

# Discrimination meets interculturalism in theory, policy and practice

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## Abstract

Discrimination of immigrants and racialized minorities as the Roma is increasing in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Different policy approaches to diversity management tackle this issue differently, both in terms of recognizing ethnic discrimination as a key obstacle to integration and in terms of defining the ideal forms of conviviality in superdiverse societies. In this special issue, we focus on interculturalism as a policy approach to diversity management that is applied mainly at the city level in numerous countries. It is expected to foster social cohesion and counteract racism and discrimination of immigrants and ethnic minorities, which makes anti-discrimination a central part of its DNA. However, policies and measures to efficiently address ethnic/racial discrimination and the inequalities it produces have not been salient within the intercultural framework. This article, which defines the conceptual framework of the special issue, focuses on the ways in which discrimination and interculturalism are closely linked. We argue that discrimination is a central factor hindering the egalitarian forms of contact between people of diverse origins that are fundamental for the intercultural ideals of positive interethnic conviviality.

Framework article for the special issue Discrimination and Interculturalism: exploring their intersection in different multiethnic societies. Guest Editors: Zenia Hellgren and Ricard Zapata-Barrero.

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## INTRODUCTION

This special issue focuses on the relationship between discrimination and interculturalism, which is a widely adopted approach to diversity management, mainly at the city level, in Europe and beyond. It is based on the emerging debate that the authors of this contribution engage in, which assumes that there is an interrelation between discrimination and interculturalism that is essential for the life conditions of immigrants and racialized groups. On the one hand, ethnic and racial discrimination constitutes an impediment for the fulfilment of intercultural policy goals, while on the other hand, interculturalism may potentially constitute a fruitful political and narrative tool to combat discrimination (e.g. Elias, 2017; Gundara, 2005; Zapata-Barrero, 2020; Zapata-Barrero & Mansouri, 2021). This, however, requires real commitment – and political consensus – in order to transform policy discourses into practices.

Discrimination of immigrants and racialized groups remains persistent and is even increasing in Europe and elsewhere in the world (Fibbi et al., 2021; FRA reports, 2019, 2022; Lentin, 2008, 2011; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Safi, 2010; Vincze, 2014). Xenophobic political parties continue to gain presence (Dennison & Geddes, 2018; Mudde, 2019), and recent studies from the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency indicate that racism and discrimination became further aggravated during the pandemic (FRA reports, 2020a, 2020b; 2022). Simultaneously, different diversity and integration policies approach the issue of ethnic discrimination differently. For instance, the assimilationism that can be identified in countries such as Denmark, or France, tends to imply denial of the ethno-racial differentiations that lead to discrimination (Brinbaum et al., 2018). Multiculturalism instead emphasizes ethnic equality, but differs from interculturalism by its focus on particular group identities (Fossum et al., 2020).

The Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) has played a fundamental role for the introduction of interculturalism in the European political context, and subsequently at the global level. It includes more than 150 cities in a wide range of countries (such as most European countries, Canada, Israel, Australia, Mexico and Morocco) who commit to intercultural policy-making, sometimes at odds with the national integration policy agendas (ICC, 2020). ICC defines non-discrimination and equality as central and interrelated components of the intercultural project: "Real equality is actively sought by preventing discrimination and adapting the city's governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population".<sup>1</sup> Interculturalism is expected to foster social cohesion and counteract racism and discrimination (Zapata-Barrero, 2019), which makes anti-discrimination a central part of its DNA. Inherent in the intercultural approach to diversity is, besides the expected commitment to its ideals by decision-makers and public officers, the ambition to "socialize" the citizenry in order to construct more inclusive forms of citizenship in diversity. In this regard, interculturalism may be viewed as a citizenship-making strategy (Zapata-Barrero, 2019). Intercultural policies explicitly address socializing processes within a diversity setting, which makes it stand out in comparison to other normative approaches of diversity management such as multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism (Fossum et al., 2020).

In each city taking interculturalism as an urban project, anti-discrimination policies consistently become prominent, oftentimes in the form of anti-racism and anti-hate speech campaigns. However, concrete measures to efficiently address ethnic/racial discrimination and the inequalities it produces have not been salient within the intercultural framework. There are several difficulties involved in translating interculturalist policy narratives into outcomes with potential to reduce discrimination against immigrants and racialized groups. Such difficulties involve, for instance, legal and structural restraints to implement interculturalism by public institutions, as well as the growing xenophobic narrative waves in Europe and elsewhere in the world, seriously damaging sentiments of solidarity and humanity with newcomers among large segments of the population (e.g. Dennison & Geddes, 2018; Williams, 2010).

Hence, we identify a risk that intercultural policies remain mainly symbolic and argue that there is a lack of empirical research that assesses intercultural policies in terms of anti-discrimination outcomes. The remaining challenges for an efficient implementation of anti-discrimination policies, also in cities that have already adopted intercultural policy agendas, have not been enough acknowledged. There are, for instance, important difficulties involved in detecting and proving discrimination, aggravated by the normalization and underreporting by discriminated groups with lacking trust in the public institutions' capacity to support them; this is a well-known problem among the Roma

population (Cortés, 2021). We need to more explicitly bring forward the issue of discrimination within the intercultural framework, including its complexity of causes and different expressions, covering both overt and subtle forms of negative differentiation.

The special issue represents an attempt to fill this gap, by gathering new empirical research on a wide range of tensions, but also potentials, involving the relationship between discrimination and interculturalism in very different social contexts. We take a broad view of different spheres where discrimination becomes an issue: access to public spaces, employment, housing or in a wide range of everyday situations. We principally consider two central dimensions of discrimination and its interface with intercultural policies. Discrimination is considered as an empirical fact affecting our social systems, but simultaneously, it is also understood as a dynamic phenomenon that can potentially be reduced through more efficient policies and struggles against the expansion of destructive social dynamics.

Additionally, we find that the academic and political debates on interculturalism are often limited to Western societies, particularly in the European context. Our special issue aims to fill also this gap and add breadth and contextual nuance by including empirical cases from a wide range of countries: Japan, Morocco, Spain, France, the US, Italy and Germany. While in certain environments (mainly cities), we find real attempts to implement policies that are at least inspired by the basic principles of interculturalism, such as the recognition of diversity as a social fact, other contexts are much more reluctant. This is illustrated by the empirical examples provided through the different contributions to this special issue, which all shed light on different dimension of the relationship between discrimination and interculturalism. For instance, while cities in Spain, Japan, Germany and Italy formally endorse interculturalist policies – which in practice collides with persisting and even growing discrimination and racialized inequalities (e.g. Fibbi et al., 2021; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Safi, 2010; Boland; Müller; Ueno; Santagati and Bertozzi in this volume) – other countries such as Morocco or France continue to apply policies at odds with intercultural principles both at the national and local levels. Then, interculturalism may instead emerge through interaction at the micro level or through individual initiatives, such as cultural production offering alternative narratives or school teachers who may promote an intercultural education in the class room despite an overall educational context that is insensitive to diversity (Hellgren, 2021; Bergamaschi, Santagati, Blaya, Seyedafshin and Arcidiacono; and Taher in this volume). Also in societal contexts that promote interculturalism, however, the micro-level construction of intercultural forms of contact and identity-building may prove more socially transformative than top-down policies without an actual impact on everyday practices, which Boland's and Müller's contributions to this volume reflect.

The different social national contexts included in this special issue all face problems with continuing – and often severe – discrimination of immigrants and/or racialized groups. Formal discourses of non-discrimination are often at odds with this reality; a problem that is frequently not acknowledged by authorities (e.g. Lentin, 2020; Maneri, 2020). In fact, it may even be more challenging to fight against discrimination in a context where the political actors declare their commitment to anti-racism and interculturalism, as this can entail an unwillingness to recognize the “failure” of the official policy approach in coming to terms with the problem (e.g. Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Rodríguez-García, 2022). Comparing cases from different geographies will allow us to examine the barriers for a successful implementation of interculturalism, of which non-discrimination is considered a fundamental component, in different types of societies with different immigration histories and with different ways to acknowledge diversity in the public sphere.

In a global context that is ever more marked by diversity-related issues, there is a need to empirically explore the obstacles and opportunities to implement interculturalism in ways that favour non-discrimination, and thereby inclusion, in multiethnic societies. Under what circumstances does, for instance, interculturalism contribute to the development and implementation of more effective measures against discrimination and racism? And when this is not the case, what are the principal obstacles involved? The authors that contribute to this special issue intend to answer such questions. By contrasting very different national, regional and local contexts, we aim to shed light on what are the specific challenges and opportunities for combating discrimination in different types of intercultural policy environments. The empirical cases of this special issue show that obstacles may indeed be found both at the

structural/institutional level and in people's prejudices and rejection in everyday situations, just as opportunities are reflected both in the pro-active policies of some urban contexts and in micro-level forms of interaction and solidarity.

In the remaining part of this introductory article, we seek to deepen our definition of the conceptual framework for the special issue. We will first focus on discrimination as a concept and as a central marker of racially defined inequalities. In this context, we argue that it is central to conceptually distinguish between racism and discrimination in order to adequately address the complexity of discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, origin or religion (in the following referred to as "ethnic discrimination" for the sake of simplicity). Then, we use European anti-discrimination policies – and their shortcomings – as point of departure, arguing that the difficulties involved in formulating effective policies against ethnic discrimination are related to their strong dependence on the broader society's willingness to act non-discriminatorily in a wide range of situations. Finally, we shift our focus to interculturalism and its relationship to discrimination and suggest that discrimination is a central factor hindering the conditions for positive contact, which is central for the intercultural policy to be successfully implemented.

## ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION AS PRODUCER OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS

As we examine the links between, on the one hand, the multiple forms of discriminatory discourses and practices that harm integration processes and hamper the construction of more egalitarian forms of citizenship in multi-ethnic societies (e.g. Yuval-Davis, 2007), and, on the other hand, the potential of interculturalism as policy and practice to reduce discrimination, we first need to clarify what meaning we assign to this concept. In order to do so, it may be illustrative to draw a conceptual distinction between "discrimination" and "racism".

Ethnic discrimination and racism are often used as practically synonymous and interchangeable concepts (Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Lentin, 2011). Indeed, both concepts are intimately linked with power structures that favour those defined as white, often with roots in colonialist classifications and pigmentocracies (Telles, 2014; Van Dijk, 2005). Discrimination however is a behaviour that may or may not be related to sharing racist beliefs. Consistent with Silverstein's (2005) argumentation that the different forms of labelling affecting immigrants in European societies constitute different expressions of racialization, we define ethnic discrimination as an overt or subtle, negative form of differential treatment based on ethno-racial categorizations, including skin colour or other physical traits that mark a visible difference from the white, western, native norm, such as "ethnic" clothing; speaking the majority language(s) with an accent; or in general being categorized based on a "different" ethnicity, culture, religion or belief or national origin. This broad understanding of discrimination is in line with the notion of *unconscious bias* (Bourne, 2019), which is central in order to interpret the difficulties in effectively implementing anti-discrimination also by institutions who are actively committed to non-discrimination, which is the case for all cities adopting intercultural policies. Representatives of the public institutions (such as school teachers, social workers or health care staff) may however adhere to ideals of non-discrimination, but in practice unconsciously continue to reproduce a subtle, systematic differentiation between people (based on, for instance, ethno-racial features) (Bourne, 2019; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Safi, 2010).

In addition, we consider that an intersectional perspective (see, e.g. Schiek & Lawson, 2016; Seng, 2012; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012; Young, 2009) is fundamental in discrimination research. In practice, it may indeed be difficult for, for instance, a female migrant domestic worker from the Dominican Republic to determine to what extent she is being discriminated against for being poor, for being a woman or for being racialized. There is also a class-related dimension of racialization that cannot be left out of any serious discussion on discrimination (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Rodríguez-García, 2022). For stigmatized groups such as Roma people and migrants of different origins, the disadvantage of being (or being expected to be) poor, "underclass", is closely intertwined with their ethno-racial features. Sub-Saharan Africans, for instance, reported being denied entrance into expensive stores or stopped if they drive a certain type of car as they are expected to be unable to afford this (Hellgren, 2019), based on generalized prejudices about the "precarious black migrant". Recent research also shows that visible difference (most notably skin colour) stands out as the most common ground for discrimination, together with religion in the

case of Muslims, and that ethnic minorities tend to underestimate rather than exaggerate its frequency (Brinbaum et al., 2018).

The multiple and often subtle dimensions of discrimination are central to our analysis, as they reflect the challenges involved in elaborating efficient forms of anti-discrimination policies and practices. While overt forms of racism such as hate speech or racist violence receive immediate attention and call for intervention, they merely represent the tip of the iceberg. Far more common are the subtler forms of discrimination, such as simply not choosing people of certain origins for employment or rental contracts, with serious consequences such as hampered opportunities, sentiments of non-belonging and perpetuated inequalities between natives and racialized others (Barnes & Lightsey Jr., 2005; Burgett & Hendler, 2014; Crul & Schneider, 2009; Hellgren, 2019; Rodríguez-García et al., 2021; Silverstein, 2005). There is a growing body of empirical research that provides evidence of indirect discrimination, for instance, in admission processes (e.g. Fibbi et al., 2021; Nobis et al., 2021; Pager & Western, 2012). However, indirect discrimination is difficult to legally prove and victims who denounce it rarely receive any recognition (Kotkin, 2009). This understanding is also important for an accurate analysis of the relationship between anti-discrimination and interculturalist policies and practices, since focus for intercultural/pro-diversity agendas tends to lie on combatting overt forms of racism rather than addressing the subtler, structural and institutional forms of discrimination and unconscious biases that are often invisible to those unaffected by them, but continue to reproduce inequalities in a wide range of situations (Bourne, 2019; Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Rodríguez-García, 2022).

## ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES AND THEIR LIMITATIONS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

Anti-discrimination legislation as such has its origin in the US Civil Rights movement against oppression and discrimination of Black people in the 1960s, leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Donohue, 2005). The political mobilizations in USA of the 1960s were used as reference more than three decades later, when broad mobilizations against ethnic discrimination emerged in the European context. It is widely held that the European Union's approval of the Anti-discrimination Directives in 2000<sup>2</sup> marked the beginning of a new policy paradigm and the official recognition of discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities as a European problem (Bell, 2002; Bousetta & Modood, 2001; Burns et al., 2007; European Commission, 2020a, 2020b; Geddes, 2004). It is also generally recognized that the implementation of European anti-discrimination policies was the result of years of mobilizations among a broad range of anti-racist organizations and lobby groups across Europe, perhaps most notably the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and the network of migrants' rights activists called the Starting line group (Bell, 2002; Geddes, 2004). Moreover, in 2014, the coverage of the European Anti-Discrimination Directives was expanded as the European Commission's Racial Equality and Employment Equality Directives required the Member States to "prohibit discrimination on the ground of racial or ethnic origin in the fields of employment, social protection including social security, healthcare, education, and supply of and/or access to goods and services, including housing" (European Commission, 2014). The Directives thus explicitly use the term "race," which is a concept that for long has been and to a great extent still is controversial to use in a European context (Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Rodríguez-García, 2022). Some consider the Directives to have imposed an Anglo-Saxon rhetoric of group-recognition in Europe, though there is currently a discursive shift in Europe towards increasing recognition and scholarship on the centrality of race, both in European present and history (Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Lentin 2008, 2011, 2020; Warmington, 2020).

Nevertheless, the European anti-discrimination policies have important limitations regarding their actual impact in terms of reducing discrimination. It has been argued that there are obstacles for an effective implementation, both concerning the ways in which the policies were formulated, and in how the EU directives have become incorporated, or not, into the national policies of the different member states (Bell, 2002; European Commission, 2016). In negotiating the framing and scope of the policies before their approval in 2000, claims by anti-racist and migrants' rights networks to include the recommendation of active measures against underrepresentation of immigrants such

as quotas and positive action were dismissed (Bell, 2002). In his analysis of the Anti-Discrimination Directives, Bell argues that their approval and implementation were successful due to the fact that they did not challenge the main policy framework based on (neo) liberal principles: discrimination was framed as an obstacle for merit-based competition rather than linked to structural inequalities. Moreover, the directives were formulated in very general terms, leaving it up to the individual member states to translate them into public policies (Bell, 2002). The implementation task has in turn been carried out differently, or not at all, in the different EU countries (European Commission 2016). In some countries or cities there are specific, publicly funded anti-discrimination offices or bureaus; however, only 15 of the 28 EU Member states have any action plans or strategies at all against discrimination (FRA report, 2019). All in all, the gap between anti-discrimination policies and practices appears, as we shall see in this special issue, to be a central challenge also in the other geographical contexts that our empirical studies cover. This in turn represents an important obstacle for the successful implementation of intercultural policies.

Moreover, comparing different anti-discrimination policies may also prove illustrative of the sometimes-paradoxical relationship between policy intentions and outcomes. On the one hand, the EU Anti-Discrimination Directives' focus on race/ethnicity rather than on equality was criticized for not acknowledging sufficiently the socio-economic vulnerability of many immigrants and ethnic minority people; it was argued that emphasizing "race" rather than "class" may reflect how states opt for less costly, symbolic solutions that do not challenge the overall (neoliberal) policy frameworks (Bell, 2002; Geddes, 2004). Yet, on the other hand, in many countries the lack of data on the situation of certain ethnic groups (who may rarely be categorized as such) makes it virtually impossible to prove indirect discrimination and overall seriously hampers the possibilities to file complaints and reach verdicts for ethnic discrimination (Geddes, 2004).

The question of whether and how to register people's race/ethnicity is indeed contentious. Many anti-racist and migrants' rights networks advocate for such registers, claiming that such registers are necessary in order to generate evidence of discrimination and take actions against it. Their opponents would instead emphasize the risks of such registers, bringing to our minds the darkest chapters of human history, as crimes against humanity based on ethno-racial classifications (Hellgren, 2021). There are also countries that are reluctant or even refuse to collect data on discrimination and inequalities. Nghi Ha, Lauré al-Samarai and Mysoreka (2016) for instance argue that Germany applies this approach as a political strategy intended to invisibilize problems with discrimination and racialized inequalities – in other words, to not generate knowledge as a strategy to deny the problem – in order to maintain the superiority of those perceived as white Germans over other groups; a colonial hierarchy that they argue pervades Germany's entire migration regime.

The gap between anti-discrimination policy and practice is a central dimension of this special issue and closely related to its core issue: the relationship between discrimination and interculturalism. As we shall return to in the following section, interculturalist or pro-diversity policies are applied in some shape and to some extent in all the different countries that are covered by the articles. These policies, in turn, have often not been explicitly linked with anti-discrimination policies, but they do in practice both rest upon the assumption that there is absence of discrimination and aim at achieving this goal of egalitarian conviviality in diversity (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Before further exploring the intercultural policy paradigm and its links to anti-discrimination, we shall look closer at the discrepancy between anti-discrimination policy and practice and how it can be explained, beyond the difficulties in implementing (supranational) policy directives discussed above.

Multiple studies reveal that there is a broad gap between anti-discrimination discourses and policies on the one hand, and widespread discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities on the other hand, in virtually all societies applying such policies. This gap is often explained by the attitudes and practices of the native majority society (e.g. Crul and Schneider, 2009; Hellgren, 2019; Löden, 2008; Safi, 2010; Wu, Shimmele and Ho, 2012). From this perspective, the efficiency of anti-discrimination policies ultimately depends to a large extent on how willing the native population is to implement the ideals of non-discrimination in a wide range of situations. In Löden's (2008) words, it is a matter of to what extent the majority society is willing to let people of immigrant descent be a part of it. This statement lies close to Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas's (2016) definition of integration as *becoming an accepted part of*

society; something that is impeded as long as discrimination remains widespread and, perhaps too often, normalized. Many NGOs that engage in anti-discrimination work (ENAR report, 2020; Hellgren and Gabrielli 2021) also confirm that the main challenge they identify is related to what Essed (1991) famously denominated “everyday racism”. Even if anti-discrimination policies are necessary, not the least as a public statement of ethnic discrimination being intolerable, they are not sufficient to end the subtle forms of everyday exclusion or “white preference” that continue to mark invisible boundaries between who is perceived to fully belong to society, and who is not (Dalal, 2002; Gans, 2017; González-Sobrino & Goss, 2018). In order to conclude this section: new approaches to (anti) discrimination are clearly necessary. Arguably, these approaches would benefit from being integrated into an intercultural policy framework. In the next section, we shall suggest to view the struggle against discrimination through the lens of interculturalism, with emphasis on its key premises: contact and equality.

## SEEING DISCRIMINATION FROM AN INTERCULTURAL LENS

Analysing the interface between discrimination and interculturalism necessarily involves defining the optimal conditions for positive contact promotion and to identify the factors that prevent this contact. Most of these factors are addressed in the different contributions of this special issue, such as social inequalities, cemented power relations, prejudices and racism. In order to argue for an intercultural approach as better suited to deal with the challenge of discrimination than other diversity management paradigms, it may be illustrative to contrast interculturalism with multiculturalism. Interculturalists agree on the backlash of multiculturalism literature (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010), which has charged multiculturalism with causing self-segregation and engendering more inequality and separation among people of different cultures. Interculturalism is fundamentally different from multiculturalism by its focus on constructing *one* cohesive society, where there is recognition of cultural difference, but the core consists of interethnic contact and power-sharing.

Promoters of the intercultural paradigm recognize that ideally shared practices and relations are constrained by inequality and asymmetrical power relations and by the lack of a minimum level of common public culture. A central challenge is for instance to mitigate the risk that contact zones become conflict zones, particularly in vulnerable areas where tensions between communities may be more accentuated. The added value of intercultural citizenship as a political project is probably that while actively promoting contact between people from different backgrounds, it also helps to develop intercultural values such as trust and common understanding. Interculturalism is essentially about developing what we may call a *culture of diversity* (Zapata-Barrero, 2019), which means going beyond the simple fact that cities are currently ethnically diverse and discuss how diversity is being incorporated into public and civic culture, at the level of both institutional structures and everyday routines. This, in turn, requires re-designing institutions and policies in all fields in order to treat diversity as a potential resource and a public good that needs to be distributed, and not as a nuisance to be contained. This *culture of diversity* can be seen as a by-product of what in the recent work of Matejskova and Antonsich (2015) is called governance *through* diversity rather than governance *of* diversity. The *through* indicates that diversity does not exist apart from politics, but needs to be incorporated within governance (2015, 3), the incorporation of diversity in political parties probably being the first step (Zapata-Barrero et al. 2018) with further research is required for other pillars of society (such as schools, police, public administration, etc.—see Hellgren, 2021 for an initial study in this vein).

Recently, Zapata-Barrero and Mansouri (2021) defended the multi-scale approach of interculturalism, going from globalized politics to a localized policy and practice. They argue that interculturalism is neither theoretically new nor was it always intended for application merely in city contexts of diversity. Rather, it has a global origin as a political basis for international relations and negotiations; as intercultural dialogue. In discussing the origins of interculturalism, this work covers two main aims. Firstly, it disentangles analytically the different empirical bases where interculturalism can frame the diversity agenda. Secondly, it explores whether a lack of appreciation and awareness of this

multi-scale orientation may affect interculturalism's capacity to address the challenges of diversity governance at the local level. These multi-level perspectives can be added to other more contextual ones.

As Zapata-Barrero argues (2019: 19–20), in most of the geographical contexts where intercultural policies are implemented, the seminal conflict-based approach persists. For instance, it frames most diversity debates in Latin-American countries, where it is sometimes even recognized constitutionally (in the case of Mexico). Here, interculturalism is seen as a strategy to deal with conflicts related to indigenous people. This view takes shape within the particular theoretical framework linking indigenous traditions and modernity. This debate has been ongoing in Quebec and throughout Canada, as well as in Australia. In this last case, interculturalism forced the political authorities to recognize the territories of the first aboriginal populations. Interculturalism is also used for inter-faith conflict resolutions in territorial ethnic areas such as Lebanon. So, we cannot say that the intercultural policy paradigm is new. Certainly, what probably is comparably new is its application to migration-related issues. In fact, the policy paradigm first entered into migration-related diversity contexts in Quebec, and then in Europe, but with rather different approaches. But in all these contexts, entering in the interface between discrimination and interculturalism invites us to go through a debate on the conditions of interculturalism, specifically in terms of providing a necessary structure in order to ensure the promotion of positive contact between people of diverse origins. The literature on interculturalism in general highlights two necessary conditions for this to happen: equality and power sharing. This essentially means that in conditions of inequality, competitiveness and discrimination, the relations between people could have the perverse effect of increasing prejudices and negative attitudes, thus generating a vicious circle of increasing prejudice > increasing discrimination > increasing gap between objectives and outcomes of intercultural policies.

Let us recall that the underlying mantra of interculturalism lies in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which states that under conditions of equality, cooperation, interpersonal exchange and law/policy support, contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice and increase mutual understanding. We can extend this hypothesis to suggest that engaging in positive contact also presupposes recognizing diversity, and maybe most important as a condition: diversity awareness. If people have the opportunity to communicate with others (of diverse origins), they will also be more likely to understand and appreciate different points of views, including other ways of life than their own. They may also be open to change their views as a direct outcome of this contact. Again, this ideal form of contact is seriously harmed in contexts of (deep) inequalities and discrimination. Sentiments of belonging may thrive in relation to concrete everyday spaces and places, though it is often a question of an “underdog identification” among people in marginalized areas (Hellgren, 2019; Zapata-Barrero and Hellgren, 2022 forthcoming). The centrality of *equal* forms of contact is why discrimination needs to be understood not only in racial and identity terms, but also in intersectional ones, as discussed above. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) highlight this social class component when dealing with diversity-related prejudices. Festenstein (2005: 13), for instance, affirms that the relationship between diversity and tolerance is not clear. Sometimes exposure to “the other” evokes greater understanding, but if lifestyles are seen as being too incompatible, it only heightens prejudice.

Discrimination by definition separates people. It is clearly a restrictive factor since it breaks any bridging condition and often increases social conflicts. It belongs to what has been labelled “conflict zones”, together with unequal and unbalanced power relations, racist and xenophobic attitudes (Zapata-Barrero, 2019: 69). These conflict zones can be any sector of society, but the main concern of interculturalism often lies with public spaces (Zapata-Barrero, 2020), or the educational sphere (as reflected, for instance, in the contributions by Bergamaschi et al, Santagati and Bertozzi, and Colon et al in this special issue, or the journal *Intercultural Education*). When people self-restrain themselves as a result of perceived (or expected) discrimination; they may for instance choose not to go to certain streets, neighbourhoods, pubs or public parks because they feel they are not welcome (Hellgren, 2019); an interculturalist transformation of public spaces is impeded. These subtle modalities of power shape the ways in which diversity is organized in particular places, spatializing the politics of diversification (Ye, 2017). Public spaces constitute a resource that should be accessible to all (Wood, 2015), including old and new migrants (Peters, 2011). Public spaces need to be discrimination-free zones, free from diversity-related hostilities and conflicts. Studies show how discrimination may discourage the use of public parks, civic centres and other places. Moreover, reconnecting with the earlier



reflections on racialization, this dimension needs to be brought into the intercultural debate. For instance, we argue that also subtle dimensions of discrimination and its consequences, such as racialized people restraining themselves from going to certain public spaces because they feel unwelcome, must also be an intercultural policy target. Physical proximity of diverse populations in spaces such as buses, parks, public squares has the potential to generate hostility as much as conviviality (Ye, 2017). The existence of deeply rooted, ethno-racial hierarchies that continue to stratify people in European societies (Hellgren and Bereményi, 2022; Lentin, 2020; Rodríguez-García, 2022) needs to be recognized and addressed by interculturalist theories and policies.

So, before returning to the core question linking discrimination with interculturalism, we must ask: how can we promote positive contact if people live in unequal conditions in terms of legal statuses, socio-economic conditions, educational opportunities and different power situations and constantly are subject to racialized categorizations in everyday life (e.g. Lentin 2011; Safi, 2010; Silverstein 2005)? Indeed, it is the focus on (in)equalities that informs most intercultural policies, in Barcelona and others cities where intercultural policies are formulated in order to fight against the adverse conditions for contact, such as racism and discrimination (Barcelona Antirumour strategy, 2019; Barcelona Interculturalism Plan, 2010). Within this policy field, in turn, there is an array of policies, though they are largely limited to anti-rumour strategies, anti-racism and campaigns for equality of rights and respect for human rights. There is also a lack of evaluation of their implementation and actual outcomes. The promotion of anti-discrimination is necessarily a fundamental element of intercultural policies, since it focuses on the factors that hinder the emergence of positive contact zones. There are contextual, legal, institutional and structural factors that reduce people's motivation to interact and even build walls of separation between them based on misinterpretations of differences.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have suggested that the relationship between discrimination and interculturalism that frames this special issue is rather paradoxical. On the one hand, we assume that successfully applied interculturalism, whereby prejudice is ideally reduced and prevented through positive and egalitarian forms of interaction between people of diverse origins, holds the potential to reduce the plague of ethno-racial discrimination in our societies. On the other hand, it appears that precisely such discrimination is a central factor impeding a more efficient implementation of interculturalism. This paradox is central to most of the contributing articles, reflecting how it operates rather differently in different social areas, at different scales and in different geographies across the globe. As stated in the section on the gap between anti-discrimination policy and practice, we understand this discrepancy as to a great extent explained by people's reproduction of prejudice or simply (negative) differentiation in a wide range of everyday situations. Such discriminatory behaviours do not have to be the result of outright racist attitudes, but indeed of racialization and unconscious racial biases. To summarize: while racialized classifications continue to produce barriers for many migrants and racialized people to access different spheres of society on equal terms with (white) nationals, interculturalism cannot move beyond being a declaration of intention rather than a reality. Perhaps, part of the problem is that interculturalism has largely been implemented as a (top-down) policy and not gained any explicit support among the broad layers of the population. The tensions increase as the populist far right is gaining support among voters, and agendas of tolerance and openness towards migrants and diversity are contested with increasing hostility. Yet, as we shall see in several of the articles included in this special issue, there are also many examples of how solidarity and inclusionary practices or minority resistance emerge and strengthens interculturalism at the micro level, with bottom-up transformative potential.

In the section on anti-discrimination policies and their shortcomings, we concluded that though more efficient policies and tools to implement them are necessary, the broad change of "hearts and minds" among the native majorities that appears necessary in order to come to terms with discrimination and ethno-racially defined inequalities can only take place if people are truly willing and able to live together in egalitarian diversity. Interculturalism, we argue, may provide a fruitful tool to promote such necessary changes of the attitudes that underlie multiple, subtle (and

sometimes even unconscious) forms of discrimination with severe consequences for the life chances of racialized people, as well as for conviviality and social cohesion in society overall. If it can contribute to accomplish a change in the deeply rooted value systems that continue to give preference to those defined as “native” or “white”, much should be achieved.

Interculturalist policy has been accused of being merely rhetoric, without action and with unclear or unmeasurable results. Though interculturalism by necessity must address the multiple forms of inequalities that we discussed earlier, we believe that it has a central task precisely in mainstreaming a normalized rhetoric of diversity across the different spheres of society; in education, in politics; in public institutions and ideally also in the private environments. This way, it may contribute to fill the gap between anti-discrimination policies and practices by addressing the missing link: the generalized tendency that also people with good intentions tend to differentiate based on (conscious or unconscious) racialization.

If race, ethnicity, origin, culture, religion, social status, etc. would no longer be a relevant determinant of who is chosen for a job vacancy or for a promotion; who is given the highest grades in schools or a rental contract in an attractive housing area; who is stopped by the police or questioned for driving an expensive car, then we would be far closer to the truly egalitarian, diverse society that interculturalism strives towards. Needless to say, there is a long way to go towards this ideal scenario. We argue that linking discrimination and interculturalism and recognizing that racialization plays a central role in defining inequalities and discriminations that impede the transformation of the intercultural rhetoric into reality, represent one initial, necessary step.

Finally, we are still in much need of rigorous empirical studies in order to learn about the assets, potentials and shortcomings of intercultural policies, since their outcomes need to be tested, measured, evaluated, compared and contrasted. This is a central research task that we take on with this special issue, convinced as we are that it is hardly constructive to analyse the discrimination/intercultural policy nexus merely at the theoretical level. The different contributions of the special issue contribute perfectly to this endeavour.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.13048>.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/about>, 2 June 2022

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2000/43/EC against discrimination on grounds of race and ethnic origin, and Directive 2000/78/EC against discrimination at work on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation

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**How to cite this article:** Hellgren, Z. & Zapata-Barrero, R. (2022) Discrimination meets interculturalism in theory, policy and practice. *International Migration*, 00, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13048>