WELDI

BUILDING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES FOR MIGRANTS

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URBACT

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MULTITUD

Content

Editorial: Europe, Culture and Migration. By Hans Sakkers, City of Utrecht

I try to remember what I might have said about these 3 topics ten years ago. What were my 'thoughts, beliefs and expectations' before we entered the reality of renewed national border controls, upgrading Frontex, compromised EU migration policies, and a European militarisation? Borders are back and have once again seeped into our daily subconscious. Could culture still offer a conscious counter-response to this? Just to be sure, I reread what we wrote in 2014 in "(Re)Programming Europe".[1]

"... on the close connection between debates on interculturality and on human rights, and hence on the relationship between local practice and global standards, the work of Robert Putnam is informative ... 'bonding' occurs between people who share things in common, while 'bridging' refers to relations with people who come from a different social and cultural background: 'bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrow selves' (Putnam, 2000: 23). According to Putnam, each of these social skills reinforces the other, although a decline in bonding is accompanied by a decrease in bridging and leads to a rise in cultural and ethnic tensions: Ethnic diversity is, on balance, an important social asset ... however, immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital ... on the other hand, successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and dampen the negative effects of diversity by constructing new, more encompassing identities. Thus, the central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we'. (Putnam, 2007: 138)*

Post-nationalism represents a more cosmopolitan perspective that stresses globalisation, bridging between communities of all sorts, and in particular bonding on a global level in terms of universal personhood ... Supranational structural factors, such as an evolving universal human rights regime, are stressed as elements that contribute to bonding and bridging on a global scale. (Holzhacker and Scholten, 2009: 85). Following Holzhacker and Scholten, the human rights discourse could help to create a 'broader sense of we' (Putnam, 2007: 138). In this respect some thoughts of the urban planner and theorist Charles Landry might be meaningful. He articulates a link between the 'ethical foundation' of a city and its cultural programmes. Landry argues that creativity is one of the ethical pillars of a city, since creative processes integrate members of the most diverse groups and help cities as well as larger regions to maintain solidarity, moving the focus from the city itself outwards into the world: a city should not seek to be the best and most imaginative in the world (or region or state) – it should strive to be the best and most imaginative city for the world. This one change of word – from 'in' to 'for' – has dramatic implications for a city's operating dynamics. It gives city making an ethical foundation. It helps the aim of cities becoming places of solidarity where the relations of the individual, the group and the outsider to the city are in better alignment (Landry, 2006: 1).

What is needed, according to Landry, is to initiate a process in which cultural programmes do not only stimulate and mobilize creativity or innovation, but also develop new forms of solidarity by offering, to use the words of Putnam, more encompassing identities by reinforcing local trust-building (bonding) and fostering global curiosity (bridging), thus underlining the necessity for multiple bonds between individuals in multicultural societies.

These reflections from twelve years ago may now seem outdated to many of us, perhaps even

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[1] Nicole L. Immler & Hans Sakkers (Re)Programming Europe: European Capitals of Culture: rethinking the role of culture. Journal of European Studies 2014, Vol. 44(1) 3–29.

naïve. And still, there's a chance we saw things more clearly back then than we do today. In this fifth edition of the Weldi Journal, we encounter numerous examples where newcomers find meaningful belonging through culturally and artistically driven initiatives at the local level. These approaches foster compelling forms of bonding and bridging, and they reflect an ongoing, place-based search for that elusive 'broader sense of we'. Wishing you an enjoyable read!

About WELDI

The URBACT network WELDI (2023-25) tackles the question of how local authorities can promote human rights when receiving and offering integration support to newcomers. WELDI starts from the acceptance of the reality of migration and focuses on how to ensure a well-organised and dignified reception and integration that can benefit the whole local population. WELDI starts from the potential of cities as places of dignified reception and integration of newcomers and wants to demonstrate local leadership in reception and integration and to trigger bottom-up change towards models that are in line with the fundamental rights that lay the basis for the European Union.

Unless otherwise stated, the content of the WELDI Journals is written by Dirk Gebhardt (WELDI Lead Expert).

Culture as a lever for participation and interaction: WELDI's 9th transnational meeting in Seine-Saint-Denis.

Highlighting the crucial role of culture in building a shared place-based identity, in amplifying unheard voices, and in challenging exclusionary notions of who we are, Network Lead Hans Sakkers (Utrecht) provided the arguments of why culture has to be on WELDI's agenda for strengthening the human rights of newcomers.

Bobigny mayor Abdal Sadi set the context of the meeting by describing Seine-Saint-Denis as a "département du monde" — proud of being a place of arrival. One third of its population are immigrants, 160 languages are spoken, and more than 4,000 associations work on cooperation and global citizenship. Yet, this cultural richness contrasts with pressing social challenges. Although the *département* has long invested in social housing, today there are 115,000 unmet housing requests. And while it is the 7th largest contributor to France's GDP, more than half of the jobs do not benefit the local population, leaving unemployment high and explaining why labour market integration is a political priority.

Charlotte Lepri, Director for International Cooperation, stressed that values such as hospitality, solidarity, dialogue and tolerance are deeply rooted in Seine-Saint-Denis. Thanks to this shared commitment, the département has launched bold initiatives beyond official mandates, such as the Mission Égalité Diversité and two observatories — one on discrimination and equality, and one on violence against women.

The exchange presented a range of inspiring local initiatives that use culture as a driver of participation and intercultural interaction. The association *Citoyenneté Jeunesse* runs artistic programmes for unaccompanied minors, including street art and puppet theatre. In sports, the social welfare centres' project *Bienvenue au club* connects refugees with local sports clubs and offers training support. Meanwhile, the House of Languages and Cultures in Aubervilliers organises events that present cultural practice -such as new years celebrations- from an intercultural lens.

The dépertement is also keen to give visibility in public space to intercultural elements of its local history that are usually invisibilised, e.g. by commemorating the 40th anniversary of the anti-racist "March for Equality" in La Courneuve through a mural.

Fostering interaction through sports and culture

A WELDI exchange then brought locals together with WELDI partners in collecting ideas on how local authorities can promote citizenship and interaction between migrants and established residents through culture and sport. Many participants emphasised that there was still a need to better adapt the cultural offer to migrants, e.g. by giving real protagonism to newcomers, making better use of migrant grass-roots movements and giving space to oral expression and micro-histories.

Sport was widely recognised as a powerful tool for interaction. Good practices include helping newcomers find sports clubs, making extracurricular activities more accessible for migrant children through information and scholarships, and opening the sports offer to an intercultural public. Cricket and cycling were mentioned as particularly effective: intercultural cricket teams have flourished in several cities, with cricket even integrated into Portugal's school curriculum, while cycling initiatives promote sport and increase mobility and wellbeing at the same time.

Another line of discussion addressed the need to rethink cultural heritage. Participants stressed the importance of recognising migrant heritage — both material and immaterial — and valuing hybrid cultural expressions that emerge from migration. Anthropologist Delphine Leroy argued for moving beyond the belief of homogenous cultural groups, and instead focusing on transcultural change and "creole" practices born from encounters. In culture, as in wider society, we must move away from us vs. them thinking and pay more attention to the new transcultural elements that emerge through interaction.

Culture, work and social impact: the PAM! experiment

A site visit to PAM! demonstrated how everyday cultural practice can be connected with inclusion to the labour market. Set in Pantin's arrival neighbourhood Quatre Chemins with an unemployment rate of 45%, PAM's radical premise is that everybody is employable and that jobs need to be tailored to the capacities of the people, and not the other way around.

At the PAM! Premises - a former school building

With Funding from the French social experimentation programme "Territoires Zéro Chômeur de Longue Durée" (Zero Long-Term Unemployed Areas), the initiative has grown to currently 80 workers covering a wide range of activities including gastronomy, sewing, woodwork, urban farming, digitalisation, cycling, deliveries and social support.

Located on the site of a former school, PAM! has also become a formidable place of intercultural interaction, hospitality and mutual support. While the initiative currently benefits from state funding for each long-term unemployed person it integrates, its long-term aim is to become financially self-sustaining.

Visiting an upcycling workshop

Changing the narrative: Seine-Saint-Denis' Multitude festival

At the end of the meeting, WELDI partners could get to know for themselves a flagship initiative of Seine-Saint-Denis' intercultural policies when they visited the département's Biennale Intercultural Festival. This festival aims to represent Seine-Saint-Denis' popular culture in all its diversity through gastronomy, music, urban sports and dance.

The second edition featured a European Pavilion, where WELDI partners joined discussions with the Intercultural Cities programme and the Sound of Diversity project — two other initiatives involving Seine-Saint-Denis. Together, they explored how cultural diversity can drive local development and counter misinformation.

Seine-Saint-Denis' President Stéphane Troussel explained to the practitioners how Multitude was "a statement, a counter-narrative in a context where some try to divide through identity politics. Here in Seine-Saint-Denis, with its 150 nationalities, we show that diversity is not a threat but a fertile ground for a vibrant, inclusive society."

As part of the transnational meeting in Seine-Saint-Denis, WELDI partners also enjoyed an intercultural walking tour through La Courneuve.

Planned in the post-war times by the former department "Seine" that included both Paris and its suburbs, the neighbourhood "Les 4000" is an example of "imposed urbanism" that served to house working class Parisians expelled to the industrial suburbs. Only with the creation of the department Seine-Saint-Denis in 1968 the interests of the local population became more articulated by planning. Today, most social housing blocks have been destroyed and given way to a functionally more diverse neighbourhood that bears many traces and past and present migration, such as a cinema opened more than 100 years ago by Italian immigrants.

Anti-Rumour Strategies: countering misinformation and prejudice*

On April 4th, the WELDI network met with Gerardo Gómez, an expert on the Anti-Rumour Strategies that a number of European cities use to tackle prejudice and disinformation about migrants and other minorities. The spread of negative narratives is a problem that WELDI partners know all too well: migrants are being unfairly blamed for getting more help than others, are seen as not wanting to work, or as a threat to local culture. These messages, often emotional and reinforced by media or politicians, affect people's lives and behaviours. They divide communities, create fear, and undermine trust between people.

Invented in Barcelona in 2010, Anti-Rumour Strategies have been promoted by the Intercultural Cities Network and the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities as a more systematic response to disinformation that goes beyond one-off campaigns or fact-checking.

A fundamental premise of Anti-Rumour Strategies is that rumours grow not just because of ignorance, but because of emotions such as fear, frustration or uncertainty and that they therefore cannot just be tackled by confronting them with facts. Instead, it takes new, positive narratives about who we are and how we live together. These new narratives need to feel real and emotionally meaningful to the people who hear them.

On the institutional side, Anti-Rumour Strategies build on a long-term collaboration between a wide range of actors who receive training to break the chain of rumours, create alternative narratives, and actively promote communities free from prejudice. It's a collective effort rooted in critical thinking and civic responsibility, where also unexpected allies (from artists to shopkeepers, youth groups to librarians…) play a key role in sparking change and challenging stereotypes from within their own spaces.

Putting an Anti-Rumour Strategy into practice usually starts with identifying the common narratives in a given place and what lies behind them. In confronting these rumours, the goal is not to impose a message from above, but to open spaces where local people can reflect about how to change the way in which diversity is seen and talked about.

Anti-Rumours Strategies already exist in many places: in Getxo, stand-up comedy shows challenge prejudice through humour. In Bilbao, an annual writing contest invites international authors to share stories about identity and inclusion. And every year, around 60 young people from different cities meet at the Antirumours Youth Summit to exchange ideas and turn them into creative campaigns in their own communities.

The WELDI session made clear that acting against the willful spread of disinformation that undermines social cohesion cannot be a side issue for cities.

More information on Anti-Rumour Strategies:
https://diversit.net/en/antirumours-global/
https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/anti-rumours
* This is an edited version of an article by Gerardo Gómez for WELDI's URBACT website

Partner Updates

Conversations with Purpose - Fundao's vidcast series showing the human side of migration


Under the title "Conversas a Propósito" ("Conversations with Purpose") Fundao launched a vidcast series produced together with Rádio Cova da Beira and Incubadora de Música. The episodes feature people from the municipality, cultural actors and migrants. They provide testimonies of their stories of arrival and their experiences with language learning and the education system. By focusing on people's stories the city wants to counteract stigmatising and dehumanising discourses .

"Conversas a Propósito" was developed as a pilot action in WELDI connects with Fundão's "Fundão, Terra de Acolhimento" ("Fundão Welcoming Territory") initiative.

Sosnowiec newcomer guide

The city of Sosnowiec recently released its first guide for newcomers to the city. The guide, which is the result of a "pilot action" of Sosnowiec's ULG, answers questions such as:

- How to register with the Polish authorities?
- Which different work permits exist?
- What is the city's "Three Emperors' Corner?
- Who can ride public transport for free? and
- How can you do a proper rental agreement?
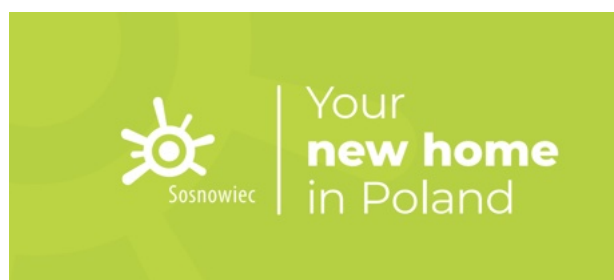
Available in English, Spanish, Ukrainian and Polish, the guide is meant to help newly arrived residents from abroad in their first steps in the city, which is an important instrument in safeguarding human rights for migrants.

WELDI Migrant Recommendation Videos

WELDI's first network product is there: videos in which migrants provide recommendations to cities on how to protect human rights based on their experiences: the obstacles they encountered and the support they received that helped overcoming them. The clips' themes of language, recognition, orientation and representation are what mattered most when

WELDI partners asked migrants about what human rights mean for them and what they would change in their cities reception and integration policies. They are a reminder of the insights that can be gained by listening to "experts by experience" and of the principle "nothing about us without us". All videos can be found on WELDI's linkedIn pages.
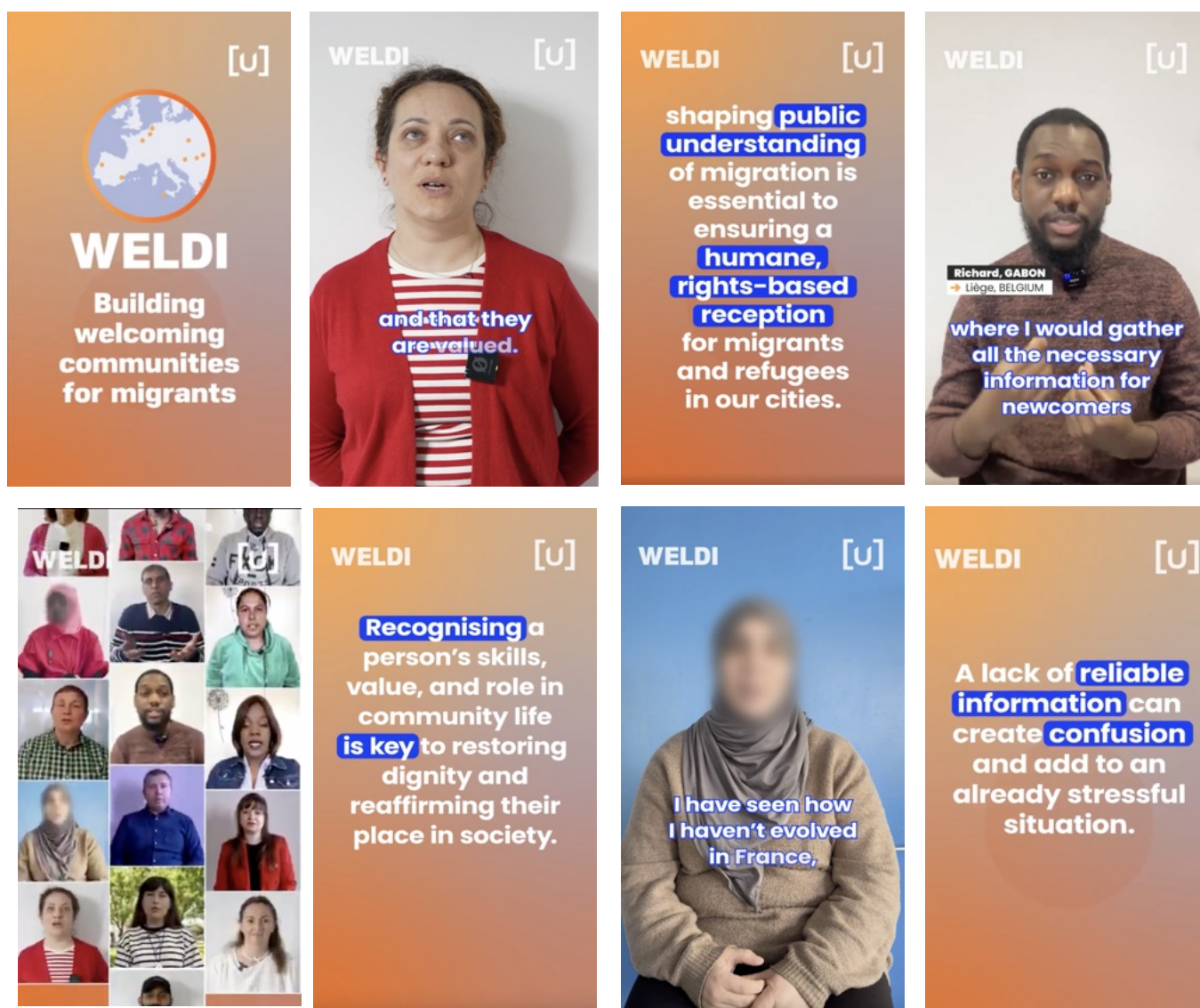
Upcoming WELDI-exchanges

September 23: TEX 10: Women and Children-centred approaches (online), Sosnowiec

October 20/21/22 (date tbc): Advocacy Masterclass with Jan Braat, Utrecht (online)

December 10-12: TEX 11: WELDI Final event, Utrecht