

Enterprise and Diversity: Competitiveness and Cohesion in the Global City

Professor Stephen Syrett

Middlesex University
Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research (CEEDR)
The Burroughs
Hendon
London
NW4 4BT
England
UK

Tel: +44 9(2) 8411 5327
Email: s.syrett@mdx.ac.uk

Co-Authors: Leandro Sepulveda and Fergus Lyon

ABSTRACT

Diversity is increasingly recognised as a defining feature of global cities. Such cities which bring together and mix migrants from across the world are seen as archetypes of the cultural and economic diversity widely believed to be a fundamental attribute of thriving cities in an era of increasing globalisation. Migrants, refugees and new comers constitute the actors and developing architectures of such diversity and are viewed as an economic asset promoting urban economic competitiveness. Through the distinctive skills, entrepreneurial potential, and connections to international trade networks brought by such groups, as well as their impacts upon creativity, innovation and the urban landscape, policy-makers increasingly identify a 'diversity dividend' to be realised by economically successful cities. Yet beyond the rhetoric, there is only limited understanding of how in practice diversity feeds into economic competitiveness whilst simultaneously recognising the considerable challenges to social inclusion and community cohesion brought by an increasingly diverse city population.

This paper seeks to develop a more fully developed understanding of the relationship between urban economic competitiveness and diversity through a focus on one aspect; enterprise activity among new arrivals and refugees. Despite the considerable policy interest in entrepreneurship and ethnic minority businesses, little is known about the impacts of self-employment and enterprise owned-managed by new arrivals, and the roles that such activities play in the process of socio-economic integration of these often disadvantaged ethnic populations. Drawing upon original primary research, findings are presented with regard to the nature of formal and informal enterprise activity among different groups of new arrivals within deprived areas of London. These findings demonstrate both the constrained economic impacts that such enterprises have in promoting competitiveness and their important role in the process of socio-economic integration of new arrival groups. The paper concludes with consideration of the implications of these findings to the development and delivery of enterprise and social policy within diverse urban environments.

Key Words: urban competitiveness, diversity, enterprise