

Asia and Europe Mayor's Summit: Keynote Speech

Toward a Formation of International Partnership between Intercultural Cities

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Today, approximately 3% of the world population, or 192 million people, are living in countries other than their country of birth, and that number is increasing. The global movement of people is one of the most important themes for the humanity in the first half of the 21st century. Especially for industrialised countries, which face challenges of aging population as well as globalization, the importance of foreign workforce has been ever rising.

Generally speaking, immigration concerns two policy areas: admission policy relating to admitting what kind of migrants and how many of them and integration policy relating to how those migrants whose entry has been approved are integrated as members of society. The former is a responsibility borne by the central government, but the latter is an area where the central and local government must cooperate in their initiatives, and the role of local community is quite significant.

Overview of Japan, South Korea and Europe

In Japan, local governments with large numbers of migrants have led the national government in developing integration policies. In particular, the Council of Municipalities with a Large Migrant Population, which was set up in 2001 through the initiative of Hamamatsu City, pressed the national government to reform migrant policies, and it has produced certain results. In fact, the disparity of national and local government policies is not something peculiar to Japan. It is also seen in the West where a longer history of immigration exists.

In Europe, debates on immigration policy have continued since the 2000s, and whereas critical discourse on multiculturalism becomes dominant at the national level, local governments have begun exploring new approaches toward diversity. A representative of this is the Intercultural Cities Programme, which was started in 2008 by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. On one hand, diversity is regarded as a city's source of vitality and dynamism; on the other hand, there is much effort being placed on the promotion of migrant integration through interaction between citizens with different backgrounds.

For its part, South Korea is becoming one of Asia's major migrant admitting countries. Korea, where immigration policy was very similar to that of Japan until the 1990s, introduced an employment permit system in 2004, and since creating the Immigration Policy Council in 2006, the central government has tried to establish systems for immigration and integration, through the legislation of the Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea (2007) and the Support for Multicultural Families Act (2008), referring to experience of Western countries. In marked contrast to Japan, the central government is leading the policies of local governments in Korea.

9 Mayors from Korea, Japan and Europe with these points of similarity and difference gathered in Tokyo in January 2012, and the Intercultural City Summit took place, organized by the Japan Foundation and the Council of Europe. It was the first time in history for mayors from Asia and Europe to come together and meet under the theme of interculturalism. And today, through Hamamatsu City's initiative, once again, mayors from 11 Japanese, Korean and European cities have gathered here in Hamamatsu.

Next, I would like to present the significance of the Intercultural City Summit for Japan, Korea and Europe.

Significance for Japan.

First, it will help Japanese cities develop intercultural policies. Japanese intercultural cities aim for "living together", and as ideals, there is much they can share with their European counterparts. However, up until now, many of these initiatives have been related to the support of migrants. I believe that Japanese cities can learn from European experience, regarding the importance of placing great effort in community building so that people with different backgrounds can live together.

Second, Japanese cities can learn from the intercity cooperation of Europe. In the Intercultural Cities Programme, study visits and seminars on various themes are planned every year, and the intercity exchange between European countries is quite active. Domestic networks have also been born in Italy, Ukraine, Spain, Norway and Portugal. In Asia, there are no international networks of local governments. In Japan there are domestic networks such as the Council of Municipalities with a Large Migrant Population and the Council for the Promotion of Intercultural Communities, but they consist of local governments with a large number of South Americans of Japanese descent. Apparently, because of that, the current central government initiatives are focused mainly on these residents. In May this year, the Minister for the Cabinet Office Masaharu Nakagawa established a commission to realize "a society to live together with migrants," and at long last, a discussion on a government system for social integration began. Local governments, not just those with South Americans of Japanese descent, should now work together to convince the government and the society at large of the importance of intercultural integration.

Thirdly, it may stimulate the central government into establishing systems for migrant integration. Perhaps through the exchange with Europe, where many of the countries have laws on and a government body responsible for social integration, and Korea who have in recent years seen a rapid advancement in this field, the direction that the Japanese government should take will not be difficult to find. Then, intercultural cities with models of social integration will be a further stimulus to central government policy making.

Significance for South Korea and Europe

In Korea, based on the strong guidance of the national government, "multicultural policy" has progressed. In the midst of this, there are many cases where the word "multicultural" is

utilized as an adjective to describe something related to migrants i.e. “multicultural family” or “multicultural society” etc. There are many instances where this “multicultural policy” is simply support for migrants. Therefore, I believe there is much to be learned, just like Japan, from the initiatives of European intercultural cities. Further, in Korea, there has been no domestic network of cities on migrant integration. Through exchange with Europe and Japan, Korea could learn intercity cooperation as well. In fact, thanks to the initiative of Ansan City which participated in the first summit, preparations for the establishment of a national council of intercultural cities are underway.

For European cities, first, there will probably be a hint for re-evaluating their initiatives from a new perspective. Also, there are some areas where Japanese cities are more experienced, such as disaster prevention and cooperation with business etc. For cities in Eastern Europe whose ratios of migrant populations are still not so high, Japan and Korea’s initiatives may be more relevant. Further, the Japanese Council of Municipalities with a Large Migrant Population, which has had constant leverage on the national government, is quite unique, so European cities may be interested in its activities.

Conclusion

With the advancement of globalization and as the international movement of people becomes more widespread, the formation of intercultural society has become a global challenge. Based on cooperation between intercultural cities of Japan, Korea and Europe, if cities from countries in other regions, such as North America and Oceania, as well as the rest of Asia will participate in the future, we will see the realization of a global network of intercultural cities.

It is said that local governments are the testing sites for various policies. If each local government can, through trial and error, display models of social integration rooted in the locality and convince its national government of the importance of interculturalism, perhaps they can contribute to the formation of a global society which places great importance on diversity.

I expect that, with today’s second summit, international partnership between intercultural cities will take a further step forward.