

GEITONIES (meaning 'Neighbourhoods' in Greek) is a research project funded by the European Union's 7th Framework programme. GEITONIES is concerned with how interethnic interactions, in local neighbourhoods, in European cities, may influence the creation of a more tolerant, cohesive and integrated society. In Europe, multiculturalism and integration have become hotly debated issues, and are often used as banners by opposing camps. Integration, and even assimilation, are concepts that bear increasing weight, as concerns about the cohesion of society have grown steadily due to global processes and dramatic events clothed in symbolism that stress global cultural differences. Long-established policies of dealing with immigrant populations and of 'managing' diversity and difference are currently at stake.

Despite the value of these debates in political terms, they do point to a significant lack of scientific knowledge on how cultural interactions actually develop between individuals and groups of different ethnic background, in contexts where they meet on a daily basis. Also, we lack data on how these interactions are related to an interchange of skills and attitudes (acculturation) and how they bear on the social status of the individuals and groups engaged in contact. This project intends to address these issues from a relational perspective through the lens of place, assuming that in contemporary multi-ethnic European cities spaces of intercultural communication and engagement are vital to promote tolerance, cohesion, participation and inclusion in society. The research will be implemented in 6 European cities using cross-comparative analysis, in response to the consensus which recognises the need for comparative evidence across Europe. A survey with a longitudinal design, using a calendar format questionnaire, will be implemented to 600 residents in 18 neighbourhoods in 6 European cities (Lisbon, Rotterdam, Bilbao, Warsaw, Thessaloniki and Vienna).

In accordance with the project's name, the neighbourhood context will be adopted as the field of research, given it is a place where daily social practises, representations and group relations develop and give meaning and identity both to the physical space and to the inhabitants. The research is innovative in its approach of focusing not only on the immigrant populations of areas but on the whole population, regardless of socio-cultural or ethnic background. This takes the onus of the immigrant community and takes a more inter-cultural approach to exploring aspects of social cohesion in the city. The main research objective is to explore how and in which contexts interdependencies, be they of a consensual or conflictual nature, develop between different individuals/groups in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and the impact that this has on the progression toward more tolerant and cohesive European societies. Furthermore, the role that place and neighbourhood factors play in developing or hindering belonging, intercultural interaction and tolerance will be deliberated.