

2012

The Intercultural Alternative to Multiculturalism and its Limits

Katharina Bодirsky
Middle East Technical University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess_easa



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Bодirsky, Katharina, "The Intercultural Alternative to Multiculturalism and its Limits" (2012). *EASA Workshop 2012: Working Papers*.
8.

Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess_easa/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Cultural Heritage in European Societies and Spaces (CHESS) at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in EASA Workshop 2012: Working Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

The Intercultural Alternative to Multiculturalism and its Limits

Katharina Bодirsky

(Middle East Technical University, Ankara)

Paper presented at the Workshop “Uncertainties in the Crisis of Multiculturalism” at the EASA 2012 conference, Paris.

Scholarly attention in the “post-multicultural moment” in Europe has tended to focus on renewed assimilationist / exclusionary national policy and on the success of populist/right-wing political parties. The implicit or explicit frame of reference here is generally the nation-state. Less discussed has been a turn to “interculturalism” in particular in EU and city level policy in Europe, which is the subject of this paper. In the following, I argue that such intercultural policy is best understood not as an alternative *to* liberal multiculturalism, but as an alternative – *neoliberal* – multiculturalism which is embedded in contemporary processes of state transformation. With this I mean the interrelated development of multi-level governmental arrangements in Europe and the neoliberalization of state governance.

My argument is based on research in Berlin on EU-Berlin relations in regional development and immigrant integration policies from summer 2008 to summer 2009, which included among others interviews with key policy-makers, attendance at relevant policy events, and analysis of policy documents and verbatim transcripts of parliamentary meetings. At the time of research, the Berlin city government was constituted by a social democrat – socialist coalition. After the most recent elections in late 2011, this has changed to a social democrat

– Christian democrat coalition, which is likely to have an impact on parts of the policy frame I am discussing here (i.e. immigrant integration policies).

Interculturalism in EU-city relations

Intercultural policy has been promoted in European policy networks involving EU/European institutions and "multicultural" European cities since the mid-2000s. Who are the key players here? Apart from the international UNESCO, this is the Council of Europe (with a focus on intercultural dialogue), various EU institutions, in particular the European Commission (which linked the theme of intercultural dialogue to immigrant integration on the one hand and innovation and competitiveness on the other hand), and city networks (in particular EUROCITIES) and city administrations where intercultural policy has been promoted as a means to enhance both economic competitiveness and social cohesion. (This is because interculturalism in the EU-city policy link draws heavily on the theses of Richard Florida and Charles Landry, about which more later on.)

The Berlin city government has taken an active role in the EUROCITIES network with its goal of developing a (EU-wide) 'shared language' – and de facto cooperation – on immigrant integration and regional development issues. Berlin also took part in the "Intercultural Cities" program which is a joint project of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and EUROCITIES, and the goal of which is cooperation in city-level policy formation on immigrant integration. The city government at the time moreover developed a new "integration concept," finalized in 2007, which reflects the intercultural paradigm well.

This city-level promotion of intercultural policy should thus not be seen as a passive implementation of a European policy framework; rather, the city administration was actively involved in policy development through the EURO CITIES network and much might have been in fact carried 'upwards' from the city level to EU-level policy-making. It is important to keep in mind though that, despite such policy networks and a 'shared (intercultural) language' developing, the approaches of the key institutions mentioned above are not identical; nevertheless, we can identify certain 'key features' of intercultural policy that are articulated and differently emphasized in these different policy contexts. It is to these that I now want to turn.

What are Key Features of Interculturalism?

Interculturalist policy as articulated in these policy and political circles is explicitly presented as an *alternative to* multiculturalism. For example, the concept of the "Intercultural Cities" program distinguishes "intercultural policy" from "non-policy", "guestworker policy", "assimilationist policy", and "multicultural policy". The distinction to multiculturalism is drawn as follows:

"MULTICULTURAL POLICY – migrants and/or minorities can be accepted as permanent and their differences from the cultural norms of the host community are to be encouraged and protected in law and institutions backed by anti-racism activity, accepting of the risk that this may in some circumstances lead to separate or even segregated development;

INTERCULTURAL POLICY – migrants and/or minorities can be accepted as permanent and whilst their rights to have their differences from the cultural norm of the host community are recognised in law and institutions, there is a valorization of policies, institutions and activities which create common ground, mutual understanding and empathy and shared aspirations;" (Council of Europe, European Commission 2008:5)

Interculturalism, according to the statement above, is about the preservation of diversity, i.e. it is assertively *not* about exclusion or assimilation. In this sense it might be construed as

in line with multiculturalism. However, the above distinction – the keyword here is “segregated development” – also echoes the conservative and liberal critique of multiculturalism as leading to so-called “parallel societies.” In the case of Germany, this has generally been equated with both cultural (self-)segregation and (self-)exclusion from the labor market by immigrants and their descendants. Policy-makers promoting interculturalism thus want to preserve the key thrust of liberal multiculturalism, namely, the affirmation of a culturally diverse polity in opposition to exclusionary or assimilationist approaches, while also reacting to and in fact affirming the claim that “multiculturalism failed.” Interculturalism thus promises to correct the supposed deficiencies of multiculturalism by

1) recognizing the right to *individual* cultural identity and practice (rather than a collective right to cultural community) limited by the (human) rights of others. Broadly compatible with liberal formulations of tolerance, this is a reaction in particular to liberal critiques of multiculturalism as oppressive of subordinated members of cultural communities and especially highlighted in the Council of Europe and EU policy (less so in the Berlin case). (Here, it becomes apparent that interculturalism shares liberal and conservative anxieties about “too much difference”, which is usually associated with a particular construct of “the Muslim”).

2) promoting intercultural dialogue, mixing, and hybridity (as opposed to a “mosaic” of *separate* cultures) as a means to overcoming segregation. This becomes in particular relevant through the promotion of ‘neighborhood social cohesion’ projects in cities, among them Berlin, and informs policy programs such as “Intercultural Cities”.

and 3) ensuring equality of opportunity (rather than guaranteeing social welfare) through measures that are diversity-sensitive, i.e. treat cultural properties as potential resources for success in the market. That is, the goal is overcoming "exclusion" in the socioeconomic sense through integration into the labor market or entrepreneurialism. It features in EU-city networks and is foregrounded in the Berlin case, where it finds expression in policy promoting access to employment, diversity-sensitive education, intercultural opening of state institutions, and to some extent, political participation of non-citizens.

The intercultural argument is that policies that ensure that diverse individuals participate, (harmoniously) interact, and mix in urban and work space can turn cultural diversity from a "threat" into a "benefit". Again, in the words of the Intercultural Cities concept that are quite paradigmatic for the political support for "intercultural" policies, also in Berlin:

"For most cities in Europe, cultural diversity will be an issue they will have to face up to. ... Indeed, one of the defining factors which will determine, over coming years, which cities flourish and which decline will be the extent to which they allow their diversity to be their asset, or their handicap." (Council of Europe and European Commission 2008: 4)

Or, as one of my interviewees from the Green party in Berlin put it:

Internationality [which she sees as prerequisite for a competitive city and a goal for city policy] does not develop by, let's say, determining on the basis of a census that this or that many nationalities live here. The question is how they are interrelated, how they live together, and whether they are in fact in their daily practice international or rather again only national, each one in his small.... This is not internationality, this is only statistical internationality; you can indeed decorate yourself with that, but it is not a true asset for this city.

Here, again, it is interculturalism (people interacting – what she calls "internationality") rather than multiculturalism (her implicit adversary, "statistical internationality" of separate cultural or national communities) that is considered "a true asset".

A Neoliberalized Multiculturalism?

Despite occasional claims to the contrary on the part of interculturalists, I want to suggest that interculturalism is not a radical departure from multiculturalism. For example, liberal multiculturalists have generally advocated certain limits to the right to culture (usually in the form of human rights) or debated "exit rights" for subordinated members in cultural communities. Interculturalism is, however, also not the same old wine in new bottles (cf. Meer and Modood 2012, and responses). Interculturalism, I argue, *neoliberalizes* (liberal) multiculturalism. On a conceptual level, this is shown in its particular conceptualization of the relation of the subject to her culture in a world of free-market-capitalism, On a practical level, it is manifested in policy propositions that fit well with a shift from welfare to workfare within a political context that prioritizes competitiveness in the free market over other goals.

In interculturalism, 'culture' is an *individual* property and resource rather than a collective good. For example, the right to individual cultural identity and practice that figures strongly in relevant EU documents is *not* to protect the freedom of cultural communities from majority imposition, a strong motivation of liberal multiculturalism, but the freedom of the individual to *choose* culture. This speaks of the deep suspicion in particular by liberal critics of multiculturalism of "thick" cultural collectivities that would limit an individual's right to "opt out" particular practices and belongings or would fail to be tolerant of "other ways of doing things". What interculturalists value instead is hybridity, mixing, creative choice, which presumes that an individual takes an entrepreneurial stance towards her own culture (or cultural property/ies), which is then, as we will see, to constitute a resource for her in economic terms. Culture, it is argued, is at the heart of creativity, which is the fount of

innovation, which constitutes competitiveness in the knowledge-economy (see Bodirsky 2012). The individualization of culture as property thus links up with the dominance of economic forms of valuation in line with the free market logic characteristic of neoliberal governance.

In fact, interculturalism makes its case for diversity on the basis of intercultural policy's supposed *economic* benefits in a context of free-market-competition (rather than, for example, through a discourse of social justice (see e.g. Wood/Landry 2008)). Interculturalists here frequently make three claims about how interculturalism can turn culture from a "threat" into an "asset" (which, in turn, function as justification for the adoption of intercultural policies):

First, interculturalism is seen to mobilize "unused resources" for the economy and relieve the finances of an overburdened welfare state by ensuring (culture-sensitive) equality of opportunity, thus not only including unemployed immigrants into the labor market but also using their culture-specific capacities and networks.

Second, it is claimed via Richard Florida (2003) that the diverse and tolerant city environment that intercultural policy promotes constitutes a competitive advantage in inter-local competition among cities over high-skilled labor and capital investment driving the contemporary "knowledge-economy", as these prefer "tolerant" places.

Third, it is argued via diversity management approaches and Charles Landry (Landry/Wood 2008) that the intercultural interaction and mixing of diverse individuals leads to the

generation of new creative ideas and that resulting innovation results in increased competitiveness of the local economy.

Such economic arguments for diversity are usually in the foreground when interculturalism is promoted over assimilationist or exclusionary "alternatives to multiculturalism". The implication of course is that when diversity is valued for its supposed contribution to value-creation, then those who seemingly do not use their culture entrepreneurially as a resource, those that apparently do not seize the opportunities now supposedly created for them, are devalued. The recent "Sarrazin debate" in Germany showed this very clearly.

The concept of diversity foregrounded in interculturalism in fact has an implicit class dimension – it refers to the high-skilled immigrant for the much-hyped knowledge-economy, not to long-standing often low-skilled immigrant populations. This is reflected in a bifurcation in policies for the 'creative diversity' that is considered a 'resource' and an 'asset' on the one hand and for the low-skilled or unemployed that figure in policy speech still predominantly as a 'problem' or 'threat' on the other hand.

In the case of Berlin's new integration concept, for example, the first goal specified is to render the diversity of the city more visible and thus to enhance its "attractiveness" for "high-skilled" migrants and capital (building on Richard Florida). A staff member of Berlin's commissioner for integration and migration explained the reasons for this goal to me as follows:

Integration policy so to say is not only the attempt to minimize lack but also the attempt to discover resources, and those are in part in the innovative capacity or attractiveness that originate from big companies like MTV or Universal for a very different strata of migrants, who are nevertheless immigrants, who are not our first concern, because they can look after themselves, they have enough money, but nevertheless are part of the migrant population which one cannot neglect entirely – or should not, because Berlin of course lives from that.

This bifurcation in policy links up with an implicit hierarchy, which also shows in the comment of a member of the Green party in Berlin that I interviewed who took a broadly intercultural stance and who contrasted the "classic Turkish migrant" making negative headlines with the potential of "well-educated" recent immigrants:

"Berlin has quite interesting potential in terms of a well-educated workforce with multicultural background and all that. We have relatively big communities both from eastern European states and for example from the Middle East, not only the classic Turkish migrants who are always written about in the newspapers, a relatively well-educated English-speaking community and all that. This could actually be a location advantage for many things."

This translates into an actual contradiction in policy-making for these different "categories" of immigrants which is generally not acknowledged by intercultural policy-makers – namely, that creating an urban living space attractive for "creative diversity" can mean the displacement of low-income residents, many of them immigrants, by supporting local gentrification processes. In the case of Berlin, current gentrification, propelled not least by housing speculation in the contemporary context of crisis, affects in particular the "multicultural" neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukoelln. Intercultural city policy welcomes this under the heading of creating the "right mix" in currently "problematic" neighborhoods. Thus, the report on Neukoelln for the "Intercultural Cities" program notes:

"As ghettos usually don't re-converge on their own with society, it is important to recruit new inhabitants According to local actors, the transformations have already begun. More and more artists are looking for apartments, galleries and studios in the district. This is a good sign, because, according to a model that repeats itself in many European cities, this is the first step towards gentrification." (Council of Europe, European Commission 2008b)

Such active support for gentrification is a feature of neoliberal governance. In Berlin, it has been promoted not only by targeting investment for the creative and cultural industries at such "multicultural" neighborhoods, but also by foregoing measures that could prevent displacement of current low-income residents (see Bodirsky 2012).

The equality of opportunity measures that interculturalism also entails do not address such problems. In fact, they fit rather well with a neoliberal shift from welfare to workfare by focusing on integration into the labor market rather than a more comprehensive vision of social justice. This moreover glosses over the problematic conditions of the labor market in which immigrants are to be integrated, low-income, low social security work being the norm. Equality of opportunity, however "culturally-sensitive," fails to address the ways in which neoliberal policies, including the decline of social protection, support for increased temporary and flexible employment, the lack of a minimum wage, and push for workfare in Germany have increased class inequalities. Allowing immigrants the same opportunities in such a system entails only a limited vision of equality and cohesion. The intercultural social cohesion focus in neighborhoods cannot remedy resulting precariousness, but has been criticized for taking part in the neoliberal outsourcing of state functions to civil society and in some cases for promoting gentrification (see e.g. Lanz 2007).

In short, interculturalism is not so much an alternative to liberal multiculturalism as an alternative multiculturalism – a *neoliberal* multiculturalism. Its neoliberal tenor consists in the individualization of culture as a personal resource to be mobilized via channels of equality of opportunity, fitting well with the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state, the

individualization of risk, and the political prioritization of competitiveness in the knowledge-economy. Valuing diversity because of its supposed contribution to value-creation implies the devaluation of those who seemingly refuse to do so, who seemingly fail to use the opportunities given to them. Thus, the culturalist distinction between diversity and difference (see Eriksen 2006, Grillo 2010) finds its double in class, implicitly opposing the newly sought-after "creative" migrant with long-standing low-skilled immigrant populations in Germany. The implications become clear in the dovetailing of intercultural policy with processes of gentrification to the detriment of those populations, many of them the denigrated "Turkish guestworkers," that do not seem to fit the intercultural ideal of the "diverse" subject.

Origins in State Transformation

Why do we have the concerted promotion of interculturalism on the city scale, in contrast to the trend on national levels? While in the case of Germany, different political orientations of the respective governments of course matter, I suggest that we can find further enabling conditions in contemporary processes of state transformation.

In recent decades in Europe, supranational integration in particular through the development of a common market and the strengthening of European political institutions has not only had implications for the nation-states but also changed the parameters of regional political practice. The freer flow of capital in Europe combined with the draining of subnational governmental scales from state resources and processes of deindustrialization have prompted city governments to compete with each other for investment and consumption moneys. As David Harvey (2001[1989]) has shown, such "entrepreneurial" city

governance often turned to culture in the form of spectacle or cultural heritage to promote the city in such inter-local competition. With the popularity of Richard Florida's theses, culture in the "way of life" sense has now become a further means for competition. Deindustrialized, multicultural cities such as Berlin cling to their promises in a context where, as one of my interviewees from the socialist (then) governing party put it, the attractiveness of the city is its only trump in inter-local competition in the absence of financial means to lure capital to town. Moreover, as has become particularly pronounced in the current crisis, Berlin has proven an attractive place for developers and speculation in housing, with "multicultural" – or, rather, potentially "intercultural" – neighborhoods being particularly sought after and consequently gentrified.

The political prioritization of economic competitiveness over other goals that springs from this context of increased inter-local competition also helped rationalize the turn from welfare towards workfare and the political support for low-income, low-security jobs in Germany. The result has been increased social inequalities. Consequently, cities have to make do with a reality of increasingly class divided populations produced by neoliberalization where claims on the state are often made in a culturalist frame (i.e. who is entitled to the scarce resources existing?). They have to negotiate the social consequences of neoliberal state-making, but without much resources to do so. Interculturalism, with its emphasis on dialogue, mixing, and equality of opportunity leading to economic benefit, promises to solve all the problems of the city without much investment (that more comprehensive social measures would require). That is, interculturalism becomes attractive in this particular context because it promises to reconcile what is in fact a contradiction: to resolve problems of economic competitiveness *and* of social cohesion, in a way moreover

that is possible for fiscally strained cities. This conveniently glosses over the way in which so-called social cohesion problems are a *result* of the neoliberal political prioritization of competitiveness over goals of social justice.

There is a further political rationale for the city-level adoption of interculturalism. Cities are differently positioned in the multi-level governmental arrangements in Europe from nation-states. Much of the "diversity" of nation-states is concentrated in large cities, all the while cities, unlike nation-states, have no "gate-keeper" function, they cannot regulate immigration and have no influence on citizenship laws. The previous Berlin government's campaign to allow long-term residents (non-citizens) to vote in municipal elections, which failed because of resistance on the national level, speaks to that. This particular positionality of cities lends itself to political approaches that seek to *manage* diversity rather than overcome it, and to attempts to create political legitimacy not by homogenizing the population, as was frequently the case with nation-states, but by *heterogenizing* the state. Thus, a staff member of Berlin's Commissioner for Integration and Migration at the time explained the city government's attempt at an "intercultural opening" of state institutions as follows:

"the public service as translator [*Umsetzer*] of a state idea [*staatliche Idee*] has to reflect in its composition the composition of the population. Therefore the interest in recruiting more migrants for public service, for democratic or legitimacy reasons, because one has to ask at some point, for whom do you work after all, if oneself can no longer really reflect the population."

The seeking of legitimacy through such means is the more important in a context where the state has retreated to some extent from delivering "welfare" to its population and where high-skilled immigrants are sought-after for economic reasons. As multiculturalism has been thoroughly discredited politically and lacks the "economic" promises of interculturalism, the

latter seems to emerge here as the policy paradigm of choice for multicultural, deindustrialized cities.

Conclusion

Interculturalism promises to "update" multiculturalism by recognizing diversity but discouraging the formation of separate cultural communities reliant on the welfare state. While intercultural policy does have positive dimensions – in particular some of the diversity-sensitive equality of opportunity measures – it is clearly limited by the way such policy works with rather than against neoliberal governance. Here, its implicit conceptualization of culture as individual property and resource chimes well with practices of neoliberal governance that entail de-facto hierarchies of belonging drawn on the basis of presumptions about class and "culture" and resulting from the prioritization of competitiveness in the free-market over goals of social justice. Interculturalism thus emerges as a tool of governing increasingly divided populations in a context of neoliberal state transformation, a tool however that seems more geared towards the needs of the latter than improving the lot of the former.

References Cited:

Bodirsky Katharina. 2012. Culture for Competitiveness: Valuing Diversity in EU-Europe and the "Creative City" of Berlin. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18:455-73

Council of Europe, European Commission. 2008a. The Intercultural City: What it is and how to make it work. Introductory Documents for Cities Participating in the Pilot Phase of the Intercultural Cities Programme, Joint Action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. DGIV/Cult/IC(2008)01.

Council of Europe, European Commission. 2008b. Intercultural Cities. Übersetzung des Berichtes des Europarates nach dem Besuch am 18. und 19. Februar 2009 in Berlin Neukölln, Deutschland.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2006b. Diversity versus Difference: Neo-Liberalism in the Minority Debate. In *The Making and Unmaking of Difference*, ed. Rottenburg, Richard, Burkhard Schnepel, Shingo Shimada, pp. 13-36. Bielefeld: Transaction.

Florida, Richard. 2003. Cities and the Creative Class. *City & Community* 2:3-19.

Grillo, Ralph. 2010. An Excess of Alterity? Debating Difference in a Multicultural Society. In *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism: New Directions*, ed. Vertovec, Steven, pp. 19-38. London: Routledge.

Harvey, David. 2001 [1989]. From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism. In *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, pp. 345-68. New York: Routledge.

Lanz, Stephan. 2007. Berlin aufgemischt: abendländisch, multikulturell, kosmopolitisch? Die politische Konstruktion einer Einwanderungsstadt. Transcript, Bielefeld

Meer Nasar, Modood Tariq. 2012. How Does Interculturalism Contrast with Multiculturalism? *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33:175-96.

Wood, Phil, Charles Landry. 2008. *The Intercultural City: Planning for Diversity Advantage*. London: Eearthscan.