

## **The Intercultural City after 7/7**

'The Intercultural City' project will not solve the problems that lie at the core of the attacks of 7/7 or 21/7 in London. These are complex, multi-layered and not as yet clearly articulated. The 'intercultural city' instead can guide a light on how things could be as it is aspirational. It seeks to change the way we think, plan and act for diversity and to understand and track far better the dynamic forces at work. It is a test case to help deal with the massive population changes underway, which will be exacerbated by the EU enlargement to 25. It may in time effect how we live together so that we can identify with the feel of places whose demographics, rhythm of life and look are transforming. By December 2005 the project will have released 8 publications covering issues such as indicators of openness, masterplanning through an intercultural lens and new forms of community engagement.

### **Inter or multi?**

We contrast the 'intercultural' with the 'multicultural city' in which at its best we acknowledge and ideally celebrate our differing cultures that in essence remain separate. In the intercultural city we move one step beyond and rather than focusing on what is different we concentrate on what we can do together as diverse cultures in shared space. Our contention is that the latter leads to greater well being and prosperity. On the ground this is already happening far more than the media would suggest.

The history of successful cities in the past, from Constantinople to Hangchow to Florence, where the role of merchants as traders of products and ideas was tantamount, suggests the capacity to absorb and bring cultures together was key. This did not mean cultures were subsumed, identity was still shaped by where you came from. There was, however, sufficient mutual influence and counterinfluence, coalescing and mixing over time to create a special fused identity as older and newer citizens changed. This is what is meant when we talk of London as 'the world in one city'.

We criticize classic multiculturalism not for its intentions, but some of its practice. In its degraded form a city or local authority would set up employment or social schemes or youth centres on the basis of ethnicity. The funding system was skewed and with a leadership within ethnic communities coming from a narrow grouping, often masking inter-generational problems, there was no debate and the political correctness regime meant you could not talk about it. Some felt funding was going into organizations that made time stand still. For those people and especially the young who did want to fit into those patterns it was difficult and made it hard to encourage projects across cultural boundaries. Yasmin Alibhai Brown was the first person to articulate this in 'Beyond Multiculturalism' where she raised the issue of hybridity.

When we use intercultural we are interested in how the full mosaic of cultures connects not only Asian, African or African-Caribbean, but also Bosnian, French, German or Brazilian or Irish or Mexican. Each culture can

bring something to the urban experience, but do we allow its potential offerings to flourish? The richness of British culture is deeper than the census tells us. The New Policy Institute will re-look at the census and provide an overview of other data sources in an analysis to help our project understand Britain's dynamic population texture, its urban movements and who is doing what more fully. The census does not tell us how many Japanese are in Britain, or Somalis, or Italians and where they live. The breakdown of the category 'elsewhere' in the census is unpublished. Nor does it tell us where our parents were born or who is intermarrying with whom. Equally little work has been done on the professions apart from CABE's recent research on ethnic minorities and the built environment professions. Who is working where and why are some cultures attracted to certain professions and what effect does it have. For example BME students are particularly under-represented in landscape design or the law and the engineering and medical professions have very different ethnic profiles.

### **Indicators of openness**

The 'intercultural city' notion has three themes at its core. For each we intend to deliver a practical tool for cities. First, it seeks to bring into debate and foster universal principles that allow us to live together so mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and much more can develop. This requires a value set and ethical framework of openness. This is easier said than done. In the past it meant the city as a haven or refuge. Our project seeks to create a forum to work out what this means in 2005 and beyond through a secular perspective. It is trying to shift the debate about cities away from an exclusive concern about efficiency and management important as these issues are and refocus on the big picture ethical issues of city living, such as 'how do we want to live' or 'what do we mean by the good city'. 'who makes and shapes the city'.

An important outcome will be our 'indicators of openness' which are being tested in Bristol and measure four dimensions. The openness of the institutional framework, such as the regulatory and legislative framework within national or local government or the policy or educational environment. The openness of the business environment such as how open the job market or business training is and who runs companies. The openness of civil society. How welcoming are we; do we publicly recognize diverse cultures and shape services accordingly? Does representation on boards or the media reflect this? Finally the openness of public space. What are the spaces we share and where are they located: The city centre or spaces within it? What are good examples of space cultures wish to mix? Which mixed housing estates encourage interaction? Cultural institutions like libraries? Sports facilities? What about the screen and airwaves?

The openness indicators will allow towns and cities to assess whether they are making the most of their diversity potential.

### **Masterplanning through an intercultural lens**

In Lewisham we will look at masterplanning through an intercultural lens and produce a 'how to' guidebook of use nationally. Using development

sites large and small in scale the work involves spatial and land use planners, engineers, urban designers, highways specialists and those concerned with social, economic and cultural matters as well as the varied range of cultural communities. The aim is to shape local area planning.

Why is this important? How we build the physical fabric of our cities is culturally defined. The look, feel and structure of the places we as planners encourage, help design and promote reflects our assumptions about what we think is right and appropriate. This is etched into codes, rules and guidelines. It sets the physical stage upon which social and economic life plays itself out. What happens when different cultures meet and co-exist in the same space? Should the basic building blocks of the city be the same when looked at through intercultural eyes. Think of street frontages, building heights, set backs, pavement widths, turning circles, the amount of windows and their size, how we deal with enclosure, privacy or sight lines. Think too of the materials we use, colour, light or water. At its simplest would streets or the colour palette used be different seen interculturally? Should we structure space to reflect different cultures as they see and use spaces in varied ways, but how do we coalesce or balance seemingly contradictory cultural priorities of differing communities? This is the challenge we seek to answer. For some ambling and hanging around in public places is an intrinsic part of life; for others such socializing takes place in greater privacy at home or a club. In some cultures women are confined to the domestic realm in others their role is more public. Peter Luxton from the Architecture Centre East Midlands will provide an additional report on good examples of intercultural architecture and urban design

### **New forms of community engagement**

In Tower Hamlets Comedia is working with the New Skills Academy and the borough to look at new forms of community engagement. Like in masterplanning, would this be different when seen through intercultural eyes? Tower Hamlets is about to enter a process of consultation as part of the new plan making system which requires a Local Development Framework. Mutual understanding of differences is at the heart of successful city making and given Tower Hamlets' beacon status in community engagement the borough is especially interested in remaining at the forefront of knowledge. The New Skills Academy has identified the topic as central especially in relation to the built environment professions, whose more technical training and background makes them less oriented to process and involvement questions. The aim, working with leading experts in the field, is to provide a learning kit for local authorities. By taking an aerial view and assessing the matrix of existing community involvement techniques from 'Enquiry by Design', 'Planning for Real', 'Citizens Panel' to community visioning and well beyond the study will propose how to etch greater cultural understandings of need and desires into involvement processes. Importantly too how you get to involve people and get the job done.

### **How are our cities doing?**

We have learnt how different London is. There is a sensibility that this is 'a world in one city' and that there we 'share all our fortunes'. It is part of the London identity. Politically it can be seen in the strategies. Can the same be said of our other great towns and cities? For the most part they have grasped the economic drivers of a changing world and there is nodding recognition that the world is changing demographically. Yet recognition of the full cultural impact of mass mobility and migration especially after EU enlargement is not apparent. Apart from Ken Livingstone in London how many leaders in provincial cities are willing to make interculturalism their issue? Too often our cultures are living separate lives with a benign indifference from the political leaderships.

Getting beyond the cultural ghettos is more than the mix and match of the easy examples, fashion, food and music. For example are we assessing housing policy and stock through cultural eyes by mixing in saying larger units suitable for mixed generations with the smaller semi-detached. And what about the design? Are we considering new forms of finance that reflect how family incomes are made up? . Are we analysing the blockages in the professions. Too often we still consider their techniques or procedures as culturally neutral. Are we acknowledging in economic development the lessons from progressive business that greater insights or innovations and value added are occurring through mixed cultural teams. That leaves aside the crude marketing issues for companies operating globally where cultural diversity is key. HSBC's recent airport adverts strike the right cord. For example what various numbers mean in different cultures from good to bad.

Will interculturalism become the defining community philosophy in the coming year or so? I doubt it, but perhaps in 5 years.