Anti-rumour strategy: Taking stock of a 10-year-old policy conceived in Barcelona

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The anti-rumour policy was born out of the combination of two factors. The need to respond to ongoing demands, resulting from associationism, to refute rumours involving immigrant communities, and the identification during the drafting of the Interculturality Plan (2009-10) that rumours and prejudices were one of the main factors that hindered coexistence in diversity and could generate situations of discrimination or racism. The anti-rumour policy was drafted in 2010 as a city strategy with an emphasis placed on training, awareness and communication that has evolved over its ten years in operation. This new policy was very well received by city residents, organisations and other administrations which have approached the City Council to learn about the experience. Many cities have adapted it to stop rumours, understanding that these are a good gateway to address deeper and more complex issues. Finally, the emergence of a mainstream xenophobic and racist discourse, pervasive in the media, social networks and neighbourhoods, made us rethink the way we work on the policy, going far beyond rumours.

1. The creation of the anti-rumour policy

Around 2008, at the beginning of the economic crisis, which led to a surge in the unemployment rate, cuts in public services and an increase in evictions in the city, a rise in the number of queries was observed by people working for organisations to those in charge of immigration at the municipal level about rumours regarding alleged benefits being enjoyed by migrants. Most of the queries raised always concerned groups of migrants and were baseless. They referred to alleged tax benefits, affirmative action in social assistance, food subsidies, trade, benefits in access to social housing, and so on.

These queries tended to come from members of residents' associations from different neighbourhoods of Barcelona who expressed serious concerns about the comments that even the members of their own associations expressed in public and were completely convinced that what they were saying was true. The insistence of the associations, the repetition of the queries and, at the same time, the lack of available information to be able to remove any doubt about the rumours led municipal officials to identify this issue as a problem that needed to be addressed. As a result of this, objective statistical data began to be collected and explanatory materials were developed to refute the information that was being disseminated as true.

The City Council tried to find out if there were any European experiences in combating rumours against the immigrant population, but none could be found. Exchanges with other European cities within the Eurocities network identified rumours as a serious problem in many European cities, but said there were no initiatives or policies to reverse the problem. The only experiences detected at the international level had to do with large and expensive communication campaigns in the mainstream media to give a positive image of immigration which had often had counter-productive results.

Under the political leadership of the Immigration Commissioner, Daniel de Torres, in 2009 it was decided to begin the participatory process that ended with the drafting of the 'Barcelona Interculturality Plan' (2010)[1]. For the drafting of the Plan, it was considered convenient to carry out an intense participatory process. This included the participants being asked about the factors that hinder coexistence between the residents of Barcelona from diverse cultural origins. The answers obtained effectively pointed to two major issues: On the one hand, they highlighted the inequalities of immigrants in Barcelona and, in particular, the situation of people in an irregular situation. On the other hand, the other factor that was mostly highlighted was that a huge number of people were prejudiced, which meant that the relationship between people from different backgrounds was negatively conditioned. The conclusion was that prejudice against migrants acted as a mental barrier that hindered relationships and coexistence and could lead to situations of discrimination and/or racism when trying to access work, education and so on. In fact, the aim of working on rumours regarding migrants and/or racialised people had a specific, preventive slant: to prevent situations of discrimination and/or racism.

Seeing the lack of similar municipal policies in Europe and determining the clear need for them, municipal officials decided to include a specific section on this issue in the Interculturality Plan and initiate specific actions to address the problem and its complexity; over time, these actions became the anti-rumour policy.

Another factor that influenced the formulation of the policy were the high levels of media interest generated. During the public presentation of the Interculturality Plan in 2010 by Mayor Jordi Hereu, the measure regarding the creation of anti-rumour officer raised a lot of interest amongst those present from the press, even though the policy had not yet begun to be developed and it was only a potential initiative for the future. For this reason, work was begun at pace on the policy, and always under the umbrella of the Interculturality Plan, in the form of a pilot training scheme for people who wanted to fight rumours, stereotypes and discrimination.

Amongst the first trainers was the anthropologist Lola López, director of the Centre for African Studies, who later became the Commissioner for Immigration, Interculturality and Diversity in 2015. Initially, there was a collaboration with the Xixa Teatre, a social theatre organisation, which organised a role play practical module to train anti-rumour officers. The success seen was immediate and the Immigration Directorate was overwhelmed by the avalanche of requests for training and the media attention generated.

In 2011, with the change of municipal government, the new Commissioner for Immigration and Interculturality, Miquel Esteve, took the decision to create the Barcelona Interculturality Programme (PROGBI) and facilitated the creation of a permanent team including specific professionals dedicated to managing the Anti-rumour Strategy and Training. This helped to consolidate the policy and extension of the framework: a more region-wide vision, the improvement of training content and the creation of a catalogue of anti-rumour activities available to organisations and facilities around the city. Likewise, there was also a clear commitment to consolidating the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Network as a model of participation and joint leadership with the Administration.

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1. Accessible at: https://bcnroc.ajuntament.barcelona.cat/jspui/bitstream/11703/85038/1/4052.pdf.

2. What is hidden beneath rumours, stereotypes and prejudices?

According to the American constitutionalist, Cass R. Sunstein, cited in the 'Practical Guide for Anti-Rumour Officers', rumours are 'statements about people, groups and events that are passed from one person to another without any veracity being demonstrated, that have credibility not because there is direct evidence to back them up but because many people believe them' (Barcelona City Council, 2011: 31).

Another major concept highlighted in the same guide is 'information cascades', i.e. when people believe a rumour from the moment that a certain amount of people appear to believe the rumour. Staying with the same guide, Gordon Allport defines as prejudice 'the hostile and suspicious attitude towards someone belonging to a group, simply because they belong to that group' (Barcelona City Council, 2011: 17). Finally, according to David Mayers, stereotypes would be 'the widespread attribution of certain characteristics of some members of a group as a whole. Qualities are attributed to a person as a member of a group and they are not judged as an individual' (ibíd.).

It is important, however, to distinguish between people who help to propagate rumours through a lack of knowledge and who repeat them subject to information cascades, and those people who intentionally propagate rumours being quite aware that they are false. In this second situation, we would be speaking, in the most current language, about fake news, i.e. the fabrication of false information.

Choosing the figure of the rumour as an excuse, and also as a catalyst for a communication and awareness-raising strategy, such as the BCN Anti-Rumour Strategy, was initially a success at that time for two main reasons:

- ●Ease of conceptual explanation: from a very simple theoretical diagram explaining the relationship between rumours, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination.

- ●A simple communication strategy: it made it easier to reach diverse audiences from face-to-face interactions, from dialogue, and served as a gateway mainly to work more regionally, where people's reality and real concerns were seen. This made it possible to speak openly about racism through the generation of spaces of trust and security, and to promote actions from an intercultural perspective taking into account the particularities of each territory.

With these years of internal work and in partnership with different actors, and especially with the BCN Anti-Rumour Network, it was concluded that the anti-rumour recipe 'ignorance + stereotype + prejudice = discrimination' does not give an explanation of all the complexity that there is or that hides rumours. Rumours are the tip of the iceberg of a whole web that generates and perpetuates discrimination and on which many dimensions intervene and intersect: individual, collective and structural. In this sense, the question arises of how we can explain the complexity of the machinery that generates discriminatory rumours or comments about certain groups and/or communities from diverse cultural origins. These types of rumours are not innocent, have a very deep and complex background and, at the same time, are based on the discrimination that has its roots in the construction of the ideas created in relation 'to the other' that it is not part of 'us'.

The strength of anti-rumour policy is precisely its ability to transform, adapt to the current contingency, build together with others and, therefore, be self-analytical over its actions. All this has meant that today it remains an active policy which is well-enforced and necessary. For a number of years, the strategy of the far right and European and US populism have pointed clearly to intentionally spreading rumours, particularly in an attempt to link immigration with insecurity. This strategy was not so present 10 years ago in the mainstream press; however, it is has been increasingly gaining traction, and has become more present to the extent where some extreme right parties have gained institutional representation.

Additionally, the increase in xenophobic content based on prejudice and with clear partisan intentions has mainly seen an increase on social networks, where, unfortunately, on a mass scale, people form their opinion on the world around them.

Due to the shifting reality, local and international political contexts, anti-rumour political strategy has gone beyond what was initially planned for it. This can be seen in the following changes and transformations:

1. From the outset, the Anti-Rumour Training has been reformulating in order to collect requests from participants and respond to the social context at any time.

2. Anti-rumour initiatives are not only based on migration, but also seek to deal with diversity from a broad perspective, such as speaking about anti-Gypsyism, Islamophobia and generating actions and content regarding these topics.

3. The increased production of a diverse range of educational and through-provoking materials.

4. The creation of a catalogue of anti-rumour activities with a range of educational and awareness-raising proposals.

3. The target audience of anti-rumour policies

At the social, political and economic point in time in which this anti-rumour policy emerged, the population as a whole could be divided, greatly simplified, into three main groups according to their attitude towards immigration and cultural and religious diversity: a small group of favourable people who saw immigration as an asset and therefore did not consider it problematic; A second group, also a minority, which was very opposed to diversity and immigration and which acted in a discriminatory way, which we could say was made up of consciously racist people, and, finally, a third group, formed by a large proportion of citizens who had an ambiguous position on diversity and immigration.

These were people who did not have a position that was either favourable or contrary to diversity and who certainly did not have much information about it. This is the group of people to whom the strategy was addressed and which was called the 'ambivalent majority'. Their perception of immigration and diversity was key, as they could be easily influenced by rumours and cause a majority of the population to lean towards hostile attitudes, which would have really complicated intercultural coexistence in Barcelona.

Diagram 1. Initial target audience for the anti-rumour strategy.

Who was the strategy aimed at?

Racists and Anti-immigration

Ambivalent majority
Ambiguous position or no position, but they are easily influenced by rumours

'Convinced' Activists

Source: Original.

Therefore, the initial target audience for the policy was neither the activists who saw diversity as an asset, nor those consciously racist people. For the latter minority of the population, anti-discrimination legislation and the firmness of anti-racist laws and policies had to be asserted by denouncing their attitudes.

Diagram 2. Current target audience of the anti-rumour strategy:

BCN Anti-Rumour Network

Whoever wants to join

Anti-rumour activities across neighbourhoods

• Entities and people from different cultural backgrounds with different professional profiles.

• Added to this is the grassroots component of the anti-rumour activities, which has been key in recent years, in order to address the context and the adequacy of the action.

Source: BCN Interculturality Plan. Barcelona City Council, 2010.

3.1. First phase of the BCN Anti-Rumour Strategy

Based on the collaborative work carried out with different city actors, including organisations from various fields, facilities and municipal services, it was considered that this policy did not take into account the opinions of the people who suffered or to whom these discriminatory rumours were targeted. Therefore, the strategy aimed to expand this target audience, seeking to incorporate these opinions and begin to create new tools, fostering spaces for participation where this cultural diversity, which goes far beyond migration, could be represented and heard. This is one of the main lessons from this journey towards a fairer and more egalitarian society.

On the other hand, anti-rumour policy does rely on the mobilised and aware group that considers immigration and cultural diversity a learning opportunity to help carry out the strategy, as it appeals to this group to seek complicities, for example, by training volunteers from this group as anti-rumour officers who are also the main group of people who are part of the associative network that belongs to the Network of Anti-Rumour Organisations.

As a result of this work and collaboration and seeing that a revision and historical explanation of this phenomenon is also needed, 'Stopping rumours' was created – an infographic that explains why and where the rumours come from, and what their consequences on the material, social and relational life of people are.

Infographic 1. 'Stopping rumours'. Barcelona, 2018

Source: Anti-Rumour Strategy. City of Barcelona, 2018.

4. Who implements the anti-rumour policy?

The Anti-Rumour Policy is endowed with a technical body to be implemented and is carried out under the umbrella of the Anti-Rumour Strategy, which brings together the four main areas of work: Participation, Training, Awareness and Communication.

The first area is Participation, which is carried out through a network of dedicated bodies that are part of the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Network. The Anti-Rumour Network also facilitates the possibility of participating in individually. The idea is the membership of all types of local associations, but also of generalist associations of all kinds (not only in the field of reception of immigrants, but educational, trade, health, etc.). There are currently 443 members and 611 individuals. The member bodies of the network can be consulted on the Network's interactive map[2].

From the outset, and taking advantage of the motivation of the associations, this association network was set up. The associations were the first to ask the City Council for information materials and training. But it was also possible for individuals to take part. Rumours are spread by word of mouth. To attack them you have to act the same way, individually, with person-to-person actions, rather than with media campaigns. The associations were also the ones that began to devise activities of all kinds to combat rumours, framed within the first Action Plan of the BCN Anti-Rumour Network.

The Network already has two action plans that mark its progression taking into account the constantly-changing context. Throughout 2021, the assessment of the current plan and the creation of the new Action Plan will begin. The Network is currently organised into topic-based working groups (regional revitalisation, training and communication) and has the Strategy Committee, which pilots the major actions that need to be undertaken in common agreement with the City Council and the organisations that make up the working groups.

The second key area of the strategy is Anti-Rumour Training to become an 'Anti-Rumour Officer'. Initially, it was a training programme of 12 hours where it went into greater depth into the nature of rumours and in different forms to be able to disassemble and to contrast or, at least, to break the 'information cascades' previously mentioned. It was about creating a shared discourse between volunteers. The aim of the course was to be able to develop individual skills in order to be able to contrast rumours based on theoretical and practical knowledge. These sessions offered, from a

2. Accessible at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/estrategia-bcn-antirumors/xarxabcnantirumors/mapa-entitats-antirumors

multidisciplinary perspective, information, relational guidelines and communication tools designed to deactivate rumours. The idea was to form the 'Anti-Rumour Officer' as a key factor and active actor in the execution and reinforcement of the strategy. We are working to promote the future work of the anti-rumour officers in four major areas:

1. First, awareness through interpersonal dialogue. That is, the work that the anti-rumour officers can do with face-to-face dialogue, in informal, everyday contexts, and often in improvised contexts. We also work on how to counter and dispute categorical statements without necessarily confronting the interlocutor.

2. Second, the awareness that can be raised within their own organisation. The idea is internal membership work that can be developed through promoting debates within the organisation on cultural diversity, challenges, opportunities, coexistence, rumours, promoting the training of organisation members around these issues, carrying out internal distribution of available materials and information, and so on.

3. Third, networking. As if it were an oil slick, the Anti-Rumour Officers will promote the joining of new organisations to the Network, informing them and raising their awareness about the importance of combating stereotypes, prejudices and rumours, as a way to improve coexistence in the city. The idea is to create a 'snowball effect' in the world of associations towards the values of diversity and coexistence and against rumours.

4. Four. Seek to work with the media and social networks as disseminating actors. Anti-Rumour officers must work on the involvement of the media and social networks, both internal (web, Facebook, Twitter, etc.,) and external (radio, press and television, etc.). It is important to incorporate everything related to local media and social media, as Anti-Rumour Officers can have a proactive effect in the area of local communication.

The third area of work of the strategy is Awareness and Educational activities carried out mainly through the Anti-Rumour Catalogue. These are a series of activities of all kinds that the City Council makes available to the city to carry out in the territory and that different organisations and municipal facilities and services use in their field of action. These types of activities are very diverse, and can be a talk, a hip hop workshop, a social play or street action. The activities can be requested free of charge and are funded by the City Council. The activity organiser must justify the idea behind the activity and must give an assessment of it once it has been carried out.

At present, and in order to advance the generation of alternative narratives that do not discriminate against cultural diversity and that these are truly transformative, it is necessary to take into account the context, economic, socio-demographic and cultural characteristics, etc. for the activity to take place. It is for this reason that the catalogue increasingly prioritises its action framed in medium- and long-term processes, where the context is taken into account. Awareness-raising is also carried out through the distribution of anti-rumour materials that have been produced over the years, communication materials such as videos, manuals, or infographics, etc[3].

And finally, the fourth area of work of the Anti-Rumour Strategy is Communication The Network decided to launch certain themed campaigns and calls for the maximum participation of the organisations, disseminating the actions, materials and messages that are proposed through social networks, through the organisations, through the interpersonal communication and in contact with the media.

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3. These materials are accessible at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/estrategia-bcn-antirumors/materials-antirumors

Infographic 2. The islamophobic route. Barcelona, 2018

Source: Anti-Rumour Strategy. City of Barcelona, 2018.

According to the four points above, the same experience led to going beyond the rumour and, therefore, not to mention specific rumours about certain groups or communities to prevent their dissemination and spread. The attacks on La Rambla in 2017 were a turning point for the recommendations provided to organisations and the general public thanks to the ideas coming from the framework of the communication group of the BCN Anti-Rumour Network at that time.

Along these lines, this specific episode highlights the need to delve deeper into the strategy at the communicative and training levels, pointing to the structural causes that generate inequality, discrimination and/or racism. As shown in the infographic, the strategy takes a turn, understanding the rumours as the consequence and the most visible, but at the same time most superficial, part of some problems that due to their approach must put people at the centre and suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

This conceptual and methodological change translates into communicative strategies such as the #NoComparteixoRumors (2017) campaign, which, through the creation of an infographic, recommended specific action methodologies:

- do not dismantle rumours

- develop critical thinking that questions the discriminatory intentionality of the messages that reach us and what their consequences are as well as the structure that underpins them.

With the ongoing aim being that society is able to generate alternative narratives that counteract the discriminatory narratives that bring us rumours, or fake news, work began to avoid actions aimed at dismantling rumours and, instead, to direct the efforts and energies towards education and explaining what the social and discriminatory function of these is, on which they are based and the different levels of action: relational, communicative and also work within the same structure which also generates these situations.

5. Barcelona's policy as a model for other municipalities in Spain, Europe and the world
Since the beginning of the presentation of the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Initiative, the Council of Europe, through the Intercultural Cities Network, promoted by the Council itself, has shown great interest in the strategy developed by Barcelona. The former commissioner, Daniel de Torres, actively collaborated in promoting politics among the different cities in the Intercultural Cities Network, developing a series of materials that have served as a guide for many municipalities in

Europe. Among the materials prepared by the Council of Europe, the Anti-Rumour Manual (De Torres Barderi, 2018) published in eight different languages is of note.

As an example, in 2013, the Council of Europe promoted the undertaking of a European Project called Communication for Integration, with the aim of 'combating prejudice, stereotypes and racist attitudes' inspired by the Barcelona experience. Ten European cities have started creating anti-rumour networks for diversity: Amadora (Portugal), Bilbao, Botkyrka (Sweden), Erlangen (Germany), Limerick (Ireland), Loures (Portugal), Lublin (Poland), Nuremberg (Germany), Patres (Greece) and Sabadell. Barcelona also took part in helping to transfer knowledge based on the experience of the BCN Anti-Rumour Strategy, in particular through the regional project developed in Ciutat Meridiana.

At the Spanish level and within the scope of the city association *Red Española de Ciudades Interculturales* (RECI), the establishment of anti-rumour networks has been promoted in cities and regions such as Tenerife, Bilbao, Fuenlabrada and Getxo.

From Canada, Morocco, Japan and Mexico, there has also been interest in the anti-rumour policy, which goes to show that the issue of rumours towards immigrants, people from diverse origins or belonging to minorities is a global issue.

However, it is very important to note that these cities have evolved anti-rumour policies in various ways depending on their capabilities, objectives, and contextual elements. They have thus adapted the idea in a different way and have innovated in instruments and working methodologies that have improved the anti-rumour policies.

6. Strategy results

Over the last 11 years, 1,810 people have been trained as anti-rumour officers and on a daily basis have helped to break down negative and stereotyped perceptions of immigrants and cultural diversity in a broad sense.

Table 1. Anti-rumour actions indicators. Evolution 2010-2020

	Certified anti-rumour officers	Attendees at anti-rumour activities
2010	171	-
2011	265	-
2012	229	2,440
2013	210	3,929
2014	253	5,146
2015	178	4,671
2016	113	6,032
2017	114	4,794
2018	110	4,734
2019	110	4,352
2020	57	3,598
Total	1,810	39,696

Source: Barcelona City Council. Department of Interculturality and Religious Pluralism.

The consolidation of a network of organisations, the Anti-Rumour Network, has been key to consolidating the policy, adjusting it and modulating it according to the changes that were taking place in the region.

Another fundamental aspect has been the possibility of developing cultural actions, projects and activities through the 'Anti-Rumour Activities Catalogue' that are carried out in the region and help to fight against discriminatory rumours, stereotypes and prejudice. Through the actions of the Anti-Rumour Catalogue, hundreds of activities have been carried out throughout the city, in all the districts and neighbourhoods of Barcelona, to the extent that 39,696 people have attended some of the activities in recent years.

Under the mandate of Commissioner Lola López, from 2015, the Anti-Rumour Strategy incorporated and addressed topics that had not been dealt with until that point and that are part of a broad concept of culture and interculturality: Aspects related to religion and religions and also aspects related to the prejudices suffered by the Gypsies, the main historical ethnic minority in Barcelona and Catalonia.

Beyond the quantitative results of the actions, the question must be asked about the effectiveness of the actions carried out: have they acted to prevent discrimination and to achieve a society that is more receptive and open to cultural and ethnic diversity?

A first assessment carried out in 2014 (Hernández Carr, 2014) concluded that the strategy had been a success in stopping rumours within social and neighbourhood organisations in Barcelona. This fact may seem anecdotal, but it is key given that the social fabric is the first level of closeness in the fight against rumours. It was necessary to convince the members of the local organisations; without their complicity, the task of fighting the rumours would have been impossible.

On the other hand, the city has a perception indicator developed over more than twenty years by the City Council's Data Office using surveys on what are the main problems perceived by citizens.

In these half-yearly surveys, the indicator of the perception of immigration as the main problem in Barcelona remains at low levels, and certainly much lower than in 2007 and 2008. In 2020, only 2.2% of respondents said that immigration was the main problem in the city, far behind issues such as traffic, cleaning, security, parking, access to housing or corruption.

Graph 1. Percentage of city residents who view immigration as a problem. Evolution 2007-2020
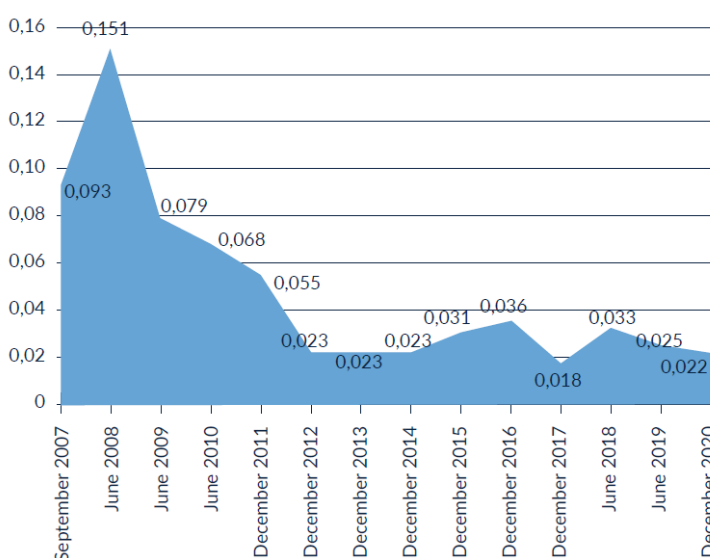
Source: BCN Interculturality Plan. Barcelona City Council, 2010.

We cannot determine a direct causal effect between anti-rumour policy and these results, but we can assume that anti-rumour policy has contributed, along with other policies and other factors, to achieving them – mainly because of its ability to transform and listen to professionals who work on

the street. The strategy, like the rumours themselves, mutates and adapts and, like the roots of a tree, reaches the complex depths that underpin discriminatory and/or racist rumours in the relational and structural spheres.

7. Conclusions

We can say that this new public policy proposal has been very well received by the organisations, the general public and by other administrations that have reproduced the Barcelona experience. It is not uncommon for a new policy to be initiated by the City Council and for demand and acceptance to exceed the most optimistic forecasts. This policy has provided solutions for other cities that shared the issue of rumours and prejudices and have adapted Barcelona's proposal to their own realities.

The beginning and the creation of the anti-rumour policy coincided with a time when the economic crisis was having a very serious effect on Barcelona, and there was a real risk of social breakdown of coexistence, especially in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. This breakdown that some experts had predicted in 2008 and 2009 did not occur, and even in some neighbourhoods, social cohesion among the working class increased, regardless of people's backgrounds. The anti-rumour policy certainly contributed to that.

In general, we believe that there are no magic or universal solutions to combat rumours, stereotypes and discrimination, but the tools and strategy must be adapted according to the issue and the region where it is required, just like in other cities inspired by the Barcelona idea.

In this regard, to keep this process of adaptation alive to the new realities, Khalid Ghali, the commissioner of Intercultural Dialogue and Religious Pluralism, has promoted a new Barcelona Interculturality Plan for the period 2021-2030 that renews the City Council's commitment to interculturality while adapting to the new reality of the city.

The takeaway from these 11 years is the need to ensure, through the formulation of diagnoses and putting into practice of actions and campaigns, a truly diverse participation to guarantee maximum levels of representation and the creation of common spaces where the diversity of origins is ensured and can speak in their own words. Diverse participation involves sewing together networks at different levels and action areas, i.e. neighbourhood, associations, educational, political, institutional, cultural, labour, trade union and communication.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that on its own the anti-rumour policy would not be effective without all the municipal public policies being coherent and going in the same direction. This policy should be placed into the context of a model of intercultural global coexistence; for that reason, all actions undertaken by the city government should adopt a transversal, intercultural perspective. If not, the strategy would lose coherence and effectiveness. In this regard, it is key that the basic programmes to guarantee equality of opportunities (access to education, health, work, incorporation into the civil service, etc.) work properly for everyone.

Currently (2021), the political and media panorama is very different to 2009. The emergence of new xenophobic parties on the Spanish and European political scene are increasingly gaining traction over public opinion, and little by little, hate speech is being normalised in some mainstream media and on social media. In recent years, top-tier political leaders have emerged on the international scene who have legitimised and adopted a racist, supremacist and xenophobic discourse. These political representatives have enjoyed widespread popular support and have 'popularised' racist messages that have reached the Barcelona city residents through the media. Backed by local leaders, often their message is intentionally fabricated and has clear partisan political goals. It seeks to break the trust between neighbours, to break class solidarity in underprivileged neighbourhoods, to mark a clear discourse of 'them' versus 'us' and to provoke conflict and confrontation on the grounds of origin. These are strategies designed in think tanks that have important support on social media that makes the task of dismantling them much more

difficult and complex. Think tanks are real laboratories of ideas that help to develop the narrative or the political narrative so that it can be hegemonic. The aim is to provide ideas that can influence public opinion and build a hegemonic narrative, hence the continued insistence on the concept of 'cultural wars' of the far right. It is no longer just rumours that are being spread through word of mouth.

That is why we see the strategy of territorialisation in the neighbourhoods and adaptation to the circumstances of proximity as a very proper response to this new trend. However, some of the instruments and actions of the anti-rumour policy should be rethought to adapt them to the new circumstances and also see what other cities that have adapted this policy have contributed.

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