



**UCLG Working Group**  
**on the Local Dimension of the Alliance of Civilizations**  
Chaired by Pedro Castro, President of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces  
**within the UCLG City Diplomacy Committee**

**THE ROLE OF CITIES IN THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS:  
BUILDING IDENTITIES, MANAGING COEXISTENCE**

**Background paper to be proposed at the Second Forum of the Alliance of Civilisation,  
Istanbul, Turkey**

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**1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

From the perspective of local governments, building identities and managing coexistence has become one of its main responsibilities at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cities have always been a crossroad, a meeting point for people and collectivities of diverse origins. Currently, they experience the crisis of universal systems of reference such as religion, ideologies, culture, etc., both as a threat and as an opportunity: diversity contributes to increase the social and cultural capital of cities, especially if there is the determination and the resources to lead the processes of building identities as a genuinely urban initiative, neutralizing conflicts in order to encourage coexistence.

The global scale of current migration flows adds complexity to process of building identities and managing coexistence. What for the developed countries represents a challenge that could be turned into an opportunity —i.e. the massive arrival of people from other parts of the world, most of them highly qualified—, for the cities of developing countries is a tragedy or at least a difficulty hardly avoidable: the lost of human capital or the irruption of new forms of poverty. Nowadays, it is indisputable that whatever happens at a global scale is interconnected, and that the disappearance of ideas such as of ‘fringe’ and ‘periphery’ (D. Innerarity, 2006) and the emergence of phenomena such as transnational citizenship —migrants that make compatible the physical distance with several forms of virtual presence at their home countries— in the processes of growing globalization have become key factors for cities and local governments, that undergo the need to think and act both locally and globally.

Cities must act globally. City diplomacy represents, in this sense, a newly created category of governmental activity with growing legitimacy. But cities should not refuse to think locally, contributing to strengthen local thought and capital gathered as laboratories of urban innovation, one of the most important assets in dealing with issues such as migration and conflict resolution. A significant part of the innovative solutions to this problems come from the local level, up to a point we can state that local leadership has become one of the main factors of institutional renovation.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations, held in Madrid in January 2008 in parallel to the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Alliance of Civilisations and UCLG, the four main areas for action of the Alliance of Civilisations were ratified: education, youth, migration and media. On the other hand, at the session about “the Local Dimension of the Alliance of Civilisations held at the World Conference on City Diplomacy of The Hague (June 2008), two new subjects were dealt with: the religious dimension and the management of public spaces. In fulfillment of the obligations undertaken by this organization in the Memorandum of Understanding with the initiative of the Alliance during the First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations held in Madrid in

January last year. Moreover, the content of this document responds, in general, to the spirit of local government commitment to promoting peace and upholding human rights contained in the Hague Agenda for Cities and Diplomacy. More specifically, the objectives 1, 3 and 4 in particular, development-related initiatives of local governments to build peace, to improve the quality of the Diplomacy of Cities and the promotion of culture of peace respectively.

Discussing the role of local governments in conflict resolution as a scenario to build identities and manage coexistence implies, for the members of the UCLG Committee on City Diplomacy, to tackle transversal issues such as:

- the traditional role of the city as a place of gathering, coexistence and a crucible of new identities of citizens coming from different places has ceased to exist spontaneously as a consequence of the large scale urbanisation processes and massive migrations, circumstances that have transformed radically the 'ecologic' equilibrium of the city and its traditions systems of integration. More and more often, having the risk of cities becoming scenarios of new identity conflicts, it is imperative to look for new urban policies that consciously face the following aspects:
  - the design of the space within the city, updating the notion of compact city (R. Rogers) as the alternative to the 'diffuse' urbanization processes and 'urbanisation' (F. Muñoz, 2008). A urban space that foster knowledge and coexistence among its citizens. A social city that is culturally sustainable.
  - the amendment of policies oriented to improve social cohesion in a way that guarantees diversity and race mixing. The lack of cohesion fostered by poverty, forced displacement or migration affecting the relationship of identity groups with the outer world, but the 'cultural insecurity' (E. Delgado, 2003) creates fractures within identity groups as it compromises their capacity to react coordinately with dialogue and alliances. The acknowledgement—or its absence, central problem of the 'knowledge society'—is the fundamental ingredient of cultural security. This cultural security is, jointly with the presence in the narrative (that is to say the integration of particular treats on the shared community values) and fairness, a key element for social cohesion dynamics within cities.
  - finally, cities—as territories oriented to production and economic development—should be able to incorporate the new phenomenon of diversity and interculturality as a key factor of innovation, creativity and competitiveness processes. Richard Florida, in his well-known *The rise of creative class* (R. Florida, 2002) presents the 'three Ts': tolerance, talent and technology as fundamental components of the new creative indicators of cities, highlighting basic indicators of tolerance such as the number of creators, the presence of sexual minorities and the number of citizens coming from other countries.
- Cities, on top of conceiving what we could call 'structural policies' (urban, social and economic) in order to foster better standards for coexistence, should rethink traditional models of managing diversity, overcoming the debate between 'multicultural' and 'intercultural':
  - given the expiration of the main occidental models from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the crucible or American 'melting pot', the British 'corporate multiculturalism' and the 'republican laicism' à la French (Bianchini & Bloomfield, 2004).
  - Taking a threefold approach that combines multiculturalism (fostering knowledge, acknowledgement and legitimacy of all the cultures, because without them the concept of citizenship for immigrants is seriously questioned), interculturalism (the creation of effective conditions for dialogue among different cultural groups), and even transculturalism, in line with some experts have labeled "the right to indifference" (M. Delgado, 2001) as a condition to exercise modern citizenship.
- cultural policies, on the other hand, have been growing in cities that devote efforts to build identities and manage coexistence during these last years. A culture clearly committed with development (Mondiacult Conference, 1982, México) and designed as one of the pillars for sustainable development for cities (Jon Hawkes, 2001), together environmental development, economic development and social development. A new task for culture that

reaches numerous and recent 'roadmaps', among them the Agenda 21 for Culture (a document that nowadays represents the backbone of the activities of the UCLG Committee on Culture), the 2004 UNDP report "Cultural freedom in a diverse world" or the "Convention for the protection and promotion of diversity of cultural expressions" approved by UNESCO in 2005.

- Cities, in this sense, could and should be able to deal with conflicts from its symbolic dimension, finding solutions based on a ritual perspective that relates to the new dimension of public cultural and educational policies: Antanas Mockus, former Mayor of Bogota, based its citizenship program and most of its successful initiatives on the need to harmonise three basic systems that affect both the individuals and collectivities: law, moral and culture. Adriana Kaplan, anthropologist of the Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, has been leading several initiatives on preventing female genital mutilation in Gambia through the creation of non-aggressive alternative rituals for the transition from infancy to adulthood...

What could be done from cities, and with which resources, in order to tackle conflict resolution from the angle of building identities and managing coexistence?

- the development of local charters of citizens' rights that guarantee the right to knowledge and being acknowledged of all groups and cultures of the territory.
- the adoption of measures to foster participation in order to transform "I" into "we" and go from the use of services and the attendance of public events to collective commitments, contributing to the increase of organized citizenship.
- reconsider the function of public space as a place of coexistence and integration. A space formed not only by new public spaces, but also new times and rituals.
- incorporate newly arrived population to the dynamics of creative economy, capitalizing existing creativity and creating occupation. In sum, showing that diversity is creative.
- promote dialogue among the collective memories of the urban territory as a fundamental task in the process of building identities as a project and elaborate "future patrimony". The memory of the city, sometimes without human points of reference, and the dialogue with the citizenry collective memory, often without urban points of reference.
- tackle the construction of identities and the management of coexistence taking advantage of the opportunities that new logics linked to transnationality and co-development.

Furthermore, when acting globally, cities should make coordinated efforts to provide themselves with:

- Agendas ("roadmaps", "white papers" "green papers", etc.) that show the way towards building identities and manage coexistence locally. See, for example, the documents *Local policies for cultural diversity* (UCLG - UNESCO, 2006), *Towards an intercultural city policy* (Council of Europe, 2008) or *Rainbow paper on intercultural dialogue* (European Cultural Foundation, 2008).
- Agencies that take the shape of a laboratory (that is, capable of transforming the information into knowledge and the knowledge into innovation for local action) following the traditional outlook current of "observatories". See, for example, LabforCulture, a project of the European Cultural Foundation (<http://www.labforculture.org>)
- Indicators and instruments for the evaluation of local policies. In this sense, it should be highlighted that the task done by the Culture Commission of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces regarding the evaluation of the Agenda 21 for Culture in terms of access, participation, cross-cutting issues, contribution to development, etc.

## **2. PROPOSAL COMMON PLACES/ LUGARES COMUNES. New spaces, times and urban rituals**

### **2.1. Reference Framework**

Cities are, basically, a collection of public spaces where an interaction of different human groups takes place.

In opposition to the “no places” (M.Augé, 1992) of the globalization and post modernity (stadiums, airports, malls, franchised shops and so on) that bring about anonymity and uniformity all over the world, a local tradition is now being valued and updated. This tradition has been able to create, in regions such as the Mediterranean basin, spaces that have their own genetic code and that work as stages for knowledge and recognition of the citizenship such as:

- the square
- the market
- the park
- art in public places (monuments, statuesque, ornamentation and so on)
- urban furnishings and “*atrezzo*” (please see <http://www.cite-creation.com>)
- urban crossroads (please see the exposition “Cities, Corners” made by M. de Solá-Morales for the Forum Barcelona 2004)

The “local thought”, which has been traditionally associated to the design of the public space, is nowadays at risk. This is due to the strong tendency towards the segregation of ways of using the urban that disperses production, spare time and daily life places, and to the existing threat that streets get into a mere conveyor belt of citizens that move from one place to another.

The notion of “common places” is not only referred to public spaces but also to public times (the alternation between labour time and holidays) and to public rituals that happen in the cities’ territory.

We must remember that nowadays the physical spaces coexist with virtual spaces (media, social online networks and so on) and that the clock of the TV news and the bell of the main square are, at the end, two manifestations of the same thing (Martín-Santos).

### **2.2. Purpose**

“Common Places/Lugares comunes” is part of the work done by the working group about the Local Dimension of the Alliance of Civilizations the UCLG City Diplomacy Committee. His proposals include the most important action domains of the Alliance of Civilizations: education, youth, migration and media.

The proposal of “Common Places/Lugares comunes” is to work with the added value of cities in conceiving spaces, times and public urban rituals, updating their knowledge and hoping for a future in which diverse and inclusive cities will have to think about identity construction and coexistence management as one of their main tasks.

“Common Places/ Lugares comunes” pretends to synthesize existing local capacities, as well as create spaces for a dialogue with the new citizen phenomena to detect their necessities and opportunities and, finally, shape new solutions from the urban sphere.

### **2.3. Possible actions**

#### **2.3.1. Action 1**

##### **Elaboration of a guide on “Coexistence, identity and urban design”**

The guide must contain a group of specialized cards and a repertoire of successful practices of cities from the North and from the South.

The guide, published in different languages, will be edited both in a digital format and on paper. As example, please download the guide "Diversity, Equality and Planning" (Heriot-Watt University - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London 2005) at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/diversityequality>.

### **2.3.2. Action 2**

#### **Series of documentaries "2030 cities"**

This initiative would consist on the production of 3 to 6 documentaries on new urban spaces, times and rituals, with a length of about 30 minutes each.

For the realization of these reports, if possible, the local public television channels of each city will be collaborating with the working group.

The reports, dubbed or subtitled in different languages, will be spread all over the world using multiple strategies such as public and private TV channels, public showing in cultural centres, spreading by internet, and so on.

The reports' contents will basically try to present creative solutions about new uses of the urban space, as an instrument for the construction of an identity and the managing of the people's coexistence, all based on the hypothetic future vision of 2030. The examples will come from a large number of urban initiatives, from northern cities as well as from southern cities too, specially from the cities that are part of the working group.

As mere indicative example, some of the reports can be about:

- new common places (public canteens, creative factories, open air media libraries, ecumenical temples and so on)
- Buying and selling in the city (new markets, innovative management of the mobile and informal commerce, artisan streets and so on)
- 24 hours opened cities ("white nights" and so on)
- new urban rituals (days without cars, intercultural celebrations and so on)
- playing in the streets (the innovation of the public children's plays, new resources to keep elderly in good shape and so on)

### **2.3.3. Action 3**

#### **Visual contest "Cheers to the city"**

Small international audiovisual contest, using innovative technologies (phone cams, web cams and so on) addressed to the younger people of the cities of the world, specially of those cities that are part of the working group.

The submitted pieces should answer to the question "What should happen in your city in order to improve your daily living together?"

The pieces will be placed on a digital platform (as "Myspace" or "Youtube") of broad access and will be publicly presented in different cities and broadly spread by the media.

Please, as example, take a look at the website of the "StrangerFestival" (<http://www.strangerfestival.com>), organized by the European Cultural Foundation.