
SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL

Living With Difference – Interventions for Just Cities

Marit Aure and Anniken Førde

UIT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, NO

Corresponding author: Marit Aure (Marit.aure@uit.no)

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Most cities, including small and medium ones, experience diverse multicultural populations. The sustainability of such diverse cities requires them to be capable of living with differences and diversity without producing new social inequalities and sustaining old ones. We argue that there is a need for a new conceptualization with which to approach cultural diversity, differences and similarities in urban planning, in line with Gressgård and Jensens' (2016) quest to understand the relationship between migrants and cities. This special issue analyzes several initiatives aiming at facilitating encounters and creating urban spaces for cross-cultural interaction, participation, and dialogue. The articles stem from the research project *Sustainable diverse cities: Innovation in integration (Cit-egration)*,¹ which explores the role of various initiatives to create spaces of co-existence and interaction across differences and to develop new concepts and understandings of just cities. The contributing articles share the understanding that diverse cities consist of and benefit from a multitude of encounters. The articles present analyses based on initiatives and activities in the small- and medium-sized cities Bodo and Tromsø in Norway and Hundested and Halsnæs in Denmark. Small- and medium-sized cities are the most common in the Nordic countries. Hence, there is a need to understand how diversity is approached in such cities. Small- and medium-sized cities also serve as interesting laboratories for studying these themes due to their complex yet small scale.

The collection starts with analysing a map of how urban spaces are used as meeting places by different groups of urban dwellers. It then focuses on how art- and culture-based interventions and activities in voluntary organizations hold potential for living with, crossing and negotiating differences. We then turn to a discussion of how local diversity policies are designed and implemented before concluding with an insightful look at how inhabitants engage with everyday hospitality when faced with emergency and how this engagement challenges the Nordic welfare states' current approaches toward refugees. This provides different perspectives on the relation between urban planning and development and diverse populations in the city. It also provides a line of thinking moving from urban (geographical) spaces, via encounters in such places, to local diversity policies and finally an approach that draw the lines from encounters to national state policies.

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The Right to Encounter and Living with Differences

The articles commonly depart from Lefebvre's (1996) argument that the right to the city implies the right to encounter since participation and engagement require places to meet and interact. The concept of encounters has gained increased interest in urban studies, especially in studies of urban diversity. As cities become more diverse, facilitating encounters between people, similar and different, has become a core issue in urban planning (Fincher & Iveson 2008). Through the many encounters, the city is 'thrown together' in new ways (Massey 2005), with multiple pasts – but also futures – being folded into the present (Amin & Thrift 2002; Forde 2019). Just cities grant diverse populations rights to physical spaces, participation in urban life and the right to shape the city as equals (Harvey 2008; Fraser 1997; Fincher & Iveson 2008; Lefebvre 1996; Mitchell 2003).

The analyses in this special issue seek to explore the conditions for encounters, the right to the city and hence the just city in different ways. Understanding the right to the city as the right to encounter, the issue emphasizes the transformative potential of interventions in promoting, facilitating, contesting and sustaining understandings of wide varieties of differences. Wilson (2017) argues that encounters are distinct genres of contact; encounters are centred on the maintenance, production and reworking of difference. The point of departure is that planned and coordinated urban encounters are not seen as meetings of already formed differences with fixed attributes or identities. It rather involves a continuous fabric of hybrid compositions in the city. Yet, while differences are negotiated in everyday encounters, not all encounters invite impersonal integrative encounters (Valentine 2008). Integrative encounters and 'gatherings of strangers' in urban societies need to allow and value differences and be impersonal, according to Amin (2012). Differences are what make people unique individuals, while the scale of modern mobile urban spaces makes impersonal respect and rights necessary. Such a focus on diversity and living with differences, 'as a paradox inasmuch as recognition of distinctness – which is a prerequisite for "the right to be different"' (Gressgård & Jensen 2016: 3), holds the potential of reifying categories (of difference) and meanings ascribed to (perceived) differences. The research project *Cit-egration*, however, starts from the assumption that all individuals are different and unique and sustainable cities and communities must find ways to recognize and live with differences. This implies that the content, significance and consequences of differences are not given and taken for granted. Differences and similarities are produced in interaction and inscribed with meaning, and yet they are subject to constructions and reconstructions, according to Yuval-Davies (2006). Differences are produced in encounters, as Ahmed (2000) emphasises. Several of the contributions in this collection deconstruct, discuss and demonstrate how differences are sustained, reworked and transformed through encounters in specific settings and interactions, like Aure and Al-Mahamid (this issue), Magnussen (this issue) and Koefoed, Simonsen and Forde (this issue). Some authors (Taff & Aure, this issue) ask how such encounters may translate into various forms of participation and engagement in collectives and communities in the city, whereas Nyseth's article in this issue has this as its main theme. Therefore, the articles also highlight that the city is not one common unity, one community, but could be seen as a kaleidoscope of communities.

Studying various initiatives to create cross-cultural interaction, the *Cit-egration* project thus explores the possibilities and challenges of facilitated and coordinated contact across differences, as Magnussen vividly discusses in her analysis of the contact facilitated by Red Cross in the second-hand shop in Bodø. Well aware that encountering differences can produce conflicts and anxiety as well as acknowledgement and possibilities, we are mainly concerned with the ability of encounters to make, transform and imbue value to differences. Koefoed, Simonsen and Forde's article explores such reworkings of differences by using the concept of everyday hospitality in their study of grassroot movements in Denmark and Norway. Enhancing

cross-cultural interaction is hence to embrace the hybridity and potential of the city. While Taff and Aure's contribution try to map the differentiated use of city spaces as meeting places, Nyseth, in this issue, studies how city municipalities may be able to plan for and accommodate city spaces, for differences. According to Amin (2012), this requires not only to accept and respect differences (Hillier 2007; Nyseth et al. 2017) but also to maintain differences. As pointed out by Aure and Al-Mahamid in this issue, this implies working with, not against differences: sometimes differences are the material from which integrative encounters are made. To Amin (2012) this entails shifting attention from encounters promoting interpersonal relations to impersonal relations. The aim of this special issue is to understand such transformative powers of encounters and add to the knowledge about how encounters are enacted and how they can contribute to respect, trust and dialogue, as Valentine (2008) asks for. As Askins and Pain (2011) argue, encounters should be framed as emergent, transitory, fragile yet hopeful. These analyses add glimpses of such knowledge.

Participatory Research as Interventions

The rapid increase in asylum seekers and refugees in 2015–2016 spurred a wide variety of innovative integration activities and initiatives. The articles in this issue analyse some of these interventions as cases. Starting from innovative cross-cultural activities practiced by local institutions, organizations, and inhabitants, the research project *Cit-egration* and the articles in this collection explore and analyse interventions. The authors of this special issue not only study integration initiatives but also take active part in them. Engaging in making new city maps and crafting new methods for participation with city planners, working with voluntary organizations and collaborating with artist and cultural associations, the researchers contribute to enhancing urban encounters and intervene in processes of developing and (re) designing urban spaces. This is participatory *action* research, aspiring to change social realities (Kemmis & McTaggard 2005). The vision is to develop cities' problem-solving capacities and the theoretical understanding of differences, meeting places, encounters and just cities. Together, researchers and public and private organizations and companies produce knowledge to help enhance integrative interaction. The articles learn from and engage in such initiatives and report the results of these studies, to generate new knowledge. This approach requires a constant questioning of concepts and theories (Aure, Førde & Liabo 2020) and forces the research teams to 'stay with the trouble' (Harraway 1988) and the messy spaces (Law 2004) and uncertainties new initiatives and new approaches may include. Analysing such 'micro-politics' of social interaction based on bottom-up initiatives, on the backdrop of public policy and planning, points to new directions and practices through grassroots bridging (Harris & Young 2009). Some of the studies are also part of an emerging tradition of participatory art-based research and co-production, especially found in migration studies (Askins & Pain 2011; Jeffery et al. 2019; Nunn 2010; Pratt 2007). These argue in favour of the possibilities for new knowledge, openness, and contestations and the significance of involving research partners in knowledge production (Bergold & Thomas 2012; Leavy 2015).

Studying Encounters and Participation in Just Cities

Access to urban spaces

According to Lefebvre (1996), access to and use of space in the city is a vital element of envisioning a just city. To better understand the relationship between encounters and urban spaces, this special issue starts with an attempt to map the differential uses of urban spaces. While the *Cit-egration* project started with an overview of initiatives and activities by voluntary organizations, public and private actors offered to promote cross-cultural interaction. The first article in this collection focuses on the possibilities of mapping actual meeting

places. Gregory Taff and Marit Aure present a participatory geographical information system (PGIS) developed to map physical arenas for cross-cultural interaction in the Norwegian cities Bodø and Tromsø. The digital participatory mapping tool was used to log information about locations where participants of various backgrounds spend time and interact with others in the city. Taff and Aure describe substantial differences among various groups in their interest in and access to urban spaces and point to how this could be addressed. They also find that the established non-immigrant respondents seem to lack knowledge of and maybe access to urban spaces for cross-cultural encounters. Taff and Aure moreover discuss methodological aspects, potentials, challenges and limitations of participatory mapping. By providing a physical frame of reference for encounters and participation in the city based on quantitative data, this article contributes to the discussion of conditions supporting cross-cultural interaction. The qualitative case studies that follow will add depth to this picture.

Embodied encounter

The increase of migrants to Europe after 2015 led to a tremendous growth in activity by place-based and neighbourhood organization, as well as by new actors within the broad field of arts and culture, in welcoming migrants and creating meeting places for meaningful interaction. Focusing on the conditions for, the mechanisms in, and results of the micro-politics of social interaction based on bottom-up innovative activities and initiatives the researchers are involved in, this special issue has participated in and analyzed a range of integration initiatives. Together, these analyses add to the international study of encounters and living with difference, and they point to new directions and practices through grassroots bridging.

The article by Marit Aure and Marsil Al-Mahamid in this special issue provides a collaborative analysis by an artist and a researcher of an international embroidery workshop. They emphasize the role of arts in affording integrative encounters and facilitating impersonal rather than interpersonal interaction, which neither presupposes similarities nor avoids difference. Aure and Al-Mahamid ask how art's alternative modes of knowing and encouraging and enabling interactions among strangers may facilitate social change and understandings of how individuals become parts of collectives. Their work is based on arts-based participatory action research to promote encounters and collect and analyze data. The article shows how the repetitive rhythm of embroidery, the materials and the creative expression of the embroideries invite integrative interactions and offer possibilities for non-oppositional, non-hierarchical and non-binary dialogues. Their analyses show how embodied encounters come to matter, how such safe spaces afford shared moments where the participants become stitched together and part of collectives yet remain different.

Tone Magnussen discusses multicultural voluntarism in her article in this special issue. Based on a longitudinal ethnographic work in the voluntary organization Bodø Red Cross, and in Bodø Red Cross second-hand store in particular, her contribution addresses how voluntary activities can foster intercultural encounters and understanding. Voluntary organizations have a long-standing tradition for humanitarian and social work and play an important role in welfare support in Norway's, Scandinavia's, and other countries' societal integration. Voluntary activities for integration often introduce migrants to meeting places, which may lead to new and multiple encounters. The article by Magnussen emphasizes how such voluntary initiatives are challenging and changing traditional voluntary work and organizations, and in what way a new voluntarism can be identified. Magnussen shows how voluntary institutions such as the second-hand shop become arenas for negotiating limits, tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity. She argues that the embodied encounters taking place among volunteers with different backgrounds, despite the presence of structural limitations, have a transformative power in reworking difference – which represents a hopeful future.

Policies of diversity

Policies of diversity at the municipal level provides another frame of reference for developing cross-cultural encounters and just cities. This adds a local institutional perspective and operationalization of policies, which supplement and sometimes form alternatives to policies at the national state level. How do cities and towns plan for and approach the multi-cultural city? Planning for cultural and ethnic pluralism in Nordic cities was topic for a former special issue in this journal (Gressgård & Jensen 2016), also emphasizing Lefebvre's argument that the right to the city must be complemented by the right to difference.

Torill Nyseth's article in this special issue adds to this knowledge, addressing municipal diversity policies as a tool to increase participation and encounters – and the ambivalences of such policies. Analysing local policies in the two North-Norwegian cities of Bodø and Tromsø, Nyseth asks if it is possible to identify a local profile in the integration of diversity policies within the areas of democratic participation, urban planning management and cultural policy. The analysis demonstrates ambivalence in the involvement of people with immigrant backgrounds in planning processes but also attempts to give the immigrant population a stronger voice in local politics. Parts of the immigrant population are given representation in city governance through advisory councils, but this remains a narrow-oriented policy. Planners in the cities of Bodø and Tromsø seem to lack tools to meet the increased diversity and to reach immigrant groups. Nyseth argues that planning processes that are not designed with difference in mind fail to include immigrant communities. This work is also based on an action-research approach, where the researcher has contributed to push local planners to work *with* immigrants, whereas municipal planners have also been partners in the research project.

Politics of hospitality

Europe's hospitality crisis materialized itself clearly around 2015. The civic society mobilized and performed embodied activities with the aim of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into local communities. The many initiatives to create cross-cultural interaction presented in this special issue came about both as a genuine wish to engage with others and as a political protest against governmental policies, and they serve as a correction to restrictive national immigrant policies. The act of welcoming strangers is hence political; they are acts of everyday politics based on lived experiences in a shared world and the responsibility to act (Simonsen & Kofoed 2020). The last article in this special issue discusses the political potential in everyday encounters.

Lasse Kofoed, Kirsten Simonsen and Anniken Førde explore everyday hospitality and politics in cities in Denmark and Norway through embodied encounters in theatre, food, dance and music. Their article demonstrates how people mobilize and take action when faced with emergency. Local initiatives of welcoming refugees and producing meaningful meeting places are seen as ethical action, grounded in shared human experiences. Their contribution investigates how local initiatives and creative social strategies from local actors can oppose the production of fear of the unknown other and empower and include refugees and immigrants in local communities, and how these initiatives can potentially transform traditional practices and challenge formal spaces of democracy. Everyday hospitality and politics are discussed in the light of the transition in the Nordic welfare states to neoliberal governance, securitization of global mobility, the restructuring of public services, and the re-scaling of political and economic power that has made the debate around inclusion of refugees and immigrants in local communities and the welfare state central. All contributions in this special issue see cross-cultural encounters as having the potential to rework difference and envision a possible world where we can mutually change. Through everyday hospitality, people oppose discriminatory politics and point towards an alternative direction of living with difference.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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