

DIVERSE

Diversity Improvement as a Viable Enrichment Resource for Society and Economy



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This project aims at exploring, in ten European regions, the barriers to recognizing the formal aspects of TCN's SKC and the informal facets of diversity that can have a positive spillover into society. It assumes that both formal and informal SKC, if fully understood, can be put to good use both for migrants and their families, and for societies at large. The comparative perspective adopted allows furthermore information exchange between different European places and to build a learning network built on actual ongoing experiences.

Ten organizations active in the cultural sector were used as a basis for the observation of these issues in Portugal, five are profit organizations and five are non-profit; among the latter, one is public, and four other are voluntary organizations. All of them are located in Lisbon.

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Migration as a development lever

In demographic terms, Lisbon has been benefitting, more than any other region in the country, from the TCN influx, as of the mid 1970s. Citizens from Lusophone countries have the largest share of these fluxes. As for socio-demographic attributes, women have a larger share than men, in a population which is younger than the average residents. As in other European regions, Lisbon has gained from immigration not only population but economic sustainability as well, and new opportunities for transnational connectivity.

The sector of symbolic production

As the transformation from production to consumption sites has changed contemporary cities in the industrialized world, these cities' economies are more and more dependent on culture-based industries and activities (Zukin 1991). Innovation, a key aspect to the urban symbolic production, can come in many ways and guises, from the more technology- and capital-intensive initiatives (world events, etc.) to the more soft-capital ones (locally circumscribed initiatives). The latter, sometimes disregarded as irrelevant, can have an important role in building the city cultural infrastructure (Zukin 1995). In this banal, everyday process of symbolic production, the localized experience, know how, communication and organization skills and practices is fed back into the urban economy as resource (Jessop 2000) – as in the case of marketization of personality suggested by Wright Mills (1951) or more generally as human capital.

Social innovation in the city

Migrants can bring distinctive resources to the symbol saturated urban environments: the non-standardized cultural capital or social remittances they bring along (Raulin 2000, Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011). In the ten organizations we contacted for the present study, TCNs' cultural and human capital was fed back into the organizations and thus into the city's symbolic economy in different ways. Advertisement firms benefitted from the TCN employees' former experience of different economic environments, but also from their specific ways of looking at things (including the very advertising activity), based on their experience of different social environments and cultural understandings, and also benefitted from TCN employees' distinct capacity to communicate and involving in teamwork, thanks to their between cultures bridging experience; firms involved in cultural events organization and promotion were mainly interested in the specific TCN's cultural SKC and their distinct networking abilities among other, local- and transnationally-based, cultural producers, crucial for their regular operation as cultural event producers; organizations involved in teaching and training activities (music and dancing) resorted to specific TCN collaborators as manpower, but also as symbolic guarantors of genuine and authentic cultural mediation. In the non-profit sector, voluntary associations that work with TCNs can also benefit from their presence, whether as leaders and rank and file collaborators, or simply as voluntary workers for the association internal and outreach activities; in some cases, their presence is a *sine qua non* condition for these outreach activities to take place (using co-ethnic networks and social capital, building trust between the association leaders and ethnic minorities, etc.). Associations active in cultural activities are nowadays part of a significant niche feeding the city leisure industry, an important sector of the urban economy. Most of the times their voluntary activity is crucial for the associations' survival, and several studies have shown that their very existence was often instrumental in order to implement integration programs and policies. As for the public body, a municipality-based organization aiming at bringing together the stakeholders involved in the migrants' city life

experiences, TCNs and their organizations have a voice in this forum, where they have a status of partners with a say on the city's policies and initiatives concerning migration, integration and diversity in general.

Actionable levers

In this context, the proposals we arrived at for “diversity improvement as a viable enrichment resource for society and economy” are hereafter expressed as concrete actionable levers. Before that, a full disclosure of our starting points is in order:

We assume that TCNs, as any other migrants, if affected by some sort of social need (poverty, lack of language proficiency, barriers to housing, etc.), should benefit from public services as any national citizen; social cohesion policies can make more resilient societies (Hall & Lamont 2013).

But TCNs, as any other migrants, are not to be viewed exclusively as welfare recipients; in fact, there is no evidence that most of them depend more than the average resident on public funds (Marques & Ciobanu 2011). Instead, TCNs should be perceived first and foremost as producers, innovators, and citizens. And as such, their skills, knowledges and competences, if fully recognized and explored, could be put to good use, for them and society.

Finally, we admit that diversity in the work place can, if specific conditions are met, boost the learning and innovative processes, through the exchange of experiences acquired in different contexts – mobilizing migrants' social remittances (in Levitt's terms) –, including learning how to build bridges across cultural differences, which is crucial for economic processes in the context of globalization (Hofstede 1980).

The actionable levers based on the study are as follows:

1. the existing national and regional state structures targeting specifically migration and migrants integration, and integrated in European networks of information production, should be prepared to collect and diffuse rigorous, transparent and public information on migrants, on a regular basis – with yearly updates; rigorous, transparent and public statistics, fully accessible on line, and regularly updated, involving (at least) socio-demographic and education attributes, and labour market integration, would allow to have a picture of the moment, but also to have a follow up of migrants' outlook and mobility patterns;
2. whenever possible, standard European criteria should be developed to assess integration, at the national and regional scales; if this is not feasible, all programs, policies and measures involved in migrants' integration should be regularly assessed (ex-ante, ongoing and final assessments) at the national and regional scales, using *ad hoc*, relevant categories, adopted by the central statistics body, and arriving at rigorous, transparent and public independent results, specifying migrants' outcomes and inputs;
3. given the diversity of situations at the local level, some latitude should be recognized at the municipal and regional scales to implement specific measures for TCNs SKC recognition, involving local stakeholders, including TCNs' representative structures; rigorous, transparent and independent results of these activities should be made public on a yearly basis;
4. thorough data on migrants labour force SKC should be collected, using the existing statistic inquiry instruments, at the firm level, and should not exclude the public sector;

5. transnational activities and connections are also enacted through bottom-up and grassroots initiatives promoted by migrants. Through these connections, cities may open or lubricate international connections, and become more integrated in global circuits. A regular assessment of these transnational ties and processes should be done and made public;
6. finally, a measure of the added value, at the appropriate local or regional level, and by selected sectors of activity, of migrant's input (on the dimension and characteristics of the labour force, on the evolution of productivity rates, on the evolution of the industrial added value, on SKC transfers by migrants to the existing labour force, on labour flexibility, etc.) should be incorporated in the regular public accounts of the economy, on specific sectors of activity (those where there are the largest concentrations of migrants, those that are more dependent on migrants' labour...).

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