

# Connected Communities

## New Migration, Neighbourhood Effects and Community Change

David Robinson and Aimee Walshaw



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## **Executive Summary**

Public opinion has coalesced around the view that new migration is having a major impact on settled residents in effected locations. This project set out to test these claims through a review of the evidence base relating to local experiences of new migration. An extensive literature details the situations and experiences of migrants in the UK. Glimpses are provided into ways in which migration is being experienced in different ways in different places. Little effort has been put into describing and explaining this variable geography. A small number of studies provide useful insights into different dimensions of place important in shaping experiences of migration but say little about their relative importance or interconnectivity. Little evidence also exists about what works, where and why in terms of promoting trust and understanding and nurturing positive relations between new and long-standing residents. Two key priorities for future research emerge from this review. First, the development of conceptual models of causation relating to the pathways through which place informs and is impacted on by migration. Second, greater understanding of how to actively promote cosmopolitan practices in the context of new migration and analysis of good practice in bridge building between new and long-standing residents.

## **Key words**

migration; place effects; community relations

## Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the UK has witnessed a marked rise in the number of foreign nationals arriving in the country. Public opinion has coalesced around the view that this new phase of migration is having a major impact on settled residents in effected locations. This project set out to test these claims through a review of the evidence base relating to local experiences of new migration. Analysis was guided by attention to three key questions:

- in what ways and to what extent are the effects and consequences of new migration (for new migrants and longer-term residents) playing out in different ways in different local settings?
- what community challenges are emerging in different places as a result of new migration?
- what lessons have been learnt regarding the management of the changes wrought by new migration, including how community-based initiatives can limit tensions and resolve conflict between different communities and groups?

This summary report provides an overview of the key conclusions to emerge from the review. It is organised into three sections: local experiences and effects of new migration; promoting community relations; and recommendations for future research.

## Local Experiences and Effects of New Migration

There is an extensive literature detailing the situations and experiences of migrants who have arrived into the UK through different immigration pathways. This includes local and national studies exploring the material situations and everyday experiences of migrant workers and refugees and asylum seekers. An extensive literature also exists exploring issues of migrant identity, acculturation and integration. Studies have also explored the impacts of migration, with a particular focus on the economic and labour market consequences and issues raised for service providers. Discussion of the experiences and outcomes of new migration within these literatures has been largely placeless. Despite recognition that migration is experienced differently in different places and is affecting different parts of the country in distinct ways (Audit Commission, 2007; CLG Committee, 2008), little effort has been put into describing and explaining this variable geography of experience and outcome associated with migration.

Few studies of the integration experiences of asylum seekers and refugees explore 'place' and, in particular, the role of neighbourhood places as mediators of social exclusion and inclusion (Spicer, 2008). Analysis of the experiences of migrant workers rarely ventures beyond the description of the local experiences of migrants to consider the social and physical environments within which experiences are rooted or how

migrants understand and negotiate the opportunity structures apparent in the places where they live (Robinson and Reeve, 2006). Local studies often provide an overview description of the context into which migrants arrive, but rarely endeavour to relate their situations and experiences to the particulars of the places in which they are living. At their best, studies provide rich, agent-centred accounts of individual experiences, behaviours and trajectories and provide insights into the complex interplay between the agency of migrants and the structures and power relations which inform individual outcomes. However, they shy away from exploring the complex interplay between people and places, rendering unclear the role that different dimensions of place might play in shaping individual outcomes. Meanwhile, analysis of the impacts of migration has tended to focus either on the national context at the expense of local geographies of change (Stenning and Dawley, 2009), or has been aspatial in nature and has failed to consider how consequences might be manifest and managed in different ways in different contexts (ICOCO, 2007; Thorp, 2008). Consequently, few insights have been forthcoming into the experiences of existing residents in locations effected by new migration. Urban researchers have also been accused of being largely silent on the interplay between migration and urban transformation (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009).

A small number of studies have questioned the failure of analysis to situate the experiences of new migrants and longer-standing residents within the places they live and interact (Cheong et al., 2007; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009; Hickman et al., 2008; IPPR, 2007; Kesten et al., 2011; Netto, 2011; Phillips et al. 2010; Robinson et al., 2007; White, 2011). These studies tend to be dynamic in nature, charting migrant experiences through time or contrasting associated outcomes in different places. Variability, contradiction and ambiguity has been revealed in the effects and consequences of new migration, prompting questions about the importance of place as a determinant of different experiences. Two key themes have dominated discussion.

The first concerns the relationship between context (material conditions and the profile and availability of local resources) and experiences and impacts of migration. The social and material context has been identified as critical to the experiences of migrants (Hickman et al., 2008; White, 2011). New migrants are typically living in disadvantaged and deprived neighbourhoods, often characterised by poor housing, high levels of unemployment, limited service provision and poor local amenities (Robinson, 2010). These places can represent an unfavourable context of reception and induce what has been referred to as acculturative stress; adverse effects, including anxiety, depression and other forms of mental and physical problem, associated with adapting to a new cultural context (Schwartz et al., 2008). Living in close proximity to people from the same country of origin or from an shared ethnic or religious background can help limit such challenges. Benefits are most apparent in situations where the migrant community is well established and has a good knowledge of local bureaucratic systems, resource availability and has established its own community based services and facilities (Crawley et al., 2011; Williams, 2006; White, 2011; Glick Schiller et al., 2006; Kesten et al., 2011; Spicer, 2008). Migration also has the potential to reshape places. The arrival of migrants into an area can put strain on local services that might already be overstretched, including housing, schools and health care (Pillai et al., 2007; Audit

Commission, 2007; Hickman et al., 2008; Phillimore et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2007; Thorp, 2008). However, the arrival of migrants can also have various positive impacts in some neighbourhoods, for example, addressing shortages in the local labour market, underpinning the sustainability of neighbourhoods and ensuring the viability of local services (Cameron and Field, 2000; Casey et al., 2004; Pemberton, 2009; Hickman et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2008; Thorp, 2008).

The second theme concerns the relationship between the composition of the long-standing population and community relations. Available evidence suggests that diverse places with a history of migration are more likely to adapt better to new migration, to be more inclusive and to foster a positive integration experience for migrants (Audit Commission, 2007; Casey et al., 2004; Hickman et al., 2008; IPPR, 2007; Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Netto, 2011; Robinson et al., 2007; Spicer, 2008). Such neighbourhoods can provide access to inclusive local resources, such as schools, enabling new arrivals to develop social bonds and access practical and emotional support (Clayton, 2009; Hickman et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2007; Spicer, 2008). These findings are consistent with analysis pointing to the positive impact on interethnic relations of living in a more diverse environment (Laurence, 2011). They also appear to confirm the inter-group contact hypothesis, which asserts that under the right conditions intercultural encounters can facilitate greater appreciation and understanding of diversity and difference and promote positive social interactions. These encounters might only be mundane and fleeting in form but can have an important positive precursor to more open and democratic cultures. However, one must be careful not to overstate the importance of such encounters. Intercultural contact does not always translate into progressive and long-term social relations and can in certain circumstances reinforce prejudices and exacerbate tensions (Amin, 2002; Clayton, 2009; Valentine, 2008; Valentine, 2010; Vertovec, 2007). The process of negotiation associated with everyday encounters within spaces of new migration is an uncertain process and the outcomes can sometimes be problematic; evidence of practical conviviality can exist alongside evidence of limitations, difficulties and tensions (Kesten et al., 2011). A key reason for this variability of experience is reported to be material context. Struggles over resources need not inevitably result in hostility from existing residents towards new groups perceived to be culturally different, but such feelings appear likely to be exacerbated by a relative lack of interaction between new communities and others (Hickman et al., 2008; Hudson et al., 2008).

These studies have pointed to some of the ways in which particular aspects of the social and material context and compositional nature of place can inform the experiences and effects new migration. Efforts to conceptualise these place-specific experiences and outcomes have tended to focus on the generation of neighbourhood archetypes (Hickman et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2007; Spicer, 2009). At one extreme are locations which possess a recent history of different cultures meeting, colliding and negotiating a social settlement, where there is an increased likelihood of new migrants receiving a more positive reception. At the other extreme are neighbourhoods with a more limited recent history of accommodating ethnic diversity, where there is a heightened likelihood of negative reactions to new migration. Working at the city scale,

Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009) argue that migrant incorporation is influenced by the positioning of the city along a continuum of power and influence. At one extreme are **top-scale** cities (such as London), which are identified as offering the broadest range of possibilities for migrant incorporation and transnational connection. At the other are **down-scale** cities which have not succeeded in restructuring and where migrants are not highly valued and opportunities for integration are more restricted.

These conceptualisations represent useful organising devices. They point to some of the ways in which the nature of the neighbourhood and city into which migrants arrive might inform experiences of incorporation and influence the impact of their arrival. However, they are descriptive, rather than analytical tools, which speak in generalities and say little about causal pathways between the nature of place and the process of migrant incorporation. They provide little guidance about how to engage with the complexity of context and explore how place and people interact. They point to different dimensions of place important in shaping experiences of migration but say little about their relative importance or interconnectivity. These limitations become all too evident when faced with the challenge of understanding and explaining experiences and outcomes in places (neighbourhoods or cities) that fall between the archetypes outlined by these typologies. It is also important to remember that rarely, in practice, is it possible to make a straightforward distinction between places that 'work' in terms of inter-ethnic relations and those that do not; intercultural tensions and accommodations can exist side by side (Clayton, 2009).

## Promoting Community Relations

Various local initiatives supporting formal encounters and structured interactions have been developed in a bid to support the development of trust and understanding, and nurture positive relations between new and long-standing residents. These local initiatives are premised on the notion that positive encounters which facilitate inter-cultural understanding are not an inevitable consequence of more mundane, informal encounters and sometimes need to be actively nurtured. People often only interact with people perceived as 'different' if they have a strong personal motivation to do so and engagement might need to be actively promoted (Harris and Young, 2009).

Many of these initiatives have been developed under the auspices of the community cohesion agenda. These bridge-building projects have been varied in scope, form and focus (Amas and Crosland, 2006; Council of Europe and the European Foundation, 2010; Perry and Blackaby, 2007; Wilson and Zipfel, 2008). Typically, they have been developed in response to a combination of local challenges posed by new migration. Priorities have included community development, promoting understanding between new and longer standing residents, improving the responsiveness of local services to the changing profile of local need, supporting the integration of new residents and managing tensions. Bridging-building initiatives has been identified as playing a key role in the emergence and maintenance of cohesive social environments (Hickman et al., 2008;

Robinson et al., 2004). However, it is difficult to glean any significant insights from available evidence base about what works in terms of promoting positive community relations. A recent review by Phillips et al. (2010) found that interventions have rarely been subject to any form of evaluation. Information about local initiatives typically takes the form of short vignettes, which describe but make no effort to evaluate the effectiveness or efficiency of interventions. There is little or no evidence of attempts to examine the context, inputs, strategies or methodologies of initiatives. Nor has much effort been put into assessing the outputs and associated costs and benefits of the numerous activities targeted at meeting the challenges raised by new migration. Specific initiatives are referred to as examples of good practice, but no evidence is presented to substantiate these claims.

Academic literature has also been less than forthcoming when it comes to understanding how to limit tensions and resolve conflict that might emerge between long-standing residents and new migrants. It is widely recognised that the arrival of strangers and the exposure to different cultures can be perceived as a threat to the existing socio-spatial and socio-temporal sense of place and identity and a disruption of taken for granted categories of social life and urban space (Iveson, 2006). This has led to questions being asked about how existing residents should respond to the disruption caused by the arrival of the stranger. According to Sandercock (2003), the good city should respond by welcoming the stranger and avoiding any temptation to lapse into stranger-danger by treating the stranger as a threat to be excluded. This laudable aspiration poses an obvious question; how might this cosmopolitanism be formed and reformed in particular locations and everyday spaces? As Vertovec (2009) observes, virtually all recent writings on this topic remain in the realm of rhetoric and "there is little description or analysis of how contemporary cosmopolitan philosophies, political projects or practices can be formed, instilled or bolstered". Nothing is said about how to assist this process and to ensure that global-local encounters are not negative in form (Delanty, 2006).

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Two key priorities for future research emerge from this review. First, there is an urgent need to develop conceptual models of causation relating to the pathways through which place informs and is impacted on by migration. This will require greater clarity about the variable geography of experiences and outcomes associated with migration. What experiences and outcomes are evident in different kinds of place? Can any particular correlations be observed? This is an immediate priority for research. Building on this analytical foundation, the challenge will then be to develop causal models that abstract the relationship between explanatory variables and particular outcomes. One suggestion for a productive way forward is to mirror efforts in analysis of place effects on health to establish the essential characteristics of a healthy neighbourhood and to explore the characteristic of place evident in locations associated with a more positive experience of new migration (Robinson, 2010). The next step will be to test any casual models that emerge.

Second, there is an urgent need for more rigorous evaluation of local initiatives aimed at building bridges between new and long-standing residents. Consideration needs to focus on 'what works for whom in what circumstances?'. This emphasis reflects the fact that the effectiveness of different interventions will vary depending upon the circumstances and situation in which they are introduced, an important consideration given evidence of the very different experiences, outcomes and challenges associated with new migration in different places. Armed with a greater understanding of what works under what circumstances policy makers and practitioners will be better able to decide which approach to implement in what conditions. Meanwhile, there is also an urgent need for academic debate to venture beyond the realm of the rhetoric and analyse how cosmopolitan practices might be actively promoted. A useful starting point here would be a focus on relationship building in practice in particular places, and the process of negotiation that takes place as communities are defined and redefined (Kesten et al., 2011).

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*"to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities."*

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