

## **Urban Thinkers Campus Mannheim 17-19 February 2016**

### **Keynote speech – summary**

## **Migration, democratic renewal and the integrating city**

Richard Stanton

### **Understanding integration**

Integration means ‘making whole’. As a demand, it has to be addressed not to migrants nor to the host population they join, but to places. Integration is what cities have to do.

It means equal access for all the city’s residents to all the spheres of activity which together enable it to develop and flourish. From housing and use of public space, employment and enterprise to cultural production and enjoyment, leisure amenities, healthcare, justice and social protection – in the integrated city, all will be open on equal terms to everyone. It is an ambitious goal, far from realisation, but we cannot afford to abandon the effort.

Nor can the city afford exceptions. Exceptions segment, fracture, dis-integrate. Integration will not be ‘for’ migrants, but it will tackle their exclusion. Equal access to all realms of city life must apply to all, wherever they came from and whichever status the central state gave them. Cities’ integration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with transnational migration reaching them all, rests on de facto urban citizenship available to everyone who comes to live in them.

### **Local democracy**

Strong local democracy is the precondition, and sole guarantor, for this challenging process of making the city whole. We stay on track for integration only if citizens finding inequality or discrimination in any one of those spheres can effectively demand that it be put right.

This calls for democratic variety. We need the full range of channels through which they can press for change in the city, from formal institutions like municipal elections and political parties, through civil society bodies to neighbourhood campaigns and direct action. What focuses these multiple forms of action and ensures impact, is the common sense of civic identity: we all belong to a social entity, the city, which all cherish and can directly shape.

Even if launched autonomously, many of these actions can be sustained over time only if facilitated and supported in some degree by the local authority. In any case, all need public structures to recognise their input, gathering diverse views together to feed them into city-wide decision-making so they can contribute to the move towards integration.

### **Globalisation – threat to integration**

Globalisation – the drive to extend the scope of private accumulation by imposing market relations world-wide, in place of social control over production and investment - at first sight promotes city integration. It stands for openness, breaking down old structures. But overall its net effect is to threaten profoundly the work of integration. Imposition of global market relations acts constantly to dis-integrate the city – segmenting and fracturing it, creating advantage and

disadvantage in each sphere from control over public space and access to housing, to healthcare and risks of crime.

At the political level, globalisation brings massive social and cultural changes whilst denying the vast majority of citizens any say in them. Many older, less secure citizens in particular have responded by scapegoating migrants for these changes. Globalisation drives not only immigration but also xenophobia which could create new fractures in city life.

Above all, it undermines the guarantor of integration: local democracy. Globalisation could eventually affect all the varied forms of democratic action, curbing them or prompting cuts in the capacity of public authorities to support them. So all are ultimately put at risk by the accelerating shift (disguised as 'austerity') from public to private appropriation and control of society's available surplus. As budgets for local government shrink, in Europe at least, cities could over the long term face a dangerous trend towards dis-integration.

### **Counteraction: can responses to migration renew local democracy?**

Amongst contradictions built into the complex story of globalisation, can we see a counteraction stemming from migration itself, which could ultimately renew local democracy and even help it to win back powers and resources for city-level government under citizens' control? Whilst wary of romanticising migration, we put forward three theses which may imply a positive answer.

First: most migrants are **here to stay**. Apart perhaps from a small minority of younger workers, the only migrants with a truly nomadic lifestyle are the super-rich – deploying their 'high net worth' precisely to enact the globalisation process. Most migrants are not nomads. For sure they are transnational, typically with far closer links to their country of origin than past immigrant generations, and may see more of it than their predecessors. But 'home' can soon come to mean both place of origin, and city of destination.

Second: migrants' capacity to **champion democratic change** in receiving countries is clear from the historical record. Standing outside established structures of privilege, sharing daily life with other disadvantaged people, often (whether formally seeking asylum or not) with experience of struggles for justice before migration, they have over many generations contributed in destination countries to collective demands for equality and for rights. Even if sometimes distorted or limited, these actions confirm the potential agency of migrant communities in helping to energise democratic movements in cities of settlement.

Third: growing awareness of migration and its hardships is stimulating new levels and forms of **activism in 'host' communities**. Recent research in England suggests the movement to welcome and support refugees is drawing in previously less-active citizens from non-migrant population; that their experience of agency to seek change, even on a small scale, may have a radicalising effect; and that the local scale of such action is crucial. The long term outcome is hard to read. But, counterposed to xenophobic politics, this could open up the possibility of a new alliance of migrant and 'host' activists in helping to reinvigorate local democracy.

If so we may find that globalisation, even as it threatens to dis-integrate the city, has itself generated a countermovement that helps to get it back on its path towards integration.