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# THE ROLE OF SPACE IN THE POLITICS OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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## *1. Introduction*

In the recent decades, Europe has become more and more diverse due to the increasing pluralism based on global cultural flows, new means of communication, immigration, EU enlargement, etc. In the political discourse, the diversification of societies has often been considered as a positive opportunity which enriches the society. However, the problems – or challenges – generated due to the multilevel diversification of the societies have also been discussed and aimed to be tackled by various means. In the past two decades, European societies have aimed to govern their increasing diversity through national diversity policies, which have ranged from multiculturalism to integration and from transnationalism to assimilation.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the European political organizations, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe (COE), have reacted to the diversification of the European societies and the societal changes and challenges it has entailed. Diversity has become one of the key words in the policy rhetoric at the European level. Besides being a popular key word or slogan, it has become an important domain of governance.

Ulrike Hanna Meinhof and Anna Triandafyllidou state that cities as focused urban environments offer better cognitive tools than nations or states for re-imagining the new interdependencies and flows of contemporary societies. According to them, the contemporary urban realities in European cities provide a landscape where intercultural encounters and flows of immigrants develop new forms of cultural expression that transcend the boundaries of the 'national' and of the 'ethnic' and create new types of artistic and cultural phenomena, new cultural and commercial networks for art products, and eventually new realities of cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism.<sup>2</sup> In the political discourse, cities are often considered as the arena through which the diversity can be governed. Cities have also been taken to the focus of the diversity policies in the European organizations: cities appear to be the most appropriate level where new forms and types of participatory and inclusive policy processes can be designed and

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<sup>1</sup> Lähdesmäki & Wagener (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Meinhof & Triandafyllidou (2006): 13–15.

implemented.<sup>3</sup> Cities have been considered as arenas which should foster formal and informal encounters and mobilize citizens on issues of common interests that cut across ethnic and social boundaries<sup>4</sup> while setting out conditions for participatory and open-ended engagement to sustain 'micro publics of negotiation'<sup>5</sup>.

Besides the political sphere, the interrelations between the urban environment and the opportunities, challenges, and problems embedded to diversification processes have been recently discussed in the academia, as well. Scholars have analyzed and proposed how the cities and their urban environments should be developed in order to foster and promote fruitful and positive encounter of diverse people and cultural fluxes. Urban planning and urban design have been considered as concrete tools to influence the 'intercultural dialogue' in the city.<sup>6</sup>

In the recent decade, the European organizations have aimed to rethink and renew their political rhetoric of governing diversity. The EU has promoted the idea of 'intercultural dialogue' e.g., in the 'European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World' (2007). The same idea is emphasized in the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' published by the COE in 2008. It aims to give practical suggestions in order to increase the intercultural dialogue as a response to various problems the diversified European societies are currently facing. The attempts of governing diversity have also been put into practice in the European-level urban initiatives. The European Commission's and COE's joint initiative 'Intercultural Cities' – which was launched in the run-up to the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and 'the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue' (2008) – aimed to develop a model supporting intercultural integration within diverse urban communities.

Both the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative emphasize space as one of the concrete instruments for producing and strengthening intercultural dialogue in the contemporary European societies. In order to enable citizens to actively participate in public matters, to meet, and to communicate, they suggest that cities should offer and plan space for it. The spatial agenda of the White Paper and the Intercultural Cities reaches from commercial to religious and from educational to leisure spaces.

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3 Council of Europe (2013): 28.

4 Khovanova-Rubicondo & Dino Pinelli (2012): 14.

5 Amin (2002).

6 See e.g., Sandercock (1998); Wood & Landry (2008); Buradyidi (2000); Low, Taplin & Scheld (2005).

Particular attention is paid to design and management of public space and urban planning.

In this paper, I investigate the spatial agenda included in the policy documents of the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative by analyzing their rhetoric on space with the method of critical close reading. The main question is: How does the European level policy discourse aim to tackle the challenges and problems of diversified societies through urban planning and governing space. The spatial agenda of the White Paper and the Intercultural Cities is discussed in the paper by contextualizing it from the point of view of the recent theoretical discussions in urban planning.

## *2. Intercultural dialogue as a discursive innovation*

Diversity as a cultural and societal condition can be distinguished from the policies of governing diversity.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the reality of multicultural, transcultural, or intercultural practices, communities and cultural phenomena in contemporary European societies does not automatically indicate the implementation of multiculturalism, transculturalism, or interculturalism as a political ideology in the administration and governance of diversity. Most of the European societies implement some kind of diversity policies in regards of their minorities and immigrants. However, the policies differ greatly between the societies.

In the recent decades, the diversification of the European societies and the policies of governing it have typically been discussed in the political and public spheres with the concept of multiculturalism. In the academia, multiculturalism as a political idea and a policy has been discussed by recognizing theoretical dichotomies in its foundations. Thus, scholars have distinguished e.g., politics of assimilation or acculturation<sup>8</sup>, and moderate or radical<sup>9</sup>, weak or strong<sup>10</sup>, thin or thick<sup>11</sup>, and liberal or communitarian<sup>12</sup> politics of multiculturalism. Some scholars have categorized the politics of

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7 Bauböck (2008): 2.

8 Barry (2001).

9 Miller (2000).

10 Grillo (2005).

11 Tamir (1995).

12 Taylor (1994).

multiculturalism with more detailed strands in relation to political theory.<sup>13</sup>

However, the concept of multiculturalism has also been recently much critically discussed and analyzed. It has been criticized e.g., for emphasizing boundaries instead of their blurring, and for focusing mainly to ethnic and national issues instead of paying attention to multisectional diversity in the societies. The critics have rather discussed the contemporary diversity and its governance with the term of interculturalism. However, several scholars have emphasized that the concepts and the policy rhetoric of interculturalism and multiculturalism are discursively fluid and it is difficult to draw any clear or stable demarcation between the two.<sup>14</sup> As Taqir Modood and Naser Meer have pointed out, the qualities, such as encouraging communication, recognition of dynamic identities, promotion of unity, and critique for illiberal cultural practice, that are often used to promote political interculturalism, are equally important (on occasion foundational) features of multiculturalism.<sup>15</sup> Due to the fluid and vague contents of the concepts, the discussions on supplanting the multiculturalism by interculturalism have included politicized dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

Politics is made in language and through discourses. Due to the discursive nature of politics, political innovations are always conceptual – and conceptual changes embody politics.<sup>17</sup> Political language in the administrative documents does not only describe the reality of policies, but it participates in the production of them. Thus, political language is a performative speech act in a sense of John L. Austin even though its explicit claims might not be fulfilled.<sup>18</sup> The concepts of interculturalism and intercultural dialogue are both political innovations and conceptual changes in diversity policies. In the White Paper, the intercultural dialogue is understood as

an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g., Bauböck (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Levey (2012); Wieviorka (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Modood & Meer (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Levey (2012).

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Farr (1989): 31.

<sup>18</sup> Austin (1982).

backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.<sup>19</sup>

### *3. Transformation of rhetoric on diversity in the Council of Europe*

The Council of Europe is a prominent agency in the developing the discourses on culture, identity, and diversity in Europe.<sup>20</sup> It has had a major influence on the EU's political discourses. Its rhetorical formulations and interest areas have been absorbed to the EU's political discourses and goals with a short delay, particularly in questions related to culture.<sup>21</sup>

'Cultural mosaic' in the European societies has been in the interests of the COE since its beginning. The COE has promoted the idea of diversity along with a common European identity and unity in Europe. The idea of the 'unity in diversity' in Europe – the idea which was later adopted to the official slogan of the EU – was brought to the fore in the COE's 'Resolution on the European Cultural Identity' already in 1985. The diversity rhetoric of COE transformed in the 1990s, when the idea of multiculturalism was related to the discussions on European identity in the declaration of 'Multicultural Society and European Cultural Identity' (1990). The 'Declaration on Cultural Diversity' (2000) took a broader aspect to diversification processes in Europe by discussing diversity in relation to information technologies, globalization, and trade policies. In it, the "member states are urged to pay particular attention to the need to sustain and promote cultural diversity".<sup>22</sup>

The political and societal debates over multiculturalism have influenced the current diversity politics and rhetoric of the COE and the EU. Several recent EU's and COE's policy documents participates in and speeds up the shift in the diversity politics by emphasizing the 'intercultural dialogue' instead of multiculturalism as a core focus of the policy rhetoric. The 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative are examples of this shift: the focus of the policy discourse has been laid on encountering and communication between diverse people in the diversified societies.

The background of the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' is on a broad consultation implemented among the diverse bodies of the COE and a questionnaire study conducted among various bodies,

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<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe (2008): 10.

<sup>20</sup> Sassatelli (2009): 43.

<sup>21</sup> Sassatelli (2009): 43, 59; Patel (2013): 6.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe (2000).

organizations, and communities in the member states on the practices and needs for diversity policies. On the base of the investigation, the 61–page White Paper aims to identify how to promote intercultural dialogue in Europe and provide guidance on analytical and methodological tools and standards for it. On the bases of the White Paper, the COE launched in 2008 a pilot project titled 'Intercultural Cities' with 11 cities from 11 member states in order to

examine the impact of cultural diversity and migration from the perspective of Europe's cities and identify strategies and policies which could help cities work with diversity as a factor of development.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the pilot phase in 2010, a further group of cities joined the initiative.

The 'Intercultural Cities' initiative includes new innovations in the policy discourse of governing diversity. The concept of the 'intercultural city' originates in a research carried out by a British think-tank Comedia, which has analyzed the links between urban change and cultural diversity and aimed to provide tools to manage diversity in urban contexts.<sup>24</sup> 'The intercultural cities approach' used in the initiative aims to advocate respect for diversity and a pluralistic identities in the city. As Khovanova-Rubicondo and Pinelli state in their assessment for the COE,

it [the intercultural cities approach] promotes the vision of a city where informal encounters between residents with different cultural and ethnic background is easy and facilitated by the design of urban spaces and institutions. It aims at promoting open spaces of interaction, which will help breaking diversity fault lines, sustaining trust and social cohesion and facilitating the circulation of ideas and creativity.<sup>25</sup>

As the quotation indicates, urban planning and design has been perceived as one of the means for promoting intercultural dialogue in the cities.<sup>26</sup> Taking the urban planning and design as tools for promoting the positive impacts of diversification and tackling the problems embedded to it, differentiates the White Paper and the initiative from other European level policy documents and urban projects with a focus on diversity.

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23 Wood (2009): 17.

24 Wood & Landry (2008).

25 Khovanova-Rubicondo & Pinelli (2012): 14.

26 See also Council of Europe (2013): 26.

#### *4. Spatial agenda in the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and 'Intercultural Cities' initiative*

In order to enable citizens to actively participate in public matters, meet, and communicate, the White Paper suggests societies to offer "appropriate, accessible and attractive spaces" for it.<sup>27</sup> The spatial agenda of the White Paper reaches from commercial to religious, and from educational to leisure spaces. As the White Paper states:

It is essential to engender spaces for dialogue that are open to all. Successful intercultural governance, at any level, is largely a matter of cultivating such spaces: physical spaces like streets, markets and shops, houses, kindergartens, schools and universities, cultural and social centres, youth clubs, churches, synagogues and mosques, company meeting rooms and workplaces, museums, libraries and other leisure facilities, or virtual spaces like the media.<sup>28</sup>

The diversity is aimed to be governed by influencing space in which the intercultural encounters are expected to take place. Even the 'family environment' is included to the spatial agenda of the White Paper.<sup>29</sup> Both the White Paper and the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative promote active 'place-making' in order to "create spaces which make it easier and attractive for people of different backgrounds to meet others and to minimise those which encourage avoidance, apprehension or rivalry".<sup>30</sup> The fundamental point of departure in the spatial agenda of the paper and the initiative is the idea of 'openness' of space. According to their logic, openness of space enables people to encounter and bring about intercultural communication and participation in the society. What the 'openness' of space and 'encountering' eventually mean, remain however vague in their rhetoric.

In the White Paper and the Intercultural Cities, a particular attention is paid to urban planning and the design and management of public space. According to the White Paper:

Town planning is an obvious example: urban space can be organised in a 'single-minded' fashion or more 'open-minded' ways. The former include the conventional suburb, housing estate, industrial zone, car park or ring road. The latter

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27 Council of Europe (2008): 46.

28 Council of Europe (2008): 33.

29 Ibid. (2008): 32.

30 Council of Europe (2013): 69.



embrace the busy square, the park, the lively street, the pavement café or the market. If single-minded areas favour an atomised existence, open-minded places can bring diverse sections of society together and breed a sense of tolerance. It is critically important that migrant populations do not find themselves, as so often, concentrated on soulless and stigmatised housing estates, excluded and alienated from city life.<sup>31</sup>

The change from the "single-minded" to the "open-minded" urban planning ideas was related in the policy rhetoric of the Intercultural Cities to the paradigm change from multiculturalism to interculturalism, as the following quotation indicates:

Multicultural planning practice has established important principles such as the requirement of equality for all in the face of planning legislation and for equitable and just treatment of all in its application. However, the intercultural city demands more of the people, the professionals and the politicians. Whilst multiculturalism is predicated upon static notions of group identity, interculturalism expects a dynamic and constantly changing environment in which individuals and collectives express multiple, hybrid and evolving needs and identities.<sup>32</sup>

As the quotation indicates, the transformation of the urban planning discourses and shifts in the policy discourses on governing diversity were paralleled in the rhetoric of the initiative.

The 'Intercultural Cities' initiative provides some concrete suggestions to develop the urban space in order to increase the intercultural encountering and its positive impacts in the city. The focus is laid on the public spaces and public housing. Housing policies are advised to "give ethnic groups confidence and information enabling them to consider taking housing opportunities outside their traditional enclaves".<sup>33</sup> The aim is to tackle the problems of the 'traditional' – and often decayed and disreputable – migrant suburbs by mixing the population with other residential districts and suburbs e.i. enabling the inhabitants in the 'ethnic enclaves' to move elsewhere. Interestingly, the problems of these enclaves are not aimed to be tackled by encouraging inhabitants from other 'unproblematic' districts and suburbs to move to these areas. In addition, the urban

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31 Council of Europe (2008): 33.

32 Council of Europe (2013): 69.

33 Wood (2009): 57.

managers and planners are suggested to "[i]dentify a number of key public spaces (formal and informal) and invest in discrete redesign, animation and maintenance to raise levels of usage and interaction by all ethnic groups".<sup>34</sup> As the examples indicate, the focus of the spatial agenda is in the 'ethnic groups' and the space used or not used by them.

The spatial agenda of the White Paper and the Intercultural Cities combines the diversity politics with the some recent ideas and aims in urban planning theories. The common interest in these ideas and aims has been for two decades in increasing the interaction and communication between citizens in the urban space, strengthening communality and urban identities in the city, rediscovering the urban spaces in the city center, and fostering human-scale and pedestrian-friendly urban design as a basis for active and 'livable' cities. Scholars have discussed and conceptualized these theories and practices of urban planning by relating them e.g., to a 'communicative paradigm' in urban planning, the 'post-modern planning principles', and a set of planning ideas termed as 'New Urbanism'.

Nigel Taylor describes the development in urban planning by identifying a paradigmatic change in the planning theories and practices during the 1990s. According to Taylor, at that time the views following the new communicative paradigm started to emphasize interaction and communication instead of rational, scientific, and technical thinking as the bases for managing the urban planning.<sup>35</sup> The emphasis on interaction and communication has easily adapted the cultural points of view to the core of urban planning ideologies. Cultural planning has become one of the current key points of view in urban planning discourses. In addition, similar kinds of ideologies in urban planning have been described as characterizing the shift from modern to post-modern planning principles. The ideals of post-modern planning are considered to include e.g., the fostering of urban identities and cultural uniqueness, the appreciation of historic places and traditions, and the participatory planning methods and the pursuit of human-scale, pedestrian-friendly and compact urban forms. <sup>36</sup> Respectively, the planning principles conceptualized as New Urbanism, stresses e.g., the rediscovery of the city centre and its activities, pedestrian-friendly urban design, diversity and accessibility of public space, urban aesthetics, quality of urban design, and sustainability and good

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 54.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor (1998).

<sup>36</sup> Hirt (2005).

quality of life as a base for urban planning. The goal is to create a compact city with short distances and promote an urban structure which mixes the functions of space and combats the social exclusion and differentiation of districts.<sup>37</sup> The planning ideas of New Urbanism have been however criticized for increasing the problems which it aims to tackle – for producing white gentrification and homogenization of neighborhoods rather than social and ethnic mixing in them.<sup>38</sup>

In general, the attempts to enliven the city and to make them more 'livable' often originate from a top-down decision-making and urban planning practices. Several scholars have criticized these practices for forgetting to involve local people and ordinary citizens in the urban planning processes.<sup>39</sup> Respectively, scholars have emphasized the importance of collaborative planning and taking into account the grass-root level initiatives in urban development in order to encourage intercultural dialogue and encounter.<sup>40</sup> The 'Intercultural Cities' initiative advises the urban planners to co-operate with the citizens. According to 'The intercultural city step by step' guide book:

The most important skill for place-makers and planners is to listen to people, to their stories, to the way in which they use space and live their lives, and their aspirations and then to work with them to translate this into expert systems.<sup>41</sup>

## *5. Conclusions*

Diversity has become one of the key points of view to discuss the urbanity. As the 'White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue' and the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative indicate, urban planning has been taken as tool for diversity policies at the European level. Motives for it can be found from an unwanted transformation of the urban structure in the diversified European cities. The development of isolated enclaves housed by migrants and ethnic minorities and the increase of urban decay, social problems, unemployment and a feeling of insecurity in some of those areas has wakened the European organizations to react to these changes with diverse means, such as 'place-making'. Even though, the 'Intercultural Cities' initiative states that the "[g]ood intercultural place-making should reach beyond the issues of migration and ethnic diversity to embrace all aspects of difference in

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37 Haas (2008).

38 Saitta (forthcoming).

39 Hall (2004); Evans (2005).

40 Bloomfield & Bianchini (2002); Morrison (2003); Moulaert et al. (2010).

41 Council of Europe (2013): 71.

contemporary urban communities"<sup>42</sup>, the discursive focus of the policy rhetoric is in the migrant and ethnic groups. In the rhetoric, these groups often narrow to mean non-European, non-white, non-Christian, and non-educated migrants.<sup>43</sup> Instead of approaching the urbanity and its current challenges from the point of view of (ethnic) diversity and intercultural dialogue, these challenges could be discussed by emphasizing e.g., the elimination of poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, etc.

In the policy rhetoric of the White Paper and the Intercultural Cities, the diversity is discussed in a profoundly narrow sense. Diversity in the European cities, is however profoundly diverse. Differing historical, political and social conditions have produced distinct 'diversity structures' into European societies.<sup>44</sup> In today's super-diverse societies pluralism is not only broad but multidimensional and fluid.<sup>45</sup> In a 'complex diversity' characteristics of cultural, ethnic, or national categories become more difficult to perceive.<sup>46</sup> Fluid social ties, statuses, positions, and competences of people create structural complexity to the diversity. However, diversity is often discussed in a universalistic discourse, which ignores the local, regional and national particularities in diversity structures and the differences among the migrants and the people with a different ethnic, religious, or cultural background.

ERICarts report for the European Commission has indicated that the principles of human, civic, economic, and social rights embedded in the EU directives and agendas have not been implemented in a uniform manner into national legislation or policies in relation to diversity policies in European societies. Moreover, the report concludes that "one single model encompassing all national approaches to intercultural dialogue cannot realistically be expected, at present".<sup>47</sup> Respectively, the use of space, spatial structures, and the need for spatial interventions differ greatly between European cities.

The urban planning and design produce concrete and a more easily recognized outcomes in the city than diverse social development programs. Thus, urban planning and design bring about more easily a

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42 Ibid.: 70.

43 Lähdesmäki & Wagener (forthcoming).

44 Saukkonen (2007): 41–54.

45 Vertovec (2007); Blommaert & Rampton (2011).

46 Krauss (2011).

47 Wiesand et al. (2008): v.

feeling that 'something is done' in order to improve the quality of life in the city. Even though the spatial agenda is emphasized as one the crucial means for increasing the intercultural dialogue and integration in the investigated documents, the documents do not however concretize what the good urban planning and design eventually comprises. The urban planners – and the inhabitants themselves – are expected to have this knowledge.

Implementing the urban plans and designs requires economic investments. The 'Intercultural City' initiatives advises the cities to invest in 'place-making' by emphasizing: "The point is not to ask 'what is the cost of interculturality-competent place-making?' but 'what is the cost of not doing it?'" and

The two most frequent barriers to new forms of place-making are prejudicial responses: 'It cannot be done' and 'It is too expensive'. The first is an error in design thinking. The second is an error in accounting practice.<sup>48</sup>

Even though the economics is a crucial issue for implementing the 'place-making' and diverse social programs aiming to increase the intercultural dialogue, the financing of them is not further discussed in the policy discourse. How the means through which the challenges of diversifying societies are aimed to be tackled should be financed? The 'Intercultural Cities' initiative suggests that in the future the EU's Structural Funds could be allocated to the urban development and intercultural place-making in the cities.<sup>49</sup> Before that, the financing responsibility is left to the local authorities.

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48 Council of Europe (2013): 70.

49 Council of Europe (2012): 3.

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