



UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY POLICYMAKING BY EXPLORING ITS TOOLS AT THE URBAN LEVEL¹

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ABSTRACT: Cities are important grounds for cultural diversity, both in terms of perception and impact of diversity, and in terms of political and cultural reproduction. Nonetheless comparative studies with an urban focus are limited, partly due to methodological difficulties. The paper proposes to explore a policy tool approach in order to detect and compare given characteristics of cultural diversity policymaking at the urban level and to compare them internationally. Drawing on relevant examples of grant use to support cultural diversity in four European and American cities, the paper discusses how cultural diversity policy is conceived and fosters public action in the urban environment according to the policy tool adopted. This concept allows the technical and political dimensions of cultural diversity policy to be analysed and compared, and requires further attention both in the academic and policy debate.

KEYWORDS: cultural diversity, urban policy, policy tools, policy analysis, comparative studies.

RESUM: Les ciutats resulten molt propícies per a l'estudi de la diversitat cultural, tant en termes de percepció i impacte de la diversitat com en termes de reproducció política i cultural. Malgrat això, avui dia són pocs els estudis

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comparats amb un enfocament urbà, a causa de les dificultats metodològiques, entre altres qüestions. Aquest article proposa examinar un enfocament basat en instruments polítics per tal de detectar i comparar determinades característiques de l'elaboració de polítiques sobre diversitat cultural en l'àmbit urbà i fer-ne una comparació a escala internacional. Basant-nos en exemples il·lustratius sobre l'ús d'ajuts per al suport de la diversitat cultural en quatre ciutats d'Europa i d'Amèrica, aquest article investiga com es concep la política sobre diversitat cultural i com aquesta fomenta l'acció pública segons l'instrument polític adoptat. Aquest concepte, que requereix més atenció en el debat acadèmic i polític, ens permet analitzar i comparar les dimensions tècnica i política de les polítiques sobre diversitat cultural.

PARAULES CLAU: diversitat cultural, política urbana, instruments polítics, anàlisi de polítiques, estudis comparats.

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RESUMEN: Las ciudades resultan muy propicias para el estudio de la diversidad cultural, en términos tanto de percepción e impacto de la diversidad como de reproducción política y cultural. Sin embargo, hoy en día no abundan los estudios comparados que incorporan un enfoque urbano, en parte debido a dificultades metodológicas. Este artículo propone examinar un enfoque basado en instrumentos políticos que sirva para detectar y comparar determinadas características de las políticas sobre diversidad cultural en el ámbito urbano y compararlas a escala internacional. Basándonos en ejemplos ilustrativos sobre el uso de ayudas para el apoyo de la diversidad cultural en cuatro ciudades de Europa y América, el artículo investiga cómo se concibe la política sobre diversidad cultural y cómo ésta fomenta la acción pública en entornos urbanos según el instrumento político adoptado. Este concepto, que requiere una mayor atención en el debate académico y político, nos permite analizar y comparar las dimensiones técnicas y políticas de la política sobre diversidad cultural.

PALABRAS CLAVE: diversidad cultural, política urbana, instrumentos políticos, análisis de políticas, estudios comparados.



Introduction

The question of multiculturalism and cultural diversity has been approached in international debates and policymaking in different ways over the last 20 years (among others, Wieviorka, 2008; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2009). Diversity policy programmes vary significantly from country to country as they depend on different institutional and legal frameworks; they also vary in local contexts, depending on the social, political and broader urban conditions (Gagnon and Jouve, 2006). But research in cultural diversity policy has been developed with limited interest in the urban environment and policymaking arena, in part due to the methodological problems of making international comparisons and to the practical problems of transferring policy initiatives into such different contexts (Le Texier *et al.*, 2010).

This paper suggests that looking at the policy tool as an analytical unit instead of at entire cultural diversity programmes (Salamon, 2002) allows researchers to identify and compare specific technical and political issues. The first section briefly summarises the reasons why the urban environment should be considered when discussing cultural diversity policymaking. The second section introduces the concept of the policy tool with reference to diversity policy in the urban realm. Relevant examples of grant use in European and America cities are considered, and finally some conclusions are drawn.

The paper discusses how cultural diversity policy is conceived and fosters public action in the urban environment according to the policy tools adopted.

Cultural diversity policymaking in contemporary cities

Discussing cultural diversity policymaking from an urban perspective seems relevant for many reasons: because cities are the meeting place for different local and immigrant populations, cultures and subcultures, they offer an interesting field of observation for such social cohesion issues. The economic effects of coexistence are visible in cities and are increasingly used as a competitive factor for cities' attractiveness. Social and political movements concerned with diversity issues are located in cities, and political consensus among diverse populations generates growing urban political constituencies.



The way cultural diversity policies are implemented differs – sometimes radically – from city to city, and the effectiveness of such policies may depend on their relationship to the local context, among other factors. Cities are becoming important political and policy agents, especially in Europe (Ilczuk and Isar, 2009).

Because immigrant or culturally diverse populations sometimes live in concentrated sections of a city, they tend to be visible. Providing services in ways that take account of cultural diversity (as well as more conventional services) can mobilise local politicians to put forward highly local agendas in order to ensure their election as local political representatives (Jouve and Gagnon, 2006).

Cities concentrate skilled and highly educated people, providing them with the opportunity to encounter culturally diverse people (Amin, 2002). Cultural innovation and diversity feed one another in the city. Cultural reproduction and change can emerge from the intertwining of subcultures, but the environment and its contextual conditions can be crucial. Places matter not only in physical terms, but for their social and symbolic capital. Individuals find local resources and limitations in specific locations. Each policy tool tends to produce a typically different mode of interacting or recruiting social and subcultural groups or of providing specific types of actors (for example, local governments and bureaucrats, socio-cultural organisations) with resources and particular positions in the policy network.

In recent years the mobility of different kinds of population and the integration of subcultures and diverse groups of highly skilled workers has fostered debate on the so called ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2005). Due to its socio-economic, cultural and political relevance, cultural policy can be seen as instrumental in promoting urban cultural diversity. There may well be a danger of oversimplifying and exploiting cultural diversity and its manifestations in urban contexts, motivated by the objective of benefiting the economy. This sort of exploitation of culturally diverse urban areas sometimes draws in tourists, and may make such areas attractive to the creative class and industries (Clark, 2004; Fainstein, 2010). Urban planning measures can be oriented to foster cultural diversity in order to enhance its direct and indirect impact on the local economy. The complex debate surrounding this issue already demonstrates



that, besides the evident problems of cultural authenticity (Zukin, 2010), serious problems may result from the creation of niche, intra-urban competition, inefficient localisation of cultural amenities, congestion due to mass tourism and the like.

As mentioned, the political dimension of urban life also seems to be crucial. The basic political reason for focusing on the urban level is that the city is a laboratory for diversity: conflicts and potentials are more in evidence, political mobilisation and the gradual struggle of diverse groups is today common at the local level, even in societies which are not in any way isolated and in which there is a great deal of mobility. Gilbert's words on this question are pertinent: "Cities are the locus where the challenges of living together first emerge. [...] the process of participating in the new society is usually realised at the local level of services, practices and activities. It is at the local urban level that the notion of access, rights, participation and consultation take on an immediate and everyday meaning. It is also at the urban level that the social tensions and spatial conflicts occur in reaction to societal and structural conditions" (Gilbert, 2009, page 75). Furthermore, "The urban and metropolitan region is an intermediary level between the national dimension of immigration and the local services delivery where the practices of diversity and interventions to recognise pluralism are increasingly present and significant" (Gilbert, 2009, page 81).

In Western countries the recognition of cultural diversity generally happens at the national level and involves policy instruments (and ways of structuring public action) at levels higher than city government. City governments seldom have the legal power to create alternative regulatory regimes for culturally diverse groups, and rarely are they empowered to determine affirmative action. At the same time the city offers an interesting perspective on cultural diversity policy implementation and trans-sectoral integration since cities are crucial in providing services not only dealing with culture or cultural expression, but also with housing, education, employment and representation in public institutions and in taking decisions about urban planning and development issues, not simply about where to site places of worship or how to provide culturally sensitive local services.



The role of European cities in this policy field seems increasingly important in the light of current trends such as decentralisation, related to the timid public intervention at the European level, and the development of cultural strategies that require the partnership of private and non-profit actors. Although discussion of cultural strategies generally shares a common terminology, actual policies tend to vary greatly in their conceptions of contemporary culture and the practices that they lead to are very much context-driven.

A perspective on cultural diversity policy tools

When research in cultural diversity policy takes an urban perspective, methodological problems may arise, especially in comparing international results and implementation problems, and transferring programmes and general recommendations into different policy contexts. The comparison of entire programmes shows that cultural diversity policies can vary significantly because they are shaped by national institutional and legal frameworks, and at the local level they depend on contingent political equilibria, social capital and site-specific conditions. This paper discusses the idea of using the policy tool concept as an analytical unit (Salamon, 1989; Howlett, 1991), and it argues that this new perspective allows researchers to identify and compare specific technical and political questions in urban policymaking, despite significant differences in geographical contexts. Examples include direct government, regulation, grants and tax expenditure.

To understand relationships between the government and the governed in cultural policymaking requires a conceptual grid that is more nuanced than “carrot, stick and sermons” or other generalised categories (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998). Several policy tool debates at the European level are conducted with this level of generalisation, perceiving tools as merely technical devices (for example, excluding the possibility that tools sometimes exist before a policy’s goals are defined, and that they can shape policy networks and actions on the basis of vested interests).

The international debate focuses very closely on defining what the tools of government are, and adopts a range of positions to do so. Agreeing largely with Vedung (1998), Salamon argues that, “a tool, or instrument, of public



action can be defined as an identifiable method through which collective action is structured to address a public problem” (Salamon, 2002, page 19). This definition helps us to understand that each instrument has its own distinctive policy design characteristics, which tend to structure networks facing certain public problems. Even though particular characteristics cannot predict specific outcomes with certainty, public action can be specifically understood in terms of tools of government: direct government, regulation, government sponsored enterprises or agencies, grants, tax expenditure and many others. This paper focuses on a tool which is widely used in the cultural diversity policy field: the grant (Beam and Conlan, 2002).

There are important factors that policy tool studies consider only marginally, even though they appear to shed light on the effectiveness of selected policy tools; these factors include political pressure by social interests and parties, incrementalism, political ideas and ideologies that sometimes dominate the public scene. These factors and questions seem to have explanatory potentials that are not sufficient on their own to provide exhaustive solutions to the current changes in public action.

The extensive and systematic work of internationally renowned scholars, guided by Lester Salamon (2002), proposes and extends the categories and basic classifications of policy tools in several fields and develops an exhaustive analytical and interpretative set. In tool analysis, effectiveness, efficacy, equity, manageability, legitimacy and political feasibility are the most important characteristics, so that each tool can be described and evaluated. Other key features of tools that may have been selected include: coerciveness, directness, automaticity, and visibility of the tools (see: Salamon, 2002).

Tool features and dimensions have an analytical, interpretative and predictive capacity that can be fine-tuned in accordance with a wider set of questions regarding tool choice and implementation. A multitude of social factors create the circumstances in which these policy tool decisions are made; they may include norms and values, symbolic systems, ideologies, and cognitive scripts. In this paper the explanatory relevance of this concept can be tested on a set of diversity policy examples specifically selected from different urban contexts.



Grants for cultural diversity policy in four Western cities

A selection of cases of cultural diversity policy dynamics in cities of Western countries (Paris, Bristol, Montreal, Los Angeles) can highlight the issues related to the technical and political characteristics of the use of the grant tool and the relationships of these characteristics with the local context.

Dense concentrations of low income and immigrant population have historically been consolidated in the Parisian metropolitan region. The Chinese community, for instance, which since the 1980s has risen to an estimated 100,000 people, is mainly concentrated in the relatively central 3rd and 11th *arrondissements* and in Belleville (20th), a sort of natural laboratory for cultural diversity.

Centralised policymaking has always targeted equality in the treatment of immigrants in France. For example, an experiment in affirmative action involved setting a quota of pupils living in designated ‘priority zones’ to be admitted to higher education institutions, without regard to the students’ countries of origin. The issue was considered important enough for the city of Paris to create a special unit, called ‘Mission Integration’. In the early 2000s, this unit submitted an application to the co-financed Equal programme promoted by the European Union for a programme entitled ‘European Chinese and integration’. The grant covered 50 per cent of the budget and set specific requirements for the applicants. The goal of the programme was integration, specifically targeting work-oriented services to young and in particular female members of the Chinese community. The grant called for partnership with the local community, such as local associations and actors, but did not explicitly mention representatives of the Chinese community.

Fourot (2007) explains that although this programme typified several traditional characteristics of French national policymaking and included a typical set of participants, in part, the way in which it was to be implemented induced some innovation and potential criticality. The French tradition of making policy applicable to every citizen and equal in its treatment of different populations was under pressure because the programme was designed for one specific ethnic group, the Chinese community (ethnic origin as such has no legal validity in French law).



Although the hierarchies this grant brought about in a public action were no different from the traditional ones, the direct participation of the target community was limited. This case shows how the definition of the policy target in the international policy arena and its local implementation through non-coercive instruments such as the grant can eventually shape the policy contents, even if they partially contrast with the universal principles of a given policy context.

Latour's (2010) study of a neighbourhood in the city of Bristol showed how policies were implemented for the management of cultural diversity in a port city with significant immigration. Latour analysed cultural diversity and inequality in the neighbourhood of St Paul's and Easton in the period 1991 to 2008, under the lens of government strategies with reference to social and cultural associations. There were several ethnic- or religion-based (Caribbean, Somali, Muslim) associations in the area; because of persistent tensions between these groups they encountered difficulties in forming a common alliance to tackle the inequalities faced by all the minority groups. St Paul's Unlimited Community Partnership, a leftist association aimed at producing services that respond to multiple and diverse groups, embraced a continuous dialogue with the community through bimonthly public meetings. But in 2007, the partnership's grant of public money, which since 2001 had enabled it to function, was cut off.

The Bristol example clearly poses the question of institutionalisation of cultural diversity through different social, ethnic and cultural (apparently only technical) categories related to public support. The UK government at that time was attempting to promote community cohesion and citizen public representation politically in order to strengthen minority groups' sense of national belonging and was providing funding to cultural associations, which were sometimes defined on an ethno-religious basis.

Liette Gilbert (2009) described two interesting examples that shed light on how simple tool analysis explains the structuring of public action in urban cultural diversity policymaking. In Montreal, the Bureau des Affaires Interculturelles (Intercultural Affairs Office) supports different public services and inter-community relations, and coordinates various administrative branches in matters of immigration and cultural diversity. More generally,



Quebec developed a partnership between the Ministère des Relations avec les Citoyens et de l'Immigration (Ministry for Citizen Relations and Immigration), and a network of community-based service providers that typically mediate between the provincial government and immigrants. As an aspect of the institutionalisation of cultural diversity one can consider how grant-in-aid to non-profit bodies can systematically nurture the activity of intercultural organisations in cities.

Secondly, Gilbert (2009) describes how in the USA community-based services offering help with various legal and social issues are generally supported by the federal Homeland Security's Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. In California, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) offers information and education to newcomers and liaises with a network of more than 125 immigrant organisations. Grants support a multi-ethnic organisation that advocates for immigrant groups and organises campaigns on civil rights and working conditions. The production of services and reproduction of sub-cultural (for example, workers' union) activities is contrasting the support that each organisation gives to specific ethnic groups.

Conclusions: Understanding urban and cultural diversity through its policy tools

The different interpretations of multiculturalism and cultural diversity (among others: mosaic or hodgepodge multiculturalism: Joppke and Lukes, 1999; superdiversity: Vertovec, 2007) clearly have a strong influence on the conceptualisation, approach and actual shaping of local cultural diversity policies. Nonetheless the structure of public action can be described in terms of the policy tools selected; this structure helps to explain technical and political links in the provision of cultural service, in the recognition of a political constituency, and in general in the institutionalisation of given activities for managing cultural diversity problems.

The first example showed that diverse communities and socio-cultural groups were labelled as such in order to face a set of urban problems through the use of grants. This label was partly a technical measure for shaping the policy problem and tackling it with a specific intervention. Yet the decision to



target a specific minority population or preferring to support particular providers of cultural diversity services is a political choice, implemented through a specific policy tool.

An examination of grant mechanisms helps to illustrate how much tool selection can shape control devices. Similarly, the kinds of cultural and political activities that are included are somewhat determined by the design of the grant. It would be difficult to attribute this to an explicit ideological orientation towards any particular interpretation of multiculturalism or cultural diversity. Nonetheless the opportunities for intervention structured by this policy tool clearly have a more direct effect than other tools in terms of how cultural service provision and public action become embedded in existing contexts or otherwise.

We have shown that focusing on policy tools for cultural diversity and the context in which they are selected and deployed can explain the public recognition and promotion of cultural diversity in given circumstances more effectively than by focusing on multicultural approaches as a whole or on entire policy programmes for cultural diversity.

The advantage of opting to focus on policy tools is revealed when investigating how cultural diversity policy tools impact urban contexts. In cities that have had a comprehensive political debate about the problems and potential policy for a culturally diverse population, where the national legal and institutional framework has developed a solid context and regulations – designed to be inclusive – are in place, together with explicit measures for accommodating cultural diversity (e.g., Montreal), then individual urban and cultural diversity policies tend to have less impact on the social exclusion that is implicitly being addressed by cultural diversity policies.

The mechanisms selected for deploying cultural diversity policies can be charged with political implications and values to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed one might consider the pressure exerted by social and urban movements and simply by diverse political constituency over policy measures. Whatever the original approach, the final outcomes are part of a more complex and unpredictable process that is only partially structured by policy tools.



Besides being expanded and used in single-city policy evaluation, the policy tool approach presented here can lead to a better comparative understanding of cultural diversity policy trends in Western cities and beyond. Further research and attention to policy tool analysis at the urban level seem required in the cultural diversity policy debate. Such inquiry might show how large programmes (for example, those of the EU) influence the range of tools in urban cultural diversity policymaking or how such tools become institutionalised.

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