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Article

The European Ideal of an Inclusive City: Interculturalism and "Good Social Practices" in Barcelona

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Abstract
Within the contemporary debate about what could be broadly called the "challenge of inclusion," three major interrelated trends can be identified: First, a growing dissatisfaction with the traditional approach known as multiculturalism, which in Europe led to the emergence of interculturalism as a new approach to managing cultural diversity; second, the shared acknowledgment that the concept of diversity must be reconsidered in terms of super-diversity and properly understood through an intersectional lens; third, the emergence of cities as pivotal new players in a multi-level framework. Notwithstanding the growing interest in the topic of inclusion, the theoretical level is still limited by strong barriers among different disciplines, and the practices of promotion of social inclusion often result in a few specific projects characterized by an episodic nature and, consequently, by very limited impact in the middle- to long-term. This article critically analyzes how Barcelona is re-conceptualizing and developing its understanding of interculturalism as the basis for building its self-image as a European model of an inclusive city. After a brief overview of the formulation of interculturalism as a contemporary approach to managing diversity at the city level, I analyze the development and implementation of interculturalism in Barcelona. Finally, by focusing on some initiatives selected in the project Bones Pràctiques Socials, I critically discuss some of the main opportunities and challenges for the promotion of social inclusion stemming from the cooperation between municipal institutions and social actors in Barcelona.

Keywords
city governance; cultural diversity; European ideal; inclusive city; interculturalism; social inclusion

Issue
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1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that, as a consequence of the increase in circulation of people and information, cultural diversity is by now structurally embedded in the economies and societies of most countries (Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2007, p. 5). However, at the same time, the phenomenon of diversity carries with it a disruptive potential, driving tensions and conflicts, often related to discrimination, power imbalances, and various other forms of exclusion and inequality. Accordingly, societies are required to deal with what can be broadly called the "challenge of inclusion," that is, the challenge of finding social and political solutions enabling people with different socio-cultural backgrounds and worldviews to live together as equal members of the same community.

At least since the end of WWII, most countries—especially Western democracies—abandoned traditional assimilationist approaches, embracing what has been defined as a "differentialist turn" (Brubaker, 2001): In contrast to the ideal of a quick disappearance of minorities in the social melting pot, this perspective was grounded in the recognition of the value of cultural diversity and the implicit commitment to protect and promote it. In this context, multiculturalism progressively emerged as the new paradigm for social cohesion and inclusion in the contemporary era of diversity.

Nevertheless, although to this day it can be still regarded as the main alternative to political assimilationism, multiculturalism has been subject to an increasing deal of criticism. At the beginning of the 2000s, propelled by what can be considered a rhetorical narrative of a general "retreat from multiculturalism" (Orgad, 2015, p. 114), a new approach to cultural diversity emerged that, especially in the European context, was proposed as the solution to the various flaws of multiculturalism and the remedy to its failures—this was interculturalism, which since the early 2000s has been officially embraced by the European Union.

Interculturalism is characterized as a city-based approach grounded on a re-conceptualization of the concept of diversity and focused on the promotion of positive interactions between individuals from different cultural groups. As a result, cities have become real laboratories for the construction of the European approach to diversity management and the promotion of social inclusion. This is especially the case of the city of Barcelona, which, against the typically episodic way most cities commit themselves to promote cultural diversity, has officially embraced interculturalism, pioneering its implementation as an institutional paradigm for long-term city policies.

The present article is aimed at contributing to the discussion about the formulation and diffusion of the European ideal of the inclusive city as an intercultural city by analyzing the case of Barcelona. In particular, on the one side, I am interested in how Barcelona has been transforming the theoretical tenets of interculturalism into a basic resource in order to develop long-term policies for the governance of cultural diversity and to promote itself as a European model of an inclusive city. On the other side, by focusing on what the city's institutions have identified and promoted as Barcelona's "good practices," I critically discuss the role, challenges, and opportunities that, in this process, are played by social actors.

In the next section I trace a brief overview of how, in the context of the narrative of a general crisis of multiculturalism, interculturalism successfully emerged as the new European approach to managing diversity. Then, I move to discuss the different steps through which Barcelona progressively built its long-term and sustainable commitment to interculturalism. Finally, by focusing on the concrete case of the project Bones Pràctiques Socials (BPS, which translates to "good social practices"), I consider the concrete experiences of those social actors working for the promotion of social inclusion in Barcelona, critically discussing the role of civil society and the main opportunities and challenges emerging from the field.

As concerns the research methodology, the article is grounded both on secondary sources in English, Spanish, and Catalan, and on a five-month qualitative fieldwork carried out in Barcelona from November 2021 to March 2022. In particular, some of the information provided in Section 3 is grounded on semi-structured interviews that I conducted with some of the key people working at the formulation, development, and implementation of the two Barcelona interculturality plans, namely Dani de Torres (former Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue), Khalid Ghali (current Commissioner), and Ramon Sanahuja (municipal government official and interculturality policy expert who worked at the formulation of the first plan with de Torres and continues to be currently engaged in the promotion of interculturalism in Barcelona). Finally, Section 4 is grounded on semi-structured interviews with a representative number of coordinators (kept anonymous for privacy concerns) of Barcelona's "good social practices" and on a series of participant observations during the working routine and the implementation of such practices.

2. The Crisis of Multiculturalism and the Rise of European Interculturalism

By the 1960s, a major shift had taken place in most immigration countries. On the one side, it had become clear that contrary to what many theorists of assimilationism had been promising the dissolution of cultural diversity in a social melting pot was not something that would be achieved—if ever—in a short period. On the other hand, the general "human rights revolution" following the end of WWII progressively led to the rejection of racialist ideologies traditionally motivating illiberal relations towards given cultural groups and minorities in favor of the affirmation of an ideal of equality of races and peoples (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, pp. 34–35).

In the context of this so-called "differentialist turn" (Brubaker, 2001), multiculturalism progressively emerged both as a normative theory and a political discourse. As concerns its theoretical foundation, multiculturalism is ultimately grounded on the following two core assumptions: (a) Each culture must be acknowledged a certain kind of value and, accordingly, be protected; and (b) members of minorities can be part of the society while maintaining their distinctive collective identities.

Since its formulation, multiculturalism has not only attracted predictable opposition from illiberal perspectives nostalgic for the old coercive assimilationism, but it has also been the target of "friendly fire" from those who agree on the recognition of the value of cultural diversity and on the need to include minorities on an equal footing. In general, criticism has focused on the "groupist tilt" intrinsic to multiculturalism (Joppke, 2017, Chapter 5). Indeed, to preserve, protect, and enhance cultural minorities, multiculturalism seems to be bound to cultural essentialism and it may foster a perilous tendency to submit the interests of individuals to those of cultural groups.

As concerns more empirical criticisms, standard anti-multiculturalism arguments claim that, by focusing on intergroup differences and enhancing the rights of

minorities against the majority, this approach (a) reinforces a dualistic discourse opposing minorities to the majority and (b) hinders intergroup interactions and the development of shared commonalities, thus (c) fostering tension, conflicts, segregation, and the creation of parallel societies; all this, in turn, (d) deepens socio-economic inequality and (e) creates fertile ground for the rise of extremism and terrorism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, pp. 12–13). It should be noted that, despite their intuitive and rhetorical appeal, many of these points have not been supported by sufficient research. For example, as concerns the connection between multiculturalism and segregation, it has not been proven that the latter has been the result of multicultural policies rather than, say, the failure of education, housing, or labor policies (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

Nevertheless, criticisms have continued to escalate both in the political and academic context, to the point that, by the turn of the millennium, many took for granted that multiculturalism had failed its promises and that we could not but accept the "death" of multiculturalism and salute the dawn of a "post-multicultural" era (Zapata-Barrero, 2017, 2019). Although the rhetorical scope of these claims has been convincingly underlined (e.g., Joppke, 2017; Kymlicka, 2010; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010), it is undeniable that, at the rhetorical level, a general "multicultural backlash" (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010) did actually take place, in particular in the European context. Notably, the Council of Europe (2008, p. 9) declared that "what had until recently been a preferred policy approach, conveyed in shorthand as 'multiculturalism,' had been found inadequate." Similar views were expressed in a report by UNESCO (2008). A few years later, in 2011, important state leaders such as David Cameron, Angela Merkel, and Nicolas Sarkozy declared the failure of multiculturalism in their respective states (Bowen, 2011).

It was in the context of this (at least rhetorical) crisis of multiculturalism that interculturalism appeared on stage as a sort of deus ex machina. To be true, the concept of interculturalism was not new: Already since the 1970s the term was used in Quebec to oppose the multiculturalist approach of the Canadian federal government. However, while this contraposition was ultimately grounded on political reasons connected to the rise of Quebecois separatism against Anglophone Canada (Chiasson, 2012), the scope of the European understanding of interculturalism—at least in the intention of its advocates—was aimed at reaching a whole new level. Indeed, interculturalism was intended to be nothing less than a "Copernican revolution" for diversity management (Meer et al., 2016, Chapter 4), thus representing the ultimate approach to effectively promoting social inclusion.

In order to directly address and overcome the main criticisms regarding multiculturalism, interculturalism is proposed as an approach grounded on the three following core assumptions (Zapata-Barrero, 2015, 2019):

1. Diversity categories are self-ascribed, dynamic, and not ethnically based.
2. Positive intergroup and interpersonal contacts at the local level are the main way to achieve social inclusion.
3. Well-managed diversity represents an advantage for societies and can generate public benefits.

To be sure, many doubts have been raised about the actual scope of interculturalism as a revolutionary theory for diversity management. In fact, contrary to multiculturalism which can be considered a fully-fledged political theory, interculturalism suffers from some relevant flaws both at the theoretical and empirical level—as its own advocates recognize (e.g., Meer et al., 2016; Zapata-Barrero, 2015, 2019). Among other things, interculturalism still relies more on intuition than on rigorous research: For example, notwithstanding the central role that interaction has in the interculturalist account, no theory of intercultural contact has been formulated, nor have interculturalists dealt with the vast literature concerning the so-called "contact theory" (see, for example, Pettigrew, 1998; Vezzali & Stathi, 2017).

Nevertheless, despite these theoretical limitations, the European Union enthusiastically embraced interculturalism, which has become an important resource for the promotion of an approach—so to say—"made in Europe." Such an "intercultural turn" must be understood in connection with the consolidation of three crucial trends in the contemporary debate about diversity management:

1. The widespread reformulation of the concept of "diversity" in terms of "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007) crucially contributes to moving the focus from a "groupist perspective" to the individual level. Indeed, in this new sense, the scope of diversity is no more limited to the traditional categories of ethnicity and nationality, connected with large, identifiable, and organized groups, but is extended to include many other interconnected diversity categories (sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, etc.) which must be understood from the individual perspective.
2. A renewed focus on integration explicitly rejected assimilationism but also cultural essentialism, cultural relativism, and the general *laissez-faire* approach, which has been typical for societies after the differentialist turn (Joppke, 2017). Specifically targeting migrants, this dimension usually refers to the promotion of a shared language and some principles, requiring, in general, a commitment to the core values of liberalism.
3. Cities emerged as pivotal new players, in opposition to the traditional emphasis on the role of the national government. In particular, cities—as the actual loci where diversity is experienced—are considered the real stakeholders for diversity

management. In fact, given their concrete proximity to the phenomenon of diversity, as well as their competences over softer policy areas (such as health, housing, and social services), cities, meaning both institutions and civil society, are in a vantage point to take action.

To actively promote the diffusion of interculturalism and its implementation in the city, in 2008 the Council of Europe and the European Commission launched the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC Programme), a platform aimed at giving "support to cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies" (https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities). In this framework, an index was developed, allowing—through different indicators—to measure and rank the level of interculturality of cities. Once joining the network, cities commit to the tenets of interculturalism to collect the data for getting ranked on the ICC Index and promote and implement intercultural initiatives. In this way, cities become the real laboratories for the construction of the European intercultural approach. The success of the intercultural narrative is testified by the extraordinary expansion of the network of cities taking part in the program—the number of which has increased from 11 cities in 2008 to the current 157 cities.

However, despite this success, it is difficult to disagree with criticisms remarking that all this enthusiasm often results in nothing more than empty and "do-good" rhetoric. In fact, most intercultural practices seem ultimately to consist of a few specific projects characterized by an episodic nature and by a very limited impact in the middle- to long-term.

Nevertheless, in this context, Barcelona stands out for a steady and explicit commitment to setting the challenge of inclusion at the center of its political agenda by embracing interculturalism and striving to institutionalize an intercultural model of governance on a long-term basis. Progressively emerging as a widely recognized model for inclusive policies (Bazurli, 2019; Peña-López, 2019; Triviño-Salazar, 2020), Barcelona is becoming one of the main drivers of the intercultural discourse.

3. The "Firework" of Barcelona Interculturalism

According to data from the Instituto National de Estadística (https://www.ine.es/index.htm), Barcelona is the capital of the autonomous community of Catalonia and the second-most populous municipality of Spain with a population of 1,664.182 inhabitants. The city stands out for its high levels of cultural diversity: Indeed, about 27.8% of its population is represented by foreign-born residents, coming from 183 different countries and speaking no less than 300 different languages (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021, p. 4).

The theme of cultural diversity was explicitly set in the city's political agenda as early as 1997 when the City Council approved the first and pioneering municipal plan for interculturality. A few years later, in 2002, due to a sudden increase in the arrival of international migrants, the first municipal immigration plan was formulated. Very interestingly, this immigration plan was approved with the unanimous consensus of all the political groups represented in the City Council: As we will see, this political legitimation is one of the most important characteristics of the Barcelona approach to diversity management, crucially contributing to its sustainability.

A turning point was marked in 2007 with the elections of the mayor Jordi Hereu (social-democratic/federalist party). Hereu immediately set immigration and social inclusion at the center of his political agenda. In the very same year of his election, he created the political role of Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue with the mandate to develop a new immigration plan and, secondly, a plan for the promotion of cultural diversity and social inclusion.

Once again, in order to secure the sustainability of the immigration plan, Commissioner Dani de Torres negotiated the unanimous consent of all political groups. At the same time, thanks to the contribution of the philosopher and anthropologist Carlos Giménez—one of the most prominent theorists of interculturalism—the city's first theoretical framework for the implementation of intercultural practices was created. In this way, sometime before the official formulation of European interculturalism, Barcelona was already pioneering the adoption of this approach paving the way for the "intercultural turn" of European cities. Barcelona's interculturalism was grounded on the following three principles (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2010, pp. 11–12), which clearly already resembled the basic tenets of European interculturalism:

1. Principle of equality, conceived of respect for the equal rights, obligations, and social opportunities of all citizens against situations of exclusion and discrimination.
2. Principle of recognition of diversity, which refers to the need to recognize diversity "understood in a broad sense" (this principle translates the re-conceptualization of diversity in terms of superdiversity, which is at the core of European interculturalism; at the same time, it also emphasizes the opportunities represented by socio-cultural diversity "linked to cultural enrichment but also to the economic and social spheres," thus also incorporating interculturalism's core assumption of "diversity advantage").
3. The principle of positive interaction, also specified as "the one that defines the interculturalist approach and differentiates it from other philosophies such as multiculturalism" and which states that coexistence can only be achieved through day-to-day contact and dialogue among all citizens (in this case, too, one can see a clear resemblance

to the other principle of European interculturalism, i.e., "positive contact").

The formulation of these principles has been the spark that ignited the firework of Barcelona's interculturalism. In fact, these principles provided a general, uncontestable, framework able to put together the various interests of different stakeholders: On the one side, civil society was reassured about its central role both as the target and as the agent of the intercultural transition, seeing the potential for space and opportunities; on the other side, the political and institutional representatives could get a clearer idea about the directions which the ideal of the Barcelona intercultural city was aiming at, and could find motivation in engaging with it in order to strengthen their ties with the civil society. In this way, right from the outset, the intercultural narrative revealed its potential as a precious resource and driver of socio-political changes.

By sheer coincidence, the year 2008 was declared the "European year of intercultural dialogue," thus setting the theme of cultural diversity under the spotlight at both national and transnational levels and reinforcing its appeal. In this context, de Torres developed the Barcelona Intercultural Dialogue Programme, calling on civil society to cooperate in the organization of hundreds of activities and debates in the city. It was in this context that de Torres had the chance to get in touch with representatives of the ICC Programme that was about to be launched. In this way, Barcelona got involved in the program from its very beginning, actually helping to shape it.

In October 2008 the City Council unanimously approved an Immigration Working Plan 2008–2011. Among the specific measures set forth, one referred to the "drafting of a municipal plan for interculturality" that should have become the framework of reference for strategies and practices concerning cultural diversity (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2010, p. 14).

The Barcelona Interculturality Plan (Pla Barcelona Interculturalitat) 2010–2020 is the result of intense and complex work carried out from late 2008 to 2010. The strategy for the official implementation of interculturalism as a city policy was grounded on (a) a participative methodology, adopted both during the plan's formulation and implementation, and (b) transversalization, that is, the engagement of all the different areas and departments of the municipality in both the formulation and implementation of the plan. The basic idea was to make interculturalism a lens for driving a process of rethinking the city as a whole.

To implement the participative methodology, representatives from all the areas and departments of the municipality and from the civil society, as well as experts and scholars, were directly involved in the drafting process. After surveys, interviews, working groups, and data collection, the findings of this participatory process were analyzed and used for the final drafting. In 2010, the 10-year plan was finally approved, once again, with the unanimous consensus of the City Council.

Centered on the three core principles of Barcelona's interculturalism, the plan specifies a detailed interculturality decalogue consisting of 10 strategic linchpins representing guidelines for the implementation of initiatives aimed at fostering social inclusion and coexistence in diversity. Soon after the publication of the plan, a team was organized under the name of Programa Barcelona Interculturalitat, whose members were responsible for the different concrete actions to be implemented.

For the following 10 years, up to 2020, a great number of actors have been working in the framework of the plan. First, to stimulate intercultural practices and spread the intercultural perspective, a service of free intercultural training programs was established, targeting different professional and social areas of the city. Second, the City Council actively promoted a wide range of specific intercultural projects by providing financial and technical support to NGOs and NPOs working in the field to elicit initiatives and engagement from civil society. In 2011, the project Espai Avinyó was launched, aimed at offering (cultural and artistic) spaces of dialogue and interaction for promoting the city's cultural diversity.

Finally, the Barcelona Anti-Rumor Strategy was created, which became one of the most interesting outcomes of the participative process of construction of the plan itself and an interesting bottom-up practice of the city's governance of cultural diversity. In fact, during the plan's drafting process, participants identified as one of the key obstacles to social inclusion the lack of mutual knowledge among citizens, fostering, in turn, stereotypes, prejudices, and, in general, rumors. In connection with this concern and as a way to proactively address the citizens' demands for intervention, in July 2010, a number of NGOs encouraged by the City Council created the Barcelona Anti-Rumor Network. The network is committed to engaging in anti-rumor actions, both inside the network (i.e., within member organizations) and out, by organizing awareness and prevention campaigns, free projects and activities, and free training.

Having been approved with the unanimous consent of all political groups, the plan enjoyed an extremely solid political legitimacy, which allowed it to survive without problems through a succession of three municipal governments belonging to different political groups: 2007–2011, the social-democratic/federalist party; 2011–2019, the liberal-democratic/Christian-democratic party; 2019-ongoing, the social-democratic/republican civil list. As the year 2020, and the end of the 10-year plan, was approaching, Barcelona was ready to re-examine the results obtained and the current situation of the city in order to launch a new interculturality plan. After negotiating, once more, unanimous political consent to the plan, current Commissioner Khalid Ghali started working on the new drafting, which was carried out by consolidating the two pillars of the first plan, that is, transversality and participation. The final aim was to

create a new framework able to address the criticisms and incorporate the lessons learned during the implementation of the previous plan, as well as re-tune it, adapting it to the context of the second decade of the 21st century.

The second Barcelona Interculturality Plan 2021–2030 was published at the end of May 2021. Three new pillars were added to Barcelona's intercultural strategy: dynamism, self-criticism, and territorialization. Dynamism is conceived as a reaction against a certain ideological rigidity perceived during the implementation of the first plan to redefine interculturalism as a "transforming process in a constant state of learning and construction" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021, p. 5). Self-criticism refers to the necessity of developing indicators allowing for constant monitoring of both the implementation of the plan and the situation related to cultural diversity in Barcelona to promptly detect issues and needs and elaborate strategies of targeted intervention. Finally, it was widely acknowledged that the first plan was still affected by top-down dynamics—enacted not only by the institutions but also by some of the associations involved—which had not succeeded in effectively rooting interculturalism at the micro-level of the neighborhoods. Much more (participative) work of territorialization was needed in order to spread a sustainable intercultural practice in the *barrios* (neighborhoods) of the city.

The following two diagrams describe, respectively, the relations between Barcelona's interculturalism and European interculturalism (Figure 1) and the process of development of Barcelona as an intercultural city (Figure 2).

In these last thirteen years since the publication of the first plan, a growing number of actors have engaged in the promotion of cultural diversity in the framework of Barcelona's interculturalism which has by now become a major framework of reference for the promotion of cultural diversity and social inclusion—as initially intended. As we have seen, the process of implementation of interculturalism still has a long way to go before Barcelona can truly claim to be an intercultural city. The representatives of the city's intercultural program themselves acknowledge that the city did not succeed in effectively implementing all the intercultural practices envisaged in the first plan and that the most relevant result in the first 10 years of work has rather been the consolidation and dissemination of an intercultural narrative within different levels and sectors of the institutions and the civil society.

Notwithstanding the "perfectibility" of Barcelona's implementation of interculturalism—which is explicitly acknowledged in the second plan—the city crucially demonstrates that interculturalism can inform the development and progressive implementation of a sustainable model of governance of cultural diversity, characterized by a consolidated and methodology and structure, and by a certain level of institutionalization. In this sense, there is no doubt that the city represents a benchmark both at a national and international level and it has been playing a central role in the process of conceptualization and development of European interculturalism and the European ideal of the inclusive city, providing an extremely interesting point of reference both for researchers and policymakers.

4. Promoting Social Inclusion in Intercultural Barcelona: Challenges and Opportunities for Social Actors

The implementation of interculturalism in Barcelona, grounded on participative methodology, transversalization, dynamism, self-criticism, and territorialization

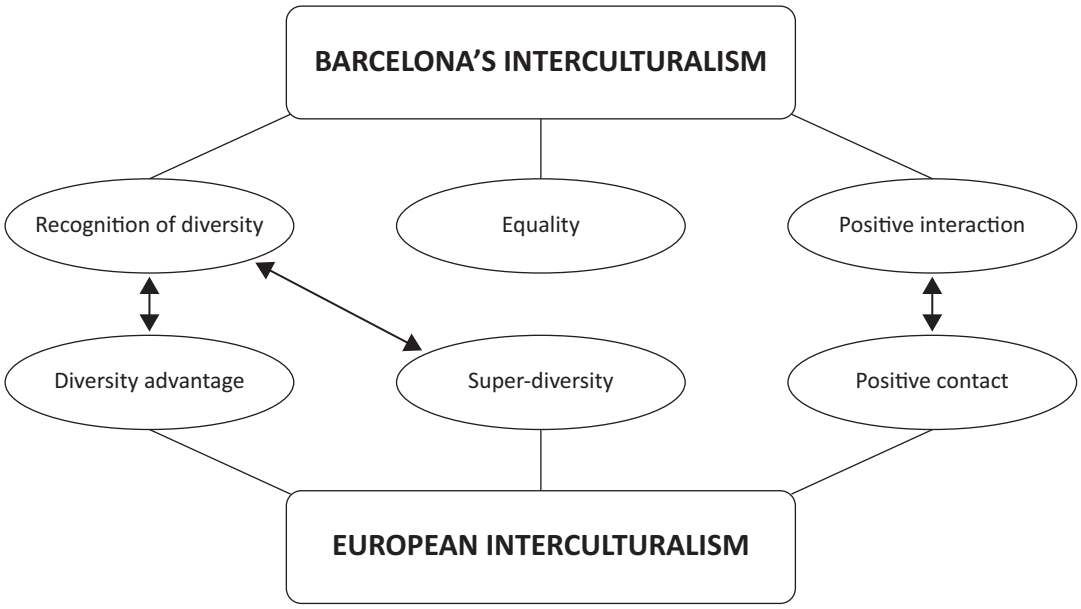

Figure 1. Barcelona's interculturalism and European interculturalism.

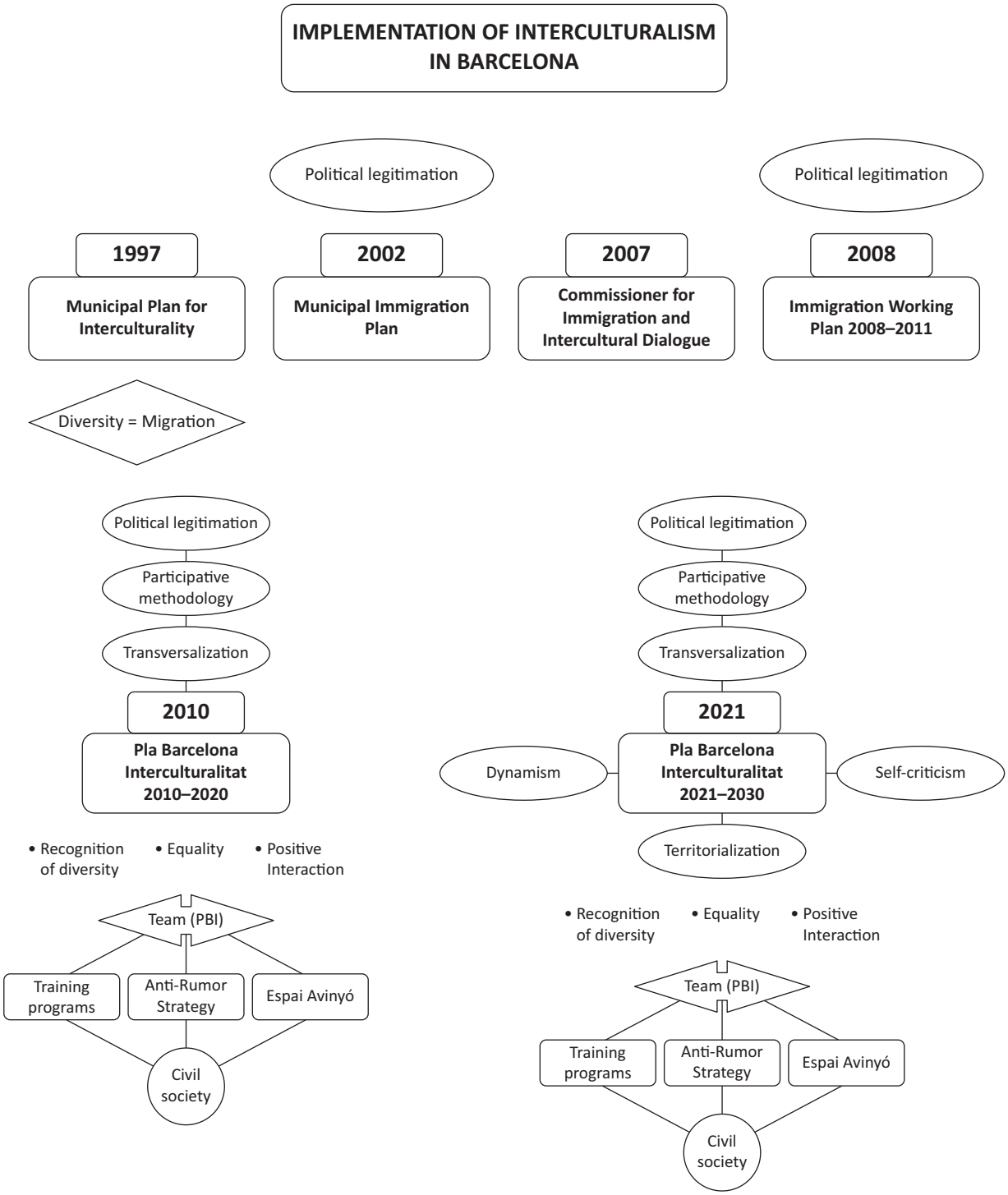

Figure 2. Process of development of Barcelona as an intercultural city.

has been ultimately fueled by the intense cooperation between municipal institutions and civil society. Such dynamics, which have become one of the hallmarks of the promotion of social inclusion in the city, are not something new and must be properly understood in the framework of the traditional governance model of the city.

Extensively studied and analyzed, the "Barcelona model" of governance is the ultimate result of the process of decentralization in post-Franco Spain, characterized by the devolution of power from the national government to regions and cities (Blakeley, 2005, 2010; Blanco, 2015). Acknowledging its limits as concerns the delivery of services for social welfare as well as in the implementation of social policies, the City Council resolved to let the process of decentralization continue within the city itself, dividing it into 10 districts and 73 neighborhoods, and distributing power and competencies. This operation, in

turn, had the expected effect of activating and empowering civil society which, ever since, has played a crucial role in the area of social policies in Barcelona (Ferrando & Triviño-Salazar, 2022, p. 13).

Interculturalism was easily incorporated into this long-standing model, enrooting in the initiatives of civil society the practices of promotion of social inclusion and connecting them with a variety of social services aimed at overcoming various forms of inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. Municipal institutions, on their part, contributed by providing resources such as technical support, spaces, and financial resources.

However, as criticisms have often underlined (e.g., Blakeley, 2005), it may well be that all that glitters is not gold. Indeed, as concerns social policies in general, and intercultural practices and promotion of social inclusion in particular, the generous support of the government comes, in turn, with a constant monitoring and evaluation of the development of the initiatives. In so doing, the city government maintains a de facto steering role in the effective implementation of social practices, thus posing a limit to the agency of civil society and the possibility for innovation (Blakeley, 2005).

More specifically, while, on the one hand, the government promotes and empowers civil society by providing resources and support, on the other hand, this may perversely result in an addiction to governmental funds, inevitably connected with competition to grab financial resources. This, of course, becomes an opportunity for *divide et impera* strategies and, in general, provides the government a golden chance to direct the initiatives of civil society according to its interests. Indeed, it can be argued that a significant dimension of the agency of civil society and its political participation is, to some extent, connected to its possibility to take stances against the directives of the government—something which is well-known in the vast literature about social movements and democracy (e.g., Della Porta & Diani, 2014).

In what follows, to go beyond the overall picture of Barcelona as an intercultural city and to move some steps towards a deeper understanding of the role of civil society in the promotion of social inclusion, let us focus on the project BPS. Launched in 2012 by the Area of Social Rights, Global Justice, Feminism, and LGBTI Affairs (henceforth merely called the Area), the project is aimed at selecting, sharing, exchanging, and disseminating good practices of promotion of social inclusion and social welfare implemented either from the Area itself or in collaboration with NGOs. As explained on the web page of the project, a good practice is defined as "a coherent set of useful, relevant and significant actions (experiences, projects, activities, actions) that have obtained good results in a given context and that are expected to obtain similar results in similar contexts" (BPS, n.d., author's translation).

Every year, based on a set of criteria, an institutional commission selects a number of initiatives the information from which is inserted in a "bank of good practices." Besides the requirement for eligibility (i.e., "adequacy and relevance" of the practice), the basic criteria for the evaluation are defined in terms of transferability, innovation, planning and processes, evaluation and impact, and continuous improvement and quality; finally, some added value criteria are leadership, participation, transparency and communication, optimization of resources, sustainability, transversality, and comprehensiveness (BPS, n.d., author's translation).

Considering that those recognized as social practices are the very initiatives that, for Barcelona's institutions, are supposed to be the flagship of Barcelona's social governance, analyzing their organization and implementation can provide particularly precious insights: Indeed, by diving into the reality of the experiences of the social actors implementing those practices, we have the chance to get a more concrete picture of the role of the civil society in such a model, as well as some of the opportunities and challenges perceived by its representatives.

From November 2021 to March 2022, as part of a wider fieldwork carried out in Barcelona, thanks to the extraordinary support of the Escola de l'IGOP, I had the opportunity to get access to the contacts of all the persons representative for the different social practices. After studying the information available, within 69 social practices (as of March 2022), I selected 20 that were especially in line with the intercultural paradigm, targeting members of minorities or vulnerable categories such as immigrants or ethnic minorities, young people in marginalized contexts, LGBT, elderly people, and people with disabilities. I carried out semi-structured interviews with 18 out of the 20 persons selected (two of them being unavailable for interviews at that time). The interviews focused on the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities of cooperation between government and social actors in the context of Barcelona. Notice that, considering that more than 15 of the remaining 69 social practices have currently become inactive, the results of my fieldwork can have a certain representative value for the whole set of remaining social practices, thus providing an overview of the role of social actors in Barcelona also beyond those immediately related to diversity management.

One of the first findings of the fieldwork was the shared enthusiasm towards the supportive role of the government: 16 out of 18 interviewees declared that technical and financial support was crucial for the possibility to organize and develop the practices. However, the value of this finding can be questioned by considering a critical issue that emerged while carrying out the fieldwork, that is, many of the selected good practices (10 out of 18) are actually initiatives promoted by municipal organizations working under the direction of the Area—which is the same one that launched and coordinates the project BPS. Notwithstanding the readiness for self-criticism that I was shown during all interviews with governmental officials, the enthusiasm that they showed about the governmental support cannot be taken as quite representative of the perception of other representatives

of civil societies engaged in social practices. Even though they also usually benefit from governmental support, their position is quite different compared to people who are representatives of the government.

However, it is relevant to notice that six out of eight representatives of non-governmental practices confirmed their enthusiasm for governmental support, while only two of them mentioned the possible issues related to addiction to government funding. As a result, it seems that, even if a minority may be skeptical about the strong supporting role of the government, in general, there is no perception or suspicion of intentional manipulation. Quite the contrary, all interviewees agreed that, while institutions in Barcelona play an important role in supporting the launch and first phases of social projects, they do not provide enough resources and support for its expansion, to the detriment of the long-term sustainability of many practices: As interviewees pointed out, after the initial phase, other investments and resources would be crucial to meet the challenges that arise during the consolidation of projects. That is why, in the end, if they do not succeed in standing on their feet, many initiatives and practices soon disappear.

All this, of course, does not mean that government manipulation cannot take place: Indeed, it is still the government that sets the rule for the allocation of funds for the starting phase. However, in this case, it appears that the steering government would often fail to maintain strong control by fostering a long-term addiction to funding even concerning those practices that have been elected as the most promising according to its institutional criteria. It rather seems that to survive in the middle-/long-term, those practices have strong incentives to emancipate themselves from their dependency on governmental support, creatively finding different channels and mobilizing new resources.

Nevertheless, as expected, all the interviewees confirmed that, once mechanisms of institutional support are set, a great emphasis is put on report writing and data collection. To be sure, on the one hand, all 18 interviewees unanimously recognized the importance of supervision and monitoring to grant the standards of quality in the implementation of activities, as well as transparent and responsible employment of resources. However, on the other hand, both the results of interviews and my observation point to general bureaucracy fatigue: The frequent requirement to write reports, fill documents and procedures, and hold different kinds of meetings with governmental representatives strongly affects and limits time, energy, and the possibility for innovation. Considering that "dynamism" has been set as one of the pillars in the new Barcelona Interculturality Plan, this result could be particularly important for processes of rethinking and self-criticism that has been foreseen for the next 10 years: While it is important to impose a certain level of supervision, it seems that too much bureaucratic burden is being put on social actors, which is affecting and limiting their potential.

As concerns the opportunity for dynamism and innovation, 11 out of 18 interviewees explicitly added that the experience of the "bank of good practices" and the activities of restitution and dissemination of the knowledge accumulated in this context—in particular, meetings among all the representatives of selected initiatives—created interesting spaces for experimentation and encouraged cooperation and innovation. This finding can be considered proportionally more relevant as only six of those 11 interviewees are working as governmental officials. Indeed, this means that four interviewees, while being employed in the government, do not automatically think that the BPS project provides new spaces and opportunities. In general, regardless of their position, just over half the representatives feel that this space—provided by the government—does encourage innovation and dynamism. Interviews suggest that their opinion seems ultimately to depend upon personal entrepreneurship and willingness to use the resources and channels provided by the government.

Further elaborating on the fact that many social practices are selected among government initiatives and services, it is debatable that there is a certain problematic level of self-referentiality of the municipality to the detriment of civil society. Representatives of practices working as municipal officers are clearly in a vantage point as concerns the know-how related to the criteria of evaluation of good practices. As a result, as all the 18 interviewees recognized, if initiatives promoted by the third sector are not supported by experts or are not built in direct cooperation with the municipality, they are strongly penalized in terms of access to funds and resources. This, of course, may reinforce inequalities between organizations that already have access to cognitive or material capital and those that do not, resulting in a sort of gentrification of social action. In this sense, this result too may be quite important in connection with processes of rethinking and self-criticism envisaged in the second Barcelona Interculturality Plan.

The issue about accessibility and inclusivity of the governmental funds and opportunities for social actors is deeply connected—as all 18 representatives acknowledged—to some flaws concerning communication: while the project is aimed at the diffusion and dissemination of good practices, most of the information on the web page, as well as the material produced, are only in Spanish (and, sometimes, only in Catalan). Moreover, representatives lamented scarce and cumbersome communication not only between them and (superior) governmental offices but also among themselves. The centrality of the topic of communication emerging in the interviews could provide, once again, material for rethinking some of the practices within the process of implementation of interculturalism. Indeed, considering the ideals of transversalization between different governmental areas and the participation of civil society (as a whole) in this process, setting up a system for inclusive, accessible, and effective communication

seems crucial for further progressing in the construction of the intercultural city.

The same challenge of inclusion and accessibility also concerns the capability of the practices to effectively reach, or be reached by, the target subjects, as clearly emerged from 12 out of 18 interviews (five of which involved governmental officials). It appears that, except for the initiatives that are clearly localized in a particular neighborhood, many projects manage to involve individuals only insofar as they belong to a specific organization. This result represents another interesting empirical evidence for the relevance of "territorialization" for the promotion of social inclusion—which, as we have seen, has also been added as a new pillar for the implementation of interculturalism in the new plan. Table 1 summarizes the results of the fieldwork.

5. Conclusion

Barcelona is a paradigmatic case as a city committed to setting the challenge of inclusion at the center of its political agenda. In a context where cities are progressively emerging as pivotal new players in a multi-level framework and where diversity is being reconceptualized in terms of super-diversity, Barcelona has become one of the main laboratories for the construction of a European approach to diversity. While the process of implementation of interculturalism is still ongoing and the final goals which have been set are yet far from being achieved, the city demonstrates that contrary to what many criticisms claim interculturalism can become a crucial resource for the implementation of a sustainable model of governance of cultural diversity at the local level.

The ideal of "virtuous cooperation" between government and civil society for the implementation of social practices—which already characterized the so-called Barcelona model of governance—has been successfully incorporated into the process of implementation of interculturalism. The concrete experiences of social actors working in this context reiterate the crucial role that civil society is playing, as well as the opportunities that can be found in a virtuous combination of top-down and bottom-up dynamics for the implementation of social practices. However, as we have seen, several issues emerge at the same time from the field that need to be addressed to move further steps in the direction of the ideal of Barcelona as an intercultural city.

The results of this article point to the relevance of in-depth research about the concrete experiences of social actors working for the promotion of cultural diversity and social inclusion in Barcelona. I hope that, notwithstanding the limited scope of the analysis (which focused only on a small number of practices and initiatives), this research gives voice to social actors by providing some additional material for identifying and addressing issues that are being experienced on the field.

Considering that Barcelona will continue to invest in the implementation of interculturalism at least for seven more years under the banner—among others—of "self-criticism" and "dynamism," it seems that social research may find room for contributing to this process. While making sure to avoid falling into objectionable prescriptivism, it seems that academic research can play a transformative social role in Barcelona, helping to identify opportunities and challenges for promoting virtuous cooperation between stakeholders in the social context.

Finally, the study of the case of Barcelona can be very important for other contexts engaged in the promotion of social inclusion. It is important to keep in mind—as we learn from the very experience of Barcelona—that governance of cultural diversity is essentially context-related and needs to be built and consolidated in a long-term, constantly dynamic, and participatory process. Nevertheless, the study of successful experiences and of the ways that issues and challenges have been addressed

Table 1. Summary of results.

	Total	Enthusiasm for government support	More resources needed	Bureaucracy fatigue	The government provides spaces for dynamism/ innovation	Communication problems	Capability to reach the target
Government officials	10	10	10	10	6	10	5
Non-government officials	8	6	8	8	5	8	7
Total	18	16	18	18	11	18	12
Percentage	100%	88.89%	100%	100%	61.11%	100%	66.67%
	Self-referentiality	Positive cooperation	Scarce long-term investment	Supervision/ energy drain	Personal entrepreneurship	Need for inclusion/ access	Importance of territorialitation

undoubtedly has the potential to teach important lessons for other contexts. The laboratory for the promotion of social inclusion that can be observed in Barcelona represents a unique opportunity for researchers to analyze an attempt to build a socially sustainable intercultural city. By critically considering the different mechanisms that have been put in place, as well as their successes and challenges, we can better reflect on how we could effectively implement the European motto: "United in diversity."

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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