

# The Intercultural City and Cyberspace

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**Abstract.** These days, the issue of diversity is very familiar to us. This is likely due to the advent of the phenomenon of a multi-cultural society. Naturally, concern and research about urban space and diversity has risen. The zones for potential encounters in a city can be divided into real spaces and virtual spaces. We are concerned with the emergence of a new generation of ubiquitous computing that will play a beneficial role for urban social networking and interaction. Many now believe that the power of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) can create a new virtual space, providing opportunities to engage directly with people of other cultures. This can help manage urban diversity and foster dialogue between people from different cultures in day-to-day life.

**Keywords:** Intercultural City, Interculturalism, Cultural Diversity, Cyberspace, Ubiquitous Computing, Urban Content

## 1 The City and Diversity

Many scholars point out that the paradigm of economy has been converted into that of creative economy. John Hartley focused on creative industry, Richard Florida on a creative class, and Charles Landry on the creative city. Creativity has taken root as a key code in almost all domains, including politics, economy and culture. Although the cultural industry has attracted attention as a national leading industry in many countries, it is based on the creativity of urban resources. At the same time, the development of the cultural industry arrives against a backdrop of increased urban creativity. This interactivity brings about the increased synergy that activates economic creativity based on urban creativity.

Florida suggests three T's of economic development: technology, talent and tolerance.<sup>1</sup> According to him, these three elements are important for attracting a creative class and for the region's development under that class. Talent is defined as those with a bachelor's degree and above. Technology is a function of both innovation and high technology concentrations in a region. Tolerance is defined as openness, inclusiveness and diversity of all ethnicities, races and walks of life.<sup>2</sup> Talent and

<sup>1</sup> Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*, Routledge: London, 2005, pp.37-39.

<sup>2</sup> This is explained by Florida's Bohemian, Gay and Melting Pot Indices.

technology can be easily connected to innovation. The interesting factor is tolerance. All else being equal, more open and diverse places are likely to attract greater numbers of talented and creative people – the sort of people who power innovation and growth.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, the issue of diversity is very familiar to us. This is likely due to the advent of a multi-cultural society. Rapidly accelerated globalisation is causing all nations to rack their brains over the most effective actions to take in this multi-cultural society. The EU, which has ‘United in Diversity’ as a motto, has taken an especially active attitude towards multi-cultural discourse. Thus, it put into practice the ‘International City Project’ in relation to urban problems. The EU’s stance of accepting diversity as the source of creativity, not conflict, is in line with Richard Florida’s admonition to accept diversity, along with creativity, as a basic impetus for innovation.

Our concern is with accomplishing urban computing as a context for the city. Cities are cauldrons of creativity. They have long been the vehicles for mobilising, concentrating and channeling human creative energy. We will discuss how to manage urban diversity and how urban diversity contributes to cities. In particular, we’ll deal with the encounter zone of cyberspace. According to Landry, the creative city’s challenge is providing flexible settings for interaction. We find one possibility of such a setting through ubiquitous computing.

## **2 The Strategy of the Intercultural City**

Cultural diversity has already become a household word, and an invisible, dormant conflict awaits resolution. The issue of the intercultural city raises some questions: ‘How do we manage the diversity of a city? How can we lead a person to converse with another from a different culture in daily life?’ Since 2008, the EU has conducted the Intercultural City as a pilot project in eleven model cities.<sup>4</sup>

The EU has come up with the following visions linked with this project:<sup>5</sup> Diversity is the source of innovation, creativity and growth. It can be brought into existence when the norms, cultural heritage and identity of other, different peoples are mutually understood and accepted. Thus, public places, schools, housing and workplaces should be designed to help people with different cultural backgrounds intermingle with each other and experience productive and creative interaction. The EU is of the opinion that, based on this strategy, the existing policies and the relationships between public places, as well as the relationships between communities, should be changed. The pilot project has three broad objectives:

1. to stimulate an inclusive debate and policy making in pilot cities, taking an intercultural approach to migration, integration and social cohesion;
2. to encourage pilot cities to develop comprehensive intercultural strategies to manage urban diversity; and

<sup>3</sup> Richard Florida, *op. cit.*, pp.39-40.

<sup>4</sup> The eleven Model Cities are: Oslo, Tilburg, Lublin, Neuchâtel, Lyon, Reggio Emilia, Izhevsk, Melitopol, Patras, Subotica, Berlin Neukoelln.

<sup>5</sup> EU Official Homepage, [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc2649\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc2649_en.htm), <Accessed 2012.3.2>.

3. to act as an inspiration for other cities in Europe.

This project emphasises the importance of the 'intercultural lens'. The intercultural lens refers to reflecting upon actions, policies, processes and spaces in the city from the perspective of their impact on intercultural relations.<sup>6</sup> For instance, it hinges on advice and consultation from experts, visitor surveys, mutual mentoring between cities, workshops, public events and the like to put its visions and strategies into practice. With the help of these activities, it executes policies for complementary cooperation in detailed domains including education, housing, the public domain and neighborhoods to be in pursuit of solidarity with social workers.

The interculturalism that the Intercultural City Project wishes to realise over a variety of domains positively interprets the results of the interaction of diverse cultures. Its viewpoint is in harmony with the EU's, accepting diversity as the source of creation, not conflict. In other words, interculturalism tries to derive as many benefits as possible from intercultural innovation. Here, openness serves as its basic principle. Openness leads to the ability to be in endless, curious pursuit of something new – that is, something different – beyond a culture's own domain. And interculturalism requires techniques and abilities that enable harmonious interaction, as well as a rule of solidarity that can negotiate and actively solve differences. The intercultural approach seeks change in public spaces and civil society beyond equal opportunities and respect for diversity. Borders between cultures are not fixed, but changeable.<sup>7</sup> In the intercultural city project, these visions do not remain in an epistemological or theoretical domain, but expand into the practical one.

A city plays a key role in promoting and supporting intercultural dialogue.<sup>8</sup> Since it is a space where cross-cultural coexistence in daily life is present, it is inevitable for a city to serve as a real space for acceptance and harmony. A city is a space in which cross-cultural communities in small areas contact and meet each other. It is the delivery room for a diversity of both positive and negative experiences. Therefore, a city, as an arena of social and cultural integration, should move towards upgrading differing beliefs to creative sublimation. This sublimation should be put into practice in a variety of daily-life communities.

In addition to the city, an even greater importance has been attached to the role cyberspace – not a physical space – plays. Information technology will play a far from neutral or passive role in the future of integration and segregation in our communities.<sup>9</sup> The next chapter will discuss how cyberspace derives creativity from diversity.

### **3 Encounter Zone: Cyberspace**

<sup>6</sup> Phil Wood (ed.), *Intercultural Cities: Towards a Model for Intercultural Integration*, Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg, 2009, pp.32-35.

<sup>7</sup> Phil Wood & Charles Landry, *The Intercultural City: Planning for Diversity Advantage*, Earthscan: London, 2008, pp.255-262.

<sup>8</sup> Jong-Youl Hong, *EU's Cultural Industries and Policy*, Seoul: HUFS Press, 2012, pp.188-189.

<sup>9</sup> Phil Wood & Charles Landry, op. cit., p.88.

With the growing use of the Internet, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become more important in our daily lives. Understandably, there has been much interest and speculation about CMC's impact on international relations and intercultural contact and understanding.<sup>10</sup> The Intercultural City Project defines encounter zones as follows: housing, neighborhoods, educational settings, workplaces, the marketplace, public places and cyberspace. Here, we will focus on cyberspace.

There are great advantages to CMC for bringing about better cross-cultural relationships.<sup>11</sup> First, biases based on visual factors such as skin colour are minimised<sup>12</sup>, because CMC fosters contact that is different from face-to-face situations.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the use of multimedia and hyperlinks on the Web make it possible to provide more diverse and accurate expressions, allowing users to exchange and communicate a wealth of information and emotion with one another.

The Web is likely to create a global village. CMC has become a space in which the opportunity for expression has expanded beyond interaction between a few people. On the basis of this expansion, cyberspace can function as a space in which the public can exchange opinions and information equally and freely. Moreover, people in a globalised society increasingly have the chance to acquire information on foreign cultures and learn tolerance for each other.

The computer video game is another tool that provides a learning space for intercultural issues. Gaming has established itself as a tremendous industry and has become important to people around the world. A remarkable difference between a film and a computer game is the degree of interactivity. In particular, MMOGs (massively multiplayer online games) make it possible for people around the world to enjoy gameplay together, which breaks down cross-cultural boundaries.<sup>14</sup> The virtual world constructed in a computer game is likely to play a role as a field that puts interculturalism into practice.

The potential benefits of computer games go beyond the level of play. For several years, MMOGs have been the subject of research for their potential to convey intercultural knowledge and understanding to young people.<sup>15</sup> Participants share knowledge with one another to learn. On the basis of this experience, they grow. According to Raybourn, using simulation games to facilitate intercultural learning has several benefits.<sup>16</sup> As users learn a computer game, they also come to understand different cultures and how to cope with them. They then expand this experience to the real world and critically develop it. The shared experience of the game provides

<sup>10</sup> W. Hart, "Intercultural Computer-mediated Communication", *The Edge: E-Journal of Intercultural Relations* Vol. 1, issue 4, [www.interculturalrelations.com/Resource/TheEdge.htm](http://www.interculturalrelations.com/Resource/TheEdge.htm), 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Phil Wood & Charles Landry, op. cit., pp.204-207.

<sup>12</sup> G. Simons, "Meeting the intercultural challenges of virtual work", *Language and Intercultural Learning* Vol. 16, No. 1, 1998, pp.13-15.

<sup>13</sup> Roman Jakobson suggested six elements of communication as follows: addresser, addressee, message, context, code, contact. Contact is a physical or psychological connection between addresser and addressee.

<sup>14</sup> Phil Wood & Charles Landry, op. cit., pp.208-211.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.212.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

safety in what could be difficult and dangerous communication resulting from cultural differences.

Phil Wood and Charles Landry pinpointed Second Life<sup>17</sup> as a computer game that can arouse curiosity about intercultural communication. Second Life's virtual world provides anyone the opportunity to engage directly with people of other cultures.<sup>18</sup> Second Life is not simply a game in which there is a winner and a loser; it is a game that replicates our daily lives. Users depend on avatars to live their lives and thereby experience intercultural communication. Focusing on this fact, a number of scholars have discussed Second Life as a research topic. Increasing numbers of educators are also exploring simulation environments such as virtual worlds for use in coursework.

Although Second Life occupied users' attention in its early stages, it failed to experience great growth. This is because beginners had difficulty accessing it; it needed a high-specification computer, which prevented it from being popularised. And by allowing users the same liberty that can be enjoyed in the real world, it became a space for obscenity and gambling, which people began to abhor. It has yet to compensate for these weaknesses. Still, Second Life is a new attempt in the realm of intercultural dialogue. Second Life may have been a necessary step in procuring inspiration and intuition towards planning and realising a more elaborate intercultural cyberspace.

#### **4 Conclusion**

So far, we have seen the potential and importance of cyberspace for intercultural dialogue. Cyberspace has many advantages and popular appeal in today's cultural environment. Of course, the importance of cyberspace should not undermine real life and space in our daily lives.

Concern and research about urban space and diversity has increased. Both real spaces and virtual spaces in diverse cities should be studied in harmony. The emergence of a new generation of ubiquitous computing will play a beneficial role for urban social networking and interaction. In a world of hyper-mobility, in which the make-up of cities becomes increasingly more diverse, issues of cultural diversity naturally become more significant. However, communication across cultural differences is not easy.

Many now believe and hope that the power of CMC and MMOGs can usher in a new virtual world that will provide opportunities to engage directly with people of other cultures. This can help manage urban diversity and foster dialogue between people from different cultures in our daily lives.

<sup>17</sup> Second Life is a free, 3D virtual world wherein users can socialise, connect and create using free voice and text chat (Second Life official website, <http://secondlife.com>, <Accessed 2012. 4.10>).

<sup>18</sup> Phil Wood & Charles Landry, *op. cit.*, pp.213.

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