

‘Multiculturalism is beneficial for the whole population of London.’ Discuss.

Britain’s imperial past, the labour shortages from the 1950s until the 1970s as well as the immigration from other European Union countries are primarily responsible for the large-scale foreign population in London (Koopmans and Statham 1999, pp. 652-696). In the census of 2001, the city had a foreign population of roughly 40 % (National Statistics 2006, online). This high percentage of foreigners requires cultural openness, an acceptance of diversity and a removal of fear and intolerance. The aim of this paper is to analyse the positive and negative effects of London’s cultural diversity with a specific focus on economic and cultural issues.

London is one of the world's major economic centers and has a leading role in international finance. A further growth in business and population, which results in increased job opportunities, is expected for the future. This results in a strong need of additional human resources. For Daunton it is this need of laborer, which is partly responsible for London’s broad mindedness and tolerance (Daunton 1996, p. 1214).

Furthermore, companies are able to recruit their employees from various linguistic and educational backgrounds. In London over 300 different languages are spoken. Hence, the high foreign population contributes to a vast informal network of skills and languages. According to the census of 2001, London has the highest percentage of people with a degree or a professional education in England (National Statistics 2006, online). Many of these professionals are born outside the United Kingdom and moved to London because of better job opportunities.

According to Menski, London profits highly from recruiting or “poaching of professionals and others from all over the world” (Menski 2006, online) but he also points out some negative economic aspects. In his analysis he states that foreigners dominate certain business areas entirely and occupy a high percentage of job opportunities especially in the low paid sector. Asians for example control 75 % of all retail business in Britain (Menski 2006, online). Yet, not only in the low-paid sector but also for professional jobs native Londoners experience an intense competition. This is due to the high percentage of qualified immigrants and also to the eased conditions of recruiting within the European Union.

However, having considered some of the economic advantages and disadvantages of multiculturalism in London it is also important to examine the effects of cultural diversity on the city’s population. Cosmopolitan London consists

not only of a wide range of nationalities and ethnic groups but also of various understandings of tradition, religion and identity. Since immigrants often retain close ties to their country of origin they continue in practicing their traditions, religion and hold on to their principles.

As a consequence, an encounter between different cultures and different religions takes place. In London every religion is represented and provides a place for peaceful prayer. The vast range of London's restaurants offer specialties from all over the world. These culinary impressions and religious openness provides opportunities for intercultural encounter. According to Ash, these everyday experiences with other cultures create open mindedness towards other ethnic groups and help to remove fear and intolerance between the peoples (Ash 2002, online).

Nevertheless, the maintaining of their own roots in culture and tradition also causes problems, such as the creation of isolated ethnic communities. In Menski's view immigrants are advised to "practice their cultures" but he also emphasizes that foreigners isolate themselves and so establish the understanding that they are 'ethnic others' (Menski 2006 online). Ash argues that, persons within these communities, especially elders and married women show little attempt to learn English. Consequently not enough communication with British citizens or other nationalities takes place, since everything can easier be obtained within their own community (Ash 2002, online).

Yet, the necessity to learn English cannot be underestimated. A common language is the connecting tool between the cultures and without communication integration is simply not possible. In this sense it can be argued that in "losing the discourse of integration" (Ash 2002, online) the cultures are not coming to terms with their ethnic differences. For Ash this forms the basis for "racism and cultural intolerance in Britain".

In conclusion, the cultural respect and dialogue between different ethnic groups and cultures can be seen as one of the most agile processes in London. From an economic point of view cultural diversity offers advantages for the employer and the employee. Corporations are able to recruit employees from different backgrounds that speak mostly more than one language. Immigrates and native UK citizens find increased job opportunities in the vast growing multicultural city. Yet, a justified fear that foreigners take away jobs and dominate specific branches exists. Not only for blue color jobs but also for white color jobs the competition has

increased immense.

In a cultural point of view London's multiculturalism has also positive and negative effects on the population. On the one hand, the encounters with foreign traditions, principles and food create cultural respect and dialogue. On the other hand the holding on of foreigners to their own ethnic communities results in isolation. Since isolation works against integration, a basis for intolerance and racism might be created.

Hence, multiculturalism offers beneficial aspects for the whole population of London, but it is also linked with some negative aspects, which cannot be let out of consideration.

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