

Multiculturalism is not dead in France? Possible Convergence in multiculturalism in Lyon and Marseille:

Abstract:

Marseille and Lyon have arguably been conceived as cities that have adopted very different responses to their large ethnic minority populations. Marseille has been the only city in France to adopt what could arguably be described as a 'multicultural' agenda, where the municipal government recognises group claims for political participation through the Marseille Esperance forum of dialogue that brings the leaders of the city's 9 largest religious communities directly into political life (Mitchell 2011). Lyon, however, has been conceptualised as adhering to French assimilationist policies that refuse to recognise difference, and have left its ethnic minority communities with a 'thirst for citizenship' (Dikec 2007) due to this lack of recognition. However, on examining the cultural activities of the two cities, arguably more convergence towards a multicultural expression of culture is seen that would perhaps be expected from two cases of varying forms of municipal governance. However, both the cultural policy of the municipalities and those of NGO's in the city demonstrate a convergence towards recognising difference. This paper will analyse this convergence by first outlining a research context defining multiculturalism and its relationship to the study of France. It will then comparatively analyse the cultural policy of the municipalities of the city. After this, the agenda of NGO's involved in public culture in the two cities will be examined. Finally, the paper will conclude with summarising this convergence.

1. Introduction: Multiculturalism and the French case:

France is a 'de facto multicultural country', however this notion is contested (Withol de Wenden 2004) because while it has experienced mass immigration from Europe, Asia and Africa, it has never embraced multicultural policies (Modood 2007). This discussion would benefit, however, from a discussion of exactly how the contested term multiculturalism is defined in the literature. Taylor (1992) focuses on the importance of providing a public recognition to minority communities to underpin a multicultural society. Parekh (2000) goes further than advocating a recognition of minority culture to argue that multiculturalism should be conducted through celebrating diversity as a strength of society due to its inherent ability to offer a plurality of ideas and lifestyles. Modood (2012) takes these ideas even further by arguing that advanced forms of multiculturalism would involve the remaking of the image of society to take into account minority communities in positions of equality. It can be argued, however, that unlike in the UK, these conditions have not been met by the French state, owing to its historical commitment to an assimilationist agenda.

While, over the past 100 years the country has experienced mass immigration from Europe, Asia and Africa, France has stuck to the assimilationist policies inherited from its historical and political evolution as a nationalising state. The revolution of 1789 separated church and state and granted the individual formal equality before the law, removing the ability for ethnic or religious groups to make claims on the state in these terms. The third republic (1871-1914) that sought to integrate the national regional minorities through a process of common secondary education that pushed a patriotic historical consciousness, military conscription, a network of communications connecting the regions to the centre, and by building a territory wide economy (Hutchinson 2006:296). This has resulted in the banning of the recording of ethnic statistics and the recognition of minorities as political entities, where focus remains on the formal legal equality of the individual as the guarantor of the individual as the mechanism by which France seeks to integrate its minority

communities. However, this approach has come under sustained critique. Hargreaves (2007) highlights the hollowness of this formal legal equality given the persuasive nature of discrimination based on ethnic origin in France in the public sphere of education, employment and residence, where access to these vital resources is blocked because of ethnic origin. In his opinion, this discrimination was the key cause of the recurring bouts of riots that have occurred in France since the 1970's. Dikec (2007) and Kepel (2012) have found that in Lyon and Paris respectively residents of the poor suburban housing estates do not see even the government led, physical regeneration of these areas as sufficient means of social renewal, given the discrimination present in society. Against this backdrop, however, Marseille can be seen as demonstrating significant variance. The city, while having similar socio-economic problems to other large French cities, including Lyon, was the only French city not to riot in 2005. Mitchell (2011) has argued that this lack of rioting is due to the city's unique form of governance that subverts French Republicanism to provide a 'recognition of difference' in the governance of the city, through several means including a forum of interreligious dialogue, Marseille Esperance, where the leaders of the city's religious communities work directly with the mayor. Lyon does not have any such governing structures, instead relying on French assimilationist policies to govern. However, when examining comparatively the cultural policies of Lyon and Marseille, it appears that in recent years a convergence might be occurring in terms of Lyon and Marseille demonstrating some similarities in how their cultural policies are providing a degree of 'multiculturalism'. This paper will make this argument by offering a comparative analysis of the cultural policies of the municipal governments of both cities that are recognising difference, and then by comparatively analysing the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGO's) that produce public culture events in the two cities.

2. Municipal Government Policies: Convergence at the top:

Marseille is arguably the most advanced city in terms of its recognition of difference in its political structures. This is mirrored in the programme it is offering for the 2013 European Capital of Culture. Here, the focus has been placed on using culture to represent and include all of the city's diverse residents. This is the aim of the 'culture for all' project is to take cultural activities 'with priority for young people, residents of poor areas and isolated territories' throughout the duration of the year. The representation of all areas of Marseille society and the Mediterranean region is the theme that forms the basis of the programme of events for the year. There will be a production at La Criée Theatre of the classic Arabic tale of Ali Baba. The connection of culture to immigrants and their descents is importantly not limited to essentialist notions of what constitutes 'Arabic' culture, something that could be unfamiliar to French-Arab youths of the third or second generation in France. Here, the programmes also incorporate an entire theme of 'urban culture' events, including graffiti, rap music, BMX biking and inline skating.

The *Maison de la Région* was specially refitted for 2013 to include an interactive space to allow visitors to 'discover the region'. Located in central Marseille in a prominent position on the city's best-known and busiest street, *La Canebière*, it commemorates the history and culture of the entire Mediterranean region. Inside there are posters on the wall showcasing all of the alphabets of the Mediterranean region, including Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, and Phoenician. Stone cladding on the walls is also decorated with letters from these different alphabets. The building also holds permanent exhibits of the projects, which are being undertaken as part of 2013. One of these is *Le Centre Régional de La Méditerranée à Marseille* (CRM), set to open before 2013 on Marseille's docks with part of the structure above the water. Its mission statement is to be 'Symbol of the exchange of knowledge and continuing dialogue between the cultures of the contemporary

Mediterranean world.’ The centre is envisaged to act as a forward thinking forum and marketplace where, at the same time according to its proponent Michel Vauzelle ‘the commons roots of Mediterranean people will be remembered’. Lyon, while loosing the bid to hold the 2013 event due to the lack of diversity in it’s program, is, however, arguably also beginning to recognise difference in its cultural policy.

As recently as 2008, Lyon was noted for a municipal cultural policy where diversity is still a non-issue’ (Council of Europe 2008). This is a comment made in the analysis of the city’s membership of the ‘intercultural cities’ program. Here, the report by the Council of Europe noted that, while being a member of the intercultural cities program ‘little cultural activity has taken place outside of established activities for the majority ethnic middle classes, such as opera and theatre’ with ‘very little outreach of urban sub-cultures or to new audience groups’ (Council of Europe 2008:3). This questionable start, however, arguably underlines a possibly important emerging trend in the city in that the recognition of difference is becoming an item on the city’s agenda. This could be seen in the city’s ill-fated bid for the 2013 capital of culture under the title Lyon’s ill-fated bid was based on the concept of Lyon as a place where the cultures of Europe came together to create its cultural heritage, under the title of ‘Lyon, land of confluences’ (Council of Europe 2008:4). This bid for 2013 and the membership of the intercultural cities program has resulted in a renewed commitment from the city’s authorities to opening up the cultural narratives of the city to the inclusion of the city’s ethnic-minority communities. Here, they hold the annual ‘our cultures in the city’ days in which they bring together experts and policy makers from the city council to discuss how to approach cultural diversity and make it part of the sustainable development of the city (Ville de Lyon 2012, authors translation). This possible convergence in the recognition of difference in the two cities cultural programs can also arguably be seen in the activities of NGO’s.

3. NGO’s Policies: Convergence from below:

Marseille compliments its recognition of difference in government and municipal cultural policy with the work of the city’s NGOs. An example of this trend is the way the city chose to commemorate the 2008 European Year of Dialogue of Cultures. For this, the Alliance Francaise Marseille-Provence, located in the city, held a week four days of events commemorating Marseille as ‘at the heart of the dialogue of the Mediterranean cultures’ (JMED 2008). Here, the city was commemorated as part of the Mediterranean where a large part of the city’s post-migration communities come from. Here, conference were held on Mediterranean languages, travel, civilizations and how the various actors in the region have existed in dialogue with each other. Marseille is the only city in France where the Muslim holiday of Eid al Adha that marks the end of the Hajj pilgrimage is publically marked with a cultural program. The Eid in the city (authors translation from the official title of ‘L’Aïd dans la Cité’) festival is a unique festival in France that brings an occasion not celebrated in the rest of France out into the public realm with a full program of cultural activities. This ability of NGO’s in the city to commemorate public culture to recognise difference is something that can also arguably be seen in the case of Lyon.

In Lyon, the Rhone-Alps centre of traditional music, who has completed in depth studies of the cultural forms exhibited in some of the most economically deprived and socially marginalized areas of the city. They act as a network composed of numerous smaller cultural associations. They express their mission as the ‘job of valorising heritage and recognizing the cultural diversities of the territories of Rhone-Alps’ (CMTRA 2012). In this, and overtly through their mission statement, they aim to recognize these forms of music as constantly going through reinvention and hybridity, and also attempting to put issues

related to the social redefinition of identities and otherness at centre stage, bringing the expression of minority cultures out into the public sphere. (CMTRA 2012) interestingly, a large part of their output to this end becomes 'sounds atlases' that are released through the internet and for sale of their website. These include the ethnic minority cultures that are present in the city and present them as part of it's cultural diversity.

The association of the 6th continent in Lyon is another association in Lyon that holds a large music festival yearly in the city, each year identifying a different focus on a region of the world or a particular country. Their mission is to promote cultures of the world and the valorisation of diversity and cultural mixing (6^{ème} continent 2012, authors translation). Importantly, the 2012 program mark a significant change in focus from exploring the issue of world music and cultures as something external to the city, to celebrating how outside cultures have always played a very important roll in the culture of Lyon. This redefinition of migration as central to the success and artistic creativity of Lyon in the program of the 2012 festival of the 6th continent is a departure for both this particular means of commemorating culture and for the commemoration of culture in Lyon more generally, something commented on in the European Councils report on the city that noticed its complete ignorance of its internal diversity. The program of the festival casts the city as a place where 'since antiquity Lyon has been a destination for immigrants from the Mediterranean, Asia, Europe, the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa' (6^{ème} continent 2012, authors translation). The program goes on to describe Lyon as 'rich in cultural diversity, the city today has a rich heritage resulting from these meetings, fusions and blends' (6^{ème} continent 2012, authors translation). Here they showcased acts only from the Lyon area with origins in the '4 corners of the world' and held a debate to discuss the issue of Interculturalism. Here, they held an event entitled 'Interculturalism: When the local collectives engage' (6^{ème} continent 2012, authors translation).

4. Conclusion:

In terms of the recognition of difference in their governing structures, Marseille and Lyon demonstrate difference. Marseille has overtly used the structures of municipal power as a place to publically offer 'recognition' to the city's ethnic minority communities, while in Lyon no such use of the municipal power-structure is evident. However, while starting at different point here, and in their cultural policies, both are arguably demonstrating some convergence in the way that the municipal authority and NGO's commemorate culture in the city with both commemorating culture with the recognition of difference. The municipal government of Marseille doing this currently with the European Capital of Culture 2013 that is commemorating the culture of the city as something created by difference. Lyon, while getting off to a poor start of its membership of the intercultural cities program and missing out on holding the 2013 celebrations, has none the less used these experiences to put diversity on its cultural agenda with its yearly meetings about including the city's cultural diversity in its activities rather than excluding it. NGO's in both cases also demonstrate how they are putting cultural diversity at the centre of the cities cultural programs. In Marseille, both the Alliance Francaise and the Eid in the City festival are commemorating the culture of the city's ethnic minority communities in public as part of the city. In Lyon both the Rhone-Alps centre for Traditional Music and the 6th Continent festival are concentrating on remaking the image of the city as a place that has been constituted by cultural plurality. As a whole, however, one can still argue that Marseille, with it's cultural policy augmented by the way that it governs could be argued to be much closer to remaking the image of society to take into account minorities (Modood 2012) and promoting diversity as a positive driver of the city's success (Parekh 2000) than Lyon. However, given Lyon's starting point as a place where ethnic minorities had a 'thirst for

citizenship' (Dikec 2007). It also remains to be seen to what extent the reform of the cultural agenda in Lyon will translate either into large scale inclusion of cultural diversity in its flagship festivals, such as the Fete des Lumiers, or if it will remain a fringe issue, or be neglected all together.

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