HYPER-DIVERSITY:
A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON URBAN DIVERSITY

Present-day cities are *hyper-diversified* – not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities. This policy brief focuses on the need to look at urban diversity through a new lens; to recognise *hyper-diversity* and to better understand its potential in facilitating social cohesion, social mobility and economic performance in European cities.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decades cities have become more diverse than ever before. Individuals who at first sight appear to belong to a fixed group may show different attitudes and behaviours. They may live in the same neighbourhood, but lead very different lives and have access to different opportunities. Thus "classic" categories - on the basis of ethnic, social and economic variables - may be too simple and insufficient in today's *hyper-diversified* cities.

In order to realise positive outcomes of such hyper-diversity, we have to account for it. New governance arrangements are needed to increase communication between diverse groups and to facilitate social cohesion, economic performance and social mobility. By governance arrangements we refer to official policies, as well as initiatives by a group of inhabitants or organisations with a neighbourhood or a city-wide perspective, such as joint projects, neighbourhood initiatives, festivities with specific purposes, or non-profit projects aimed at enhancing the social or socioeconomic situation of inhabitants.

Is Diversity Good or Bad?

Many nation-states within the EU have developed more robust policies towards diversity and migration in response to internal political pressures and concerns over the effects of austerity and economic crisis. The question of 'too much diversity' is even being raised along with wider calls for the greater assimilation of diverse groups. For some on both the political left and right there has been a growing emphasis on highlighting the negative aspects of diversity as something that undermines a 'sense of place' and social cohesion.

However, austerity may encourage policy shifts towards more diversity as one way of enhancing future economic resilience and competitiveness. The positive economic aspects of diversity may become more appealing to policy-makers in such circumstances. In some cities across Europe, notably major urban centres such as London, local policy-makers have been particularly determined in their appeals for more diversity and the nurturing of hyper-diverse societies.

Globalisation, Changing Societies and the Threats to Territorial Governance

The intensification of globalisation processes during the 1990s and 2000s has shifted the scale and character of socio-economic changes in cities and created new problems and challenges for policy-makers. New mobilities are emerging in which identities and territorially-based political allegiances are increasingly being questioned. The changes brought about by intensified globalisation in recent decades have challenged the assumption that citizen and community identities in cities are territorially-based. Cosmopolitan writers now claim that identities are more fluid, relational, and global in nature.

The growth of ICTs and transnationalism may be leading to the decline of place-based local communities as a greater variety of places (i.e. the community of origin, but also other places where friends and family members have migrated to) other than the place where one resides may remain or become more important. This can have major implications for the everyday life in neighbourhoods. If residents are more interested in places elsewhere the question should be asked how important the residential neighbourhood still is and how policies aimed at neighbourhoods can be effective. These more relational and fluid forms of political identification, we argue, represent one of the greatest governance challenges associated with hyper-diversity.

Hyper-Diversity: A New Way of Looking at Cities

People with the same basic characteristics may have very different orientations, values, and activity patterns. Too much of the writing on contemporary cities does not pay enough attention to the different activities, values, and norms of citizens. Most of the 'multicultural' literature misses such intra-group diversity.

The concept of *hyper-diversity* captures the quantitatively and qualitatively diverse forms of urban diversity that are now emerging. First of all, it suggests bringing the increasing population diversity beyond the 'standard' migration and ethnical dimensions. Secondly it proposes analysing multiple diversities in groups that ostensibly seem to be similar. Thirdly, it argues that diversity in cities should be approached as a case-sensitive concept within a specific context to address the issue in a clearer way. It means that specific contextual elements for the comprehensive study of hyper-diversity should be considered and that in some cities the characteristics of diversity may be dominated by socio-economic factors, while in some others it may be dominated by cultural factors. An emphasis on hyper-diversity encourages researchers to look beyond bounded neighbourhoods and refrain from the long-running tendency to concentrate on fixed or closed spatial categories in general.

Hyper-diversity refers to an intense diversification of the population in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities. The term makes clear that we should look at urban diversity in a very open way. The term hyper-diversity takes account of the

fact that, for example, a group of young poor Indian-born men living in a London neighbourhood may on first sight be considered as a very homogeneous group. But at a closer sight they may in fact be very heterogeneous, for example because some men of this group like watching sports on television at home, another part of the group's main activity may be a constant contact with the family in India (by email, Skype, Facebook, etc.), while a third section of the group likes to hang around the neighbourhood square and mainly talks with native Londoners. This makes the, on first sight, rather homogeneous group with respect to age, ethnicity and socio-economic situation quite heterogeneous in activities and places where these activities take place.

Thus, *standardised views* that look at the ethnic or cultural background of an individual as a primary reason of failure or success (with a standard expectation of 'integration') may not be realistic today. Instead, considering the complexities and dynamism in cities, an individual's success or failure in a city (or an area) may be affected by the possibilities this area provides him or her to develop relationships, businesses, lifestyles, new activities, etc.

Hyper-Diversity Needs New Policies and Governance
The implications of such hyper-diversity may be immense, not only in the possibilities of living together in a city or neighbourhood, but also in terms of urban policies and governance. Policies aimed at traditional categories such as the poor, or specific ethnic or age groups, or policies focused on one specific area without taking into account the immense diversity within a specific area are probably doomed to fail. Traditional policy frameworks often stick to stable and sharply delineated population categories or to specific neighbourhoods in a city and thus ignore the hyper-diversified social reality. There is a fundamental challenge here: how to develop successful policies for a population or neighbourhood that is difficult to classify in stable categories? How important are the "traditional" population groups in a city? How important are neighbourhoods, when residents of such neighbourhoods have their social contacts and activities mainly outside this residential neighbourhood, elsewhere in the city or even with people living in a country far away?

Urban Governance in Times of Economic Crisis
Governance is a process of realising specific goals in which diverse actors take responsibilities that used to belong to the public sector. It is expected that individual citizens and communities will take more responsibility for their own welfare, and that the overall success of public policies is more and more dependent on partnerships between the public and private sector. Less capacities, more needs: that is the challenge modern cities face.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and the Eurocrisis of 2009, governments across the EU have implemented austerity agendas and are seeking to reduce the size of the state and to make governance arrangements more flexible and diverse. This has given a new impetus to communitarian reform and the belief that active citizens can play a more substantial part in the delivery and management of welfare services and urban policy.

Similar trends are happening in cities and countries across the EU in which governance is being re-invented as a participatory practice that opens up opportunities for policy-makers and citizens to engage in a process of policy co-production and mutual working.

The big challenge is to connect these new governance agendas with the increasing diversity in European Cities. Clues should not only be found in general concepts and complex discourses, but also in on-the-ground initiatives.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Treat Urban Diversity as an Asset
Urban diversity can contribute to all sorts of problems. All over Europe there are examples of clashing lifestyles, racial harassment, open conflicts between ethnic groups and covert annoyances. However, the possible advantages of urban diversity may be overlooked, not recognised or insufficiently leveraged. *An open mind for policies and arrangements that view urban*

diversity as an asset may lead to new ideas about how to increase social cohesion, social mobility and economic performance.

Use Hyper-Diversity as Key to Understand Urban Diversity

Hyper-diversity acknowledges that people belonging to the same population or ethnic group may show quite different attitudes in the work place, school, or at home towards other groups; and they may have very different daily and lifetime routines that should be taken into account. This altogether leads to people carrying out very different types of activities, some of them using the home as the main place to be, some using the street as their focal point, some using the city as the place to be and some using the whole world, by contacting their families and friends through the internet. *We now live in societies in which the traditional categories explain only a small part of how people act and what people's chances in society are. Hyper-diversity calls for new policy views, new arrangements, and new thoughts on how and where to carry out which policies.*

Be Careful with Generic Policies

When we acknowledge the hyper-diversity of our urban societies, we have to acknowledge that these societies cannot flourish from standard or generic approaches aiming at, for example, economic growth or better housing or more liveable neighbourhoods. Increasingly, *more diverse and more tailored arrangements are needed*; arrangements that have an eye for that hyper-diversification and that are able to cope with the diverse needs of different groups in different local and urban settings.

Be Careful with Neighbourhood-Based Policies

The growth of ICTs and transnationalism may be leading to the decline of place-based local communities as a greater variety of places (i.e. the community of origin, but also other places where friends and family members have migrated to) other than the place where one resides become more important. This can have major implications for the everyday life of neighbourhoods. *If residents are more interested in places elsewhere the question should be asked how important the residential neighbourhood still is and how policies aimed at neighbourhoods can be effective.* These more relational and fluid forms of political identification represent one of the greatest governance challenges associated with hyper-diversity.

Pay Attention to Bottom-up Initiatives

In cities and neighbourhoods, all kinds of initiatives exist that focus on using diversity in a positive way. These initiatives are sometimes quite hidden, because they are not officially registered. Often the initiatives originate with a small group of inhabitants within the neighbourhood, but they sometimes have a city-wide aim. Such initiatives might be very effective. Public authorities should pay attention for such initiatives and find out how they can assist. This might be more effective than setting up new initiatives.

Increase Communication and Interaction between Diverse Urban Groups

We believe that communication and interaction between diverse groups is the best instrument to increase social cohesion and co-existence. Therefore, besides facilitating social mobility and economic performance, new governance arrangements should specifically aim to increase the interaction and communication between diverse groups of people. These can be either social communication instruments like joint activities and programs to increase interaction between "neighbours" or specially designed places or spatial elements to increase communication among people without any form of obligation. Using art, culture, and activities that involve children are the most common forms of this kind of voluntary interaction.

Work with Us

The researchers of the DIVERCITIES project are keen to make contact and be involved with other successful urban projects in which hyper-diversity in cities is seen as an asset.

Our multi-method research combines interdisciplinary, inclusive and case-sensitive research approaches. Our research deploys an interdisciplinary expertise, as it draws on studies and methodological expertise in the fields of urban geography, political science, organisational studies, law, history, urban planning, economics and sociology. It is inclusive because it aims to provide a comprehensive approach to governance of complex urban dynamics. Our 'hyper-diversity' approach aims at understanding the case-specific characteristics of diversity in different contexts; to provide new policy approaches that recognise hyper-diversity; and to suggest instruments that can work in a diversity of contexts. Field research will be conducted in 14 cities:

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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WEBSITE

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