



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S 'CALL FOR IDEAS'
FOR PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN EUROPE**

EUROCITIES CONTRIBUTION

EUROCITIES is the network of major European cities. Founded in 1986, the network brings together local governments of 128 large cities in over 30 European countries. EURO CITIES provides a platform for its member cities to share knowledge and ideas through a range of Forums, Working Groups, projects, activities and events.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) is particularly important for cities. Cities, and especially large ones, are meeting places of different cultures and play a key role in terms of facilitating and supporting intercultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding and acceptance, and overcoming barriers between different groups.

EUROCITIES is already raising awareness amongst its members of the plans for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008). The European Commission's proposal was presented to the members in early 2006. The members of two of our thematic Forums - Culture and Social Affairs - were particularly interested in taking part in this Year and a Task Force was set up in order to discuss and develop proposals for how EURO CITIES could use its expertise. The preparation of the European Year 2008 is already mentioned in the EURO CITIES Work Programme for 2007.

EUROCITIES members, and particularly the members of our Culture and Social Affairs Forum, have shown a very strong interest in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 and cities are ready to make an important contribution to it.

A) How can one contribute towards identifying, evaluating, developing and exchanging projects, experience and good practice in intercultural dialogue on a European scale?

Identification of projects, experiences and good practices in intercultural dialogue in large European cities

One of the main activities of EURO CITIES is to organise the exchange of practices and information between large cities. Through our network, cities learn from each other by sharing knowledge, exchanging experiences, comparing different approaches, testing innovative solutions and analysing best practices. For this reason, the network could potentially play a very valuable role as a key partner in the European Year 2008.

Within cities, intercultural dialogue is being put into practice on a daily basis in different ways and by different groups: in the cultural life of the city, in public spaces, in schools, in daily working life or in the media. A first step to identifying good practices in the field of intercultural dialogue is to see in which spheres of life they are taking place and which actors are involved in them.

A questionnaire sent to the EUROCITIES members in spring 2006 allowed us to identify **processes, projects and activities fostering intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity**, which our member cities have implemented in the past or are currently developing. Of course, cities have very different profiles in terms of population and challenges to be tackled. As a result, we received a wide range of responses, which give an overview of processes (for example, councils of religions, integration services), structures (intercultural houses and centers) or events (for example multiethnic festivals) on which cities rely in order to increase dialogue between cultures. Given their own diversity, Europe's large cities themselves provide a rich canvas on which to develop a number of different initiatives within the framework of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, bringing out the complexity of the intercultural dialogue process and the huge range of different practices and approaches that can be used to develop it.

Our member cities have identified which of their local events could be directly linked to the Year 2008 and could therefore be given a special focus by this issue, for example, the Edinburgh and Glasgow Melas 2008 (Scotland's biggest intercultural festivals), the international children's theatre festival 'Bravo!' organised by the cities of Helsinki-Espoo-Vantaa, as well as the large parades taking place in several European cities.

In conclusion, all cities agreed on the need to exchange experiences and know-how in order to learn from one another, improve their own strategies and ensure a coordinated 'Year' of events.

Key issues for large cities regarding intercultural dialogue

As intercultural dialogue is a broad topic and can be understood from different perspectives, our members propose to work on:

- Increasing the awareness of young people on the topic of cultural diversity and promoting youth participation, especially in multicultural events;
- Promoting the integration of immigrants of all ages and all communities through social and cultural activities;
- Developing dialogue between people with different religious and spiritual beliefs;
- Promoting a sense of shared European citizenship.

B) What information and communication initiatives could contribute towards involving all European Union residents, and particularly young people, in the promotion of intercultural dialogue in day-to-day life (e.g. schools and other places of education, sporting and cultural activities, the workplace, etc.) and familiarising them with it?

City-based communication tools (local TV stations, websites, newsletters...) are all very efficient channels that can be used to give visibility to the EU Year 2008 and also as tools to achieving greater intercultural dialogue.

Cities propose to launch film contests on themes like integration or religious differences. Winners would be broadcasted on **local televisions stations** all over Europe. Such an initiative could also be opened up to young people through schools, universities, refugee organisations... The best films could also be broadcasted on national television stations, thus ensuring that the message reaches a large percentage of the population.

New and interactive communication tools could be used to raise awareness of the EU Year 2008 amongst young people and also to encourage them to be actively involved in initiatives: for example, internet blogs written by young people, focusing on their vision of intercultural dialogue and on their personal experiences; podcasts and short message systems (SMS) could be developed and diffused around Europe via mobile phones.

Specific written tools could also be created, which could be coordinated at a European level by a network such as EUROCITIES: for example a poster campaign about why being different is exciting; a calendar of important dates for different religious communities, which city councils could distribute to the local population; a handbook on how to approach intercultural dialogue as a theme, outlining the tools that can be used, which cities could use as a guide and distribute to other groups and institutions (for example schools, youth groups, employers associations).

C) What specific European-scale initiatives likely to reach, directly or indirectly, as many people in the European Union as possible - and particularly young people - could contribute towards promoting intercultural dialogue?

As a network, EUROCITIES has partners in all of Europe's major cities and is used to working with their representatives across all sectors. EUROCITIES would be very keen to participate in a **European-wide campaign involving cities** and is ready to play a coordination role in such a campaign.

Based on our research so far, large European cities suggest taking the opportunity of the EU Year 2008 to:

- **Raise awareness within the local population about intercultural dialogue, through social and cultural events.** These events would take place in member cities with the aim to facilitate exchange and dialogue between the different cultures represented in the cities. In addition to social and cultural events, more structured political dialogues between citizens/communities and local politicians would also be organized (for example the 'Islam and Integration' public debates organised by the City of Rotterdam and attended by around 1,500 people).
- **Raise the awareness of city politicians and officers of intercultural dialogue** and exchange experiences and practices on how to deal with cultural diversity at the local level (for example the annual 'week of diversity' during which Ghent City Council staff are faced with the diversity of people and personnel in the municipality through games and other events).

In 2008, cities propose to be the 'ambassadors' of the EU Year 2008. **Intercultural dialogue could be the common theme to cultural and social events taking place at the local level across Europe.** By working through EUROCITIES at this early stage, EUROCITIES members can already integrate this theme explicitly into their plans for 2008, creating a greater overall visibility of the initiative. EUROCITIES' participation in the Year 2008 would include:

- Events that cities are already implementing on a regular basis and that can very easily be linked to intercultural dialogue: Biennale de la danse 2008 in Lyon, Genoa's multiethnic festival,...
- Specific events taking place in 2008 that cities would like to dedicate to intercultural dialogue: Liverpool European Capital of Culture and host of the European Youth Parliament in 2008, EUROCITIES Forum for Young Citizens 2008,...

Specific initiatives already successfully implemented in our member cities could be developed in other cities in 2008. Two examples:

- The 'Rent a refugee' initiative ("Mensenbief") in Rotterdam: citizens were offered the possibility to go to a public library and 'take out' a refugee (like one would take out a book) and spend the day with this person in order to discuss their personal experiences of life.
- An interactive exhibition of European cities: schools and local administrations cooperate in order to display a project on intercultural dialogue that they are proud of. The best projects go on a European tour in a container and are displayed in city centers.

The impacts of a campaign led by large cities could be reinforced through **strategic partnerships** with, for example, organisers of large sporting events taking place in 2008 (for example the European Football championship) and European television networks.