Inclusive social housing to address segregation of migrants and sustain economic development in Saint-Petersburg

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Abstract

Housing is a problem in Saint Petersburg, especially for the large number of migrants that move to the city. The current situation is characterised by scarce opportunities to find an accommodation. These often turn into segregation and social exclusion for the migrants. The latter, in turn, fuel the existing xenophobia and racism among local citizens. Ultimately, this situation is bringing labour migrants to move away from the city, damaging the economy, which desperately needs them.

The existing policies designed to address the issue are largely insufficient if not counterproductive. This paper will investigate the problem at length and propose the following policy solution. First, the creation of an Office for Immigration and Integration. Second, the implementation of an inclusive and extensive programme of social housing, inspired by European experiences.

Introduction

After the fall of the Soviet Union, an increasingly large number of people – mainly coming from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) - has started the migration process towards the territories of the Russian Federation. The key reason to migrate is constituted by work opportunities. The current demographic trends in Russia show a decrease in the fertility rate and an increasingly ageing population. In this context, an influx of migrants is crucial for the economy, and this has been acknowledged by the government with a 'turn to integration' in its immigration policies (Putin, 2012).

On the other hand, hostility and prejudices towards migrants are still widespread (see Figure 1), and the opportunities they are offered are often scarce. These opportunities often depend on the policies that local authorities decide to implement. The outcome is too often social exclusion, rather than integration[1]. This is one of the factors that play a role in the decrease in the number of migrants that choose to move to Russian cities (Gerber, 2000). It is crucial to counteract these dynamics in order to guarantee a decent standard of living to migrants. This, in turn, would also guarantee the preservation of the input of labour so vital for the economy.

Figure 1 – Source: Levada Center, 29/05/2017

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIGRANT LABORERS FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS (TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, KYRGYZSTAN?)

	Jul. 07	Feb. 17
Good, sympathize with them	11	10
Tolerant, neutral	48	48
Bad	31	38
It is difficult to say	11	5

One of the cases in which social exclusion is exacerbated by the municipal policies is that of social housing in Saint Petersburg. The current plan – which I will detail in section 2 – creates a situation in which housing does not allow migrants to be autonomous, subjects them to their employers, and segregates them into unstable situations (Tkach & Brednikova, 2016). All these elements fuel the mechanisms which bring to social exclusion, which is detrimental both for the migrants themselves and for the whole community. Targeting these is crucial to create a more just social environment, and collaterally support the economy. It can be done through an extensive

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[1] '*The Integration of Migrants in Russia: Why Does Tension Continue to Grow?*' (2014), European University Institute Policy Brief

policy effort which would comprise the restructuring of the administrative offices and the creation of a programme for inclusive housing.

> *"Social exclusion affects individuals, groups of people and geographical areas. Social exclusion can be seen, not just in levels of income, but also matters such as health, education, access to services, housing and debt. Phenomena which result from social exclusion, therefore, include: - the resurgence of homelessness - urban crises - ethnic tension - rising long term unemployment - persistent high levels of poverty."*

(Spicker, 1998)

The standpoint from which this policy paper is written is that of an outsider, though an informed one. This will be reflected in the policy I will propose, which leaves spaces to be filled by local officers in order to supplement the core structure I can provide and fit it to the specifics of the particular situations.

The paper will proceed in this way. In the following section, I will describe the social problems created by the housing opportunities for migrants, the actors involved in the process, and the elements at stake. In the third section, I will present and discuss policy options. I will start from the evaluation of the current arrangements, then move at the exposition of my proposal, and eventually look towards implementation and monitoring of progress. Lastly, I will conclude the paper by providing closing remarks.

Housing Opportunities for Migrants in Saint Petersburg

In Saint Petersburg, there is currently no specialised official body responsible for questions of migration, as the department created by the Federal Migration Service in 2010 is focused on monitoring and control, rather than active integration (Gladarev and Tsinman 2011: 509). Therefore, legislation depends on the single municipal departments, such as *Housing and Education* in the present case.

The Housing Situation: seeds for social exclusion

The majority of labour migrants in Saint Petersburg try to find shelter where they can: some occupy rent-subsidised rooms at their place of work, others rent beds for the night or rooms in crowded communal apartments and others live in evacuated houses or squats (Brednikova et al., 2012). This may lead to extreme situations as it has been seen in many cases[2]. Housing instability plays a structural role in the overall lack of security

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[2] The Moscow Times, *Moscow's Migrant 'Tent City' Shut Down,* Online. 21/08/2013
Radio FreeEurope – Radio Liberty, *Hundreds of Illegal Migrant Workers Found in Underground 'Town' in Moscow,* Online. 05/06/2013

in the life of migrants and prevents them from creating solid links with the city and the neighbourhood (Brednikova & Tkach, 2010). This makes life harder for them and creates a positive feed into the sources of social exclusion. In turn, this can exacerbate the existing xenophobia among the local population, fuelling the image of the migrant as elusive and shifty. These elements place an additional burden on migrants.
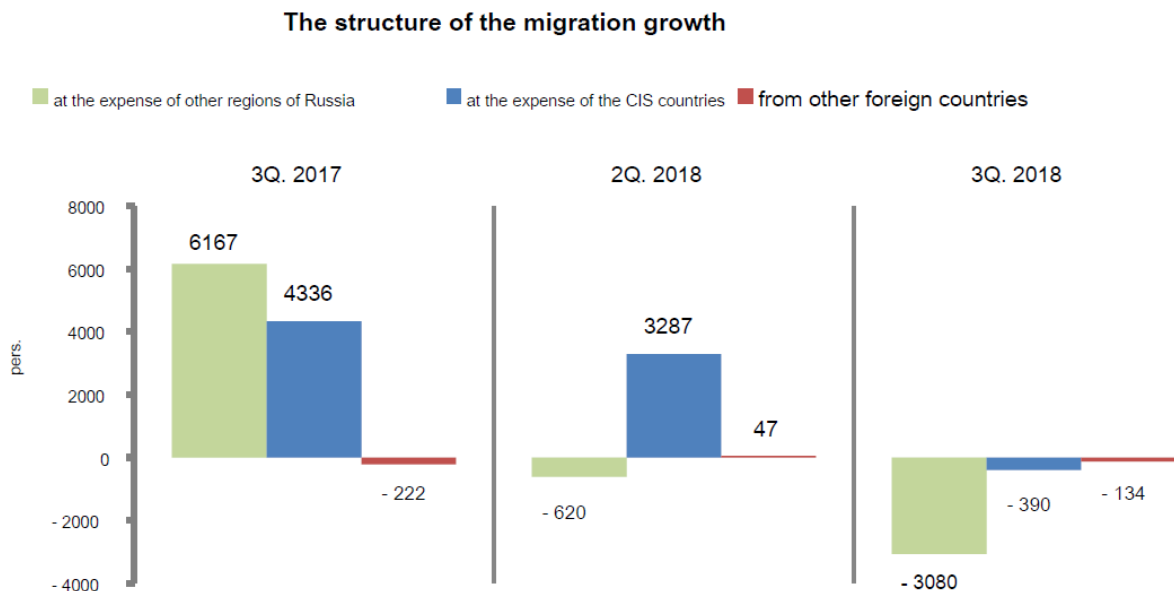
"Growth of xenophobia in Petersburg, availability of drugs and the general criminal situation in the city all comprise sources of danger"

(Rubina, informant to Brednikova et al. 2010)

Risks for the Economy

On the other side of the coin, indecent living conditions drive migrants away from the city. In 2018, an absolute decrease in their number has been registered (see Figure 2). This is a bad signal for the economy of the city, which desperately needs workers. The changing trend has been widely documented[3], and housing problems are one of the reasons behind it. In this perspective, implementing an effective plan for social housing could have positive repercussions on both the social sphere and the economic one.

Figure 2 – Net migration growth in St. Petersburg

The structure of the migration growth

■ at the expense of other regions of Russia   ■ at the expense of the CIS countries   ■ from other foreign countries

Source: St. Petersburg Information and Analytical Center, Dec 2018

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[3] Eurasianet, *Uzbekistan: Labor Migrants Looking Beyond Russia*, Online. 10/05/2016

Existing Policies

The municipality has set up a programme aimed at converting former factory dormitories into hostels and rent them to migrants at cheap prices (Brednikova & Tkach, 2016). However, the rental agreements are signed with the employers of the migrants and not the migrants themselves, and a regime of strict control is put in place in the accommodations (Brednikova & Tkach, 2016). In general, it is true that under current arrangements the legal position of the migrant workers largely depends on the employers (Buckley, 2017). This often generates opportunities for exploitation, as it is convenient for employers to house migrants near to their workplace or maintain them in unstable situations, where they're more likely to abide by the conditions offered on the job.

Policy Options

The inadequacy of current policies

The Cities for Local Integration Policy Network (CLIP) latest report shows that the most effective policies for integration are those that address the whole of the housing market, not only 'fragile minorities'. In addition, any effective policy must address both spatial and social segregation (2007). The 2018 OECD Report on the Integration of Migrants emphasizes how the creation of segregated neighbourhoods is to be absolutely avoided and how the creation of spaces for social cohesion and shared activities is vital for integration. These elements represent the minimum targets for an effective policy.

It appears clear that the current policy arrangements go against all these principles. In particular, they not bridge the distance between migrants and local citizens, but drive the former into unstable situations where their autonomy is reduced if not denied. This is partly due to the officials' lack of understanding of the living and working conditions of migrants, which lead them to devise the wrong policies.

'interviews conducted with officials have shown that their actions are often based on stereotypical preconceptions, in which migrants are often seen as disrupting the social order, as potential agents of criminal behaviour and epidemics or as competitors for jobs'

(Brednikova & Tkach, 2016)

Moreover, there is no possibility for migrants to interact directly with the local administration, as this connection must pass through the employers. This must be reversed, as it would allow migrants to get access to opportunities autonomously, and feel that a network of social security is effectively in place for them. The policy proposal

outlined will cover these two aspects and create space to substantially improve on the existing situation.

Policy proposal

1) Office for Immigration and Integration

The first step that must be taken is the creation of a municipal Office for Immigration and Integration (see Figure 3). The Office would constitute a reference point for all migrants regarding any concern. The model has already been adopted in Arnsberg, Germany, and proved to be very successful (Lüken-Klaβen, 2009). The existence of a precedent and reference would make implementation easier, with the possibility to copy and learn from eventual errors.

The dimension of the Office and training offered to Officers should depend on the financial possibilities of the municipal administration. However, some key points have to be preserved to guarantee a basic service: i) the Office must be working full-time for at least five days a week; ii) Officers must receive a minimum amount of training to allow them to understand the working and living conditions of migrants; iii) a functioning and effective network must be created among Officers. This is crucial to managing delicate and crisis situations (Lüken-Klaβen, 2009, p.16); iv) a network must be created and maintained between the Office and the local NGOs, and religious and ethnic communities, which play a fundamental role in the integration process.

Therefore, the dimensions of the Office must be adequate to meet these basic requirements. Only in this way an effective and efficient service can be delivered.

Figure 3 – Possible logo for the Office for Immigration and Integration

2) Programme for Inclusive Social Housing

Effective social housing must be built around the objective to create long-lasting arrangements for settlement. If the target is set at 'crisis-resolution level' it will be harder to achieve long term integration (OECD, 2018). Therefore, the plan must be extensive, and not only cover the provision of a roof over the migrants' head. In this perspective, it is possible to think about many areas which could be explored and developed. I suggest the following core elements for the programme:

I) Unification of the Social Housing Provision System

A unified system for the provision of social housing must be put in place. It is vital to treat migrants as citizens with full rights and set up provisions that take into consideration long term settlement. The unification of the system would become instrumental for the reduction of discrimination and segregation.

II) Differentiation of Social Housing Options

Social housing can be provided free of charge or at a convenient rate. It is important to create different options which would accommodate most situations. Moreover, it is important not to segregate these different types of accommodations within the housing blocks. This would prevent the creation of a tiered and segregated system.

III) Housing Blocks Scattered around the City

It is crucial not to create segregated neighbourhoods. In order to prevent this, the social housing blocks would have to be scattered around the City, choosing suitable places. This would increase the chances of integration.

IV) Ensure Access to Quality Public Services

Providing spaces for social cohesion and shared activities is key to integration (OECD, 2018). Structures such as libraries, playgrounds, day-care centres for children, music facilities, and theatres have an incredibly positive impact on the life of the neighbourhood community. All possible options to introduce such structures have to be explored. Habitation units without a wider network of opportunities would probably fall short of the aims of the project.

Implementation and Monitoring

The institution of the Office can be achieved smoothly and the municipality already has dispositions concerning the setup of new departments. The time for implementation should not be longer than a year.

With regard to the Inclusive Social Housing Programme, it should be fully developed by a Working Group constituted of members of both the Office for Immigration and Integrations and the Housing and Education Department, in order to ensure full

awareness and coordination. The strategy should be implemented with a long-term perspective, most likely the next 10 years.

Monitoring of the evolution of the situation with respect to housing conditions, social exclusion, and xenophobia can be done through data collection and research. A branch of the Office should be devoted to this, in close collaboration with the statistical department of the municipality, which is already operating at full force. Targets have to be set after a detailed investigation into the present situation. Success has to be measured against these targets.

Conclusion and Recommendations

At the current state of things, housing is a problem for the migrants living in Saint Petersburg. This has both social and economic consequences. On one side, migrants are forced to live in indecent conditions or in an unstable and non-autonomous state. This situation creates the conditions for social segregation, which in turn contributes to fuel xenophobic feelings among the local population, thus feeding into a vicious cycle. On the other side, poor living conditions have been driving migrants away from the city, leaving the economy without vital inputs.

The problem can only be solved through two joint policies. First, the municipal administrative structure has to be redesigned, with the introduction of an Office for Immigration and Integration. Second, an inclusive and vast programme of social housing must be designed and implemented.

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