

Report of expert visit to Braga, January 2017

Introduction

An expert visit was undertaken to Braga on 17 and 18 January 2017, following the accession of the city to the ICCs network in 2016 and its completion of the [intercultural index](#). Participating from the Council of Europe were Eladio Fernandez Galiano and Robin Wilson. (The programme is appended to this report.) The visit included a meeting between the mayor, Ricardo Rio, and Wilson and was well publicised in the two regional newspapers.

A wide variety of stakeholders beyond the municipality were engaged, including representatives of public agencies and institutions essential to the realisation of its intercultural aspirations. They were invited to attend the session on the first morning, which was addressed by Firmino Marques, the deputy mayor (the mayor being in London that day), Andre Carmo, co-ordinator of the Portuguese network of intercultural cities, Fernandez Galiano and Wilson. And they facilitated visits to two schools, a neighbourhood and the public theatre in Braga referred to later. The key staff in the municipality—two in the culture and education section and one in the mayor's office—plus Carmo helped generously with arrangements (including interpretation) throughout.



One of the two local papers led on the visit, framing it as Braga affirming its intercultural commitment

Setting the scene

The morning session took place in a capacious modern public building called 'GNRation'. This formerly belonged to the *Guarda Nacional Republicana*, with the initials of the force being appropriated for what is now an attractive venue for events with an accent on youth. Alongside the theatre, this represents a valuable public space for the intercultural activities supported by the municipality.

Carmo told the meeting that the Portuguese ICCs network was now 12-strong. A number of municipalities were involved in anti-rumours activity. Braga did just join last year but was really committed and had delivered on every task very swiftly. It was valorising the interculturality of the

city, stressing the diversity advantage (as developed below in the comments from the mayor). He also pointed to the tenth-anniversary ICCs event, which Lisbon is to host in November.

Marques—who has an interesting hinterland as a philosopher, NGO practitioner and sportsperson—made the case for local citizenship based on intercultural responsibility, welcoming different nationalities to Braga, contending that schools thus played a pivotal role. He said Braga was involved in projects with an international perspective (again, the mayor was to elaborate). The city still had relatively few foreigners but the work transcended that. Beyond the municipality, a lot of organisations were involved in welcoming refugees (on which the Portuguese prime minister, and former mayor of intercultural Lisbon, Antonio Costa, has stood out from his more refugee-averse European counterparts). Braga could welcome more, regardless of colour or religion. It was keen to share practices via the Portuguese network, he said.

Fernandez Galiano painted the wider backdrop of Braga's intercultural activity—a world of ever greater movement yet simultaneous rising xenophobia and nationalism, with all the uncertainty that generated for the European project. Thirty years of European Union membership had been very good for Portugal, he pointed out (as with Spain and Greece, offering a trajectory beyond nationalistic dictatorship). The last years had been tough but that was no reason to throw it all away. In these austere times, he reaffirmed the economic benefit of migration and how it made societies more vibrant—and the specific transcultural advantage migrants brought in making connections with their country of origin, using their language facility, and so creating a capacity for new export networks (again, the mayor was to allude to this). Notably, he said, because of its history of emigration and the immigration of the post-colonial *retornados*, Portugal did not have a far-right party exploiting xenophobia.

Raising Braga's intercultural performance

Against this challenging political background, Wilson explained the evolution of the ICCs project and what it sought to achieve before looking at Braga more specifically. Focusing on its performance in the intercultural index, he noted that this had been higher than average in education, language, international outlook and intelligence/competence. It was understandable that these strengths were relatively few, Braga being a recent ICCs member, and where they should lie: a strong international outlook followed naturally from Portugal's history of migration, for example.

He itemised the weaknesses and bracketed them together, before suggesting how they might be addressed. On commitment and the intercultural lens, political leadership was critical, he said. Commitment could be demonstrated by mayoral activities, publicity campaigns and special public events. Ensuring application of the intercultural lens required awareness-raising of senior officials. Developing a bespoke intercultural strategy would be key to both.

On public service and welcoming, all municipal staff should potentially be engaged. Intercultural integration needed to be included in the induction, training and appraisal of everyone. Achievement could be acknowledged (and stimulated) by a regular award. Welcoming however also needed a dedicated, 'one-stop shop' with specialist staff for newcomers. This could build on the existing *Serviço de Apoio ao Emigrante e Imigrante*.

On business and labour market, the municipality could similarly develop its *Empreendedorismo Imigrante* programme. Engagement of the social partners was critical: business can see the benefits of diverse talent, trade unions understand the importance of solidarity and NGOs can assist in terms of social enterprises and sensitive training. The municipality could broker relationships between the social partners and migrant associations. It could also use public procurement as a lever.

On cultural and civic life and public space, Wilson said, the key was to engender an intercultural ambience. Intercultural festivals and parades could realise this and associate diversity with 'feeling good'. The municipality could use public space to promote its intercultural work, as with the 'OXLO' public-relations campaign in the Norwegian capital. Here, Braga has a specific advantage, as the displacement of much city-centre traffic underground through a network of tunnels has in large measure pedestrianised some central boulevards. Commissioned public art was an important way of making a statement, he said. The municipality could also develop, or support, a programme (as in Copenhagen) to facilitate friendships between newcomers and locals.

On neighbourhood and mediation, taking the intercultural message to the grassroots was central. Officials could work with neighbourhood associations and public services to improve 'collective efficacy'—the sense among residents that they can solve problems collaboratively rather than feeling at the mercy of them—in neighbourhoods. A network of trained intercultural mediators could deal with tensions and frictions, with dedicated police officers in the background (municipal police officers already play this role in sensitive Lisbon neighbourhoods).

It was critically important in this context to engage the media: scare stories in the media, amplified by 'social media', could cause problems. Journalists could be pointed to engaging intercultural stories and fresh contacts. The municipality's website needed a section on its intercultural vocation,



Braga's pedestrianised spaces are good for fostering intercultural encounters

regularly refreshed, including signposts for newcomers to the city. And its public-relations officials needed a clear, simple, consistent message, across all platforms.

Finally, on governance, and recognising the value of the *Serviço de Apoio ao Emigrante e Imigrante*, engagement of migrant/refugee associations had been found to be critical to making intercultural integration 'real' on the ground. Issues to address were: to consult on and elaborate a new intercultural strategy, ensure political leadership in support, create a formal structure for dialogue with the associations, and ensure regular report-back and review.

The existing *Plano Municipal para a Integração de Imigrantes* would expire in 2017 and its successor should recognise that intercultural integration was (unlike assimilation) a 'two-sided process'. Successful implementation of the strategy should see improvement in the Intercultural Index for Braga in the years ahead. Wilson concluded by saying that the city embodied centuries of tradition, including in its architecture, yet such a weight could be a burden. Braga still did not have a large newcomer presence (one in ten) but interculturalism concerned the 90 per cent too. An intercultural strategy offered a positive way to chart through its aim a route to an innovative and vibrant future for the city.

'Rewrite the Neighbourhood'

An intercultural strategy brigades and coheres municipal projects, so that they add up to more than the sum of their parts. A large new project in Braga is called 'Rewrite the Neighbourhood' and visits to associated locations were the focus of the afternoon of day one of the visit.

The project involves three neighbourhoods characterised by the social exclusion of their inhabitants and their peripheral location away from Braga's historic centre: *Bairro das Enguardas*, *Bairro do Picoto* and *Bairro de Santa Tecla*. In each of the neighbourhoods, the most challenging issue is integration vis-à-vis Roma residents. Indeed in 2016, when the Portuguese ICCs network had a brainstorm, this emerged generally as a bigger issue than refugees.

From the start, the project was conceived in conjunction with residents of the three neighbourhoods, local actors and public authorities. It involves eight dimensions:

- gathering socio-spatial life stories—building a social archive, producing an exhibition and publishing a book;
- 'Who's afraid?' activity (see below) with Roma school students;
- Enguardas Community Workshop—after-school activities and community support;
- choir and musical ensemble;
- capacity-building for inclusive communities;
- production of a children's book to challenge rumours among young people;
- 'Closer'—paths to sustainable employment in the neighbourhood, and
- 'bootcamp' and active development workshops.

Rewrite the Neighbourhood runs for three years until the beginning of 2020. The scheme is framed by the Portugal 2020 EU funding programme for 2016-19. This means it has to focus on urban

regeneration, individual mobility and social inclusion, which could affect its success in terms of implementation. There is a question of sustainability from 2020 onwards but the municipality is keen that the project should continue in some way.

On top of the associations, involved from the start, Rewrite the Neighbourhood involves a wide array of municipal departments: urban planning, culture and education, social action. The project includes pathways into employment such that Roma individuals can maintain their neighbourhoods—for instance with horticulture skills which could be deployed in renovating the public space. The municipality's public companies offer another vehicle for Roma employment and the opportunity to lead by example. A Roma flea-market will be sustained, including recognising it as a space for encounter. A problem here is a deficit of data on migrant economic activity in the city.

Portugal is somewhat distinct in Europe in having a mainly indigenous Roma population. Its members are concentrated in certain marginalised social-housing neighbourhoods and its children tend to attend schools with disproportionate Roma numbers. In the afternoon of our programme, we attended one of the Rewrite our Neighbourhood housing complexes and two such schools.



A multinational class of children singing in harmony at *Escola Básica de Fajal*

The *Escola Básica de Fajal* is an elementary school with a pre-school attached. Opened in 1992, it was refurbished 20 years on. Some 160 children attend—down from more than 300 due to the social stigma associated with the Roma presence in the school. They include Romanian as well as indigenous Roma, Brazilians and Ukrainians. Parents are communicated with in the Portuguese, Romanian and Ukrainian languages. The catchment neighbourhood, where housing is cheap, used to be known as ‘the island’ because of the sense that it was detached from the city.

The school however seeks to celebrate its pupil mix, with wall displays including phrases like ‘Sport is for all’ and ‘United in diversity’. A Day of Dancing is organised to give children from their various backgrounds the chance to perform and doll-making is used to the same end. YouTube videos have

been produced—including one, ‘Red Hand Day’, where the children’s hands were painted red in sympathy with child soldiers.

The second school visited, *Escola Básica de Nogueira*, hosts the *Quem tem medo?* (‘Who’s afraid?’) project, for Roma youngsters (12-17 years) who are otherwise not attending regularly and at risk of dropping out of school—individuals often lacking school disciplines and social relationships with their non-Roma peers. There is a special curriculum: music and art are used to hook their attention, rather than schooling for ‘employability’. They are taken on visits to parts of Braga where they wouldn’t otherwise go—such as the monastery and the theatre—so they feel part of the city rather than marginal to it.

The organisers say they have seen significant progress in the first year of the project, including with regard to the youngsters’ families. It is expanding in this, its second, year. It seeks to build the self-esteem of participants—as, at the end of the first year, when they performed in the convent and at GNRation. A book of experiences of 25 Roma who have become diverse success stories, *Single to Plural*, has been used to offer role models to participants, to raise their own aspirations. One youngster who had participated in the course said that while he had started it in trepidation it had made him realise he could have another life.

There is a recognition here that the project accepts the segregation of Roma from other students, which is controversial, but its co-ordinators argue that the alternative is that the participants would disappear from the education system altogether. They are however trying to achieve integration, for instance by non-Roma and Roma engaging in joint performances (with their families present).

The *Bairro social de Santa Tecla*, one of the three Rewrite our Neighbourhood locations, is a dilapidated estate of medium-rise social housing nearby. Three out of five residents are Roma. The Red Cross has an office there, which helps kids who have dropped out or are at risk of so doing to develop social relationships, while sensitising schools to discriminatory practices—thus complementing *Quem tem medo?*. The municipal social-housing agency, *Braga Habit*, runs a mobile homework club on the estate.

There is a plan to renovate the estate and to develop a new community centre and public space (currently unstructured and anonymous). This work will be conducted in conjunction with the residents. *Braga Habit* seeks to break down the physical barriers ghettoising social housing, associated with concentrations of Roma and other marginalised citizens. Its vision is to think of renovation and development of transport links as opening otherwise closed-off spaces. The new community centre will be for the residents’ association but also open to others to use, such as for sports purposes. And there is waste ground, the future of which up for grabs, based on a co-design with residents. Another potential factor for integration which could be developed is that a lot of university students live by Santa Tecla—and our visit took us to the university radio station on the estate.

Cultural institutions

Braga hosts the University of Minho (which has an additional campus in Guimarães) and as in other intercultural cities this is an important cultural, and indeed intercultural, institution. It is multilingual

in approach and has a pro-rector who deals with international relations, including the attraction of foreign students—the goal is that these should comprise one in five of the student population by 2025. And the *Serviço de Apoio ao Emigrante e Imigrante* already works with the university vis-à-vis classes in intercultural mediation.

The key is to try to engage the foreign students, so that they feel ‘at home’ in Braga, and so to keep as many as possible in the region after graduation—including as an entrée to wider international networks. The University of Minho, and the Catholic university, have post-colonial connections, such as to Mozambique and Cape Verde.

The university has an internet TV channel and a newsletter targeting the academic public. And it has the radio station. This has given voice to diverse Erasmus students and in 2016 it organised a festival to promote interculturality, with musicians, talks and so on. It recognises its potential to reach out beyond the student population and it could assist students to become ‘intercultural intellectuals’ (as well as to burnish their cvs) through volunteering opportunities.

Local newspapers still matter in Braga, with the two local papers referred to earlier keeping the nationals somewhat at bay. When Wilson met the city’s director of communications, Ricardo Gomes, the first thing he did was display that day’s *Diário do Minho* and *Correio do Minho*—the former (of a Catholic orientation) leading with the visit on its front page, the latter (which also has a radio station) running the story inside. He said, however, that generally he found neither responsive to the intercultural theme as a rule.

This does reflect the wider difficulty that, from a conventional editorial viewpoint, ‘interculturalism’ is abstract and not readily turned into a story, while phenomena which can be represented as posing a challenge or threat (crime, for instance), as well as being new, are seen as enjoying more news value. ‘Human interest’ intercultural stories can thus break through and the municipality plans in 2017 to pick from diverse marginalised groups in Braga (willing) individuals whose life stories can give a human face to its intercultural commitment. This will be a knowing alternative to a programme on national Portuguese TV about the diaspora, ‘Portuguese in the world’—focusing instead on newcomers to Braga. The municipality also plans as a stratagem to place a supplement in both the regional papers about its intercultural engagement.



Braga’s Teatro Circo—an imposing central presence

Braga is fortunate to have a major cultural—and, again, intercultural—asset in its public theatre, the [*Theatro Circo*](#) (it has a wonderful circular auditorium seating nearly 100 people, yet none more than 50 metres from the large stage). The theatre building, sumptuously

decorated, was the brainchild of three local bourgeois figures more than a century ago. It was recently restored to its gilded baroque splendour, yet with the modern additions of black boxes in a downstairs studio theatre and bar. It is a perfect foil to GNRation as a public venue to showcase intercultural events.

The theatre has a company which has built relationships with the Ukrainian community. It has brought kids together from diverse communities for mutual understanding. It mounts a Festival of Public Theatre every summer and there is a weekend in September when all spaces are free and open. Nor is this something 'bolted on' to the theatre's mainstream programming—which has a very cosmopolitan, rather than provincial, feel to it.

The intercultural municipality

The municipality signals its embrace of Braga's growing demographic diversity with an annual Day of the Communities. This engages the associations representing Brazilians, Ukrainians, Roma and Senegalese. The aim is to present Braga as a welcoming city. There are also a diverse group of refugees in Braga, including from Syria, who may feel little connection with their new home.

In terms of getting its message across directly, the municipality has only acquired a social-media presence in the last four years. But it recognises how journalists in the mainstream media now use that as a resource. It can also place audio-visual material with an intercultural theme in the public domain via the screens in various public facilities, such as buses. It recognises this is a multi-media challenge and that the municipality's [website](#), which is organised conventionally by the main 'silos' of activity, needs refreshed to give prominence to its transversal intercultural work (as recommended in the Braga intercultural profile and mentioned above).

Leadership in all intercultural cities has to come from the mayor, to signal a political commitment to all staff and the wider public. Wilson met the mayor, Rio (back from London), on the second day of the visit.

An important aspect of Braga's intercultural trajectory is that it should be seen as not simply integration vis-à-vis members of particular minorities, equal citizens though they should be, but a project for the city as a whole. For Rio, the work with regard to Roma in the neighbourhoods, with Ukrainian immigrants who have put down roots, the connections to Brazil and the former African colonies (and East Timor) should all be contextualised in a vision of the city as a cosmopolitan magnet, reflected in an enhanced cultural offer, growing foreign-student numbers and so on.

The mayor noted that Braga hosted the [International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory](#), located next to the university, with a multinational staff. Every year he would greet hundreds of the foreign students in a square as part of their orientation to the city, including its cultural and sporting facilities. All children in Braga started learning English in their first year of schooling, he said. Braga positioned itself in international networks, including twinning arrangements with cities in Brazil, Ukraine, Romania and so on. In addition to the ICCs, it was a member of Eurocities. And it pursued its own paradiplomacy by making links with ambassadors in Lisbon.

All of this the mayor sees not just as a remedial process of inclusion but how to match Braga to a global and globalising milieu. For Rio, interculturalism can be linked to the capacity to attract foreign investment to the city. The more diverse the city is, the more its citizens have the linguistic competences and social networks to facilitate potential and actual inwards investors.

Next steps

Braga has a huge weight of historical tradition. It hosts a number of museums, including the *Museu da Sé* attached to the cathedral. Beside the Museum of Archaeology is a piece of symbolic art indicating that the city is more than two millennia old, going back as it does to Roman times. This could be conceived as a past glory beyond recall or, alternatively, as a heavy drag on the present. But it is perhaps better to think of Braga's distinctive past as the rich historic backdrop out of which a new city is emerging and redefining itself to thrive in its contemporary environment.

Arguably, the next step in this process is to unroll a new, bespoke intercultural strategy for Braga. This can translate that future-oriented vision into a coherent package of programmes and projects, allied to reformed governance arrangements and a communications effort. In turn, that can ensure that the good work already taking place becomes a whole which is greater than the sum of its existing parts, central to the city's strategic development.

[Robin Wilson](#)

February 2017

First Expert Visit to Braga

Braga, 17 and 18 January 2017

PROGRAMME

17 January 2017

9:00 Welcome

9:15 Official opening

Firmino Mahmoud – deputy mayor of Braga

André Carmo – co-ordinator of the Portuguese network of Intercultural Cities

Eladio Fernandez Galiano – representative of the Council of Europe

9:30 Robin Wilson (expert in intercultural dialogue)

- The intercultural city
- Results of the index for Braga

10:30 Coffee break

10:45 Discussion with group of stakeholders

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Visit to the elementary school of the Fujacal

15:45 Visit to the Hickory Elementary School

17:00 Visit to the neighborhood of Santa Tecla

18:00 End of the day

18 January 2017

9:00-12:30 bilateral meetings between *Robin Wilson* and local authority representatives

- Technical team in the municipality of Braga
- *Ricardo Rio* – mayor of Braga

13:00 End of the visit