

2003 Goldin Institute for International Partnership and Peace *Building Social Cohesion in the Midst of Diversity and Migration*



Diversity is a reality in most metropolitan areas around the world. Virtually all cities are home to a great variety of people, especially in terms of religious, spiritual and cultural identity. For many readers of *Insight*, diversity is valued as a source of enrichment. However, any casual reading through the headlines of any newspaper or magazine makes it clear that difference is often a source of division and strife.

How can we promote a positive view of difference and build a sense of social cohesion in the midst of diversity? Where have people been effective at building relationships of trust, understanding and cooperation between diverse communities, and how can we learn from them?

To explore these questions, the 2003 Goldin Institute convened teams of engaged grassroots and official leaders from over 20 cities in Brazil, Canada, India, Indonesia, Israel, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rwanda, Spain, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States and Zimbabwe. This Institute was hosted from October 19 to 25 at the Cova de St. Ignatius in Manresa, Spain — a site that proved an invaluable context and resource for uncovering best practices for building social cohesion.

Like many smaller cities in Catalonia, and indeed around the world, Manresa's sense of identity and social cohesion is being enriched and challenged by a rapid rise of immigration and diversity. In particular, more than 5,000 immigrants have arrived in Manresa over the past ten years, primarily Muslims from North Africa and Christians from Latin and South America. For a city of 60,000 residents, this has been a historic shift in demographics that has ushered in a great deal of tension and misunderstanding.

Given the rapidly increasing diversity in Manresa, Catalonia and Spain—a reality that resonates deeply with the experiences in the cities of the participants—the Institute's discussions focused on building social cohesion in the midst of growing religious, spiritual and ethnic diversity. The agenda offered an inductive approach for collaborative learning, and provided all participants opportunities to strategize with colleagues from cities around the world, interact with activists and religious and spiritual communities engaged building social cohesion in Manresa and Barcelona, participate in workshops, hear lectures and presentations, and have conversations with new and long-time friends.

Each morning of the Institute began with a time for religious and spiritual contemplation and practice that offered participants time to reflect on their experiences and explore the resources in their traditions for building social cohesion in the midst of diversity. It was clear from these sessions that each tradition has significant teachings and practices that help practitioners to welcome those who are different from them, and to provide the inspiration and motivation to persevere in the struggle to build positive relationships with others.

For the first two days of the Institute participants listened to immigrants in Manresa and Barcelona, hearing first-hand stories of why and how these persons immigrated to Spain, and how their sense of identity has changed in the process. Participants also listened to Catalonian citizens who considered themselves “hosts” to these new



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immigrants, sharing how their sense of identity was also challenged and broadened.

The moving and enlightening conversations helped to put a human face on this broad issue, and to ground the agenda of the week in the real life realities of building a sense of community in the midst of diversity. Participant Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke from Oxford stated that the underlying inductive methodology of “the Partner Cities is a brilliant idea and ensures that our aspirations are rooted in everyday situations, where patience and mutual understanding can change hostility to trust and alienation into friendship”.

Throughout the rest of the week participants met with professionals in other sectors of society that play an active role in building social cohesion, including: media, education, civil society, business, government and religious and spiritual communities. In a series of panels and dialogue sessions, professionals in these fields shared best practices, and engaged in conversations with participants on the appropriate role of their sector in building social cohesion in the midst of diversity and migration. Rev. Octave Ugirashebuja, a participant representing the Interfaith Commission of Rwanda, shared that “partnership was a key concept throughout the Institute. The sessions with media, business, government, religious and spiritual leaders and other sectors of civil society will help us to develop and enact best practices and collaborative efforts in Rwanda”.

Throughout the remaining days together, participants spent time in their city team, and across teams, refining tools, best practices and developing strategies for effectively building social cohesion when they return home. Several cities found convergences in their approaches, and have committed to partner across their cities. Sophia Dimalog, a participant from the Philippines, shared that this time together was “extremely helpful to our work in Manila and Mindanao. As a Muslim women’s organization in the third world, the 2002 and 2003 Institute’s were our only international experiences. It was a privilege to learn and share with other cities, and we encourage other cities to participate in the Partner Cities network”.

The 2003 Goldin Institute built on the great success of the inaugural Goldin Institute that was held in Chicago. At this inaugural gathering in 2002, interreligious organizers and peace activists from over 25 cities in the Middle East, North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia gathered together to share with fellow practitioners about the challenges and aspirations of their cities, to learn about better practices for dialogue and engagement, and to help lay the foundations for the nascent yet vital and growing Partner Cities Network. The organizers who attended were inspired as they learned from each other in a spirit of mutual enrichment.

The Goldin Institute was founded in June 2002, when the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions (CPWR) received a \$1 million contribution to establish the Goldin Institute for International Partnership and Peace. Now in its second year, this annual Institute effectively brings together grassroots community organizers on the frontlines of inter-religious tension to inspire or enhance peace movements in their metropolitan area.



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The Goldin Institute is the cornerstone of the Council's approach to create a network of Partner Cities around the world working for peace. Through the Partner Cities network, metropolitan areas around the world will:

- **Increase** their capacity to help a wide variety of religious and spiritual communities in their area understand each other, live together in peace, and to work constructively on issues facing their city;
- **Develop** new tools, methodologies and insights for improving social cohesion in the midst of growing diversity in their cities;
- **Leverage** the name, offices, resources and expertise of the Council and other partner cities in each site;
- **Promote** encounter, dialogue and cooperation across a broad range of groups and communities in ways that are appropriate to the local context;
- **Access** to a communication network of Partner Cities and engage with leaders on the vanguard of the movements for peace, justice and sustainability.

"The Goldin Institute renewed my hope that interfaith work really can change the world for the better", stated Rev. Marcus Braybrooke. "The courage and dedication of teams working in areas where there has been conflict and much suffering, such as Rwanda, Ukraine, Philippines, and Zimbabwe was an inspiration...[that] can offer a message and practical examples of healing to a violent and polarized world". We invite interested persons and organizations in cities around the world to join this emerging network of Partner Cities who are working together for a peaceful, just and sustainable future.

If you are interested in learning more about this exciting new Partner Cities Network and the Goldin Institute for International Partnership and Peace, please contact the Council's staff at partnercities@cpwr.org.

