Managing global flows at local level

A short discussion note on civic participation for migrants/refugees: The theme of the fifth workshop in Val de Marne 16-19 January 2018

Dear Arrival Cities ULG members,

The fifth workshop in our transnational learning and exchange programme will focus on the theme of "Civic participation of migrants and refugees"[1]. This will take place in Val de Marne from 16-19 January 2018.

This note is intended to stimulate some discussion within the ULG with a view to prepare the delegates who will take part in the fifth transnational workshop and also most importantly to provoke discussion and reflection regarding the Integrated Action Plan(IAP) that each ULG will be producing as key outcome of the Arrival Cities project. The IAP is of course an ongoing and iterative piece of work but it is important that each ULG explores and discusses each sub theme of the transnational programme with a clear objective of identifying how and in what way(s) the theme is going to be reflected in their IAP.

Introduction and General Context

In any discussion about how to support migrants/refugees in getting involved in civic participation, there has to be first a discussion about civic participation in general as this effectively sets the context within which approaches to support migrants/refugees have to work.

How to secure more effective participation in civic life has become a major preoccupation at all levels of governance. The reasons are very clear. There is a growing alienation from political life. This is reflected in lower voter turnout but also in voters voting for "non -establishment "parties or personalities. The election of Macron and Trump are clear examples of this trend.

There is a decline of social capital. That is to say a decline in the numbers of people who through volunteering or directly as individuals get involved in discussions regarding local/national/European issues. Pick up any policy document or a party political publication and the issue of citizen/civic participation will be highlighted as a key goal.

However, despite this strong focus/high priority, there is very little evidence that shows any kind of significant reversal of the trends highlighted above. Indeed, if anything the evidence suggests at best stagnation (only reaching the "usual suspects") or ongoing decline in participation.

The above description is of course disputable. In disputing the above depiction, particular recourse is made to the rise in numbers of people using social media in respect to "public issues". That is to say, whilst less people are visible in local meetings and local groups, there is a growing virtual level of participation. This kind of "click activism" is particularly reflected in the growth of mailing lists centered on particular policy issues or specific issues or causes/campaigns.

The causes of the above trends are contested but they include:

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[1] Please remember that in the Arrival Cities network we are using the term "migrant" to include refugees, asylum seekers etc. It also refers to new arrivals and those that have been settled in their host country for some time. In EU jargon we are focused on "third country nationals".

- **Apathy.** Increasing numbers people have a strong tendency to be apathetic towards the democratic process, and are strongly disinclined to vote. There is also a strong element of complacency to aggravate problems caused by apathy. This is not restricted to the EU and to EP elections – it is true across the all nations and all elections, supranational, National and local.

- **Pressures.** Most observers would agree that it is the case that people are now subject to far more pressure (and in particular demands on their time) than ever before.All of these pressures strongly mitigate against any time consuming Involvement in the democratic process, and that lack of involvement in turn leads to absenteeism.

- **Lack of identification.** There is a general lack of identification with the EU and its institutions across all ages and all demographics.

- **Rise of single issue groups.** One other phenomenon in recent years has been the rise of single issue pressure groups. In the UK the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has more than one million members. This is more than all of the political parties put together. Other pressure groups are international. environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have members and activists in all EU countries. If people identify with these single issue pressure groups, and give them their support and possibly their money, they are potentially less likely to engage with mainstream political parties.

In addition to the above specific causes of alienation there are also others which also account for the low participation of migrants.

- **Poverty.** Migrant workers often have a lower standard of living than the indigenous population. Although some are professional people (doctors, lawyers, accountants) many others are engaged in unskilled or semiskilled manual labour. Poverty itself is one of the major inhibiting factors on turnout. If all of an individual's attention is concentrated on finding and keeping work, they have less time and energy to engage in the democratic process. Therefore the fact that migrants generally have a lower standard of living than the indigenous population means that they are less likely to vote.

- **Identification with original country.** It is naturally the case that although migrants have "chosen" to settle in an EU country, they still strongly identify with their country of origin. This means that they feel less engaged with their country of residence, and therefore less inclined to engage in the democratic process.

International and European policy context

The general public's trust in the European Union, as in other political institutions, has steadily eroded over the past decades, with a significant drop since the start of the financial and economic crisis in 2008. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, acknowledged this worrying trend in his inaugural speech at the European

Parliament in November 2014, when he set the tone for his 'last-chance Commission': 'Either we succeed in bringing the European citizens closer to Europe — or we will fail'.[2]

When 27 of the European Union's Member States adopted the so-called Bratislava Declaration in September 2016[3], they presented a clear diagnosis of the reasons for the citizens' current disaffection regarding the EU: members of the general public are worried about what they perceive to be a lack of control and influence over what is going on around them; and they are concerned about global issues such as migration, terrorism, security and economic and social insecurity.

These concerns have led to a loss of confidence in traditional political institutions, which include the European Union. Indeed, the 2014 European Parliament elections yielded strong results for populist parties. Populism finds fertile soil in

claiming that there is a conflict between the so-called will of the people, which is denoted as pure and honest, and that of the elites, who are portrayed as corrupt and self-interested. Political analysis [4]of recent election results suggests that a significant proportion of voters worry deeply about the domestic effects of EU membership, as they perceive their lives to be in the hands of an 'alien' ruler.

The democratic deficit remains one of the recurring themes of the indictment of the EU. The facts are known. In the sixty years of their existence, the Brussels institutions have not managed to create an authentically democratic space specific to Europe. Despite its repeated and worthy efforts, the European Parliament has not truly managed to occupy this terrain, as illustrated by the weak participation every five years in EU elections. It is ultimately in the States themselves that debates find democratic legitimacy, even if their imperfect nature because they are incomplete is immediately obvious. Exchanges about the EU during the last French presidential campaign were highly revealing in this regard, showing the limited nature of proposals that are necessarily unrealistic for not having been perfected through open debate with the rest of the Europeans. The fact remains that the absence of channels between EU institutions and European citizens, capable of contributing ideas and objections characteristic of any democratic exchange, leads to weak political authority. This original flaw affects all decisions made nearly on a daily basis in Brussels. The new factor introduced by the current European crisis tends to indicate that this weakness, long attributed exclusively to Europe, now extends to the more general crisis of our Western democratic systems. Frustration with the elite coming from a growing part of the electorate both in European countries and the United States and linked to a sense of inability to understand one another and to share the same experiences, today nurtures a gnawing rancour against democratic regimes. This can be seen in a variety of behaviours – abstention, voting for extreme parties… – now openly expressing a rejection of past practices.

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[2] Address by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to the European Parliament, 15 July 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-546_en.htm
[3] European Council, 16 September 2016, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european- council/2016/09/16-informal-meeting/
[4] Treib, O., 'The voter says no, but nobody listens: causes and consequences of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European elections', Journal of European Public Policy, Vol. 21, No 10, 2014, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.941534

The EC has responded to these growing trends and has issued a White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017. This states: "*Europe and its Member States must move quicker to interact with citizens, be more accountable and deliver better and faster on what has been collectively agreed.[5]*" The White Paper has committed the EC to hold an ongoing process of consultations leading up to the 2019 EP elections.

It is within this general context that the workshop in Val de Marne will take place. Our focus will be on how at a local level is it possible to create avenues for participation for migrants so as to facilitate their wider integration.

Specific Context in respect to migrants/refugees

The need to engage migrants in civic matters has long been recognized at EU level.

In 1992, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level with the view to encouraging the active participation of foreign residents in the life of the local community and the development of its prosperity by enhancing their opportunities to participate in local public affairs. Article 6 of the convention grants foreign residents the right to vote and stand for election in local authority elections after 5 years of residency preceding the election.

In 2004, the European Council adopted the Common Basic Principles (CBPs) on Immigrant Integration and in 2005, in its Communication a Common Agenda for Integration, the European Commission developed these principles into a framework with action points at national and European levels.

Concerning immigrant social and political participation, the most central CBPs are:

- CBP1: A variety of measures are adopted by Member States to foster integration as a two-way process. However, to put this principle into practice in a meaningful way is a long-term challenge that requires further effort. Structural initiatives targeting the host population in order to reinforce its ability to adjust to diversity are still underrepresented in national strategies.
- CBP2: Basic values such as liberty, democracy, the rule of law and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms are considered important elements of new policies. A number of Member States have introduced measures to provide knowledge on basic values in civic orientation programmes.
- CBP7: The importance of daily life interaction and the crucial role of local activities are stressed by most Member States, although the extent to which such activities are reflected in integration strategies varies widely. Measures that promote interaction between immigrants and host society, including setting up shared forums, are still limited.

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[5] White Paper on the Future of Europe, March 2017

- CBP9: Immigrant participation in the democratic process is increasingly perceived as a significant component of successful integration. In a growing number of cases, immigrant representatives are involved in the development/implementation of integration policies. In particular, there is a growing interest in active citizenship and naturalisation processes as tools to increase opportunities for involvement in the host society. A rather limited number of Member States provide third-country nationals with voting rights in local elections.

Moreover, CBPs 4, 10 and 11 are indirectly related to issues concerning immigrant social and political participation:

- CBP4: Most Member States consider basic knowledge of the host society language an essential component of integration. Many countries focus their integration strategies on introduction programmes, including (sometimes mandatory) language and civic orientation courses for the newly arrived. A growing number of Member States increase the flexibility of courses in terms of targeting specific needs. Only a few Member States carry out in-depth evaluation of these activities.
- CBP10: Most Member States have improved their capacity to mainstream integration into all relevant policies, while also developing targeted measures. However, effective information sharing, coordinating with all tiers of government and stakeholders, and paying due attention to the mainstreaming of gender equality and to the specific needs of immigrant youth and children, are still major challenges.
- CBP11: Member States increasingly perceive the need to enhance the capacity to collect, analyse and communicate integration-related information, including gender disaggregated statistics, in a more systematic way. More detailed data helps avoid confusion and render the contribution of immigrants to the host society's development more visible. Further progress is necessary to monitor and evaluate integration policies and programmes and to identify specific indicators.

In 2007 the European Council's conclusions of June meant a change of course for the EU integration agenda by stressing the need to consider approaches to integration involving society as a whole and recognising that intercultural dialogue is an important instrument for fostering integration. This meant that the Commission would explore various notions of participation and citizenship, and examine their influence on the integration process: Platforms for discussion involving stakeholders and representatives of immigrants were encouraged at various levels. Furthering immigrants' access to rights as well as fulfilment of their responsibilities as citizens was seen as a means to create a closer connection with the host societies. The existing forms of participation and policies on citizenship were considered varied and insufficient. In order to further immigrant integration, immigrant participation in the democratic process was to be supported.

As such at EU level there is clear understanding that for the effective functioning of democratic systems it is important that individuals play an active role: as voters, community participants, workers, activists, political party members, etc. Therefore, it is important to also promote the civic and political participation of immigrants and refugees in the host country. Moreover, the civic and political participation of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, ultimately supports the diversity of the European community.

Some points for discussion/reflection

- Civic participation in refugee community and migrant organisations can help newly arrived migrants and refugees settle and develop a social network. In addition, these organisations give refugees and migrants a voice. However, since 9/11, Madrid, London, Paris, Nice and other attacks, the fact that migrants and refugees organise themselves is not always seen as something positive, but rather a step towards self-chosen isolation, in particular Muslim organisations are perceived as negative and associated with terrorism and separatism.

- There is a wide range of ways in which immigrants may participate in civic life. The method of participation depends on a variety of factors, including their civic traditions, political structures in their countries of origin, and current capacity in the host country. Hence it is important to try and understand what is the meaning of civic participation in their culture?

- It is critical to appreciate the social organization of immigrant communities in order to understand the structures through which they participate. The organization may imitate that of an immigrant community's country of origin; more likely than not, however, it is a hybrid structure that builds on the traditions of their homeland and has been adapted to fit the "local way. "The social organization of an immigrant community becomes a way in which members provide support to and obtain assistance from each other, share information, and contribute to larger society. These structures that maintain the social organization are influenced by factors such as the characteristics of the different waves of immigrants (e.g., education, gender, age), the political context of their country of origin (e.g., civil war, natural disaster), the political and social climate in the host cities that received the immigrants and the availability of already established networks to welcome and support newly arrived immigrants. These structures become the immigrants' avenues for participation.

- Faith-based and spiritual institutions have different functions in different immigrant communities.

- Ethnic media provide another means to support the social organization of immigrant communities, primarily because the communication is conducted in the immigrants' native languages.

- Native Mother Tongue classes and citizenship workshops also provide a means to develop participation. These programmes often attract large numbers of immigrants, particularly recent newcomers and provide another way to reach them. A majority of these programs are conducted on weekends and evenings. Even though their primary intent is to teach new immigrants how to function biculturally, they can also become social support systems.

- Some migrant cultures promote values that are contradictory to democratic principles, for example, patriarchal structures that serve to obstruct the participation of women or promote the expectation that the leader will take care of everyone in the community. In other cultures in oppressed nations, members learned that participation in any action that questions their government would land them in trouble.

Some resources

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2014/529080/IPOL_STU%282014%29529080_EN.pdf

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493036/IPOL-AFCO_NT(2013)493036_EN.pdf

Migration: root causes & migrants' civic participation in hosting communities

http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/news_dett.php?id=1594

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