THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE IN INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON URBAN SOCIETIES' CHANGES

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1. Foreword

The immigration issue and its settlement are very complex and controversial. The impact it generates on societies is significant and extends to all levels, from the national to the local, as well as on various fields such as the labour market, social welfare, education, culture and housing. International debate on the topic has augmented over the last decade as increased flows of immigration have influenced the daily lifestyles of individuals and their traditional models of reference, above all with regard to work and family.

However, the creation of social and cultural pluralism in societies, and Western societies more specifically, is part of a broader transformation affecting demographic and economic factors connected to globalization and the reconversion of post-industrial contexts. According to the paper "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision" published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), there continues to be a significant migration phenomenon among the different regions of the world, particularly from low-income Countries towards more industrialized, highly developed Nations. Around 2.2 million people per year migrated in the period from 2010 to 2015, reflecting global economic disparity and highlighting two important factors, typical of industrial societies: high productivity and ageing

populations with decreasing birth rates. These types of Countries continue to generate better employment prospects, thereby becoming pull factor Countries that attract populations from areas still in a phase of development or political restructuring; people from such areas migrate by covering the so-called 'ddd jobs' (dirty, dangerous, demeaning) that are low-skill in order to improve their living conditions. The interrelationship between the uneven distribution of world income between countries and the demographic crisis of the most advanced Countries thus becomes fundamental in the comprehension and overall reading of the phenomenon of migration.

It can be said, therefore, that the role of migration is to rebalance the relationship between the demographic and economic deficit in the world, which presents an opportunity for double development: on the one hand, it can contribute to reducing the minimal growth and demographic stagnation of rich Countries; on the other hand, it can also improve the dynamics of development for densely-populated territories, many of which are in Countries where minimum welfare services are not guaranteed. However, the link between the two sides of the relationship must be regulated by effective policies that guarantee benefits for both newcomers and host societies.

2. Integration as a key process

Since 2009, and in coherence with all European principles and traditions, the European Union has been trying to fill the migration gap between EU Member Countries through a common immigration policy framework. Immigration decisions are shared among all member States and European institutions, but better management of the issue is needed for high-quality socioeconomic development. In the communication "A Common Immigration Policy for Europe" from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Committee of the Regions (2008), the vital role of immigration is highlighted as a key factor for the labour market, the welfare state

and aging populations. Furthermore, the potential of immigration from the social integration point of view is recognized for its benefits in terms of cultural diversity. It allows the creation of an open-minded environment respectful of newcomers' needs, meanwhile the approach to integration is intended to be "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States" according to the definition adopted by the European Union[1].

Integration is nothing more than a deepening of immigrants' settlement process that likewise involves the host society: according to Rinus Penninx (2014:16) "integration is the process of becoming an accepted part of society," a very basic definition that assumes there is a relationship in which the receiving society's role is more powerful than that of the newcomers due to the stronger sense of cohesion and belonging of residents. As stated by Penninx (ibid:16), the integration process works within three different spheres:

- The Legal and Political sphere refers to the legal status of immigrants and how their residency permits affect citizenship;
- The Socioeconomic dimension relates to the level of immigrants' engagement in sectors like the labour market, health services, education and housing;
- The Cultural and Religious dimension is the most difficult level to reach because it is a fine line between adaptation and acceptance of newcomers.

In the analysis of European immigration flows, there is no systematic approach to settlement. Usually, at the beginning of the flows, immigrants tend to arrive in metropolitan cities due to the large-scale job opportunities. However, the environment in which the integration process is best performed is the local dimension (neighbourhood or village), where the small scale allows newcomers to access basic services

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1 "Glossary of the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affair of the European Commission", 2011 (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/integration_en).

and offers the possibility to extend community networks with a higher impact on their sense of belonging. Thus, the local spatial dimension becomes the playing field on which close relations are triggered, as well as where relationships with institutions and the community are manifested as a "low social complexity" (Balbo et al. 2015: 10) that reflect a numerically limited system of stakeholders. In short, when foreign people arrive in a new place they immediately search for a source of income and a secure place to stay, in addition to connections with different people in order to satisfy their other necessities.

Everyday life in a small-scale environment inevitably entails encounters with difference and thereby requires individuals to find an appropriate way to coexist and fulfil social integration. Daily contact or spatial proximity, however, do not necessarily have consistent results; they could lead to mutual understanding, tolerance and inclusion, or to the opposite with racism, mistrust, conflict and stigmatization.

Focusing on everyday encounters and interactions in a local context brings to light the discourse of culture, the hybridization of differences, and how people can live together in culturally pluralistic societies due to the various nationalities newcomers have.

3. The role of the arts and culture for the integration process

In everyday life, immigrants' presence often produces a negative impact on the hosting community due to the fact that the diversity of newcomers is frequently associated with a threat to the local identity. A national identity is expressed through traditions, symbols, ceremonies, a shared history, and everything belonging to intangible cultural heritage, which can have an exclusionary effect on newcomers since they are unfamiliar with these aspects of the host Country.

While international political discourse focuses on disseminating a negative image of immigration with the need to defend the identity of nations welcoming immigrants, scientific literature seeks to promote

the concept that culture plays a key role not only on the economic scene, but also with regard to social inclusion in cities with high immigration rates and diversity.

Since identity is closely connected to the field of culture, intercultural dialogue is the best way to create social cohesion and integration. In terms of definition, the European Commission affirms that "Intercultural dialogue is, essentially, the exchange of views and opinions between different cultures"[2]. It diverges from multiculturalism since its objective is to create a common understanding between citizens rather than a multicultural vision of separate identities that coexist. In daily life, interculturality represents a modification in behaviours and routines: for example, within the issue of minority group organisations, the intercultural view considers immigrants/newcomers as agents of integration, highlighting the importance of their role in societal changes and of their engagement in social life. Intercultural dialogue thus implies that individual views are secondary to collective voices and perspectives, and participation is the key factor for building up an even environment where immigrants and host citizens are involved in the same way.

If culture is the most important communication medium, artists play a central role in helping refugees in the integration process and exposing all people to diversity. Art in general allows the exploration of conflicts that could emerge due to the presence of immigrants whose culture may clash with that of the host community, and it offers tools and approaches for intervention and integration in communities.

In a refugee context, there are two successful factors that help migrants to become an essential part of the community – participation and empowerment – both of which contribute to the sense of belonging and the integration process. Both concepts are connected; participation encourages people to share opinions and express themselves as a preparatory step leading to empowerment, interpreted as "the

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2 "European Commission", 2018 (https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-frame work/intercultural-dialogue_en)

process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights" (Oxford Dictionary: 2018).

In conclusion, cultural projects and institutions should offer migrants and refugees suitable means of becoming more confident, organizing themselves, and removing obstacles to protect their civil rights and conditions for their participation in society.

4. Which successful framework in cultural projects?

The complexity of the immigration issue is due to the multi-dimensional aspects of migration requiring different regulations and policies that must be integrated. Firstly, immigration's policies play out on two levels:

- the national level that usually concerns security, citizenship rules and modes of entry and has an immediate effect on the immigration flows through means such as restrictive regulations that can lead to a decrease in entrances;
- the local level, which is considered the scene of integration because it deals directly with regulations related to social and economic settlement and more generally with the connection between the host community and immigrants.

Cultural strategies and projects follow the same approach as local and national policies in that projects are included within a national framework that strengthens identity as a collective feeling and promotes local actions, facilitating growth in the relationship between immigrants and locals and highlighting their connections with shared places.

In the last decade, following the substantial increase in migratory flows, the European Commission has placed immigration policies at the centre of its priorities. Additionally, the priority of fostering refugee integration has arisen in the cultural sector, which has launched

a special call for proposals under the Creative Europe Programme[3] in order to fund cultural and audiovisual projects with the goal of enhancing intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Among 274 application proposals submitted in April 2016, twelve projects were approved, involving a partnership of 62 organisations in twenty European Countries with a budget of € 2.35 million. Such long-term and hefty financial investment has put into relief the need to assess activities as there is a lack of project evaluation in terms of qualitative indicators.

In a report[4] published in March 2017 by experts from the 2015-2018 Work Plan for Culture, the importance of evaluation of cultural projects is stressed so that policies and best practices in refugee and migratory contexts can be shared. The report affirms that there are a few criteria to successfully evaluate activities, and the majority of cultural projects rely on numerical outputs, such as the audience reached to evaluate success.

The critical issue to be evaluated is the weakness in recognizing the impact of intercultural dialogue on communities through the arts, although there is greater policy awareness of its effectiveness for a more inclusive and democratic society. In order to ensure success in cultural projects, experts identified the different tools listed below:

- *Partnership*
  It is important at any level that cultural projects include the participation of both institutions and civil society. A key element to develop more inclusive projects is that the partnership should be composed of public authorities and private stakeholders. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could be important partners because they usually have a high impact on public opinion due to their skills in campaigning and spreading awareness of issues.

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3 "Creative Europe is the European Commission's framework programme for support to the culture and audiovisual sectors", 2018, (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/about_en)

4 "How culture and the arts can promote intercultual dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis", 2017, Brussels, Publications Office of European Union.

- *Engagement of refugees/migrants*
  Activities should open up dialogue between migrants and nationals. A participatory process consisting of the presence of newcomers and experts together is the key to successful projects.
- *Training as a cross-cultural tool*
  Training as well as mobility in projects are important for acquiring specific or transversal skills such as organisational and communication skills, teamwork, etc. Training should also include support for migrants' languages and be informative about the migrants' cultures.
- *Sustainability*
  Guaranteeing sustainable projects is the general challenge of private organizations because financial resources are unstable and often depend on public funding or management systems that are sporadic rather than carried out within a long-term strategy. Sustainability could be achieved through a quality network where there is the possibility to exchange skills, an efficient dissemination of the activity results, and a strong rate of co-ownership among stakeholders and beneficiaries. Sustainability should include replicability and transferability: the former refers to the possibility of replicating the same initiative in another place, while the latter takes advantage of methodologies and processes and tries to implement them in future projects.

5. The urban spaces of difference

Discourses on immigrants' settlement causes necessary reflection on processes of territorialization, considering urban space as a field in which different practices and representations due to difference are generated. Urban space plays a key role in the relationship among different social actors, and it should be considered not only as "a container but a mediator" (Cancellieri et al. 2012: 65). Focusing on the importance of public space requires consideration for the new global dynamics of

cities, which experience heterogeneity in density and population that increase their susceptibility to social conflicts.

A common element in the political, academic and public debate when it comes to urban transformations that have taken place in European post-industrial societies is the connection between immigration and social stigmatization: there is a shared opinion confirming the significant difference between the city centre and its outskirts, where immigrants tend to remain because of low accommodation costs. The gap that separates the cohesive city centre and suburban areas, marked by economic and social exclusion, justifies the spatial planning policy on urban redevelopment realised in big cities. The nucleus of cities represents a pull factor by offering a high labour market that attracts both resident workers and external city users, whereas suburban areas live in a permanent emergency situation in which the less well-off face lack of opportunity and space for social encounters. Very often immigrants' presence is linked to security issues, and policies that negatively influence public opinion intensify social conflicts that strain multi-ethnic coexistence. It is undeniable that immigrants have changed urban spatial processes by presenting a new element in public space, but scientific reflection requires a more objective analysis that differs from the securitarian approaches often implemented by urban policies.

When dealing with the issue of immigration, there is no definite result. Spatial proximity can produce two different effects: on the one hand, the presence of people from various geographical origins creates a multicultural environment that can be a stimulus for increasing the subjects' empowerment, both for residents and immigrants; on the other hand, the presence of diversity inside the same public space can turn into hypervisibility and give rise to exclusion. As quoted by Cancellieri, immigrants' settlement in a public space can produce "both esteem and stigma" (ibid: 68), the former referring to an improvement in the immigrants' ability to adapt, the latter to the genesis of social exclusion. Since policies take action based on the analysis of social relationships inside public spaces, it would be advisable to approach the issue of the 'visibility' of diversity with great caution and objectivity

precisely because it can generate social recognition as well as the opposite, control and conflict.

The challenge of contemporary cities is to find solutions to the social complexity of international migration. The liveability of public space depends on several factors related to access, design, comfort, maintenance and sociability. In a place where diversity of gender, ethnicity and culture coexist, these differences are reflected in the use of space.

With regard to immigrants' settlement process, it is natural that social needs intertwine with those of other social actors, and a number of authors from the scientific community have explained urban space not as an invariable stone but a field of interactions among people that changes in accordance with collective and individual use, as well as experience.

Elena Ostanel (2013: 107) asserts that public space in places of difference could represent a "comfort zone" for some categories of city users while at the same time it could be perceived as stranger for others; she analyses this experience in her investigation of the square in front of the railway station in Padova (in Northern Italy), where the informal partition of uses made by dwellers or external city users is different from that of immigrants.

Through a qualitative analysis based on monitoring activity, Ostanel realises that residents experience the space as a "Non-place" (Augé 1992), which reflects its function as a place of transit, as opposed to the immigrants who use the square as a site for socializing and meeting, making it a "comfort area".

This example is suitable for understanding the relationship between people and space and the relevance of the appropriation dynamics, above all in cases where the social mix is very high. In general, people's approaches to public space create symbols, routines and uses that are comfortable; in cities where the level of ethnic concentration is high, there is a significant symbolic construction in order to feel at home. In places characterized by immigrants' presence, a "break of territoriality" (Yiftachel 1990: 340) can occur due to an intensive use

of the space (Briata, 2014: 76), by business[5] providing foreigners with useful services.

Urban studies literature is full of investigations which recognize that proximity in public space is not enough to create social integration. Thus, it is important that urbanism poses strong questions in order to develop strategies that reinforce well-managed space. For example, who are the users of public spaces? In which places do people interact? Does interaction work, and why or why not? Which elements should be taken into account by urbanists in order to design spaces and institutions with an intercultural point of view?

6. Interculturality in urban planning

Many authors agree that contemporary cities should be more inclusive and adopt an intercultural approach in urban planning to overcome the diversity gap and attain multiculturality. The first model requires appropriate governance at each level and in different sectors, and it differs from multiculturalism in that it attempts to promote constructive interaction among people and groups of different backgrounds and cultures. Conversely, multiculturalism stops at the respect and mutual understanding of diverse cultures and considers identity to be a permanent concept. Interculturalism maintains that individuals and collective groups change constantly depending on the environment they live in.

Interculturality has been the challenge of the Intercultural Cities Programme[6] led by the Council of Europe, which supports public bodies in designing policies built on intercultural integration and considers diversity an asset for economic, social and cultural development.

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5 Generally, immigrants tend to set stores up take away food business, transfer money services or phone centres.

6 "Council of Europe", 2018 (https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home)

In practice, all municipalities engaged in the project review all areas of policies included urban planning with the aim of ensuring equity, cohesion and non-discrimination.

As a result of increased migration flows, and in part inspired by the network of the intercultural programme, other cities in the world are becoming open to intercultural urbanism and try to integrate the diversity of communities into the planning and design of more attractive spaces for people of different cultural backgrounds. Another important component is the competence of urbanists in managing diversity, who should have knowledge of all forms of difference existing in the city and have a clear idea of who the users of that space are. Furthermore, they must account for the beliefs, behaviours and traditions of culturally diverse groups. In fact, intercultural competence is the ability to decode the mix of cultures and thinking in order to formulate constructions and urban spaces that are flexible and adaptable to diverse users. A strong intercultural place maker should know that listening and collaborating with minority groups is the most important aspect for success in planning. Co-production is fundamental to fostering citizens' shared ownership of spaces through participatory activities that allow people to exchange their opinions, express needs and interact with others.

Public spaces present a challenge for planners to create places that promote intercultural values through facilitation methods, such as forums and workshops between experts and citizens of different cultural identities. Within this framework, there are various examples of how cities plan new public spaces by breaking down issues of migration and diversity with the guidance of expert place makers, above all with regard to urban parks as spaces that can act as a field of dialogue and engagement. Inside the network of European intercultural cities, the interesting case study of the Ukrainian city of Melitopol's redesign of Gorki Park into an intercultural park is an example of the implementation of policies in which methodology is the most important element of the process: the development of ideas derived from groups of citizens working together with landscape architects and urban design-

ers by attending workshop and meetings. After one year of workshops, the international team implemented ideas towards a renovated park for every kind of culture present in Melitopol through specific artistic sites, symbols, flora, traditional and intangible activities.

While substantial attention is focused on public space design, there is also a small portion of urbanists who are reflecting on mainstream housing planning, which is sometimes unsuitable for the needs of immigrant clients. Different cultures have different styles of living according to their behaviour and traditions. For example, Muslim people cannot have toilets facing the direction of Mecca, and many cultures prefer separate rooms for women and men or more bedrooms to accommodate large families, in addition to the various religious requirements that urbanists should bear in mind.

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