

MANAGING DIVERSITY IN EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CITIES

An analytical approach to official policies and field experiences

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Executive Summary



This research explores how diversity is managed in Euro-Mediterranean cities through an analytical review of official policies and real-world practices. Motivated by rising cultural plurality and social challenges across the region, the study adopts a comparative, evidence-based approach, examining case studies in cities such as Marseille, Barcelona, Naples, and Tangier. The findings reveal both the strengths and limitations of current strategies, highlighting the potential of cultural diplomacy, inclusive urban planning, and civic participation. Key recommendations include integrating intercultural policies into local governance, empowering civil society actors, securing sustainable funding, and adopting impact-oriented evaluation frameworks to foster social cohesion.



Introduction



In recent decades, Euro-Mediterranean cities have undergone significant social and demographic transformations driven by globalization, migration, and increasing cultural interconnectivity. These cities—ranging from Barcelona and Marseille to Naples and Tangier—now host diverse populations that reflect complex layers of ethnicity, religion, language, and identity (Sayad, 2004; European Commission, 2016). This cultural plurality, while offering substantial opportunities for innovation and social enrichment, also presents critical challenges in governance, inclusion, and social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2018).

The rationale for this research stems from the urgent need to understand how diversity is being managed at the urban level in a region marked by both shared historical ties and stark socio-political asymmetries between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean (Karakaş, 2019). As urban centers become microcosms of global diversity, questions arise around how to foster peaceful coexistence, equal participation, and inclusive development across cultural lines. These questions are especially pertinent in a context marked by the rise of populist discourses, socio-economic disparities, and identity-based tensions (Vertovec, 2015; Anna Lindh Foundation, 2022).

This research positions itself at the intersection of urban studies, cultural policy, and international relations, with a particular focus on how official policies and local field practices interact to shape inclusive or exclusive urban dynamics. It pays special attention to the role of cultural diplomacy, not merely as a tool of foreign policy, but as a practical framework for fostering dialogue, trust, and civic engagement in multicultural cityscapes (Bound et al., 2007; European Union, 2016).

The significance of this topic lies in its practical and policy relevance. Urban diversity is not a temporary condition but a long-term structural reality for Euro-Mediterranean cities. Understanding how this diversity is managed—what works,

what doesn't, and why—offers critical insights for local governments, international institutions, and civil society organizations alike. Through comparative analysis of selected cities, this study aims to extract lessons, identify gaps, and formulate evidence-based recommendations that contribute to building more cohesive, inclusive, and resilient urban environments in the Euro-Mediterranean region (Council of Europe, 2018; Anna Lindh Foundation, 2023).

Approach & Results



Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and evidence-based approach to explore how diversity is managed in Euro-Mediterranean cities, focusing on the interplay between official policies and local field experiences. Given the complexity of cultural diversity as a multidimensional and context-specific phenomenon, a qualitative method allows for in-depth understanding of local realities, institutional frameworks, and social dynamics (Creswell, 2013).

The research focuses on four case-study cities: **Barcelona (Spain), Marseille (France), Naples (Italy), and Tangier (Morocco)**. These cities were selected due to their strategic geographical positions, historical multicultural heritage, and contemporary demographic diversity. Data sources include:

- Official policy documents and urban plans from municipal and supranational bodies such as the European Union and Council of Europe.
- Reports and evaluations from networks like the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Intercultural Cities programme.
- Scholarly literature addressing cultural diversity management in urban contexts.
- Documented field projects, cultural initiatives, and civic engagement programs.

This triangulation of data ensures a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of both formal frameworks and grassroots practices. The approach aligns with frameworks proposed by Vertovec (2015) and the Council of Europe (2018) that emphasize the importance of both top-down policies and bottom-up civic participation for managing diversity effectively.

Research Results and Analytical Discussion

Institutionalization of Cultural Diplomacy in Urban Governance

Analysis reveals that cities like Barcelona and Marseille have successfully institutionalized cultural diplomacy as a core element of urban governance. Barcelona's **Interculturality Plan** integrates diversity management into various sectors, from education to urban planning, fostering policies that promote intercultural dialogue and equal participation (City of Barcelona, 2019). Marseille's adoption of the **Intercultural Cities Framework** facilitated structural changes in municipal governance, embedding culture as a tool to bridge social divides (Council of Europe, 2018).

These institutionalizations demonstrate how cultural diplomacy transcends traditional foreign policy boundaries to become an essential local governance strategy. This shift aligns with Bound et al. (2007), who highlight the evolution of cultural diplomacy into multidimensional governance tools.

Disparities Between Northern and Southern Euro-Mediterranean Cities

While Northern Mediterranean cities tend to have more developed policy frameworks and sustained funding mechanisms, Southern cities like Tangier face challenges including fragmented governance, limited resources, and reliance on international donors for cultural initiatives (Karakaş, 2019). The lack of comprehensive local policies undermines the potential of cultural diplomacy to mediate social tensions and foster cohesion.

This disparity underscores the need for tailored strategies that consider socio-political contexts and institutional capacities. It also reflects the structural inequalities that persist across the Euro-Mediterranean divide (European Commission, 2016).

Role of Civil Society and Grassroots Initiatives

Across all case studies, grassroots organizations and cultural NGOs emerge as vital actors in managing diversity. In Naples, for example, associations such as Fondazione Mediterraneo facilitate intercultural exchanges and provide platforms for migrant inclusion through arts and education (Friedman & Lauria, 2018). These initiatives often compensate for gaps in official policies, reinforcing the notion that effective diversity management requires multi-actor collaboration (Vertovec, 2015).

However, these grassroots efforts frequently face sustainability issues due to unstable funding and limited institutional recognition, which hampers their long-term impact.

Challenges in Implementation and Impact Measurement

Despite promising policies and initiatives, cities encounter challenges related to:

- **Tokenistic approaches:** Some cultural programs remain symbolic without deeper structural change, limiting social impact (Modood, 2013).
- **Security concerns:** The securitization of migration and diversity issues sometimes restricts open intercultural dialogue, as seen in heightened surveillance and control measures (Bigo, 2014).
- **Coordination gaps:** Fragmented responsibilities among municipal departments and lack of participatory mechanisms reduce policy coherence.

Moreover, few cities employ comprehensive evaluation tools to measure the social outcomes of cultural diplomacy efforts. This lack impedes adaptive learning and policy refinement (Council of Europe, 2018).

Conclusions

Overall, the findings reveal that managing diversity in Euro-Mediterranean cities requires an integrated approach that combines:

- Institutionalized cultural diplomacy embedded in urban governance.
- Context-sensitive policies addressing local capacities and challenges.
- Empowerment of civil society actors and promotion of grassroots cultural initiatives.
- Robust mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive policy making

Such a holistic approach is crucial to harness diversity as a driver of social cohesion, urban innovation, and intercultural understanding in this geopolitically significant region.

Policy Implications & Recommendations

Challenges in Current Policies and Practices

The management of cultural diversity in Euro-Mediterranean cities faces several entrenched challenges that limit the effectiveness of existing policies:

- **Fragmented and Sectoral Approaches:**

Many urban policies treat cultural diversity as an isolated issue within the realms of culture or migration, without integrating it into broader urban governance frameworks such as housing, education, social services, and urban planning. This fragmentation results in missed opportunities for coherent, systemic inclusion strategies.¹

- **Resource Constraints and Inequality:**

There is a pronounced gap in financial and institutional support between Northern and Southern Euro-Mediterranean cities. Southern cities like Tangier often depend heavily on external donors and international organizations, limiting the sustainability and local ownership of cultural initiatives.²

- **Symbolic Rather Than Substantive Inclusion:**

Several cultural programs focus on symbolic recognition of diversity—such as festivals or exhibitions—without accompanying structural reforms that address inequalities or foster meaningful intercultural dialogue.³

- **Security-driven Narratives and Policies:**

The securitization of migration and diversity discourse within parts of the Euro-Mediterranean region fosters exclusion and suspicion, undermining trust between communities and local authorities⁴. Such policies can hinder the open, participatory intercultural engagement necessary for sustainable cohesion.

- **Limited Participation of Marginalised Communities:**

Despite rhetoric emphasizing inclusion, marginalized groups often lack meaningful representation in policy-making processes. This top-down approach limits the responsiveness and legitimacy of cultural diversity policies.⁵

¹ Council of Europe. (2018). *Intercultural Cities Programme: Step by Step Guide*.

² Karakaş, C. (2019). *Urban Diversity and Mediterranean Integration*. *Mediterranean Politics*, 24(1), 54–71.

³ Modood, T. (2013). *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*. Polity Press.

⁴ Bigo, D. (2014). *The (in)securitization practices of EU border control*. *Security Dialogue*, 45(3), 209–225.

⁵ Vertovec, S. (2015). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054.

Opportunities for Policy Innovation

Despite these challenges, multiple opportunities emerge from the evolving socio-political landscape:

- **Existing Frameworks and Best Practices:**

Programs such as the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities initiative and the European Union's Strategic Framework for Cultural Diplomacy provide tested models and tools to integrate cultural diplomacy into urban governance.⁶

- **Increasing Civic Engagement and Civil Society Networks:**

There is growing activism and organizational capacity among grassroots and migrant-led groups, offering rich potential for co-creating inclusive cultural policies.⁷

- **Digital Platforms and Media:**

Technological advances allow new forms of intercultural communication and cultural exchange that can bypass traditional gatekeepers, fostering direct community-to-community dialogue.⁸

- **Growing Awareness of the Socio-economic Benefits of Diversity:**

Policymakers increasingly recognize that diversity can spur creativity, economic innovation, and social resilience, aligning inclusion efforts with broader urban development goals.⁹

Policy Implications

The above challenges and opportunities indicate that effective management of urban diversity requires a paradigm shift toward integrated, participatory, and adaptive policy-making:

- **From Sectoral to Systemic:**

Policies must move beyond cultural tokenism and address structural barriers in housing, education, employment, and public space management. This holistic approach can prevent ghettoization and promote equitable access to resources.

- **From Top-down to Participatory Governance:**

Inclusive mechanisms, such as intercultural councils and community advisory boards, are essential to ensure that diverse voices inform decision-making and policy design, enhancing legitimacy and effectiveness.¹⁰

- **From Security-focused to Trust-based Approaches:**

Building trust between communities and authorities through transparent communication, conflict mediation, and shared cultural activities can reduce tensions and counter exclusionary narratives.

- **From Short-term Projects to Sustainable Frameworks:**

Policies should institutionalize cultural diplomacy initiatives, ensuring stable funding and capacity building to embed diversity management in long-term urban strategies.

⁶ European Commission. (2016). *Strategic Framework for European Cultural Diplomacy*.

⁷ Friedman, J., & Lauria, M. (2018). *Civil Society and Inclusion in Naples*. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2), 101–112.

⁸ Bound, K., Briggs, R., Holden, J., & Jones, S. (2007). *Cultural Diplomacy*. Demos.

⁹ Anna Lindh Foundation. (2023). *Cultural Dialogue and Social Cohesion in Mediterranean Cities*.

¹⁰ Council of Europe. (2018). *Intercultural Cities Programme: Governance and Participation*.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following practical recommendations can guide policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders:

1. Develop Integrated Urban Diversity Strategies:

Local governments should mainstream cultural diversity across all urban policies, linking cultural diplomacy with social inclusion, economic development, and urban planning.

2. Strengthen Multi-level Governance and Partnerships:

Encourage collaboration between municipal authorities, national governments, civil society, academia, and international bodies to leverage resources and expertise.

3. Empower Civil Society and Marginalised Groups:

Provide funding, capacity-building, and formal channels for grassroots organizations to participate in cultural policy-making and program implementation.

4. Invest in Monitoring and Evaluation:

Implement robust frameworks to assess the social impact of cultural diplomacy initiatives, using participatory methods to capture diverse perspectives.

5. Promote Intercultural Education and Public Awareness:

Embed intercultural competencies in schools, public campaigns, and cultural institutions to foster mutual respect and understanding.

6. Counter Security-driven Exclusion:

Advocate for policies that separate cultural inclusion from security agendas, ensuring that cultural diversity is seen as a resource rather than a risk.

Conclusion



This research has demonstrated that managing cultural diversity in Euro-Mediterranean cities is a complex yet critical challenge that demands integrated, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches. Through a comparative analysis of cities such as Barcelona, Marseille, Naples, and Tangier, the study highlighted how cultural diplomacy, when institutionalized within urban governance, can serve as a powerful tool for fostering social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive development.

Key results show that Northern Mediterranean cities have made significant progress by embedding diversity management into comprehensive urban policies, supported by sustainable funding and multi-actor partnerships. In contrast, Southern cities often face structural limitations, including fragmented governance, resource scarcity, and reliance on external donors, which constrain the full realization of cultural diplomacy's potential.

Moreover, the vital role of civil society and grassroots initiatives emerged as a consistent theme, emphasizing the need to empower marginalized communities as active stakeholders in shaping diversity policies. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding symbolic approaches that fail to produce substantive change, security-oriented narratives that hinder trust-building, and insufficient mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating policy impacts.

Based on these findings, the research advocates for a paradigm shift in policy-making: moving from fragmented to systemic strategies, from top-down to participatory governance, and from short-term projects to sustainable frameworks. Practical recommendations include mainstreaming cultural diversity across all urban sectors, strengthening multi-level partnerships, ensuring equitable resource allocation, promoting intercultural education, and disentangling cultural inclusion from securitization agendas.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of recognising diversity as a lasting structural reality and an asset that, if managed effectively, can enhance urban resilience, innovation, and democratic participation. By embracing inclusive cultural diplomacy, Euro-Mediterranean cities can position themselves as exemplars of coexistence and cultural exchange in a geopolitically vital region.

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