

> Strengthening Urban Inclusion of Refugee and Migrant Populations

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“According to the UN, we are seeing the highest level of displacement since World War II.” That makes us alert; that gives us reason to meet at Perry House. But it might be worth to put these figures in the historic context: First, mankind has migrated for the last 130,000 years. The prime trigger is simply the will to survive and to improve living conditions. And this has not changed until today. In 2016, about 250 million people lived as migrants for more than one year outside of their birth country, regardless of whether they were a war refugee, poverty refugee or tax refugee. This equals three percent of the world population, and this proportion is constant for the last 60 years. This applies also to the number of people who have left their home country between 2010 and 2015—about 0.5 percent of the world population, 36.5 million people (Guy Abel und Nikola Sander, Wittgenstein Centre for Demography, Vienna).

What do I want to say with these figures? The level of displacement of people reflects global normality. The only unusual fact is that Europe, and in view of the reaction of the new president even the U.S., feel affected by the influx of refugees. This contrasts the reality of migration in the current conflicts considerably: Europe houses, with about 1.5 million refugees for the last years, about 0.3 percent of its current population. Turkey houses 3 million, Lebanon 1.3 million and Jordan about 0.8 million. This exceeds the relative European numbers by far, even though the conditions of housing, livelihood and education can hardly be compared.

In the following I would like to give some tentative answers to the questions which were meant to lead us through the session. These are answered from an intertwined perception: A German urban planner’s point of view and a representative of the German Association of Cities—the first and the latter have learned a lot throughout the last decades and years of refugees moving to (and from) Germany:

How are marginalization and inequality shaping the inclusion and/or integration of refugees and immigrants?

Marginalization and inequality shape day-to-day life in all market economies—and probably in all remaining socialist or communist economies, too. It seems to be an inherent characteristic of humans living in societies that stratification, personal and collective egoisms and different education, income and housing opportunities lead to inequalities, marginalization and even exclusion. This has not at all been bound solely to refugees; generations of lower income and social classes also experience subtle or obvious rejections by major parts of society. Sometimes even the other way around—a minor group determines the kind of education, living, access to services etc. for the majority, in its extreme form apartheid. In its more subtle forms, it leads to poll results like in Turkey or the U.S., which leaves the more marginalized groups behind and even aggravates their marginalization through exclusion of all kinds of opportunities including better education.

From modestly or low paid laborers’ and jobless people’s points of view, refugees and immigrants are not marginalized at all. They are eligible to obtain all basic services as the so called “bio-Germans”; they get the same amount of transfer income as any other German citizen after 18 months of being jobless, and from a headliner readers’ point of view, they absorb 23 billion Euro of German taxpayers’ money over the last year. Refugees and immigrants even receive much more attention than they have ever received in their lifetimes. Even students which have arrived from the refugees’ countries of origin legally complain about the “attitude of pampering refugees,” for which they accuse Germany.

The reaction is as simple as it is brutal—marginalized or nationalist and right wing groups fed with nicely packed but overly simplified “truths” by right wing intellectuals

take the marginalization of refugees in their own hands: they burn down or attack refurbished accommodations for refugees (more than 1,000 attacks in 2015, almost 1,000 attacks in 2016); they nourish a discussion on the “Islamization of the Christian accident,” which generally finds absolutely no proof at all in Europe; and they gather with either subtle or even offensive phrases between 10 and 25% of voters behind their newly founded right wing party Alliance for Germany.

The German Administration at all levels, except a couple of highly criticized and legally pursued incidents, does not act with refugees and immigrants in an unjust way, which provides evidence for the presumption of systematic mistreatment. But the intrinsic patterns of marginalization—such as the exemption of post-migrants from jobs in the private sector because of their names or physical appearance, the rejection of renters with foreign names or appearances and—this may not remain unmentioned—the patterns of mater- or paternalism many of the volunteers in the refugee-scene adopted—all contribute to marginalization at different levels of intensity.

What are the criteria for successful refugee policies, and are they applicable across cultures and situational contexts?

The most critical criterion lays in starting the education of refugees, screening their professional or vocational potential and determining their future status as early and rapidly as possible—will they remain refugees with a limited status and rights, for example, to choose their place of residence as long as they depend on transfer income (residence obligation applies in some of the states of Germany)? Or, are they going to shift their minor legal status towards a full immigrant’s status with all rights of self-determination? Is there a path for naturalization for those who pursue it?

For refugees, a critical criterion also goes along with a semi self-determined pattern for accommodation. “Semi,” as refugees in most cases cannot afford to pay an accommodation by their own means and depend on the assignment of an apartment by the housing authorities. Another factor is the conflicting discussion between the schools of “physical integration” (mostly German politics) and the “stability in homogeneity” (mostly international scholars). The one fears the “ghettoization” of quarters due to the concentration of immigrants, while the other sees factors of mutual stabilization in “arrival quarters” which prepare the newcomers for life in the host country. The truth depends on the situation that arriving immigrants and refugees face and the

“docking points,” on which they can hook in the arrival quarters. Most important is that the people do not remain for a longer period than necessary in emergency shelters and forms of mass accommodation, which popped up in Germany over the last 30 months, even in small industrial areas.

The applicability highly depends on the self determination of the host country and its dominant population and political setting: Does the host country allow for a considerable additional amount of public resources in personnel and funds to go strikingly beyond the mere “administration of refugee cases” towards the support of public or civil entities which provide for individual potential analysis, training programs, language qualification, psychological and social consultancy, etc.? Is there a joint understanding amongst the majority of the society that for a considerable period of time resources will be allocated to people who do not guarantee, “at the first sight,” a positive rate of social and financial return? This discussion is not only triggered by the already deprived local population but also by very much differing perceptions, comments and expertise of the scientific society. The fact that, in the past, all investments in the integration of migrants and refugees paid out 125% is widely neglected or put at stake by different numbers.

And finally, even the proponents of immigration and a humanitarian and integrative approach to refugees are not at all clear about the fact that integration does not only change the incoming people but also the population already in place. The truth lays probably in the term “inclusion,” which was meant to describe in the respective UN Charta the full participation of disabled people in education, professional and public life. This also requires changes in the welcoming society -not all at once but a constant change towards a society which bears a stronger imprint through migration over centuries, decades and the past few years.

To what extent can we change or influence the public’s will to receive vulnerable populations, and how does the media shape views of immigration?

The German proverb goes as such: “Often the child has already gone down the well”—i.e., it is much more difficult to readjust a wrong societal preoccupation than to familiarize a society with the pros and cons of immigration and integration of refugees before the “big wave” arrives. And it would have been much easier to sort out the non-refugee cases beyond the German boundaries in the countries neighboring the conflict country than in Germany itself. At the moment the

discussion is virtually on the verge: Do we want to invest more in refugees and immigrants in view of the uncertain outcome? The answer is rather “We need to invest more in order to maintain all our wellbeing” than “We cannot afford more refugees.” Or, even harsher but not at all uncommon: “The boat is full.” We need a positive narrative, such as the one of the German refugees from the east who built up Germany from scratch. This is the partly accepted narrative of the industrious guest workers who contributed to the blossoming of the German economy and to the “mediteranization,” which we all enjoy by now; and the narrative of the Eritrean apprentice who became best in the World plasterer championship. When the narrative in the contrary is nourished by five Syrian youngsters lighting a homeless person’s sleeping bag on fire in an underground station, an Afghan youngster stabbing, strangling, raping, and killing a young female student who was even engaged in an initiative for refugees, or a self-declared IS fighter who injured Chinese tourists with an axe, then we have a hard stand to convince a majority. Media and press play a decisive role—and are distrustfully monitored by a growing base of “postfactual” fans who only believe in fake news they generated or adopted themselves.

How and why do increased interactions between different groups create camaraderie in some cases and conflict in others?

A safeguarded social and income status might be seen as a prerequisite for camaraderie—but this is not the case. Camaraderie and solidarity with the fate of immigrants and refugees is a socially cross-cutting phenomenon as is, on the other side, the rejection and even hate shown to immigrants and sometimes foreigners. The negative phenomena are fed by education, overly interpreted

“own experiences,” (which often have to do with blackmailing through third parties, exaggerations of oral experience and the mushrooming of web driven lies), prejudices which travelled journeys over a multitude of generations and, to a certain but very dangerous extent, “fear of racial extinction“ by those who look, act and believe differently.

A certain proportion of these people cannot be won back, but those on the verge or strongly influenced, if not infiltrated by radicals, can be brought back in what we hope is still the mainstream of people: emphatic, based on social principles, sharing interest, or at least—neutral and uninterested. There is only limited evidence in generating fireworks of intercultural festivities, solidarity meetings and support networks which try to activate those on the verge. Most important is to prove that we show interest in the “bio-Germans” whom we haven’t sufficiently acknowledged in the past decades. It urgently requires to show those who doubt that the state invests more than ever in them. Also, it is critical to install a functioning and fast reacting social monitoring system which provides for the spatial investment needs in our cities and communities. Because the critics are correct: the distribution pattern is spatially unjust. However, they are not directed towards immigrants and refugees but rather to the “already haves” amongst all of us. The investment figures in our cities show that, for the most part, the quarters of the upper half receive more per capita funds than those of the lower half of our income strata. If we react too late we lose our local population of the lower half, not to count the right wing intellectuals. And we need the lower half of our population if we want to include immigrants and refugees in a way which pays out for the whole of our societies.