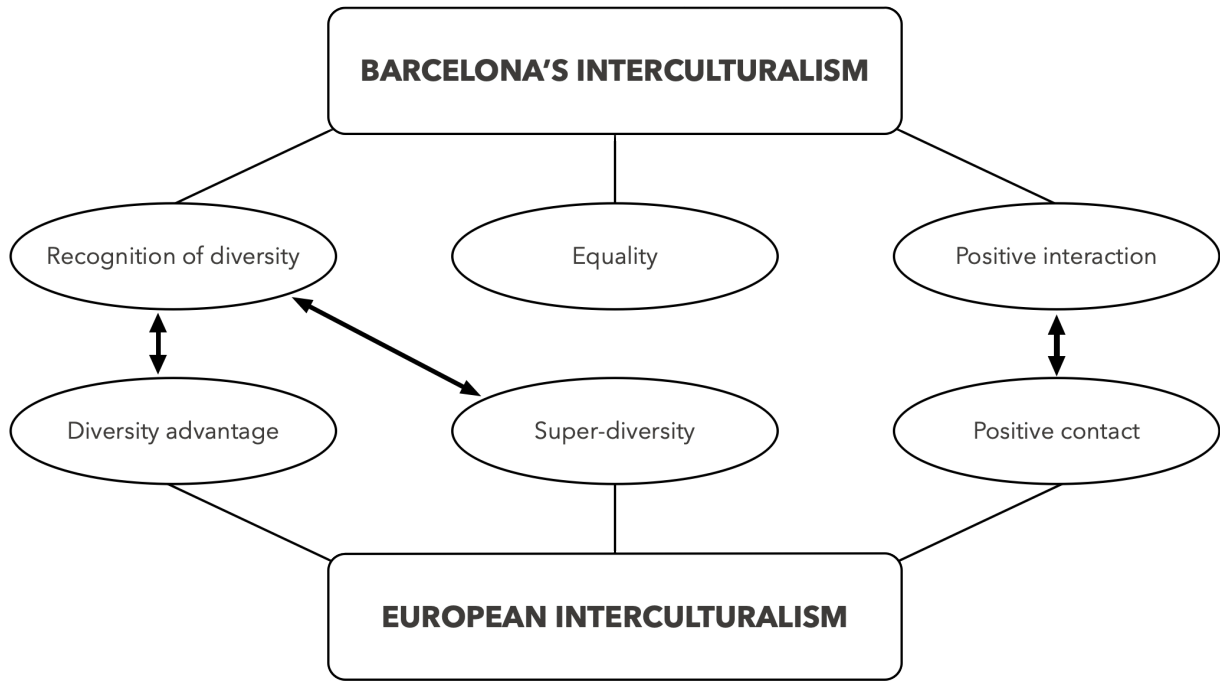
268 For the following ten years, up to 2020, a great number of actors have been working in the framework of the
269 Plan. First, in order to stimulate intercultural practices and spread the intercultural perspective, a service of
270 free *intercultural training programs* was established, targeting different professional and social areas of the
271 city. Second, the City Council actively promoted a wide range of specific intercultural projects, by providing
272 financial and technical support to NGOs and NPOs working in the field in order to elicit initiatives and
273 engagement from the civil society. In 2011 the project *Espai Avinyó* ("Avinyó Space") was launched, aimed at
274 offering (cultural and artistic) spaces of dialogue and interaction for promoting the city's cultural diversity.

275 Finally, the Barcelona Anti-Rumor Strategy was created, which became one of the most interesting outcomes
276 of the participative process of construction of the Plan itself and an interesting *bottom-up* practice of the
277 city's governance of cultural diversity. In fact, during the Plan's drafting process, participants identified as one
278 of the key obstacles to social inclusion the lack of mutual knowledge among citizens, fostering, in turn,
279 stereotypes, prejudices, and, in general, *rumors*. In connection with this concern and as a way to proactively
280 address the citizens' demands for intervention, in July 2010 a number of NGOs – encouraged by the City
281 Council – created the Barcelona Anti-Rumor Network. The Network is committed to engaging in anti-rumor
282 actions, both inside the Network (i.e., within member organizations), and outside it, by organizing awareness
283 and prevention campaigns, free projects and activities, and free training.

284 Having been approved with the unanimous consent of all political groups, the Plan enjoyed an extremely solid
285 political legitimacy, which allowed it to survive without problems through a succession of three municipal
286 governments belonging to different political groups – that is, 2007-2011, social-democratic/federalist party;
287 2011-2019, liberal-democratic/christian-democratic party; 2019-ongoing, social-democratic/republican civic
288 list. As the year 2020 – the end of the ten-year Plan – was approaching, Barcelona was ready to re-examine
289 the results obtained and the current reality of the city in order to launch a new Interculturality Plan. After
290 negotiating, once more, the unanimous political consent to the Plan, the current Commissioner, Khalid Ghali,
291 started the work for the new drafting, which was carried out by consolidating the two pillars of the first Plan,
292 that is, transversality and participation. The final aim was to create a new framework able to address the
293 criticisms and incorporate the “lessons” learned during the implementation of the previous Plan, as well as
294 *re-tune* it, adapting it to the context of the second decade of the 21st century.

295 The second *Pla Barcelona Interculturalitat 2021-2030* was published at the end of May 2021. Three new
296 pillars were added to the Barcelona’s intercultural strategy: that is, *dynamism*, *self-criticism*, and
297 *territorialization*. Dynamism is conceived as a reaction against a certain *ideological rigidity* perceived during
298 the implementation of the first Plan, in order to re-define interculturalism as a “transforming process in a
299 constant state of learning and construction” (Ajuntament of Barcelona 2021, 5). The concept of self-criticism
300 refers to the necessity of developing indicators allowing for constant monitoring of both the implementation
301 of the Plan and the situation related to cultural diversity in Barcelona, in order to promptly detect issues and
302 needs and elaborate strategies of targeted intervention. Finally, it was widely acknowledged that the first Plan
303 was still affected by *top-down* dynamics – enacted not only by the institutions but also by some of the
304 associations involved – which had not succeeded in effectively *rooting* interculturalism at the micro-level of
305 the neighborhoods. Much more (participative) work of territorialization was needed in order to spread a
306 sustainable intercultural practice in the *barrios* (“neighborhoods”) of the city.

307 The following two figure describe, respectively, the relations between Barcelona’s interculturalism and
308 European interculturalism (Fig. 1) and the process of development of Barcelona as an intercultural city (Fig.
309 2):

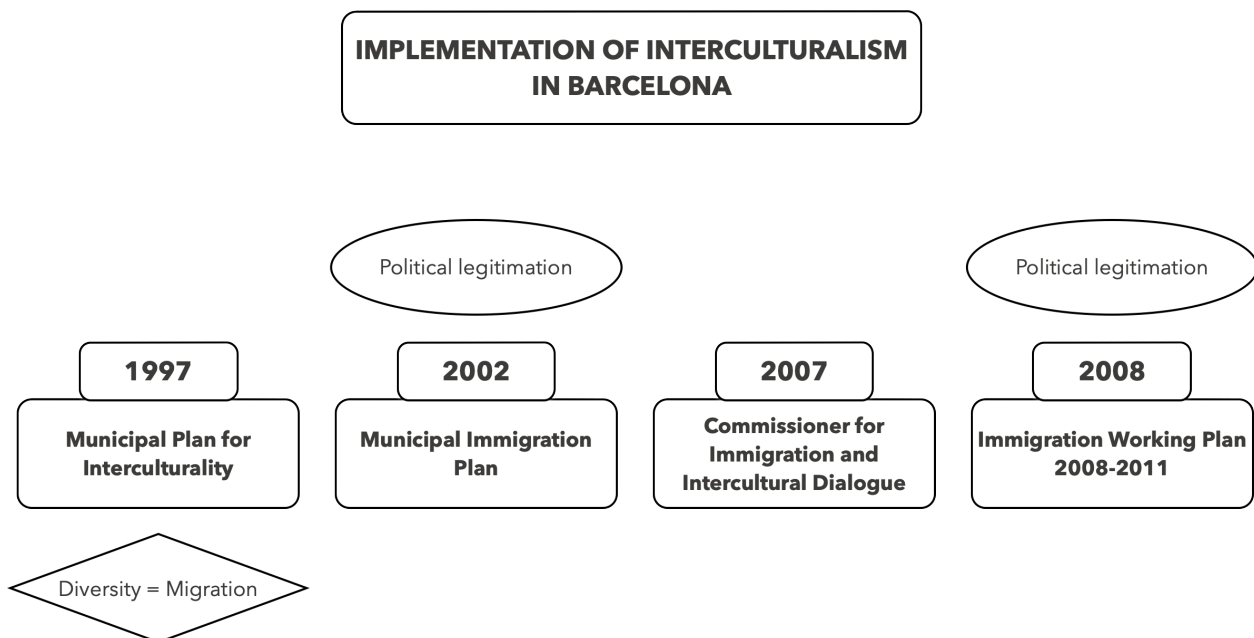


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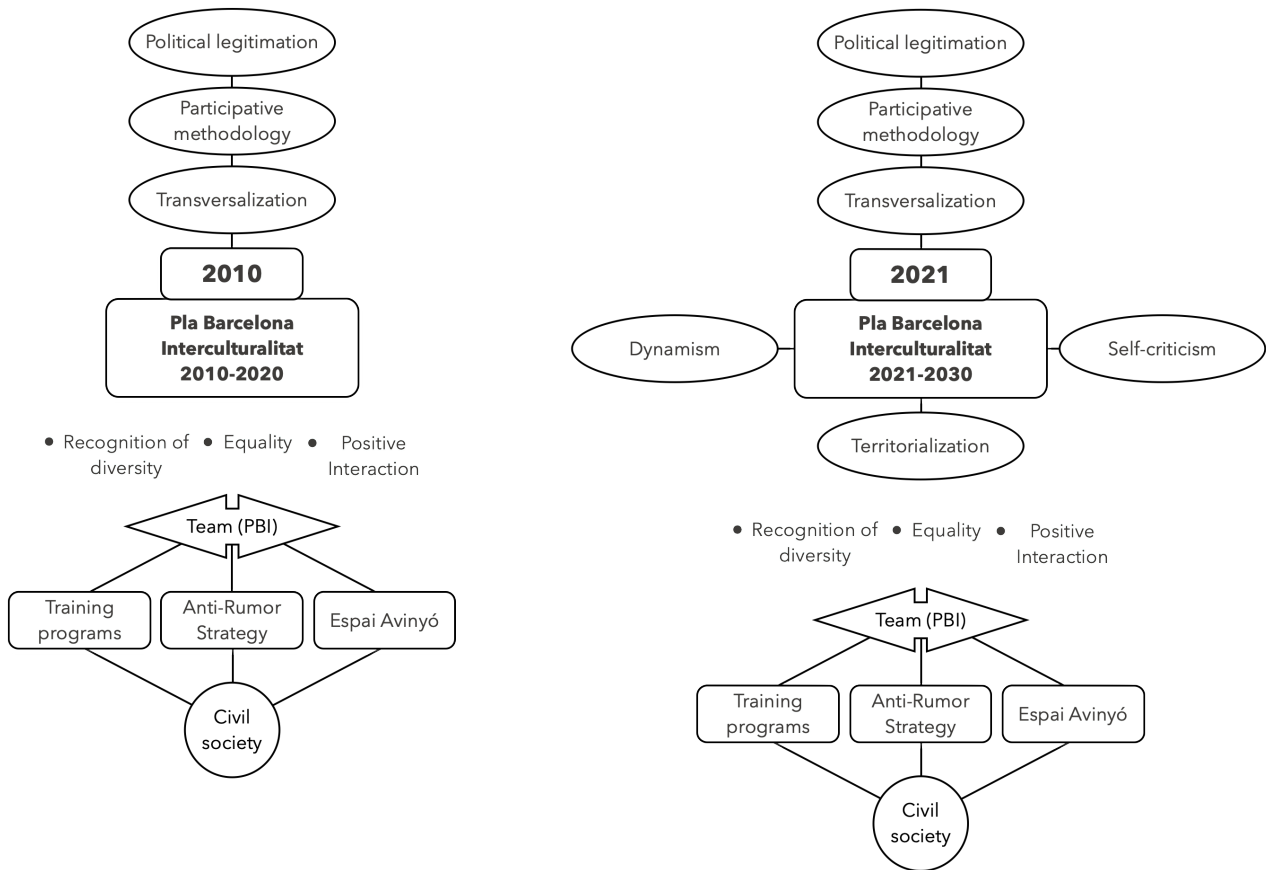
311 *Fig. 1*

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315

316 *Fig. 2*

317 In these last thirteen years since the publication of the first Plan, a growing number of actors have engaged
 318 in the promotion of cultural diversity in the framework of Barcelona’s interculturalism which did become, by
 319 now, a major framework of reference for the promotion of cultural diversity social inclusion – as initially
 320 wished. As we have seen, the process implementation of interculturalism has still a long way to go before that
 321 Barcelona can really claim to be an “intercultural city”. The very representatives of the city's intercultural
 322 program acknowledge that the city did not succeed in effectively implementing all the intercultural practices
 323 envisaged in the first Plan, and that the most relevant result in the first ten years of work has rather been the
 324 consolidation and dissemination of an “intercultural narrative” within different levels and sectors of the
 325 institutions and the civil society.

326 Notwithstanding the “perfectibility” of Barcelona’s implementation of interculturalism – which is explicitly
 327 acknowledged in the second Plan – the city crucially demonstrates that interculturalism is able to inform the
 328 development and progressive implementation of a sustainable model of governance of cultural diversity,
 329 characterized by a consolidated and methodology and structure, and by a certain level of institutionalization.
 330 In this sense, there is no doubt that the city represents a benchmark both at a national and international level
 331 and it has been playing a central role in the process of conceptualization and development of European

332 interculturalism and of the European ideal of “inclusive city”, providing an extremely interesting point of
333 reference both for researchers and policymakers.

334 **4. Challenges and Opportunities for Social Actors in the Promotion of Social Inclusion in the Intercultural**
335 **Barcelona**

336 The implementation of interculturalism in Barcelona, grounded on the five pillars above listed – that is,
337 participative methodology, transversalization, dynamism, self-criticism, and territorialization – has been
338 ultimately fueled by the intense cooperation between municipal institutions and civil society. Such dynamics,
339 which has become one of the hallmarks of the promotion of social inclusion in the city, is not something new,
340 and it must be properly understood in the framework of the traditional model of governance of the city.

341 Extensively studied and analyzed, the “Barcelona Model” of governance is the ultimate result of the process
342 of decentralization in post-Francoist Spain, characterized by the devolution of power from the national
343 government to regions and cities (Blakeley 2005; 2010; Blanco 2015). Acknowledging its limits as concerns
344 the delivery of services for social welfare as well as in the implementation of social policies, the City Council
345 resolved to let the process of decentralization continue within the city itself, dividing it into 10 districts and
346 73 neighborhoods, and distributing power and competencies. This operation, in turn, had the expected effect
347 to activate and empower the civil society which, ever since, has played a crucial role in the area of social
348 policies in Barcelona (Triviño-S 2022, 13)

349 Interculturalism was easily incorporated into this long-standing model, enrooting in the initiatives of the civil
350 society the practices of promotion of social inclusion and connecting them with a variety of social services
351 aimed at overcoming various forms of inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. Municipal institutions, on
352 their part, contributed by providing resources, such as technical support, spaces, and financial resources.

353 However, as criticisms have often underline (e.g., Blakeley), it may well be that all that glitters is not gold.
354 Indeed, as concerns social policies, in general, and intercultural practices and promotion of social inclusion,
355 in particular, the generous support of the government comes, in turn, with a constant monitoring and
356 evaluation of the development of the initiatives. In-so-doing, the city government maintains *de facto* a
357 steering role on the effective implementation of social practices, thus posing a limit to the agency of civil
358 society and to the possibility for innovation (Blakeley).

359 More specifically, while, on the one hand, the government promotes and empowers the civil society providing
360 resources and support, on the other hand, this may perversely result in a – so to say – “addiction” to
361 governmental funds, inevitably connected with competition to grab financial resources. This, of course,
362 becomes an opportunity for *divide et impera* strategies and, in general, provides the government a golden

363 chance to direct the initiatives of the civil society according to its own interests. Indeed, it can be argued that
364 a relevant dimension of the agency of civil society and of its political participation is, to some extent,
365 connected to its possibility to take stances against the directives of the government – something which is
366 well-known in the vast literature about social movements and democracy (e.g., Della Porta and Diani 2015).

367 In what follows, in order to go beyond the overall picture of Barcelona as an intercultural city and to move
368 some steps towards a deeper understanding of the role of the civil society in the promotion of social inclusion,
369 let us focus on the project *Bones Pràctiques Socials* (“Good Social Practices”), or BPS. Launched in 2012 by
370 the Area of Social Rights, Global Justice, Feminism and LGBTI Affairs, the project is aimed at selecting, sharing,
371 exchanging, and disseminating good practices of promotion of social inclusion and social welfare
372 implemented either from the Area itself or in collaboration with NGOs. As explained in the web page of the
373 project, a good practice is defined as “a coherent set of useful, relevant and significant actions (experiences,
374 projects, activities, actions...) that have obtained good results in a given context and that are expected to
375 obtain similar results in similar contexts” (BPS Website, my translation from Catalan).

376 Every year, on the basis of a set of criteria, an institutional commission selects a number of initiatives, whose
377 information are inserted in a “Bank of good practices.” Beside the requirement for eligibility (i.e., “adequacy
378 and relevance” of the practice), the basic criteria for the evaluation are defined in terms of a) “Transferability,”
379 b) “Innovation,” c) “Planning and processes,” d) “Evaluation and impact,” e) “Continuous improvement and
380 quality;” finally, some added value criteria are defined as f) “Leadership,” g) “Participation,” h) “Transparency
381 and communication,” i) “Optimization of resources,” l) “Sustainability,” m) “Transversality,” n)
382 “Comprehensiveness.”

383 Considering that those recognized as BPS are the very initiatives which, for Barcelona’s institutions, are
384 supposed to be the flagship of Barcelona’s social governance, analyzing their organization and
385 implementation can provide particularly precious insights: indeed, by diving into the reality of the experiences
386 of the social actors implementing those practices, we have the chance to get a more concrete picture of the
387 role of the civil society in such a model, as well as some of the opportunities and challenges perceived by its
388 representatives.

389 From November 2021 to March 2022, as part of a wider fieldwork carried out in Barcelona, thanks to the
390 extraordinary support of the *Escola de l’IGOP* I had the opportunity to get access to the contacts of all the
391 persons representative for the different BPS practices. After studying the information available, within the 69
392 BPS (as of March 2022) I selected 20, which were especially in line with the intercultural paradigm, targeting
393 members of minorities or vulnerable categories, such as immigrants or ethnic minorities, young people in
394 marginalized contexts, LGTB, elderly people, and people with disabilities. I carried out semi-structured
395 interviews with 18 out of the 20 persons selected (two of them being unavailable for interviews at that time).

396 The interviews focused on the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities of cooperation between government
397 and social actors in the context of Barcelona. Notice that, considering that more than 15 of the remaining 69
398 social practices have currently become inactive, the results of my fieldwork can have a certain representative
399 value for the whole set of remaining BPS, thus providing an overview on the role of social actors in Barcelona
400 also beyond those immediately related to diversity management.

401 A first finding of the fieldwork was the shared enthusiasm towards the supportive role of the government: 16
402 out of 18 interviewees declared that the technical and financial support was crucial for the possibility to
403 organize and develop the practices. However, the value of this finding can be questioned by considering a
404 critical issue that emerged while carrying the fieldwork: that is, many of the selected good practices (10 out
405 of 18) are actually initiatives promoted by municipal organizations working under the direction of the Area of
406 Social Rights, Global Justice, Feminism and LGBTI Affairs – which is the same one which launched and
407 coordinates the project BPS. Notwithstanding the readiness for self-criticism that I was shown during all
408 interviews with governmental officials, the enthusiasm that they showed about the governmental support
409 cannot be taken as quite representative of the perception of other representatives of the civil society engaged
410 in social practices. Even though they also usually benefit from governmental support, their position is quite
411 different compared to people who are actually representatives of the government.

412 However, it is relevant to notice that 6 out of 8 representatives of non-governmental practices confirmed the
413 enthusiasm for the governmental support, while only 2 of them mentioned the possible issues in related to
414 addiction to governmental fundings. As a result, it seems that, even if a minority may be skeptical about the
415 strong supporting role of the government, in general there is no perception or suspect of intentional
416 manipulation.

417 Actually, quite to the contrary, all interviewees agreed that, while institutions in Barcelona play an important
418 role in supporting the launch and the first phases of social projects, they do not provide enough resources
419 and support for its expansion, to the detriment of the long-term sustainability of many practices: as
420 interviewees pointed out, after the initial phase, other investments and resources would be crucial in order
421 to meet the challenges that arise in the course of the consolidation of the project. That's why, in the end, if
422 they do not succeed in standing on their own feet, many initiatives and practices soon disappear.

423 All this, of course, does not mean that the manipulation from the government cannot take place: indeed, it
424 is still the government which sets the rule for the allocation of funds for the starting phase. However, in this
425 case it appears that the steering government would often fail to maintain a strong control by fostering a long-
426 term addiction for fundings even with respect to those practices that have been elected as the most promising
427 according to its own institutional criteria. In fact, it rather seems that, in order to survive in the middle/long

428 term, those practices have strong incentives to emancipate themselves from their dependency to the
429 governmental support, creatively finding different channels and mobilize new resources.

430 Nevertheless, as expected, all the interviewees confirmed that, once mechanisms of institutional support are
431 set, a great emphasis is put on report writing and data collection. To be sure, on the one hand, all the 18
432 interviewees unanimously recognized the importance of supervision and monitoring in order to grant the
433 standards of quality in the implementation of the activities, as well as a transparent and responsible
434 employment of resource. However, on the other hand, both the results of interviews and my observation
435 point to a general “bureaucratic fatigue:” indeed, the frequent requirement to write report, fill documents
436 and procedures, and to hold different kinds of meetings with governmental representatives, strongly affects
437 and limits time, energy, and possibility for innovation. Considering that “dynamism” has been set as one of
438 the pillars in the new *Pla Barcelona Interculturalitat*, this result could be particularly important for the process
439 of re-thinking and “self-criticism” (other pillar) that has been foreseen for the next ten years: while it is
440 important to grant a certain level of supervision, it seems that too much bureaucratic burden is being put on
441 social actors, which is affecting and limiting their potential.

442 As concerns the opportunity for dynamism and innovation, 11 out of 18 interviewees explicitly added that
443 the experience of the Bank of good practices and the activities of restitution and dissemination of the
444 knowledge accumulated in this context – in particular, meetings among all the representatives of selected
445 initiatives – created interesting spaces for experimentation and encouraged cooperation and innovation. This
446 finding can be considered proportionally more relevant as only 6 of those 11 interviewees are working as
447 governmental officials. Indeed, this means that 4 interviewees, while being employed in the government, do
448 not automatically think that the project BPS provides new spaces and opportunity. In general, regardless of
449 their position, a bit more than half of the representatives feel that this space provided by the government
450 does encourage innovation and dynamism. The results from the interviews suggest that their opinion seems
451 ultimately to depend upon personal entrepreneurship and willingness to use the resources and channels
452 provided by the government.

453 Further elaborating on the fact that many BPS are selected among governmental initiatives and services, it is
454 arguable that there is a certain problematic level of self-referentiality of the municipality to the detriment of
455 the civil society. In fact, representatives of practices working as municipal officers are clearly in a vantage
456 point as concerns the know-how related to the criteria of evaluation of good practices. As a result, as all the
457 18 interviewees recognized, if initiatives promoted by the third sector are not supported by experts or are
458 not built in direct cooperation with the municipality, they are strongly penalized in terms of access to funds
459 and resources. This, of course, may reinforce inequalities between organizations which have already access
460 to cognitive or material capitals and those who do not, resulting in a sort of “gentrification” of social action.

461 In this sense, also this result may be a quite important theme in connection with the process of re-thinking
 462 and “self-criticism” envisaged in the second *Pla Barcelona Interculturalitat*.

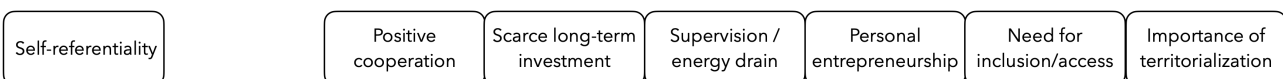
463 The issue about accessibility and inclusivity of the governmental funds and opportunities for social actors is
 464 deeply connected – as all 18 representatives acknowledged – to some flaws concerning communication: while
 465 the project is aimed at the diffusion and dissemination of good practices, most of the information on the web
 466 page, as well as the material produced, are only in Spanish (and, sometimes, only in Catalan). Moreover,
 467 representatives lamented a scarce and cumbersome communication not only between them and (superior)
 468 governmental offices, but also among themselves. The centrality of the topic of communication emerging in
 469 the interviews could provide, once again, material for re-thinking some of the practices within the process of
 470 implementation of interculturalism. Indeed, considering the ideals of “transversalization” between different
 471 governmental areas and the participation of the civil society (in its whole) in this process, setting up a system
 472 for inclusive, accessible, and effective communication seems crucial for further progressing in the
 473 construction of the “intercultural city.”

474 The same challenge of inclusion and accessibility concerns also the capability of the practices to effectively
 475 reach, or be reached by, the target subjects, as it clearly emerged from 12 out of 18 interviews (5 of which
 476 involved governmental officials). In fact, it appears that, except for the initiatives which are clearly localized
 477 in a particular neighborhood, many projects manage to involve individuals only insofar they belong to a
 478 specific organization. This result represents another interesting empirical evidence for the relevance of
 479 “territorialization” for the promotion of social inclusion – which, as we have seen, has been also added as a
 480 new pillar for the implementation of interculturalism in the new *Pla*.

481 The figure below summarizes the results of the fieldwork:

	Total	Enthusiasm for government support	More resources needed	“Bureaucratic fatigue”	Government provides spaces for dynamism/innovation	Communication problems	Capability to reach target
Government official	10	10	10	10	6	10	5
Non-government officials	8	6	8	8	5	8	7
Total	18	16	18	18	11	18	12
Percentage	100%	88.89%	100%	100%	61.11%	100%	66.67%

482



483

484 **5. Conclusion**

485 Barcelona is a paradigmatic case as a city committed to setting the “challenge of inclusion” at the center of
486 its political agenda. In a context where cities are progressively emerging as pivotal new players in a multi-level
487 framework and where diversity is being reconceptualized in terms of super-diversity, Barcelona became one
488 of the of the main laboratories for the construction of a European approach to diversity. While the process of
489 implementation of interculturalism is still on-going and the final goals which have been set are yet far from
490 been achieved, the city demonstrates that, contrary to what many criticisms claim, interculturalism can
491 become a crucial resource for the implementation of a sustainable model of governance of cultural diversity
492 at the local level.

493 The ideal of a virtuous cooperation between government and civil society for the implementation of social
494 practices – which already characterized the so-called “Barcelona Model” of governance – has been
495 successfully incorporated in the process of implementation of interculturalism. The concrete experiences of
496 social actors working in this context reconfirms the crucial role that civil society is playing, as well as the
497 opportunities that can be found in a virtuous combination of top-down and bottom-up dynamics for
498 implementation of social practices. However, as we have seen, a number of issues emerge at the same time
499 from the field, which need to be addressed in order to move further steps in the direction of the ideal of
500 Barcelona as an “intercultural city.”

501 The results of this paper clearly points to the relevance for in-depth research about the concrete experiences
502 of social actors working for the promotion of cultural diversity and social inclusion in Barcelona. I hope that,
503 notwithstanding the limited scope of the analysis (which focused only on a small number of practices and
504 initiatives), this research can contribute to give voice to social actors, providing some additional material for
505 identifying and addressing the issues that are being experienced on the field.

506 Considering that Barcelona will continue to invest in the implementation of interculturalism at least for 7
507 more years under the banner – among others – of “self-criticism” and “dynamism,” it seems that social
508 research may find room for contributing to this process. While making sure to avoid falling in an objectionable
509 prescriptivism, it seems that academic research can play a transformative social role in Barcelona, helping to
510 identify opportunities and challenges for promoting virtuous cooperation between stakeholders in the social
511 context.

512 Finally, the study of the case of Barcelona can result very important also for other contexts engaged in the
513 promotion of social inclusion. Of course, it is important to keep in mind – as we learn from the very experience

514 of Barcelona – that governance of cultural diversity is essentially context-related and needs to be built and
515 consolidated in a long-term, constantly dynamic, and participatory process. Nevertheless, the study of
516 successful experiences and the ways that issues and challenges have been addressed has undoubtedly the
517 potential to teach important lessons to other contexts. The laboratory for the promotion of social inclusion
518 that can be observed in Barcelona represents a unique opportunity for researchers to analyze an attempt to
519 build a socially sustainable “intercultural city.” By critically considering the different mechanisms that have
520 been put in place, as well as their successes and challenges, we can better reflect about how we could
521 effectively implement the European motto: “United in diversity”.

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