

C4i

Communication for Integration



**IDENTIFYING RUMOURS
AND COLLECTION ANTI-
RUMOURS DATA:
THE CASE OF THE BARCELONA ANTI-
RUMOUR STRATEGY**

DOC. 2

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DOC.2 IDENTIFYING RUMOURS AND COLLECTION ANTI-RUMOURS DATA

THE CASE OF THE BARCELONA ANTI-RUMOUR STRATEGY

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Author: **Direcció de Serveis d'Immigració i Interculturalitat – Barcelona City Council**



**Ajuntament
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Administrator: **Lilia Kolombet**, Council of Europe

Project Coordinator: **Gemma Pinyol**, Council of Europe

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1. Aims of the presentation

1. To describe the process followed by the Barcelona Anti-rumour Strategy in identifying, selecting and updating rumours
2. To offer some recommendations based on an analysis of the process

2. Stages of the process

The Barcelona Anti-rumours campaign has developed through two main stages: the first one is the constitution and developing the campaign, and the second one is focused in sustaining and strengthening it.

2.1. Stage 1. Starting the process

2.1.1. Stage 1: Context

- There was no knowledge of any previous anti-rumour campaigns
- The first inside question posed by Barcelona City Council was "Should we talk about rumours? Should they be dealt with?"
- In all the surveys, immigration came up as the 1st or 2nd social problem
- Organisations had trouble carrying out their work as they were accused of favouring immigrants.
- Rumours against migrants were being spread publicly: mass media, some political groups, public employees, etc.
- The first signs of the social impact of the economic crisis in Spain were becoming apparent
- There were few sources with reliable information
- There were no serious conflicts attributable to difficulties in intercultural community life
- The anti-rumour campaign was an innovative and risky political choice
- No one knew how to go about it or where to start: intuition and trial and error
- The aim was to start with discreet rather than big campaigns
- Local elections were less than a year away (2011)

2.1.2. Stage 1: Objectives

- To produce the “1st Handbook for dispelling rumours and stereotypes on cultural diversity in Barcelona”, in order to raise awareness about the migration phenomenon (Barcelona City Council Immigration Work Plan for 2008-2011)
- To have the technical material (with data) and awareness-raising resources (through a story involving a dialogue with characters) to kick off the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Strategy starting with the first anti-rumour training course (2010, Barcelona Interculturality Plan)

2.1.3. Stage 1: Phases (2009-2010)

- June 2009 (with the approval of the Immigration Work Plan for 2008-2011 and as the Barcelona Interculturality Plan was being drafted): identifying the issues and developing the argumentation
- 2nd half of 2009: project design, identification of the rumours and search for anti-rumour facts and figures
- Meanwhile, almost 50% of the 4,000 participants involved in the process of drawing up the BCN Intercultural Plan singled out rumours and stereotypes as the main obstacle to peaceful intercultural community life
- 1st half of 2010:
 - March 2010: the Barcelona Interculturality Plan is presented and includes a strategy for dispelling rumours and stereotypes
 - The 1st version of the Anti-rumour Handbook is completed for internal use
 - Training of anti-rumour agents begins; the Handbook is a key tool
- November 2011: Public presentation of the Anti-rumour Handbook

Determining factors:

- Short time to design and carry out strategic planning (May 2011 local elections)
- Selecting the rumours to be dispelled, contacting sources and systematising the anti-rumour information were processes that were happening at the same time as the training courses were being organised, the theoretical framework was being developed, the response to the media was being designed and the BCN Anti-Rumour Strategy was being planned
- The Anti-rumour Handbook was just one resource that aimed to be both technical (with facts, figures and arguments) and an awareness-raising tool (creating a narrative with characters who

discussed rumours/anti-rumours to give the campaign an experiential and emotional focus). The 2 in 1 Handbook turned out to be quite limited both technically and as an awareness-raising resource (the facts and figures conditioned the narrative and the narrative conditioned the facts and figures)

- We also wanted to make the most of media attention which arose with the presentation of the BCN Interculturality Plan and their interest in the anti-rumour agents. We needed to come up quickly with a list of rumours the media were asking about, we had to make the most of the opportunity to launch the issue socially and via the media and get some strategic anti-rumour messages through.

2.1.4. Stage 1: A methodology for identifying rumours

1. **A preliminary list to be produced by the expert**, the policy manager and the director of City Council's Immigration Services (based on the expert's experience in training city employees, on discourses in the media and in political groups, etc.). A set of meetings and brainstorming sessions were held. Some of the issues that needed addressing were:

- Community life and civic behaviour
- Integration/mutual adaptation
- Mixed couples/international adoptions
- Access to public resources (health care, social services, census, etc...)
- Education
- Taxes
- Public space
- Crime
- The new resident as a potential opportunity for the host society.
- Work
- Retail shops
- Businesses (entrepreneurial status of migrants).

2. **Internal consultation with several City Council departments** in order to check the list of issues that had been drawn up and find information to include them or remove them from the list

3. **Final selection of 12 rumours:**

1. Rumour: Arrival of immigrants. “They’re invading us”
2. Rumour: Welfare System. “They take all the social benefits”
3. Rumour: Taxes. “They don't pay taxes”
4. Rumour: Retail shops. “They get subsidies to open shops, they don't get inspected”
5. Rumour: Health system “They abuse the health care system and bring emergency services to a standstill”
6. Rumour: Identity. “We are losing our identity”
7. Rumour: Community life and civic behaviour. “They don't know the rules, they are not civic-minded”
8. Rumour: Housing. “They live all crammed together and lower the standards of the flats”
9. Rumour: Education system. “They lower school standards”
10. Rumour: Public space. “They take up too much space and misuse public space”
11. Rumour: Work and training. “They don't have any training. They take jobs”
12. Rumour: Integration. “They are a burden and they don't want to integrate”

Focus: A broad selection was required which would be useful for a large city like Barcelona, with very diverse particularities. A Handbook for the city was needed, and then we could evolve towards a more adapted and neighbourhood-level focus.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

- Certain issues, for obvious reasons, needed to be included, such as those relating to services and resources managed directly by the public administration (subsidies, benefits, health care system, etc.)
- **Some issues were left out** (such as crime and religious diversity) because:
 - There were no social stakeholders or appropriate partners within City Council linked to these issues to work with (or there were, but relations with them were not open or joint work had yet to be established)
 - Political risk: Some issues required very careful handling as they could easily jeopardise official approval of the anti-rumour strategy.

2.2. Stage 2: Keeping and strengthening the campaign (2012-to present)

2.2.1. Stage 2: Context

- 2012: The campaign had been launched two and a half years before (BCN Anti-Rumour Network fully up and running, training of anti-rumour agents with surplus demand, dissemination of material throughout the city, open consultation website, etc.)
- The initial handbook had been produced with a selection of 12 rumours and anti-rumour information with figures and sources collected in 2010: the information was starting to lose its impact and was becoming obsolete
- A reorientation was required: the technical material would be developed first, and then this could be used to produce communication materials
- Presentations were given where the arguments were questioned/refuted for methodological reasons. We wanted more and better arguments, with stronger foundations
- We took the opportunity to review the rumours and see if any needed to be removed, added to or changed.

2.2.2. Stage 2: Objectives

- To obtain the technical material (data and arguments) to be used, together with other elements, by the professionals and anti-rumour agents to raise awareness about intercultural community life (through materials, activities, etc.)

2.2.3. Stage 2: Phases (2012 to the present):

Selection of the anti-rumour information that needed updating. This led to:

1. Reflection on and selection of new rumours/stereotypes to be addressed by the technical officers of the BCN Interculturality Programme.
2. Review and validation with the team of professionals (Barcelona Interculturality Programme in place by then) and the Anti-Rumour Network Steering Committee (5 representatives of the organisations most involved in the anti-rumour network from the outset)
3. Drawing up the final list of rumours and stereotypes to be updated
4. Researching anti-rumour information and ongoing process of modifying messages to be counteracted

2.2.4. Stage 2: A methodology for updating rumours and anti-rumour information

Inclusion/exclusion criteria for the new list of rumours and stereotypes to be addressed (changes according to type of message and social and political variations):

1. Some issues linked to the immigrant population stirred up by the mass media (e.g. right to health card)
 2. Recurring issues identified in day-to-day life (e.g. schools stigmatised for their high numbers of immigrant students)
 3. Cross-sectional issues relevant within an intercultural model for the city:
 - Offering positive examples of an intercultural society
 - Offering examples of local residents of foreign origins who play a proactive and participative role in the city
 - Reviewing and reflecting on inequalities brought about by the current model present in the host society (e.g. School-segregation under the current education system in Catalonia, exploitation of workers by local businesses, economic crisis resulting from a consumer model that has reached its limits, etc.)
 4. Making the most of everyday spaces for interaction and powerful local stakeholders (retail shops)
 5. Working on strategic cross-sectional issues for the general programme: gender and young people
 6. Islamophobia: pending issue since the start of the Strategy
- **Inclusion of stereotypes:** work was required on issues that go beyond rumours. The commitment is to an intercultural model, which needed enhancing and highlighting its principles, otherwise it is an empty project.

3. Final list of issues (rumours and stereotypes to be addressed):

3.1. Area: SOCIAL WELFARE AND BENEFITS

- *They get all the benefits*
- *They are given priority for benefits because they come from abroad*
- *They commit fraud, they get benefits on false premises which cannot be proved*
- *They come to Spain because it's very easy to get benefits through our social security system, because we give them everything.*

3.2. Area: HEALTH SYSTEM

- *Abuse of the health system: they use the health service more than native residents do*
- *They clog up emergency services*
- *They are a burden we can no longer sustain*
- *They have rights to services without ever having paid for them, and we the locals are paying for people from abroad*
- *Health tourism: they come over here to have operations and receive treatment*

3.3. Area: EDUCATION

- *They bring down school standards, the standards of 'Catalan' students*
- *They are a bad influence on our young people*
- *They don't take part, they don't get involved: they don't get involved in decision-making processes, in debates or the running of the schools: Parents Associations, etc.*

3.4. Area: RETAIL SHOPS

- *They open businesses with money from dubious origins (mafias)*
- *Their businesses are not hygienic or nice-looking; they bring down the standard of retail shops in the neighbourhood*
- *They are not inspected*
- *They don't pay taxes and they have tax concessions for opening businesses ("they have a "legal" period during which they don't have to pay any taxes or they are tax-exempt on certain issues", etc.)*
- *They open whenever they want*
- *They cause unfair competition. You can't compete because of:*
 - *Their flexible opening hours*
 - *Their prices, which result from the low quality of their goods*
 - *The contract system: they exploit their family members*
- *They don't want to join associations. They don't want to be a part of 'our' commerce*

3.5. Area: COMMUNITY LIFE

- **Social integration**
 - *They don't mix and they have a tendency towards self-ghettoisation*
 - *They don't speak or want to speak Catalan. They don't need the language*
 - *They are not interested in:*
 - *The cultural life of the city*
 - *The politics of the host society*
 - *Civil and social activity: citizen-based organisations, volunteering...*
- **Compliance with laws and rules**
 - *Most delinquents are immigrants; our towns and cities are not as safe because of them; they've made our streets and public transport less safe.*
 - *They don't respect the rules of peaceful community life*
 - *They make noise at unreasonable hours*
 - *They live in overcrowded conditions*
 - *They make the stairways dirty*
 - *They take up too much space and misuse public space*

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3.6. Area: LABOUR MARKET

- *They take our jobs*
 - *Because they work on the black market*
 - *They accept lower wages and work longer hours. They're "wrecking" the market*
- *All the unemployment benefits are spent on them and no-one "from here" will be able to claim benefits*

3.7. Area: STEREOTYPES ABOUT IMMIGRANT WOMEN

- *They are submissive (they are not allowed to study and/or work, they don't take part in social activities/organisations because they have to be shut up at home, etc.) or "they are sexually promiscuous".*
- *They are uneducated*

3.8. Area: STEREOTYPES ABOUT IMMIGRANT YOUTH

- *Stereotypes that affect young people in general, but are stronger in the case of young immigrants: they don't want to get involved in anything, they don't want to study or work, etc.*

- Stereotypes regarding young Latinos belonging to violent gangs and, in general, being "a bad influence on our young people"

3.9. Area: STEREOTYPES ABOUT RELIGION, in particular Islam. Work to raise awareness and understanding of:

- Religious diversity in Barcelona (religious communities, number of places of worship in the city, etc.)
- More specific work with data and arguments to eradicate existing Islamophobia:
 - “excessive secrecy” concerning what goes on inside mosques (rituals, what messages are conveyed, etc.)
 - Terrorism
 - Perception of cultural-religious "colonisation"...
 - The role of women: submission, weakness, they don't have initiative or a will of their own; they are not allowed to go out on their own; the veil, etc.

And finally, facts and figures regarding the economic contribution made by immigrants to the city's social and economic system

4. Lessons learned and recommendations

During the stage where contact is made with sources to identify rumours and draw up a preliminary list of issues to be addressed, it is important to bear in mind the purpose of our research, which is subsequently to launch an awareness-raising campaign. Therefore, there are certain premises that should serve as a guide for us in this process, such as:

- **Rumours mutate**, according to context, current affairs, etc. and therefore our work should always be considered “work in progress or under construction”. We need to be aware of relevant social events so that our work is up to date and responds to needs.
- **A very open and general preliminary list of rumours should be drawn up** that will serve as the basis for more specific work later on, based on the territory/issue/target population (older people, young people, etc.)
- **During the process of researching for anti-rumour information, initial rumours might be corrected**, modified, extended, excluded or new rumours added. Through research, the messages are constantly updated.
- **The rumour is the symptom**, the tip of the iceberg: it is one of the factors that has an impact on intercultural community life and sends out alert signals. We can use it to make x-rays and diagnosis of the situation.
- **Rumours and anti-rumours are a good "excuse" for dealing with lots of other issues** associated with good intercultural community life
- We must not lose sight of the relationship between **rumour and stereotypes/prejudice**
- Though we are initially making a limited selection, **do not discard information regarding other stereotypes**: later on this information will most likely be very valuable for carrying out more comprehensive work.
- Any anti-rumour work must be based on a **clear, firm ideological and conceptual framework** (such as the principles of the intercultural model)
- The initial rumours **should not be included or excluded based on whether or not it is possible to obtain facts/figures/information to counteract them**, as some of them could serve as a basis for talking about and working on other important issues related to Interculturality, such as rights and responsibilities, human rights, etc. They can also be used to engage in debate, dialogue, etc. by offering alternative arguments and explanations of the situation.
- Sometimes it is not the **facts and figures that raise public awareness** (or they are not enough). The anti-rumour facts and figures can be useful, particularly for professionals, city employees

and officers, who are then assured that the rumours are lies that need to be addressed. However, in the end, the issues will need to be addressed with the general public using lots of other arguments and ideas.

- Keeping in mind the objectives of the anti-rumour strategy, we must ensure that the work is useful in **educating the general public and making people more critical and reflexive when it comes to consuming information** (in dialogue, through the media, etc.).
- In order to gather information on rumours, it might be **useful to frame them as a global** (that goes beyond cultural diversity), and **multi-directional phenomenon** (between different groups, between natives and immigrant groups and vice versa, etc.). It is therefore crucial to employ a cross-sectional approach and to consult a broad and diverse range of sources both in terms of fields and population sectors (women, young people, older people, etc.).
- Anti-rumour work should be part of a **policy action plan or broad strategic plan**, that may serve as an umbrella
- **A medium-term view** should guide the way in which communication materials, training anti-rumour agents and the campaign are developed..
- Make the most of **contacts with stakeholders to start raising awareness and engaging them as members of the anti-rumour network** (anti-rumour reporters/anti-rumour agents within their field). In Barcelona, for instance, this was the first time many of City Council's service managers had considered and reflected on certain issues. Making initial contact with internal and external stakeholders when researching rumours will mean a broader network for subsequent collaborative work.



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