

Social innovation and integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the UK labour market

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Project Description:

The issue of migration has been a contentious issue in the policy and public terrain within the UK for decades (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). There are systemic challenges newcomers must overcome to be able to access the labour market and become self-reliant: they must learn the language in a sufficient manner, have legal status that allows them to work. These can be complex tasks which may require navigating the bureaucracy of the UK Home Office, opportunities for employment and employer who is persuaded about their suitability and skills match for that specific job (Anderson, 2010; Mulvey, 2018). To successfully progress through such steps newcomers rely either upon the support of relatives and acquaintances, as many 'native' citizens would do, but they can also rely on a set of organisations and businesses that provide support to migrants at their different stages of progress and across a spectrum of needs through social innovation dynamics and processes.

Over the last decades, social innovation has been increasingly promoted in public policy debates as a vehicle to developing innovative and efficient solutions addressing societal needs (Sinclair & Baglioni, 2014) Sinclair and Baglioni, 2014). Social innovation has been presented as a distinctive and effective response to a welfare crisis (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Understood as a novel way of working that promotes collaborations between citizens, third sector organisations and public actors, and a platform that enhances the design and delivery of public services (Hubert, 2010), social innovation has been harnessed by policymakers around the globe. However, due to the novelty of the concept and challenges associated with measuring it, empirical research evidencing the effectiveness of social innovation in addressing societal needs is still scarce (Sinclair and Baglioni, 2014). This scarcity becomes even more relevant in the face of crisis such as COVID-19, when for example novel approaches of governance such as social innovation will be scrutinised to see if they are effective to cope with high-impact threats (Dunlop et al., 2020).

While, a substantial amount of studies have researched the basic services for migrants provided by civil society organisations, particularly in the first days and months of arrival in the receiving country (Garkisch et al., 2017), few have explored social innovation dynamics and even less attention has been paid to these relationships in the UK context. According to a recent systematic review, research has focused on job training, the direct hiring of migrants, subsidised programmes and support with work permits and work contracts (Garkisch et al. 2017). However, few of these studies were conducted in the UK context and very few

studies have explored how social innovation initiative work, for whom and under what circumstances.

Disentangling how social innovation works, for whom and under what circumstances in supporting the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the labour market needs further exploration. This PhD aims at conducting a realist evaluation of a social innovation intervention in Scotland that has developed a national process for both recognition of skills of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and supported the transferability of skills into the Scottish labour market (Jackson and Wasige 2022 forthcoming; Jackson 2019). This infrastructure developed using a community led approach which began through engaging with those who migrate and identified the systemic often racialised challenges to skills recognition (Jackson and Wasige 2022 forthcoming).

Realist evaluation is a relatively recent but widely accepted empirical approach to the investigation of interventions (Pawson, 2016; Porter & O'Halloran, 2012). Realist evaluation acknowledges that interventions are an example of social processes at work, and therefore they can be subject to an overabundance of explanatory possibilities because they are complex and behave as adaptive systems (Pawson, 2013). The ambition of realist evaluation is therefore to unravel the complex relationships between the 'ingredients' of interventions and the social fabric in which they operate (Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012). Empirically, this is done by exploiting theory-informed evidence to establish context, mechanism, outcome configurations (CMOs) that account for what works in interventions (outcomes), why and how interventions work (mechanisms), for whom and under what circumstances (context). Realist evaluation employs these configurations to advance a set of 'program theories'. These are explanatory statements that are transportable from one context to another, and can be subject to further conceptual refinement through new data collection and emerging theory (Van Belle & Mayhew, 2016). In sum, realist evaluation allows an exploration of the 'black box' approach that can characterize certain programs (Salter & Kothari, 2014), especially those that remain under-theorized about specific crucial ingredients and processes. For doings, so the PhD student will conduct a mixed method studies which will include both quantitative methods (such as for example network analysis) to identify the outcomes of the intervention and qualitative methods (such as interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries and stakeholders) to explore the mechanisms and the contextual characteristics. Secondary data collected from the organisation will also be analysed and results will be triangulated.

The results of our study will lay the ground for contributing to academic knowledge in migration and social innovation, third sector studies as well as potentially supporting the replication of the intervention and the establishment of policies that could better support integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the Scottish and UK labour market.

About the Supervisors:

Francesca Calo is a Lecturer in Management at the Department of Public Leadership & Social Enterprise, where she brings academic experience from posts held in the UK and Italy. Her research interests include social enterprise and third sector organisation in health and social care, impact evaluation methods and social innovation.

Fidèle Mutwarasibo is a Lecturer in Work Based Learning in the Faculty of Business and Law at the Open University. He has previously worked in the voluntary sector at all levels (volunteer, executive and trustee/director). In terms of research interests, he is studying inclusive leadership and collaboration practices aimed at addressing in a systemic way, racial inequality, where the leadership of Black and Minority Ethnic plays an active role.

Alessandro Sancino is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the Department of Public Leadership & Social Enterprise, where he brings extensive academic experience from posts held in Italy, Switzerland, Peru' and the UK. His research is focused on cities, democracy, government-citizens relations, public value and social innovation.

Ima Jackson (External Supervisor) is a community engaged researcher working within migration and with those from marginalised and racialised ethnic groups. She works regularly across portfolios with Scottish Government Ministers, their civil servants and policy makers. Since 2018 she has led the development of the Skills Recognition Scotland infrastructure. Her work is based in social justice and disrupts usual process within the Academy to support communities evidence their experiences through research to those that make decisions about them in research, policy and service delivery.

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