

RICCs: 'Creating the Cosmopolitan City: Manchester migrants old and new'.

Workshop 2: Employment.

Abstract. 'Skilled EU migrants in Manchester's economy as producers and consumers'.

In global studies most research on migrants has either focused on poor, economic migrants from the South or, more recently, on the lifestyles and key roles played by the supposedly highly mobile members of an emerging transnational business/professional elite. Little attention has been given to skilled middle class non-elite individuals even though they are migrating in growing numbers. This paper, therefore, is based on in-depth interviews undertaken in 2005 with 61 individuals – mostly aged between 22 and 36 - with postgraduate qualifications who were working in Manchester at that time and who hailed from thirteen EU countries (though only a few were from the newly accession countries). Though many held relatively comfortable positions as professionals or in business they were far from being highly privileged individuals exercising power and influence in the local or world economy.

Their average length of stay was six years though some had been here much longer and others only a year or two. The discussion first considers what motivations initially brought them to Britain and Manchester and argues that though these were mixed, utilitarian reasons were usually prominent - not least the lack of suitable educational or more especially employment or career opportunities in their own countries. Many ended up remaining here though this had not been their original intention. Second, we look at the kinds of occupational niches in the local economy which skilled EU individuals are most likely to find both attractive and welcoming and explores the reasons for this likely 'fit'. Sometime this depends on language abilities but other factors are also at work which relate either to the existence of certain skill deficits in Britain and/or the needs generated by Manchester's re-invention of itself as a high-level service or knowledge economy with strong claims to be a cosmopolitan city. Of course, their ability to implant themselves often very successfully in jobs which provided career opportunities and reasonable incomes in 2005 may have become far more problematic for newer migrants given the current recession!

Last, I suggest that these migrants were also important to Manchester as consumers who mostly sought a possibly wider range of cultural, leisure interests than their middle class British equivalents. But in any case their very presence whether as workers in planning or cultural fields, as witnesses to the city's recent cultural and architectural transformation and/or as participants, in the fabric of post-modern, multi-cultural life, helped – vitally - to legitimize Manchester's claims to have become a cosmopolitan global city.

Paul Kennedy,
Manchester Institute for Spatial and Social Transformations (MISST),
Manchester Metropolitan University.