

Signifying urban diversity through an imported label: Mexico City as an "intercultural city"

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Mexico City, as other federal entities in Mexico, has recently approved a law aiming at protecting and supporting migrants. The "Law of interculturalism, assistance to migrants and human mobility in the *Distrito Federal*", is the most comprehensive among all legislative initiatives in Mexico, as it does not only aim at tackling migrants' needs but also issues related to urban diversity more in general. Mexico City is mainly an emigration context but it is increasingly becoming a return migration city - as a consequence of the increase of deportations from the USA - and a transit city. New policies of control and the externalization of the northern frontier ("Programa de la Frontera Sur"), along with the increasing of violence against migrants have changed the transit routes, making the passage of migrants through Mexico City more intense. To a smaller extent, Mexico City is also a fast growing international migration destination (around 4% of foreign people living in the city). On the top of this, there is a significant presence of indigenous people and communities making up the great cultural diversity of the city (145 indigenous communities, 1,5 million people, counting for the 17% of the population, SEDEREC 2008). Interestingly, the intercultural discourse that the city has adopted is the result of its participation to the Council of Europe "Intercultural cities" programme. The latter started in 2008 with the aim to manage urban diversity – and especially migrant-related diversity – as an asset for cities, promoting strategies to: reorientate urban governance and policies, encourage diversity in governing bodies, promote the capacity to deal with conflict and develop a model of integration based on intercultural mixing and interaction. The programme has been conceived to face the challenges of superdiverse European cities and the widespread growing public concern about the failure of multiculturalist policies. These priorities differ from the ones that Mexico and Mexico City have been facing. Drawing from an on going qualitative research based on the analysis of official documents, interviews with policy makers, politicians and third sector actors, observant participation in a shelter for migrants in the

city, the paper focuses on how Mexico City local institutions have signified and approached ethnic and cultural diversity through this “interculturalism” discourse and on the governance of migration in the city. In particular we will explore:

- The reasons and the implications of adopting the European Intercultural Cities approach and how it has been interpreted, adapted and transformed to the specificities of Mexico City; the extent to which it is a case of “policy transfer” or more the seizing of an opportunity to serve specific political interests. During the Ebrard administration (2006-2012) Mexico City has been promoted as a national and international attractive destination through a combination of “right to difference” and urban marketing strategies (for example: same sexual marriage and abortion are legal in the city, differently from the rest of the country). In a similar way, the “intercultural” label is a way to market the city while promoting a strong and progressive program in terms of civil and social rights.
- The significance and content of the intercultural approach, the different aspects of diversity considered in the “Law of interculturalism”, its policy program and implementation, looking specifically at how different dimensions are “kept together” and harmonized (such as international, internal, return, transit migration; indigenous communities; young people; LGBTQ communities); is interesting to focus on the words used to label the new approach, as they show the struggle to find an overarching discourse to include different aspects and interests (interculturalism, human mobility, migration, hospitality etc.). While this looks as a positive approach likewise confusion and difficulties in establishing priorities have also emerged, as well as questionable issues (what does the assistance to migrants has to do with a cultural approach implicit in the “intercultural” discourse?)
- The political and governance issues arisen with the adoption of this model, the construction and implementation of the law and in particular the extent to which the aim of cutting across different policies has been achieved and the resistances coming from other departments and actors possibly addressed. The focus here is especially on issues of policy implementation, which to a good extent are related to the ill functioning of the organization in the public administration and to an

implicit ambiguity: while on paper the city was been declared as “hospitalaria” (welcoming) and third sector organizations are working in order to make it so, consistent sectors in the local government show resistance to put the principles of this vision in practice either because they do not see it as priority or are afraid to become attractive for economic and transit migrants.

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