



Toronto: Crazy, Sexy, Cool?

Recently, the American blogger Laurie Lyons wrote in the [Huffington Post](#) that “Toronto is the hot new destination for all things crazy, sexy, cool”.

Yes, really.

In her article, she highlights Toronto’s accessible art (from Luminato to Nuit Blanche), our fusion and fresh restaurants and the fact that Toronto, a city of just five million and over 200 ethnic groups and 130 languages, is also one of the most diverse cities in North America.

And growing.

Each year, the city absorbs another 50,000 new immigrants.

While smugness is never attractive, Toronto has something else to be proud of. Global cities around the world look to Toronto to understand and learn from our ongoing experiment with diversity.

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For instance, in 2008 the [Toronto District School Board](#) was held up as a global model for successful social integration and equal opportunities for schools when it was awarded the prestigious international Carl Bertelsmann Prize. The City of Toronto is one of the few international cities of migration that provides information to city residents in 180 languages on services such as recycling, garbage and municipal elections. The Toronto Public Library has successfully turned itself into an institution that not only lends books, but also provides settlement services to its many immigrant visitors.

However, lest we start feeling totally virtuous, we need to remember that Toronto has still a long way to go before claiming success. To do so, it must be open to learning from other cities.

For instance, here in Toronto, there are over 200,000 permanent non-citizen residents who cannot vote for their mayor, their city councillor or school trustee – even though they live, work, own property and pay taxes in the city. Meanwhile, non-citizen residents in [Dublin](#), Stockholm and Caracas can all vote in municipal elections. In the city of Chicago, non-citizen residents can vote in school site elections.

Similarly, while bike lanes are a hot issue in our current mayoralty race, the city of [Copenhagen](#) is successfully using cycling as a way to integrate newcomers into the fabric and streets of the city.

So while we have much to offer to global cities, we also have much to learn from them.

Globally, there is an increasing interest in cities learning from cities. New York Mayor Bloomberg points to New York's new urban plan that drew on the experiences and ideas for "traffic reduction from London, Stockholm, Singapore, for transit-orientated development policies from Amsterdam and Tokyo, and so on."

City-to-city learning can travel fast because it is local and grounded in the business of daily living. It is almost always practical and is therefore more readily transportable.

For the past 18 months we've been working with international partners in the UK, New Zealand, the US, Germany and Spain to help cities better connect around their shared issues of urbanization and migration.

At Cities of Migration, cities can hear about and share good ideas in integration. For the first time, there is an organized way for London to learn from Toronto, and for Toronto to learn from Zurich. Through webinars and the [Cities of Migration website](#) the interest in learning from and transporting successful ideas from one place to another has grown with remarkable speed.

In October, Toronto will go to The Hague to learn from practitioners from far flung cities like Malmo, Madrid and Moscow. We invite you to join us as we listen to and talk with leaders drawn from urban planning, local governments, media, employers and academics in this agenda-packed gathering.

And we will bring back ideas that have been tested in other cities - from deploying the police force in teaching English to refugees (and simultaneously building community trust) to training immigrants in the provision of culturally appropriate health care. These and many other good ideas on integration will be on show at The Hague.

We hope to see you there!

To learn more about the upcoming Cities of Migration conference, visit the [conference website](#).