

Preface

European cities, in particular the major cities with strong economies, attract immigrants from all over the world. Today, these metropolises possess a long experience of integrating a highly heterogeneous and culturally diverse immigrant population into the local community. And yet the integration of increasing numbers of immigrants and interethnic relations between population groups with and without migration background have become hotly debated issues. Long-established policies of dealing with immigrant populations and of “managing” diversity and difference are becoming more and more inappropriate and are thus currently disputable. In the end the cities and municipalities pay the price for integration processes that do not work – although they are not in a position to regulate immigration flows themselves and must depend on national and federal legislation in most immigration-related issues. For this reason, cities and municipalities have a genuine interest in creating successful local integration policies; municipal political decision-makers are searching for innovative concepts that also take into account social interactions in the local context.

Integration is a concept that bears increasing political weight, as concerns about the cohesion of society have grown steadily due to global processes and local events that stress cultural differences. Despite the Europe-wide debate about integration, there has been a significant lack of scientific knowledge on how cultural interactions actually develop between individuals and groups of different ethnic backgrounds, in contexts where they meet on a daily basis. There has also been a lack of data on how these interactions are related to an interchange of skills and attitudes, and how they bear on the social status of the individuals and groups engaged in such contact. The research project GEITONIES (which means “neighbourhood” in Greek and is simultaneously an acronym for “Generating Interethnic Tolerance and Neighbourhood Integration in European Urban Spaces”) aims to fill these existing gaps and address these issues from a relational perspective through the lens of place, on the assumption that, in contemporary multi-ethnic European cities, spaces of intercultural communication are vital to promoting cohesion, participation and inclusion in society.

Generally speaking, GEITONIES was concerned with how interethnic interactions – in local neighbourhoods, in European cities – influence the creation of a more cohesive and integrated society. This research report, which is thematically focused on the connections between social contacts and neighbourhood embeddedness, is an outcome of the contribution of the Viennese team within GEITONIES. The project was funded by the European Union’s 7th Framework programme. The project’s coordinator was FLUL (Department of Geography of the University of Lisbon/CEG), which was also the leader of Cluster B5 of the IMISCOE Network of Excellence. The participating institutions were the following: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa (Geography Department, FLUL; coordinator), Lisbon; IMES, University of Amsterdam;

International Migrations Research Unit, University of Deusto, Bilbao; Regional Development and Policy Research Unit (RDPRU), University of Macedonia, Thessalonica; Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw; Institute for Urban and Regional Research (ISR), Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna.

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Josef Kohlbacher
Ursula Reeger
Philipp Schnell