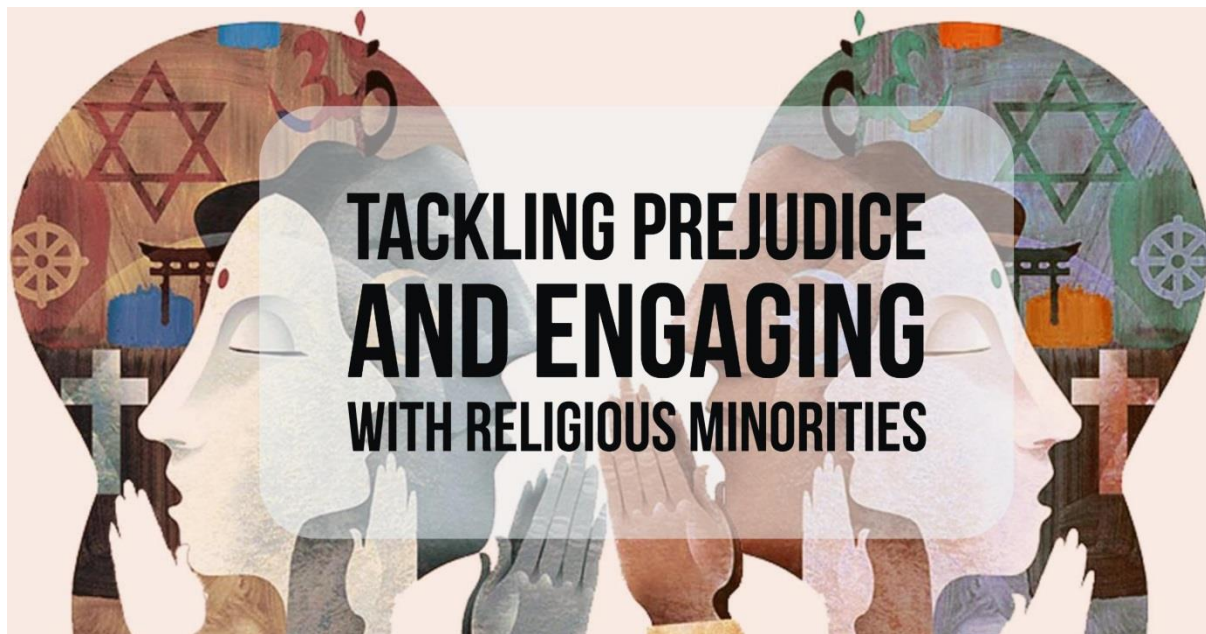




Tackling Prejudice and Engaging with Religious Minorities

How Cities Can Make a Difference with an Intercultural Approach



Report of the workshop held in Donostia/San Sebastián/

On 27-28 October 2016

Dr. Andrew Orton, Durham University



**Donostiako Udala
Ayuntamiento de San Sebastián**



Introduction

Prejudice and discrimination against people on the grounds of religion continues to be widespread, despite freedom of religious belief and expression being fundamental rights enshrined within the European Convention on Human Rights. Members of the Intercultural Cities Network have raised particular current concerns about rising levels of Islamophobia as well as the stigmatisation of other minority religions across many of their contexts. These concerns are arising in a changing social context where in Europe as a whole, there is a rise in those affiliated to no particular religious group, and after those who are Christian, Muslims are the largest religious minority, and this population is growing.¹

This briefing paper explores local policy responses to tackling prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities which are possible by adopting an intercultural approach. The foundation for this approach is acknowledging the rights of all individuals and groups, whether religious or not, under the European Convention on Human Rights. This approach is based on engaging positively with faith communities alongside those with other beliefs, including secular worldviews, for the purpose of building trust, cohesion and positive intercultural interactions within the city as a whole. It starts from the position of exploring how public discourse, policies, procedures and practices can have a significant impact in exacerbating and/or reducing experiences of prejudice and discrimination within local communities.

The paper presents the findings from a two day event held on 27th to 28th October 2016 involving over 70 participants (+ 4 interpreters) hosted in Donostia/San Sebastián, Spain, as part of their programme of activities as the European Capital of Culture.² The participants included representatives from local authority areas which are members of the Intercultural Cities Network across Europe, including those employed by these authorities and members of religious minorities from these contexts. There were also a smaller number of representatives from alternative contexts, including participants from Japan (with the support of the Japan Foundation, also represented), and from the intercultural cities of Fes and Rabat in Morocco, and Montreal, Canada. This paper also builds on previous engagement by the Intercultural Cities Network in exploring issues relating to 'Faith in Intercultural Cities' more widely. This has included a report exploring the importance of recognising the contribution of faith groups as part of local diversity, based on an event held in London in 2014³, and a workshop on interfaith dialogue at the Intercultural Cities Milestone Event held in Dublin in 2013.

A wide range of potential ways of taking action to tackle prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities were identified by participants; this report summarises these, highlighting practical examples of these actions in the process. Participants frequently acknowledged that each particular response and example may have its own strengths and weaknesses, and be more appropriate in some contexts than others. Given this, it is important to match particular responses to particular issues within particular contexts, whilst in general recognising that adopting a combination of responses was important to ensure these issues were tackled in a concerted way. The focus in the following report is on reporting the participants' perspectives as shared during the event, rather than wider research, so wider research has only been cited where this was included in their presentations; nevertheless, many of the perspectives cited here could be supported in terms of wider research, although that would require a separate paper.

Understanding the scope of discrimination and hate crime, to inform more effective responses

An important starting point for tackling prejudice and discrimination against particular groups is to understand the extent and nature of these issues as experienced by them. Participants shared a wide range of examples of prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities in their own contexts. Examples covered all of the life span from being young children (e.g. policies discriminating against dress and appropriate meals in schools) to dying (including funeral/burial provision). They also covered a range of spaces, including hate crime on the street (including verbal abuse, violence, forced removal of hijabs, etc.), discrimination in work and education, etc. etc. There were also issues of institutional discrimination, as discussed in other sections below.

However, understanding the full scope of these issues can be challenging in itself, not least because systematic data on these experiences is often limited. Research suggests that there can be a significant issue with the under-reporting of discrimination and hate crimes against religious minorities, not least because of a perception that nothing would happen or change as a result. For example, the large-scale European MIDAS study reported that 79% of Muslim respondents, particularly young people, did not report their experiences of discrimination.⁴ Đermana Šeta, the OSCE - ODIHR Adviser for Combating Intolerance against Muslims, highlighted how this means that thousands of cases of discrimination and racist crime remain invisible, and are therefore not recorded in official complaints and criminal justice data collection mechanisms. People without citizenship and those who have lived in the country for the shortest period of time are less likely to report discrimination. Regarding the reasons for not reporting incidents, based on the same study, 59% of Muslim respondents believe that 'nothing would happen or change by reporting', and 38% say that 'it happens all the time' and therefore they do not make the effort to report incidents.

Therefore, a key initial action is often to **support more thorough and widespread collection of data** (whether by international bodies, government/local authorities, and/or non-governmental organisations) to help identify systemic issues and priority areas for policy and practice responses. This includes building relationships with different religious minority groups to help build more accurate pictures of the nature and impact of prejudice and discrimination against them, and the issues which need to be tackled to improve reporting and responses to these issues. It also includes recognising the potential for discrimination on various grounds within as well as between different religious or secular groups, as part of this overall picture, and the potential interactions between different forms of discrimination e.g. based on religion, gender, sexuality, etc. However, in doing this, it is important to be sensitive in terms of the way in which it is done – for example, at least one country avoided collecting official data on religion as a result of historic abuses of this data to persecute religious minorities (particularly the Jews) during the Second World War.

Examples of responses from practice:

- *The OSCE Hate Crime Initiative:* At an international level, systematic attempts to collect data on hate crime, including on the basis of religion, is being supported by the ODIHR, <http://hatecrime.osce.org> . This seeks to include data from national points of contact and

civil society, whilst providing supportive guides on both collecting data for states and non-governmental organisations.

- At the level of the Council of Europe, a youth campaign, the “No Hate Speech Movement”, has set up the [Hate Speech Watch](https://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/) (see: <https://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/>). This is a user-generated repository to trace, monitor and collect examples of hate content on the Internet. The examples in the Watch testify and help raise awareness of the spread and impact of hate speech. They also have an educational function for young people to understand hate speech and, especially, to develop counter speech and arguments.
- *National and Local Initiatives:* Participants highlighted that there can be limitations with such datasets, including in how these are compiled. They emphasised how national and more local organisations with closer links to the groups affected can be important contributors to this process. For example, SPIOR (Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rijnmond, <http://www.spior.nl/>), a platform for bringing together Islamic organisations based in Rotterdam, collects data through its links with these organisations. Their figures highlight much higher rates (for example, up to 4 times the rates) of incidents than those recorded by official bodies such as the police and state anti-discrimination agencies. Participants were aware of other organisations which have developed methodologies to map incidents on a national level, such as the Collectif Contre L’Islamophobie en France (see <http://www.islamophobie.net/>). It was also noted that experiences may be different for different groups *within* religious minorities (e.g. women, young people), and hence it was important to collect data and information on experiences in ways which recognised this.

Improving legal and criminal justice responses to hate crime

Providing an appropriate framework within the legal and criminal justice systems to recognise and respond to hate crime is fundamental to creating cities where all individuals and groups, including those from religious minorities, can interact safely. Participants emphasised the importance of recognising that hate crime may be based on combinations of different forms of discrimination (e.g. against religions, different ethnic groups, etc.), and the need for joined-up responses which connect the work of different agencies together whilst providing both justice and support to affected groups.

Examples of responses from practice:

- The European Court of Human Rights has developed extensive [jurisprudence on hate speech](#), recognising that the right to freedom of expression may be restricted in specific cases, namely when it is necessary to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance, provided that any ‘formalities’, ‘conditions’, ‘restrictions’ or ‘penalties’ imposed are proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued.⁵

- The Council of Europe “[Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems](#)”⁶ requests each state party to adopt legislative and other measures to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law serious threats committed through computer systems against persons for the reason that they belong to – inter alia – a religious group.
 - The Council of Europe Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued a [general policy recommendation in 2015 on combating hate speech](#) that is also applicable to hate speech on the basis of religious belonging.
 - The *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* has produced work on **ensuring justice for victims of hate crime**, available [here](#).
 - Participants emphasised that implementing these responses can helpfully involve different forms of engagement by people in a wide range of different roles, working at different levels. For example, the *ODIHR* has produced particular [guides for responding to hate crimes](#) for law makers, police and prosecutors, civil society and educators.
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Improving responses to discrimination in other fields – e.g. labour market

Given the range of types and contexts for experiencing discrimination, the need for legislative protections extends beyond hate crime. **Protections against discrimination across a wide range of aspects of everyday life** were considered by the participants to be crucial in supporting the wider place and contribution of religious minorities within society. For example, in employment, this includes having effective employment law and systems such as tribunals to consider allegations of discrimination affecting work. The presence and form of these protections varied considerably across the contexts represented. There was particular discussion of discrimination being prevalent in employment when this related to roles requiring interaction in public services, e.g. pharmacists. In responding to incidents of discrimination, participants emphasised the need to not just focus on any one particular religious group’s experiences, but to provide protections which recognised different religious groups equally in light of the requirements of any particular job, whilst being aware of differences in experiences between different groups. The failure to make reasonable adjustments in the provision of public services to the needs of religious minorities (such as enabling schools to provide meals which included options that met their dietary requirements) was experienced as discriminatory by religious minorities. It can also exacerbate wider disadvantage, such as in circumstances when a parent (often a mother) then has to be available at lunchtimes to ensure alternative appropriate food is provided, affecting their work prospects, etc. Similarly, uniform rules in some schools which discriminate against aspects of dress essential to those in some religious minorities may mean that they don’t attend or take part in particular activities, potentially affecting their future, whilst also exacerbating pressures for segregated activities that reduce the potential for interaction.

A wide range of social and structural factors were understood to be contributing to prejudice, discrimination and intolerance; for example, discrimination could be exacerbated by segregated geographical patterns of living and forms of social stratification. Examples of strategies for

responding to these social and structural factors are considered below. Participants emphasised the need to move beyond just intervening after discrimination had occurred - it was essential to also consider **more preventative forms of action** to tackle forms of prejudice which were seen to be contributing to the circumstances where discrimination was more likely to occur. In addition, and in line with extensive wider research, participants emphasised the interactions between different aspects of identities (e.g. country of origin, ethnicity, gender, etc.) in affecting experiences of prejudice and discrimination; these may result in multiple and inter-related forms of disadvantage. Hence, it was seen to be important to focus on responding to prejudice and discrimination in a more holistic way, rather than just focusing on religion, in order to devise effective responses. Having said this, there was also much that could be done in terms of recognising religion as an important factor within this broader picture, as the following sections consider.

Examples of responses from practice:

- The European Network on Racism has produced a range of **related [factsheets and reports](#)**. These include a guide to *'Debunking Myths about Jews'* and a research report *'Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women'* that includes data and examples of discrimination in employment, with related recommendations and responses. These include ensuring that any restrictions on religious dress in public spaces, services and employment are kept to the minimum necessary for pursuing legitimate goals under international human rights law.

Improving understanding of religions, their prevalence and requirements

An important factor in preventing discrimination and responding to prejudice was understood to be improving public understanding of religious minorities and tackling misperceptions about them. In many cities, public perceptions of the numbers of people within religious minorities were reported by participants as being much higher than the best data available on the actual numbers. This reflected a common perception that some of the public felt overwhelmed by increasing religious and ethnic diversity. This feeling was generating related fears amongst majority communities of losing their historic rights and traditional identities in a context of increasing diversity. These feelings were understood to be a major factor in driving prejudice and discrimination on a social and political level. In response to this, initiatives which shared accurate information about both the numbers of religious minorities and which enabled greater understanding of their beliefs and practices (and the implications of these) were helpful in tackling misperceptions amongst the public and service providers. Activities which helped empower religious minorities (including different groups within each religious community) to give voice to their own perspectives were also considered helpful in ensuring that understandings were based on listening directly to those involved. These can be particularly effective when designed in ways which help different groups to share perspectives with each other as a result.

Examples of responses from practice:

- **Awareness-raising workshops about religious diversity** were being run across many cities involving participants from civil society and majority religious groups. These were organised by various combinations of local authorities, civil society groups and religious groups. The activities aimed to constructively challenge myths and misunderstandings about religious minorities (for example, by sharing accurate data, and giving these groups opportunities to ask questions about other religions in a safe environment).
- **Building deeper religious literacy amongst service providers and employers**, including improved understandings of the beliefs and requirements of different religions. This can be facilitated by building wider relationship with religious groups to enable their requirements to be more properly understood. One example of this proving helpful was in response one individual's request for particular washing facilities in their workplace; on further exploration which included engagement with others of the same faith, it turned out that these were generally considered by those of that faith as not essential, whilst perhaps being helpful. Here, it was only by having people involved in that faith who could get involved in that discussion which helped the employer at first to fully understand, and subsequently mediate and resolve the situation.
- **Engagement with religious leaders at a national level** can be helpful in supporting this, to understand different interpretations of that faith in relation to any particular requirement or social issue. For example, in Norway, the City of Oslo engaged with the Islamic Council of Norway (originally through a project funded by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity) to produce a **guidebook**, "Arbeid og Islam" (published in 2009 by Velferdsetaten Oslo kommune in cooperation with Islamsk råd): <http://docplayer.me/787953-Ansatte-som-jobber-med-deltakere-i-kvalifiseringstiltak.html>.
- At the international level, the Council of Europe's "[Compass manual for human rights education with young people](#)" includes a dedicated chapter on understanding religion and beliefs.

Adapting regulations and service provision to be more inclusive of different religious and secular groups

As the sections above have begun to highlight, an important aspect of tackling discrimination frequently involved making adaptations to regulations and service provisions to be more inclusive of religious minorities. This involves starting from the recognition that even states which view themselves as secular have histories which have contributed to the particular ways that they engage with individuals from majority and minority religions within their borders, and these frequently impact on different religious groups in a different, often unequal way. Improved religious literacy, dialogue and interaction all contribute to better understandings of what each other's needs actually are, as highlighted above, and can help determine what might be reasonable adaptations to services. Participants recognised there is a need to be willing to adapt where possible to those things that

matter in terms of our common life together. Examples of areas for such adaptations are given throughout this report, such as in terms of how meals are provided in schools (above) and how planning regulations are framed around buildings and public space (below). The exact form of any particular adaptation can be controversial, and hence it is important that intercultural negotiations over this in particular contexts respect the rights of all individuals and groups, whether religious or secular, in their process and outcome. There can be particular issues where this links to discrimination against other groups, such as against particular groups within religious minorities, and an intercultural approach to this is discussed further towards the end of this report.

Examples of responses from practice:

- Providing public services in ways that take into account different cultural needs can often be facilitated by an intercultural approach. For example, in Bergen, aspects of **pastoral care support in hospitals and prisons, and funeral/burial arrangements**, are addressed through multi-faith co-operation supported by Bergen interfaith council.
- Some participants emphasised the need to be clear about the ultimate objectives of any particular activity, which may involve **respecting the process of different faith groups** where this may differ from majority norms. For example, one participant raised the question of when teaching the national language to a group of women where there may be cultural or religious issues with doing this with both men and women present, do you provide separate gender classes or insist all classes are mixed gender? As part of building potential for wider intercultural interaction in the longer term, this participant argued for looking at what best achieved this longer term objective, and adapting the delivery language classes if necessary. (It was noted that in many of the contexts represented, even where these weren't directly organised around religiously-informed perspectives, there can be other single gender activities and spaces in many of their cultures too).

Improving spaces for expression and interaction

Space was a key issue in a range of different ways for many of the cities and religious minorities represented.

Minority religious groups often experience difficulties in finding suitable **premises in which to meet** and organise religious and related social activities. Reasons for this could include discrimination by some landlords who were unwilling to let properties to some religious minority groups, and some planning or other local authority regulations proving problematic in the way they were framed in relation to particular religious groups, etc. Such spaces were important as gathering places for those sharing religious identities, often across different cultural backgrounds and/or countries of origin (where participants were migrants). In some circumstances, they were also being used as spaces for the wider community, including for social activities and for helping to raise awareness of that religious group and build relationships between that group and the wider community.

Groups and cities had also experienced issues about requests for the **use of public spaces**, e.g. when celebrating major festivals. In the intercultural responses discussed, public spaces were considered

important in providing opportunities to help promote positive interactions between individuals and groups, whilst ensuring different groups equal rights in expressing religious and non-religious identities in ways that did not undermine each other.

Examples of responses from practice:

- **Providing clear guidance based on equal treatment:** The Adjuntament de Barcelona has responded to some of these issues by agreeing a “*Government measure on guaranteeing equal treatment for religious bodies holding occasional activities in public places*”. This provided clear guidelines on the different needs of religious groups in this regard, the use of public space and facilities by religious groups, whilst acknowledging any current issues and implementing actions to further improve planning in relation to separate places of worship, training in religious diversity, and relations between the municipality and religious groups.
 - **The use of public buildings and public spaces by religious groups** was particularly controversial in some contexts, particularly in those cases where a particular interpretation of secularism was understood to exclude this. However, from an intercultural perspective, participants saw distinct advantages to allowing activities such as the teaching of religious texts by trusted groups to happen in public settings. For example, this may mean people can see what is happening and how, whilst hopefully reducing fears as a result of this openness, rather than this being limited to taking place behind closed doors in religious buildings. In addition, participants highlighted how public building may provide more open spaces for people to explore their faith in relation to controversial issues concerning interpretation and application of their religion in contemporary society in interaction with others, in situations where they felt less able to do this in places of worship.
 - **Creating separate and shared spaces in partnership:** In San Sebastian, one project created an open structure which could be used by different faith groups separately or together, located in university grounds, to provide a symbolic representation of these principles. This had been created as part of the European Capital of Culture celebrations by students from a Higher Technical School of Architecture with support from San Sebastian Council and a local university. The students had engaged with local religious groups to understand their requirements, and then built an open structure which could be used by a range of different local religious groups separately or together. This was seen as being a visual demonstration of how religions can use public spaces, having no more or less rights than any other group, and how professions and public institutions can engage with them in dialogue to understand their needs and respond accordingly. This structure was called ‘[Möbius](#)’. Within the city, this had been balanced alongside other spaces such as the creation of a local mosque building which had brought together Muslims of different cultural backgrounds across the city, which saw its role as being both providing space for Muslims and improving opportunities for those from the wider communities to understand what went on in that place of worship. In another city, the local authority had worked with three different religious groups who were all struggling to find appropriate space in a particular area; this had resulted in the development of a combined space for them.
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Promoting interaction opportunities for improved understanding, dialogue and solidarity

The above examples begin to illustrate the importance of making space for interactions at all levels, from the everyday up to the structural level, and being clear how these interactions interact and happen. Participants shared a wide range of further examples of ways in which they had sought to create opportunities for increased interaction between diverse religious and secular groups. These included opportunities for drawing a wider range of people into safe spaces to learn about each other, discuss even difficult issues together, and work together for the common good.⁷ The importance of such spaces cannot be underestimated, and this importance is reflected in the number of examples cited here.

In considering different opportunities, participants emphasised the need for both dialogue and working together on issues of common concern, and that these can mutually support each other. For example, enabling people to work together practically in neighbourhoods on issues such as clean streets, having good schools for children, helping refugees, the environment, etc. can help participants identify shared values, concerns and responses in practical ways, even if particular participants are not interested in having religious conversations with each other. Having said this, there was a recognition that dialogue is important, including in terms of recognising the important contribution religious groups have to make to the wider democratic process. However, this needs trust, transparency, time, responsibility, accountability, recognition and empowerment of religious communities, acknowledging convictions as part of everyone's identity as human beings, and recognising religious groups as having important contributions to make, rather than just seeing them as having particular needs.

Examples of responses from practice:

- **Open days/nights for places of worship** such as mosques were considered helpful across a range of contexts, as they provided an opportunity for the wider public to see what happens within these buildings. For example, in Bergen, a citywide programme of mosque open days has developed to attract 400-500 visitors, and there are now plans to seek to extend this into a national initiative.
- **Wider programmes of interaction-focused events:** The Office of Multicultural Cohesion, Neuchâtel, organised a programme of 30 events over 3 months called '[NeuchàToi 2016](#)'. This involved lots of associations, activities, lectures, roundtables, 'unlikely conversations', exhibitions, and activities seeking to engage a wider range of people including young people than those who had traditionally engaged in interfaith dialogue. These activities tackled various topics including religion at work, religion and women, religion and state, religion and secularism, interreligious interactions, etc. This programme of activities had built on the earlier establishment of a related charter and training for engaging with religious diversity.
- **An 'interfaith travel agency'** has enabled groups in Rotterdam to visit each other within the city provided a means for this interaction to happen by visiting different places of worship. This programme has included getting thousands of pupils from schools across the city

involved in these activities. A key component of this programme is enabling people to see diversity *within* as well as *between* religions, stressing that there isn't just one version of each, but that there are different people and views within religions too. Within the same city, reflecting the need to do activities together as well, there is also an **interfaith mini-marathon**, where participants focus on running together not finishing first, wearing t-shirts bearing messages such as 'running for understanding'. Another project in the same city has involved people from the local mosque working with people with disabilities and others from a particular neighbourhood to make a gravel square more beautiful, using plants, trees, flowers, etc.

- **An inter-religious platform** in Geneva has been developed with the goal runs a range of activities to generate dialogue and relationships between people following diverse religions and philosophies in civil society, recognising diversity within different groups, and tackle common objectives together. This platform includes 23 diverse groups, and involves both individual and group members, and associated members for those interested in religion. It was initially established by a charter agreed by all participants in the platform in 1992. Their activities have included: (i) Developing a '**house of religions**' as a place where all religions can co-exist and each has some room for themselves, in a physical location close to the base of several international institutions; (ii) Developing awareness of different religions by activities such as holding a '**week of religions**' involving interaction activities (events, visits, etc.) organised around a common theme each year (e.g. sacred objects, religious facts). (iii) Publishing an **interreligious calendar** particularly focused on students to raise awareness of different religious festivals through the year; (iv) **Making public statements** to tackle divisive views expressed in the media and make common statements in support of peace and challenging discrimination, particularly in response to events; (v) **Twinning projects**, where people of different faiths go to each other's place of worship; (vi) **Discussions on inter-religious co-existence and understanding**, and events where politicians and the wider public discuss related issues together. (vii) **Artistic events and awards**, celebrating different expressions and experiences of religion in music, etc. (viii) Particular projects for groups such as young people.
- The need to develop activities and structures to support interaction can apply as much *within* particular religions as *between* them, especially where there may be many differences in religious understanding, culture, ethnicity/nationality, gender, etc. within them. For example, this can be seen in the way that the work of SPIOR has developed since 1988 as an **Islamic umbrella organisation** which builds links and capacity across different Muslim individuals and groups in Rotterdam and neighbouring towns; see <http://www.spior.nl/> . There are currently 68 member organisations, including most of the mosques in Rotterdam and many socio-cultural organisations, youth and women's organisations, across at least twelve different cultural origins. A key focus of this organisation's work is to connect people, groups and organisations to contribute to the realisation of shared values, common ground and joint activities whilst improving the participation of Muslims in the Netherlands. These include, among others, work in the fields of education, anti-discrimination, youth, employment and women's empowerment. As with many of the other examples cited above, they emphasise that it takes time to build relationships of trust, and how easy it is for this to

be undermined, citing the Dutch expression 'Trust comes by foot, but leaves on horse'. Hence, there is a focus on investing in good relations over the long-term, and this being needed in peaceful times and not just when there is an incident/stressful times, either in the local area or abroad. For example, when the terrorist attacks happened in Paris, because of their existing relationships, they were able very quickly to bring together a meeting between those from different religious and humanist traditions, and publically stand together for peace.

Participants recognised that there can be many **challenges to developing interaction activities** such as these in practice. These can include limited capacity within religious communities, particularly smaller minority religious groups, to be involved in these types of initiatives, even where they would be willing in principle to participate otherwise. For example, across many of the cities, participants emphasised the need to recognise the different structures and capacities of different groups, including the high dependence in many on volunteers who have limited time. Religious leaders can have a wide range of roles, and limited administrative support. In such communities, it can be the same people who continue to get repeated requests to get involved in dialogue or working together, or to organise visits to their houses of worship at particular times and dates, etc. This may mean that such activities require resourcing and supporting in different ways. There can also be challenges in ensuring that activities such as visits and open days affect relationships and understandings between individuals and communities, and don't turn into a passive experience like just visiting a museum. Another challenge can be ensuring continuity and sustainability of these activities, particularly in periods where there appears no immediate urgency. Further challenges include spreading the learning from these interactions to a broader public, including those not currently involved in these activities. This can be a big challenge in areas that are not diverse, and/or where people don't often meet each other in other circumstances, which is why providing interaction opportunities had to be combined with broader public engagement strategies.

Engaging with political and media discourses

This challenge to reach a wider public extends to a need to engage more broadly and collectively with discourses in the public sphere, including those espoused by politicians and media outlets. Politicians in many contexts were seen as playing a role in exacerbating prejudice and discrimination in the discourses they deployed, using this to build an anti-minority populism. This often set the tone for what is publically perceived as acceptable for others to say and do, seen in phenomenon such as the rise in hate crime in the UK (including against religious minorities) since the country's referendum vote to leave the European Union, following a campaign which included related statements. Such statements are often spread through extensive media coverage, seen elsewhere in examples such as the coverage of statements by prominent politicians. These include the Norwegian Minister of Integration, who has been reported as posting on social media: "Those who come to live in Norway need to adapt to our society. Here we eat pork, drink alcohol and show our face".⁸ Another example is the latest trial of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) politician Wilders for racial discrimination and inciting hatred in the Netherlands, having previously also criticised Islam, calling for the Koran to be banned and for the closure of all mosques in the Netherlands.⁹ Such views can begin to become absorbed even in children from a young age; for example, one Muslim

participant shared how they had been asked by children during a school discussion ‘So when did you stop being [nationality] and become a Muslim?’

In response, the conference participants emphasised the need to challenge any attempted ‘normalisation of intolerance’ that arises from politicians and media outlets ‘pushing the limit of what is acceptable to say’ about religious minorities. The approach taken to do this challenging was important, as the popularity of such views can be exacerbated if they can portray themselves as not being allowed freedom of speech. However, when other politicians don’t respond to critique prejudiced views, or know how to respond, this can leave a vacuum which enables them to flourish. Hence, participants emphasised the need for public engagement by politicians and practitioners in building a strong and positive counter-narrative in public and media discourses. As well as acknowledging the valuable contributions of different religions to society, this can helpfully highlight the need for freedom of religion for all, including majority and minority religions, within an equal framework (see below). Politicians in particular can help to frame national identities in inclusive ways, recognising the contribution of different faith and secular groups to their country. Cities, civil society and faith groups can support this by building relationships with media outlets and politicians proactively, and providing practical evidence, data and examples to support more positive coverage. They can also assist in tackling rumours, before negative attitudes become manifested in hate crimes. This can be especially important where perceptions of historical or current conflict are being stoked by some groups or even other countries for wider political aims.

Examples of responses from practice:

- In several cities, elected politicians and civic leaders (e.g. public mayors) were engaged in **repeating more positive messages** at every opportunity and public occasion, across diverse audiences. Politicians from across the political spectrum, recognising the place of different religious minorities within their constituencies, can engage with minority religious groups and build less politicised relationships with religious communities such as local mosques in the interests of good relations.
- Several participants had built **strong working relationships with particular media outlets**, to help highlight the problems faced by religious minorities in terms of prejudice and discrimination, and in helping to inform people in taking a different approach. This had included providing media outlets with accurate statistics, providing facts about their religion, talking about other problems faced by people who are members of their organisation and not just religious ones, sharing examples and stories, as well as organising coverage of joint statements and collective actions of solidarity.
- Other organisations had also focused on **creating their own media to tackle stereotypes and spreading this through social networks**; for example, the [Muslim Women’s Network](#) in the UK has created [short videos](#) providing a range of positive examples of Muslim women’s diverse contributions to society.
- In Ukraine, where religious difference was perceived by some participants as being raised by Russia as a factor in recent conflict (including through state-sponsored media coverage), an **inter-confessional council** in one region had been instrumental in organising relations

between different religious communities, whilst countering any divisive messages by distributing information about how religious organisations were working together to resolve any local issues.

Engaging critically with the impact of discourses of security, radicalisation and terrorism, and their effects on prejudice and discrimination

As the above section begins to highlight, political stances and aspects of policies at local, national and international levels can be seen as exacerbating tensions between groups. A range of other examples were shared by participants where this was seen to be the case, including many which were focused on the negative impact of discourses and practices which linked particular religious minorities to issues of security, radicalisation and terrorism. Whilst recognising that some terrorists have claimed links to forms of Islam in particular, the misinterpretation of religious texts in ways that support violence has been widely challenged by many religious leaders. Policies focusing on religious minorities as a perceived security risk can exacerbate negative public perceptions of these groups in ways that lead to discrimination and hate crime; to give just one example, one participant gave an account of a woman wearing a hijab who had been waiting at a bus stop when a car had stopped and its occupants had bullied her, telling her that she was a terrorist. These issues extend beyond individual experiences to state actions, such as in Japan when a leak in 2010 revealed that Muslims had been under mass surveillance as perceived security risks there. Complex affairs such as this and the so-called 'Trojan Horse' affair where schools in Birmingham in the UK were investigated (having been accused of being infiltrated by Muslim extremists) can be driven by public fears. In line with research into media coverage and how this is received,¹⁰ they can also affect public perceptions in terms of the words they associate with particular religious minorities. The result can often significantly undermine any relationships of trust that have otherwise been established between these groups and public authorities.¹¹

It was in this complex and controversial context that some participants reported that much of the public funding available to religious minorities, and particularly Muslim groups, was being targeted to groups that said they would address 'radicalisation' and/or 'extremism'. However, there was significant contestation over what might be defined as 'extreme', particularly given the political debates referred to above. Hence, for many, engaging with these agendas carried a significant risk of adding to confusion about engagement with religious groups and exacerbating the labelling and discrimination against their religious community.

Examples of responses from practice:

- To the extent that any engagement with such agendas and funding streams was considered helpful by the participants, this was mainly when it was done in the context of responding to all forms of radicalisation, including right wing extremism. Particular examples of this came from a Norwegian context, where the experience of mass murder in 2011 by a right-wing extremist remained in the public consciousness. Responses included an initiative **giving money to young people from a range of backgrounds (including the city youth council and a mosque) to organise their own conference** on radicalisation, and in Bergen, the city

council and mosque co-operating on a project to educate the imams on radicalisation by inviting them all to participate in related **training about all forms of extremism**. Empowerment is important to allow people to speak for themselves and seek their own solutions, rather than the city seeking these for them.

- For other participants in other contexts, as far as their work on challenging prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities was concerned, many of them felt the best thing to do was to **not engage or seek funding on the basis of radicalisation/extremism agendas**, and instead try to engage on a better footing around the rights of all groups, challenging prejudice and discrimination, and building co-operative, cohesive and peaceful relationships between communities more generally.

Engaging critically with religious discourses and practices concerning prejudice and discrimination

There was recognition amongst participants that some religious perspectives can discriminate against people because of their gender, sexuality, etc., as well as against other individuals and groups that do not share their particular religion or interpretation of it. Reflecting this, some of those from religious organisations argued that religious organisations should not necessarily have to accept all norms espoused within popular culture or by other groups. However, many of the participants argued strongly that an intercultural approach involved working against prejudice and discrimination on multiple fronts – including tackling prejudice and discrimination against religious groups wherever this was found (including within public bodies and other religious groups), and tackling forms of prejudice, discrimination and injustice against other groups, including within their own community. For those taking this approach, it was important to be reflective about ways in which religious discourses and practices can contribute to prejudice and discrimination, and tackle these when working with their own religious communities. Often, bringing diverse groups sharing a particular religion but having different cultural backgrounds provided a way in for practitioners to reflect with groups on what was central and essential to a particular religion, and what was more associated with a particular cultural expression (and even misinterpretation/misapplication) of it. Such debates could often be best facilitated by those belonging to and deeply familiar with particular religious identities and traditions, enabling an engagement with them not just on the grounds of human rights but also an engagement with the religious texts and traditions themselves.

Examples of responses from practice:

- In Rotterdam, the bringing together of 68 member organisations (including the majority of local mosques, many women's and youth organisations, etc.) within SPIOR has built relationships between diverse groups sharing a commitment to Islam, and enabled **debates about prejudice and discrimination to happen within and between these groups**. The organisation's director recognises that although such views are not intrinsic to Islam, and not all Muslims are involved in it, there is nevertheless a need to tackle anti-Semitism, homophobia, bad treatment of women, etc. amongst some Muslims: "You cannot be selective in your solidarity – if you claim, as you should, that these are human rights, and

want just treatment of yourself and your own community, you should also be self-critical of yourself and your own community and what your views are.” Based on this, they have run various projects to tackle discrimination on various grounds and through different methods; for examples, see <http://www.spior.nl/what-is-spior/> .

- Lamrani Abderrahman from the Moroccan Network of Intercultural Cities shared how the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam¹² and Marrakesh Declaration provide examples of the development of principles which build on foundations within the Muslim faith to develop a framework in principle for respecting the freedoms and rights of religious minorities in Islamic countries, whilst making links between religious texts and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³
- [Tabadol](#) is an association which takes an **‘anti-bias’ approach** involving four steps: recognising and valuing the individual in its identity, valuing the diversity of identities in a group, identifying situations of injustice associated with identities by enabling people to express the injustices they live, and finding ways to collectively to fight against social injustice. The organisation leads training programs for professionals to integrate intercultural issues related to different aspects of identity (gender, religion, nationality, cultural group, social class, etc.) in their work practices. This includes running workshops for different groups, in educational institutions or sociocultural structures. Tabadol organises also International youth meetings for young people from France, Lebanon and Germany centered on issues of discrimination and intercultural interaction. These activities include using various media including artistic approaches to enable people to reflect critically on the relationship between culture and religion in terms of how these impact on discrimination.

Constitutional/legal frameworks – levelling up to equal rights¹⁴

Running through all of the responses above are recognitions that historical constitutional and legal frameworks, as well as regulations, policies and practices, can often have embedded differential treatment for different religious and secular groups which can continue to the present day; this can in effect be a form of systemic discrimination. This report does not have the space for a comprehensive consideration of the range of these differences across the countries involved, and even within any particular context, engaging with these differences in order to consider any discrimination inherent within them is a complex process. Amongst the conference participants, there remained debates over the best ways of making adaptations in particular contexts, and in particular what might be ‘reasonable adjustments’ to regulations and service provision within specific contexts. This was particularly challenging because ‘reasonableness’ is often determined with regard to our own frame of reference, which may be rooted in a religious or non-religious worldview and set of convictions; if we are strongly committed to a particular faith or secular worldview that requires something, then anything associated with that can seem reasonable to us. However, even here, intercultural engagement provides at least a means of engaging in dialogue over which areas of policy and practice are experienced as discriminatory and/or enhancing prejudice against religious minorities. Participants emphasised the importance of being sensitive to how we might like to be treated if our particular religion or worldview was in the minority,

recognising religious and cultural diversity in what is important to people, and listening to those who are in this position about any adaptations they would request, whilst seeking to frame any change in terms of rules for equal treatment that apply equally to all religious and secular groups. This can raise particular challenges when rights relating to different aspects of identity and discrimination interact, resulting in complex legal test cases at national and European levels.

In general, participants challenged a view of public spaces as a secular space that needs to be protected from the rights of religious groups, but instead articulated a view of the public space as everybody's space. This meant that the challenge is to frame those rights in a way that enables everybody to have equal rights, including those who want to express their religion and those who have no religion. Prejudice within majority communities can often be fed by perceptions that they are losing traditional rights, and minorities are receiving rights which they don't have. In this context, where majority religious groups have traditionally had particular rights, a more effective response may be not to take these away from them, but to ensure that other groups organised around religion, conviction or belief have similar treatment within a framework that respects the rights of all.

Examples of responses from practice:

- Some authorities have sought to address this through **changing rules or constitutions around how minority religions can become recognised** by the state, region, canton or local authority, and/or reviewing whether different religious groups receive different treatment as a result.
- In Norway, religious minorities were reported as now **receiving the same support** per capita for their members as the Church of Norway does.
- Local authorities can **agree common rules on the celebration of major religious festivals in public spaces**. These can include the way it will interact with and not obstruct religious groups seeking to make space for public celebrations of major religions, reflecting their presence as part of the wider community, whilst also safeguarding the rights of those who do not belong to a religion. The common guidelines produced by Barcelona (cited earlier) provide one example of this type of approach.
- The **bringing of test cases** such as the one brought forward by the Human Rights League (LDH) and the an anti-Islamophobia association (CCIF) to the highest administrative court in France challenging the actions of police and local authorities in forbidding Muslims from wearing full body swimsuits (so-called 'Burkinis') on the beach. This example was cited by participants in their group discussions as an illustration of a state response which was considered unfair, disproportionate and discriminatory. From an intercultural perspective, participants argued that it was important that this ban had been overturned, enabling all people in France to wear what they chose on the beach (although full face coverings remain illegal in France, in a ban that has been upheld by the European Court of Human Rights¹⁵ as being supportive of a legitimate aim of supporting living together, whilst recognising the wide margin of appreciation in Europe concerning significant differences of opinion on how this can be achieved).

- The ‘**Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life**’¹⁶ explored in detail the legal situation in Britain, taking evidence from a wide range of sources and groups, to make a range of recommendations. This included a detailed discussion of how protections for different groups holding a range of forms of religion or belief, including non-religious belief, might be made more equal.
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Supporting trained mediators and bridge-builders

These approaches reflect how a wide range of situations can begin to be approached using a variety of different intercultural approaches. They do not in themselves prevent the potential for disagreement and controversy over what the right response to different perspectives on discrimination against religious groups might be. However, they do highlight some ways in which understanding of religious minorities can be developed, relationships built, and difficult conversations at least broached. Conference participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of dialogue and the significant risks associated with avoiding this.

As a result, there was strong support for cities to take a proactive approach in developing trained mediators with the skills to help support good relations between groups and intervene in situations where difficulties are arising before situations become too entrenched, within the intercultural frameworks indicated above. There was also support for having people with the skills and understanding to be able to raise these controversial issues in places like schools and not being afraid to engage in dialogue about them, but instead having processes to enable them to be explored in dialogue. This included training civil servants to their jobs inclusively whilst promoting these discussions, as well as people in non-governmental organisations, religious leaders, etc. Developing mediated forms of engagement would help to counter any taboo which may otherwise exist around these issues, where silence about them is contributing to continued lack of understanding between individuals and groups.

Examples of responses from practice:

- Montreal has developed a central team of experts in the municipality who **provide support and training to civil servants, politicians, etc.** in localities on developing responses to different religious and cultural groups in their local neighbourhoods, whilst responding to different needs and challenging misperceptions.
 - Some cities had developed **training for religious leaders** (many of whom may be volunteers), which went beyond sharing facts to sharing skills, including those helpful for educating others on engaging with difference, mediation skills, etc.
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Conclusion – Adapting responses to particular contexts and different stages within local processes

The above examples indicate a wide range of different potential areas for response and examples of how these responses have been developed within particular contexts. Selecting the most helpful responses in particular contexts was seen by participants as depending on a wide range of factors. These included (for example) the context of constitutional/legal support (as discussed above), broader socio-political events, and histories of relationships within particular local areas. In addition, migration patterns, experiences of different religious groups, histories of the states involved, etc. were different in different contexts, and this did matter in terms of deciding on appropriate responses in that context. However, across the diverse contexts considered, there were clear themes including: (i) the formation of a robust legal framework for supporting the rights of all; (ii) challenging hate crime and discrimination across a range of fields; (iii) raising mutual awareness of different religions; (iv) reasonable adaptation of public service delivery; (v) promoting positive interactions which built trust and involved dialogue and/or working together on shared social issues to break down divides; (vi) engaging critically with political and media discourses, including seeking to counteract those which exacerbate division, and be aware of how other policy agendas can interact with and undermine attempts to challenge prejudice and discrimination; (vii) supporting and training people who can enable dialogue and build bridges between individuals and groups, including on issues where there is disagreement. The formation of networks and associations across cultural and religious boundaries had particular potential to help facilitate this between different groups within and across groups of different religions or beliefs. The importance of long term relationship building and engagement was underpinned by the need to build these relationships from a realistic assessment of the current position, and awareness of what stage in the process of intercultural and inter-religious engagement had been reached so far. Whilst some places had established relationships over decades supporting their interactions, others felt they were only just forming these relationships. Therefore, there are significant opportunities for cities to learn from each other, including from those who have developed different responses and are at different stages in the process, as well as for many to be more systematic in combining different types of response which may be appropriate in their context.

Underpinning all of these approaches and examples, participants emphasised the importance of treating people as human beings with empathy, being co-hosts of each other, and having a sense of humour. This included nourishing those qualities that enabled people to have good quality debates that maintained relationships even when those involved disagreed strongly with each other. Furthermore, as well as forming new networks of relationships across different communities of religion, belief and conviction, they emphasised the importance of widening and deepening existing networks. A particular concern was reaching more widely outside the networks of those who are already supportive of challenging prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities, being aware of limitations of our existing activities and our present understandings. In the networks we form, and the way we form them, participants highlighted how we can model the change we want to make. Through this, they argued it is possible to form a more positive set of relationships which can support changes in the direction of public discourses, including in media and politics, to support intercultural interaction and challenge prejudice and discrimination against religious minorities.

Notes and References

¹ For example, estimates by the Pew Research Center (2015:161) put the Muslim population in Europe in 2010 at 43.47million (5.9% of the population), following those affiliating as Christians at 553.28million (74.5%) and unaffiliated population at 139.89million (18.8%). These are all much larger than other religious groups such as Jews at 1.42million (0.2%), Hindus (0.2%), Buddhists at 1.35million (0.2%), folk religions (0.87million, 0.1%) and other religions (0.87million, 0.1%) respectively. The same report from the Pew Research Center also predicts that the Muslim population in Europe is growing significantly, estimating this to be 10% of Europe's population by 2050 (p.161). However, the issue of measuring religion in populations (and predicting changes and trends) is well recognised as a difficult one, not least because of differences in data collection methods, measures and sources, and frequent differences between nominal affiliation and various forms of belief and practice, for example. See: Pew Research Center (2015) *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, Washington: Pew Research Center. (Related summaries and data available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>).

² The views presented in this report and the examples given reflect a summary of the participants' views and contributions, rather than necessarily representing the writer's or Council of Europe's perspective and/or recommendation of their particular approach.

³ For a report on this event which includes a brief summary of the Council of Europe's positions on related matters, see Orton, A. (2014) *Faith in Intercultural Cities: Recognising religions as part of local diversity, and exploring how they can contribute to the diversity advantage of cities*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. The current report starts from the acknowledgement of the foundations and principles laid in this previous report.

⁴ This data is from the last published version of this substantial study, carried out in 2008 and published in 2011; see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2011/eu-midis-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey> . However, the broad point was strongly supported as continuing to be the case by the event participants. For more recent statistics, an updated version of this research was carried out in 2015, with data due to be published imminently; see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2015/eu-midis-ii-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey> .

⁵ European Court of Human Rights (2016) *Factsheet: Hate Speech*, June 2016, available at: http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf .

⁶ Council of Europe (2003) "Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems", *European Treaty Series*, No. 189, Strasbourg, 28.1.2003, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008160f> .

⁷ For a theoretical discussion of different types of space for interaction which informs this, with wider supporting references, see: Orton, A. 'Interfaith Dialogue: Seven Key Questions for Theory, Policy and Practice', *Religion, State and Society*, forthcoming.

⁸ See, for example, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/norway-integration-minister-muslim-eat-pork-drink-alcohol-show-face-sylvi-listhaug-a7372991.html> .

⁹ See, for example, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37819682> .

¹⁰ For example, research by Hirofumi Okai, Waseda University was shared during the event highlighting results in one Japanese city of the heavy dependence on the media as a source of information on Islam (73.7% TV, 34.2% newspapers vs 5.6% Muslims living in the neighbourhood, for example, in a context where 90% of respondents had no Muslim acquaintances) and the free-word associations arising from these sources, which focused on conflict. This reflects wide research which also applies to Europe about how media consumption and prejudice can be mutually reinforcing; for example, see the German study: Eyssele, Geschke and Frindte (2015) 'Is Seeing Believing? The Relationship between TV Consumption and Islamophobia in German Majority Society', *Journal of Media Psychology*, 27(4):190-202.

¹¹ Also see, for example, the summary of related research in: Awan, I. (2014) 'Operation Trojan Horse: Islamophobia or Extremism?', *Political Insight*, September 2014, pp.38-39, where 90% of those surveyed felt the media had distorted the whole affair, and 95% thought community cohesion had been damaged by it.

¹² <http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/FMRpdfs/Human-Rights/cairo.pdf> .

¹³ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> .

¹⁴ The author adopted the phrase 'levelling up' used in this section heading from the presentation by Prof Tariq Modood, at a recent British Sociological Association Study Day, "Connecting for Change: emerging research and policy on religion and belief in the public sphere", on 21st October 2016. Modood was a member of the Commission of Religion and Belief in British Public Life (see note 14 below), and used this phrase to summarise some of the principles within its report.

¹⁵ See Press Release ECHR 191 (2014), 01.07.2014, of the European Court of Human Rights, on S.A.S. v. France (application no. 43835/11).

¹⁶ Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (2015) *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*, Cambridge: Woolf Institute, available at: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-online.pdf> .