

What do highly skilled French migrants in London teach us about European talent migration?



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Aims



- To outline the nature of ‘talent migration’ as an outcome of ongoing variegation in the character, and opportunity structures, of national political economies
- To explore the qualities attributed to London, as Europe’s leading financial capital, as a place of unrivalled opportunity for the talented migrant
- To explore the nature and causes of London’s characteristic capacity to recognise and reward talent
- To consider the limitations of a ‘war for talent’ framework for understanding the development needs of London

THE BROAD CONTEXT



Europe – Integration, Variegation and Opportunity



- The European project has, from its inception, been an exercise in the gradual, though multispeed, integration of important elements of economic, political and social affairs
- European economic and labour market integration seeks, through minimising the frictions of mobility, to secure the best possible fit between recruitment needs and an appropriately skilled workforce . This in turn takes its rationale from both the promise of enhanced economic efficiency and growth, and the realisation of meritocracy (Clift 2007, Hay 2000)
- Hence, the European Union's Council Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68 “*entitles all nationals of an EU Member State to take up and engage in gainful employment on the territory of another Member State in conformity with the relevant regulations applicable to national workers*”.

Variegation, Opportunity Structure and Talent Mobility



- The importance of highly-skilled mobility for growth, efficiency and opportunity is underscored by the fact that there remains important political-economic variegation on a national and regional level within Europe, despite economic and income convergence (Recchi 2008).
- In the context of understanding highly-skilled migration, it is also important to state that whatever the ‘reality’, it is the *perception* of ongoing differences in the opportunity structure provided by different places that drives much migration

Place Still Matters



- The motivation to migrate from particular places to other particular places is driven in part by what places ‘mean’, and this in turn is shaped by the ‘agency’ of place (Tseng 2011)
- Pragmatically, ‘real co-presence’, in the sense of corporeal or physical proximity to a given total stock of human capital, remains important to an individual’s ability to progress their own competencies, capacities and career (Beaverstock and Hall 2012, Sassen 2005)

The War for Talent



- In both a European and global context, firms, cities and countries compete (in complex relationships to one another) to attract the value-adding potential of the talented migrant
- In the context of London, Beaverstock and Hall (2012) have argued that: *'The City's competitiveness is founded on its ability to attract and retain elite foreign workers, in order to nourish its global talent pool, expand business opportunities, drive innovation and create wealth'* (p. 1).
- In a context in which talent circulates in a global labour market increasingly characterised by *hyper-mobility* between world cities (Beaverstock 2011), the competition to attract and retain global talent is likely to become increasingly keen
- This paper will explore one dimension of this opportunity-driven mobility, in the form of French highly-skilled migration to London, and the particular role played by 'talent'

The London Context



- Intra-EU highly skilled migrants would appear to epitomise opportunity-driven mobility, and may be taken as something of a test-case for understanding the general and specific dynamics of ‘talent-migration’
- Such migrants have been referred to as ‘Eurostars’ (Favell, 2008), ‘free movers’ (Braun and Arsene, 2009) and ‘super-movers’ (Santacreu, et al, 2009) - mobile, primarily young, with high levels of education, skills and language proficiency (Santacreu et al, 2009: 67)
- The UK is a destination of particular attraction for highly skilled, with one third of all EU non-nationals in the UK having tertiary-level credentials (Recchi and Favell, 2009).
- London has become a prime destination of European free movement (Government for London Office, 2011; Braun and Arsene, 2009)
- This is one example of broader reality, namely the pre-eminence of London as a magnet for the world’s brightest and best
- The Z/Yen Global Financial Centre Index (2007-11) places London as *the* premier global city for the quality of its ‘people’ (defined as intellectual capital in flexible labour markets)

THE FRENCH IN LONDON



The French in London – A Test Case for Talent Migration

- Striking amongst the migratory movements of the highly skilled in Europe is the migration of the French to London - A test case for researching talent migration in the EU
- French in London under-researched, and numbers unclear
- French nationals in the UK - 129,804 (Census 2011), 114,000 (Eurostat 2009)
- Other recent, though unverifiable, estimates:
 - 300,000 French nationals in *London alone* (*Mail Online* Jan 24th 2010), 400,000 French nationals in the UK - (Consulate's estimates *The Economist* Feb. 24th 2011)
- NiNo data - French are the largest immigrant group to the UK from non-accession European countries. Between 2006/7 and 2009/10, over 80,000 newly-arrived French nationals were allocated national insurance numbers
- London as 'the 4th largest French city', South Kensington as the '21st arrondissement of Paris' (Favell, 2006)

THE STUDY



- 18-month, ESRC-funded, qualitative research project - French highly skilled working in London's financial and business sectors, and their families
- Qualitative methodology - the thick biographies of migrants' lived experiences - the meaningful nature of migratory motivations, practices, patterns and effects
- Semi-structured, one-off interviews and one focus group
- 37 participants - 16 men and 21 women (most aged 35 - 44)
- Majority arrived in the UK in the 2000s, some much earlier
- 23 married, 5 co-habiting and 9 single. 25 were parents

The Findings



London – Europe's epicentre of opportunity



- For our participants, London was seen as the undisputed financial capital of Europe
- Pierre describes his move from Frankfurt (a significant financial centre in its own right) to London as 'getting closer to the sun'.
- For those with an ambition to escalate their careers in the business and financial industry, London was therefore the place to be
- Claudine suggests that 'London is more interesting than anywhere else because that's where it happens, that's where the action is, that's where the talent is'.
- This points to the importance of place in accessing and utilising relationally embedded social networks for accumulation and escalation (Ryan and Mulholland, forthcoming)

From Qualificationism to Talent



- Sennett (2004) - within the new economy, a craftsmanship model (and qualificationism) is being replaced by a focus on contemporaneous and future-orientated performance measures of 'talent'.
- Our data replete with accounts of London as definitively open (meritocratic) in juxtaposition to Paris.
- London - embracing the logic of the 'new economy' (Sennet 2006) - willingness/capacity to recognise and grant opportunity to 'pure talent', even in the absence of qualification-based credentials.
- Not devaluing higher education, but a liberalisation of attitudes as to how talent may be measured.
- Without exception, such qualificational liberalism was judged as enhancing meritocracy
- 'I think here [the UK/London] in terms of work, it's more about what you can do, whereas in France it's what diploma you have. Sometimes when you're forty or fifty years old they still look at what degree you have, whereas here I think it's more about experience and what you have achieved that maybe defines you for the next job' (Collette)

Neo-liberalism and the Culture of 'Hire and Fire'



- Kazepov (2005) - cities can be understood as open systems, with a capacity for their own agency, but nevertheless 'nested' in broader social, economic and institutional contexts, shaped in large part by the specific nature of the nation-state in which they are located.
- In this way, London (as a national capital/global city) shares, and even intensifies, the qualities of the UK as a *neo-liberal* variant of welfare capitalism, with a characteristic market dependency (Kazepov 2005).
- The recognition, and valuing, of London for its free-market *modus operandi*, was clearly evident in the data

Hire and fire



- Céline - ‘Here, you know, it’s hire and fire...’.
- But for the talented, ‘hire and fire’ was not something to be feared. Effective performance in role was seen to offer a satisfactory level of job security and prospects.
- ‘Hire and fire’ also seen to offer opportunity to talent, and enabled the economy and companies to benefit from a much needed injection of new ideas.
- It was a mechanism for renewal:
- For Beatrix, ‘every time you get a new person, they want to prove themselves so they’ll do everything they can to come up with great ideas...if you’ve been there in the company for fifteen years and you know they are not going to fire you, then you are less inclined to go over your own limit’

The Virtue of ‘Non-Discrimination’



- The working environment in London was represented as essentially non-discriminatory in nature, and this was important to London as rewarding of talent
- According to Odile, ‘...if you are good at what you do, you would be given a chance, whether you are black, white, from Asia, Muslims, Catholics, Hindu...’.
- A number of participants also mentioned the relative absence of age-based discriminatory attitudes and practices in London.
- According to Charles, ‘I think here, the position against the older in corporation life is better. You’ve got more people above 60 still working. In France there is a tendency that above 45, you’re called a senior and the senior is the door before retirement...In the mindset of the people it’s finished, it’s over, the game is over...’
- However, the general nature of London’s non-discriminatory character was qualified by some, in recognising the existence of gender discrimination in the financial sector (the glass ceiling)

Talent in the 'New Economy' – The Virtue of Flexibility



- Many participants extolled the virtues of London as a location that, in its definitive flexibility, enabled 'career sovereignty'
- Such flexibility was made possible by the accessible and performance-driven measures of talent common in the capital
- According to Valentine, 'I think it's easier to move from one industry to another [in London]. People are ready to give you a challenge, as I say, based on your skill'.
- According to Irène, "...the ability to think outside the box and reinvent yourself is huge in England, whereas in France you embark on your life path, probably at the age of sixteen when you choose your baccalauréat and that is a tragedy...You cannot get out of that because it's a very rigid attitude and nobody – the employer or the supervisor or whatever – will look at you because you will not have all the, like a general in the army, you will not have all the stripes'

Rewarding Talent



- London was defined, in contradistinction to Paris, as a place that was culturally and ethically comfortable with remunerating talent
- According to Céline, in London, if ‘you do a good job, you stay, you make big money, whatever. In France it’s still a stigma’.
- In France, dramatic salary inequalities and performance-driven job insecurity are stigmatised.
- The French political-economic model was associated with job security but at the cost of economic stagnation. In contrast, London was marked by flexibility but at the cost (to some) of insecurity

Talent Recognition as *'Anglo-Saxon'*



- Business culture, as one dimension of economic culture, as one dimension of national culture, was seen by some participants to express an *'Anglo-Saxon'* character, which framed their expectations, motivations and evaluations of working life in London
- Some participants expressed this more explicitly than others: - “I’m here because I’m not really a French patriot at all, so this is why I always wanted to live abroad...I’m very into English, American, Anglo-Saxon civilizations” Damien.

Talent Recognition as *Anglo-Saxon* (2)



- “..It’s not uncommon in the UK or in the US, which is what we would be calling, coming from Paris or from France in particular, the Anglo-Saxon style, to identify early the skill of talented people or good ideas, and give these people or these ideas a chance. While in France, typically...you have to follow some sort of internal protocol of submitting these ideas to your manager, who in turn is going to filter it out...and you will have lost complete ownership of the end project. Here at least you do have this recognition of what you do...which could lead to the very quick rise and promotion...” (Jean)

However!



Variegation and the Barriers to Talent



- Bailey and Boyle – ‘while political borders may have been removed (for certain movers), social, cultural and political structures remain which make movement between countries less ‘free’ than may be imagined’ (2004: 233)
- *Divergence and non-transferability of skills and competencies* - (Csedo 2008, Wood 2003; Ho, 2011). - Csedó (2008) points to the fact that skills are socially constructed such that the nature and sufficiency of skills must be negotiated in any national context.
- The cultural and social capital acquired in, and pertinent to, one national context, cannot be assumed to be transferable to another (Erel 2010)

Working Practices: Mind the Gap!



- Specificities of different business cultures (Wood, 2003) still evident even within the EU context, impacting on transferability of skills and to recognition of talent
- Accordingly, ‘Anglo-Saxonism’ comes with substantive cultural qualities that in turn serve as potential inter-cultural barriers
- Participants referred to differences in business practices, language use, styles of communication as potential barriers to developing one’s career
- So much so that once adjusted to such differences movement elsewhere may be difficult, as Pierre asserts, *‘it would be extremely difficult...also to read the ways. How to operate...to learn new codes all over again after twenty years abroad’*.

Working Practices: Mind the Gap!



- Valentine accounts for her friend, who has recently moved to a ‘very British company’, saying:
- “He’s really French in behaviour. Quite arrogant, secure you know, the way he talks...and there’s a clash of culture...he hasn’t been able to adapt because probably he’s just used his French mental frame and he is behaving like a French person. French people are very outspoken where in an English environment you can’t be like that. I mean you can say things but there is a way of saying it and talking to him has really made me realize that I’m not French anymore because I would not have behaved like him in that environment...he understands that he has to change but he has to do the work on himself”
- Clearly, given the career success of most of our participants, they had successfully navigated such inter-cultural experiences

Re-considering the Priorities (1)



- Our participants were, on the whole, advocates of the ‘neo-liberal model’, which had, in their experience of work and life in London, delivered on their expectations of escalation and accumulation.
- There was little evidence of any critical awareness of the ‘failures’ of London, as a place of opportunity
- Most A8 Nationals with high skills and qualifications are in fact still concentrated in low skill occupations. (Kyambi 2005)

Re-considering the Priorities (2)



- There was also little, if any, reflection on the limitations or dysfunctions of de-regulated financial or economic markets, or of the role that light-touch regulation played in the banking crisis of 2008
- As many participants could be said to be firmly located within what Krätke (2010) refers to as the ‘dealer class’, it is perhaps unsurprising to find many expressing support for London’s adoption of lighter-touch regulation
- In this regard, our participants would probably welcome the recent statement by David Cameron in December 2011:
- ‘The City still faces the same issue it faced before the summit: there is regulation coming down the track and the question is how do we deal with that?...if you are in the City and concerned, the positive thing is that the UK Government and David Cameron is fighting your corner in Europe’

Re-considering the Priorities (3)



- Krätke (2010) has questioned the central role of the financial classes in regional economic development, stressing instead the manner in which growth and development arise out of the dynamic interaction that takes place between multiple constituencies in a complex social environment
- The long-term economic success of London would appear then to lie in a more variegated approach, both to migration, and to urban and economic policy, that seeks to consolidate and enrich the diversity of London
- An excessively one-dimensional focus on attracting ‘the brightest and the best’ may not furnish London with all it needs to sustain its long term development.

Conclusion – Some Policy Questions



- While recognising the importance of diversity for London's economic development, it is still relevant to consider the need for that development of recruiting highly-skilled migrants.
- What threats and opportunities face London, post-2008, as a global city able to attract and retain the world's 'brightest and best, in an emerging condition of 'hyper-mobility' between the world's leading financial centres?
- Given that it appears to be precisely the global, and fundamentally 'neo-liberal', nature of London and the UK that has been so attractive to EU skilled migrants, what does this tell us about the probable or best way forward for the EU as a whole?
- As EU freedom of mobility was so clearly appreciated by the highly skilled respondents within our study, how might the EU further support and develop such freedoms?

Conclusion – Some Policy Questions (2)



- If the UK were to vote in a forthcoming referendum to leave the EU, how might this impact upon the City of London as a global financial centre?
- Given that EU mobility rights facilitate the movement of highly skilled migrants across member states, would leaving the Union negatively impact upon London's ability to attract talented migrants?