Episode

How welcoming are UK cities for newcomers?

Transcript

Rob McNeil

Hello and welcome to the latest episode of the Migration Oxford Podcast. I'm Rob McNeill.

Jacqui Broadhead

And I'm Jacqui Broadhead.

Rob McNeil

And today we're doing something slightly different in that I'm actually going to be interviewing Jackie about her new book. So Jackie, let's start, if this is okay, by me just asking you to tell us a little bit about what the book is, what's it called, when's it out and what's the general gist, just to start off.

Jacqui Broadhead

Thanks so much Rob. The book's called Welcoming Cities and it's kind of the culmination of a lot of work and research that we've been doing at Compass since 2017. working with 12 UK cities on their approach to integration, inclusion and welcoming. And what I really wanted to do was write a book that sits at the crossroads between the academic work that happens and the research that happens on welcoming and the practice that happens in those cities. Because a lot of the work that I do is really focused on kind of knowledge exchange. So how do we understand the challenges and the sort of difficulties that policymakers face in trying to do welcoming work? And how can we use some of the academic research and insights to really sort of illuminate what they're doing? And how can we draw some of that sort of practical experience back into the academic research?

Rob McNeil

Okay, so let me ask you a slightly more probing question, if you don't mind, because this terminology that gets used, I mean, the idea of welcoming. Now, welcoming in my day-to-day work is a sort of slightly complicated phrase because it sort of implies we would like you to be here. Now, obviously, that's quite complicated in a situation where there's an awful lot of chatter about the problems and the concerns that people have about migration. So Tell me firstly, what is the idea of welcoming all about and why do

we use this word welcoming in a situation where we have to be honest about the fact that often like measures that are being taken in countries are about precluding people from coming in. So why welcoming, but also why are we focused on cities and why are we talking about this now?

Jacqui Broadhead

Yeah, absolutely. So I think there's one really important distinction to make at the beginning, which is that this is a book that's about everything after the moment of arrival. So it's not a book that's about migration governance or about the decisions that are made about who enters or who doesn't. And that's one of the reasons why we're looking at cities. Cities also very rarely have anything to do with migration governance. You know, they're not the ones making those decisions. This is about everything that happens after. And one of the things that I've really noticed in my work is that lots of the questions of migration governance, they kind of very quickly become questions of welcoming or integration. You know, how do we live well together? What are the kind of trade-offs involved in access to public services? How do you know, how do we manage how we are all sort of interacting in a place. But there's loads less energy that's put into that topic than is put into the very important discussion of who should be allowed in and what rights should they have when they're here. So that's the kind of first thing, which is we just wanted to put energy and effort into thinking about what happens post arrival. and that the city is a really good place to think about that because firstly, obviously, cities are places that are in some ways defined by newcomers, defined by that moment of arrival, both from people coming from outside of the country, but also within as well. And what does that mean? And because traditionally, we haven't necessarily, in the UK at least, welcoming hasn't really been a focus for city leadership. And so in this work that we've been doing since 2017, we've really been thinking with city leaders, well, what is this as a policy area? You know, they don't get very much guidance from central government in the UK. So we wanted to sort of really practically think through, well, if you did want to be a welcoming city, what would that mean? And then the term welcoming kind of brings us on to the sort of slightly thorny question of terminology. The programme that I worked on was actually called Inclusive Cities, not Welcoming Cities. And obviously we use inclusion, integration, cohesion, welcoming. They all have slightly different meanings. In the academic research, they come from completely different traditions. I would say in the policy world, they're used sort of somewhat interchangeably and a little bit fuzzily. They all have pluses and minuses. People like and dislike them in different ways. The thing that I liked about welcoming is that it's human. It starts with the point of human connection. It's about how we welcome each other. And what I was interested in was the link between that human connection between a process of welcoming that I think is easy to understand and how that links to structure. So how that links to structural processes and what a government can do. Which bits of this are the role of the state? and which bits of this actually should

be better left to individuals, to community groups, etc. And so that's what I wanted to explore in the book and that's why I really wanted to focus on welcoming rather than say integration.

Rob McNeil

Which makes a lot of sense and I actually, I was pondering this a little bit myself when I started looking at the book. One of the things I really like about the word welcoming in this context actually is that it's descriptive. It's about how people come well to a place, right? And irrespective of whether or not you think that the numbers are right or whatever, at least if it's happening, you want it to be done well, right? So I think that is actually, it did actually make some good sense to me, which I suppose is slightly different to that idea of invitation, I suppose, that is also invoked by the word welcoming. I mean, one of the things that then sort of takes me to is that, you talk about this as being a book which is optimistic, right? And again, I mean, it's very hard sometimes when you're dealing with the migration sector or with issues around immigration generally in the UK or anywhere else in the world, I think pretty much, to think about the issue optimistically. I mean, we've got lots of stuff going on in the US with the Trump administration. You've got, the whole narrative about, the island of strangers and all of that kind of stuff over here. So why do you think that there are reasons for optimism?

Jacqui Broadhead

It was really important to me that this is an optimistic book. I think firstly because my view is that optimism is not inherently less sophisticated than pessimism. And I think we're living in a moment where there is a lot of pessimism, not just around migration, but just around the capacity of the state to do things, to make people's lives better, etc. And again, I think partially it comes back to the sort of sustained engagement with policymakers that this book comes from. So having had the real privilege to work with these 12 cities, And these 12 cities, and I'm really clear in the book on this, have an enthusiasm bias. So they're self-selecting, they chose to participate. That means that, you know, not really saying anything about lots and lots of places who maybe choose to do nothing in this area or who don't have any interest in doing this kind of welcoming work. But in those cities that do, I have been struck again and again by the kind of grace and persistence of those city leaders. by the clarity of what they see is needed. And what I mean by that is that they are seeing the reality of newcomers in their city, which is that there are short to medium term, some challenges. that need to be overcome in order for people to kind of live well together and also to be able to kind of make the most of the skills and assets that people are bringing to their cities, but also that they do have a kind of optimism for their cities for the medium to long term. And that's because of what they have seen, both in terms of the growth of those cities, but also in terms of the way that those communities on a day-to-day practical level kind of do get

on well together. And obviously, what makes the headlines and what we hear about is a kind of sharp end of where there are tensions or where there's a breakdown of cohesion. I'm not at all complacent about that. You know, one of the things I talk about in the book is how the importance of kind of having a watching eye and a watching brief and understanding where there might be those breakdowns in cohesion or where there are tensions with newcomer communities and in particular thinking about how to manage the pace of change, particularly when it's targeted in very small areas. That being said, the reason I'm optimistic is because those do remain quite small numbers of people when we think about like the overall ways in which people get on in cities. And most people, most of the time, get on fairly well together. That's not a picture that we kind of see of daily life with newcomer communities in our cities, but that is borne out by the research, so research asking people how well people get on together with people from different backgrounds sort of consistently shows between 70 to 80% of people in England saying, yeah, I get on well with people from different backgrounds in my area. I'm really not advocating complacency, but what I am saying is It's important for us to see what works well in our places and in our cities, as well as the things that are difficult.

Rob McNeil

I think that's really, really important. And I think it's, yeah, we see a lot of the results of people activating pessimism around these issues. And I think, you know, I mean, migration brings pluses and minuses. People get on, people don't get on. There's all kinds of different scenarios that happen as a result of any group of people living together. But activating optimism, I think, seems like a really, really important thing to bear in mind to counter some of the ways that we tell these stories, which not just tell these stories, but some of the ways that we think about and imagine the way that people live together in cities. Because, yeah, as I say, this kind of, you know, we know that people activate pessimism to create sort of negative agendas about this kind of thing. But activating optimism seems really wise and interesting thing to do here as well. So yeah, that's cool. Sorry about that. I'm waxing lyrical because it's a great and interesting approach. But I mean, one of the things that emerges again from that is that a lot of the work that's been done on this kind of welcoming agenda over the years has tended to come from organisations that are focused on, you know, like essentially activism of 1 sort or another. So, you've got things like the city sanctuary movement, you've got lots of NGOs working on this kind of thing. Why do you think that it's really important for city leaders, mayors, local authorities and what have you to play a more active role in welcoming? And what change do you think that sort of local government side of things can really make here?

Jacqui Broadhead

Thinking about the City of Sanctuary movement, which is probably the most kind of prominent of those movements, which I think has done absolutely incredible work on welcoming for asylum seekers and refugees in particular, although they are kind of expanding their focus. I think there are two reasons why you want to have not only the activist work, whilst recognising kind of how important that is. The first I think is about building community consent. And essentially, I talked about having a kind of enthusiasm bias within the cities that we work with. I think that often, obviously, activism movements are coalitions of the willing and not sometimes, but not always, coalitions of the people who already agree with you. And one of the things I think is really important in this welcoming work is that it's not solely focused on those who are already very committed to supporting refugees and asylum seekers, but about building a kind of broader base of support. And obviously, local government has to have democratic legitimacy. So it has to think about both the views of its own administration, but also try to think about the kind of views of everybody in an area and think about how you build kind of community consent and how you kind of manage tension. So I think it's important from that point of view. But I think there's also something that's kind of even more important beyond that kind of political idea of building support outside of a kind of base of people already very supportive, which is that activist movements and charity necessarily are supported by goodwill and, relatively kind of selective funding. And what we see with a lot of activist movements is that, people burn out. Like it's very hard to sustain this type of work really long term without some sort of underpinning state support. And I think it's a mistake to have, you know, as I said, welcoming, it's a very human instinct. I think there are lots of times when you want the state to get out of the way, but I think that the state does have a role in this and it's too important to say that it's solely for activists or charity groups, even when in some areas they're going to be the best people to lead. So what I'm trying to say in the book is local government has to take both a leadership and a convening role. So a leadership role in basically defining what it wants on welcoming So saying this is the type of place that we are, these are the type of policies that we want to put in place, but also a convening role of saying we're also a place where we can bring together all of the partners who are sort of interested in this work and support them and enable them. So what the book is not trying to say is actually it should be the state that's doing all of this work and there's no place for activism. It's about how do you create that kind of welcoming ecosystem?

Rob McNeil

Drawing from that a little bit. I suppose one of the things that local government has as well is the, I mean, you're talking about the public money that goes into this and the fact that it needs things like this need to be underpinned by, some sort of state support of some sort. But I suppose local government also is able to understand the limitations, the limits of what is reasonably achievable, rather than NGOs and activist organisations who are consistently obviously going to push for what they consider to be. the kind of

like the best quality outcome for people. So local government, I suppose, has a balancing role to play in terms of saying it's not only what's best, but also what's affordable and what we can reasonably manage. So there's something about limits there as well, yeah.

Jacqui Broadhead

And that's where I think it's an ecosystem. You know, I think it's really important to have activist movements who are out there advocating for the rights of newcomers and kind of saying, you know, this is the gold standard of what we should be aiming for. And, I think in some instances, it'd be important for local government to kind of act on that as well. But as you say, I think that point about legitimacy and consent is also really important. And also about not skewing support to one group over another. So one of the things that the book does is it talks about the newcomer frame. So it thinks about all newcomers to the city, regardless of migration status. Theoretically, that could also include people who are not, who are coming from within the UK and moving to a city, although, I mean, in practice, it does tend to be newcomers or nearly always thought of as international migrants. However, within the kind of activist world and the NGO world, you do tend to have a skew in who is included in those groups. So, for example, there's a lot more work dedicated towards asylum seekers and refugees than there is towards, say, economic migrants or international students, for example. Now, I'm not critiquing that. I think there's very good reasons why that's happening within in that NGO world. But I think, again, that's where local government in an ideal world can take a slightly different and broader view, given that it has this kind of responsibility for everybody that is in an area, and that it can also think about that interaction between newcomers and longer standing communities.

Rob McNeil

Yeah, and I think that, I mean, that sort of also takes us to the fact that, I mean, like we commonly talk about welcoming from a social perspective, but you know, you're also looking at the impact of the newcomer on the growth of the city generally. I mean, you talked about economic migrants. I always prefer to talk about people as, I mean, newly arriving workers, right? Because economic migrants is often sort of like tied up with the idea of asylum seekers who are actually secretly turning up in order to work or something. But I think that when you think about what actually happens in any city or any place, lots and lots of people are coming because they've got jobs and they're coming to go and do something new, but it still takes a lot to understand and settle somewhere. Why do you think that sort of economic aspects are often missing from these conversations about welcoming? And why does it actually make a difference to the way that we think about these things?

Jacqui Broadhead

Yeah, it's a hugely underexplored area in my view, and it was really important to me that it was covered in the book. I think the main reason why is exactly as you say, that we tend to think about this from a kind of deficit model. So we tend to think about newly arrived migrants as a problem to be solved, or we think about it from a kind of more negative perspective, but even from a more positive perspective, I think we tend to think about the sort of challenges and barriers and obstacles that people have to overcome. And obviously, in lots of cases, that is true, but that really underplays the assets that people are bringing with them, and also the centrality of migration to economic growth. And at the city level, Most of the cities that we're working with will have strategies that are focused on inclusive economic growth or how they can kind of grow the local economy. They'll be working on things like local industrial strategy. Most of the time in those things, migration is barely or sometimes not mentioned at all. And that's a big gap. Partly I think this is because, we don't have kind of dedicated roles within local government kind of focused on this work. I would say that one exception to that is probably in Scotland. So in Glasgow, the team that we worked with were the economic development team and that was very different from most of the other places in the UK. And so one of the things that I talk about in the book is how can you use your economic development planning or your industrial strategy planning, how can you link that to skills strategy and also to how you think about the role of migration in meeting those economic needs. Now, what that isn't is, again, we're not talking about the numbers piece that I mentioned at the beginning. It's not about then driving what numbers are needed. This is much more about who is already here and what assets they're bringing to the city and what their contribution is potentially to economic growth within the city. So we know, for example, that lots of migrants, I mean, particularly within the protection systems, but also more broadly, are underemployed. So that's a big, that's a big gap between the assets that people are bringing and what they're actually contributing to the economy. So where are kind of international approaches that can look at that skills gap? English language planning, you know, we tend to think of, you know, English language support can be about how you access public services, it can be about how you get on with people in your neighbourhood, but obviously it also has a really important role in economic growth. And, we tend to think about English language provision as how you get into work. But some work in the US, which was looking at kind of supermarkets within the US, looked at internal promotability within companies. So it's saying, actually, we've got a lot of people at the entry level that we would love to promote, but their English language skills aren't high enough to allow them to move into management roles. So can we have skill strategy that works with employers to kind of develop those skills? Now, obviously, one of the questions that always comes up within that is about the sort of contrast with newcomer communities and longer standing communities and competition for roles. Again, this work is mainly focused on people who are already in a place rather than thinking about recruitment from overseas or anything like that. But I also think that there's something about time within this. So skills

planning over time. So thinking about, okay, there may be some short term needs that certain employers have, but this should be matched over time with the skills development strategy for people who are in place. All of this, I think is pretty much missing from UK policy making at the moment. So making that link between the role of newcomers in inclusive economic growth and thinking about kind of longer term priorities. And I think partly that's because it feels politically quite a difficult conversation to have. But it is also the reality and this is what also This is one of the reasons why I really like working at the city level because you're where the rubber hits the road. So these cities are really kind of seeing those realities on the ground and trying to think about, well, how do we manage this?

Rob McNeil

Yeah, okay. One of the things that you do in the book is you try to be practical. You try to look at practical things that cities can do. I mean, you talked about English language provision just now. What is your list of the key things that should happen to start off with. And then let's talk a little bit after that about what you do to achieve something that's beyond just the role of policy interventions and moves into the realm of creating a sense of participation, a sense of welcomeness, but also of wanting to be part of something that comes after that. And how do these things fit together? So let's start with a list of things that cities need to do.

Jacqui Broadhead

It's in the book, basically. I talk about like 5 policy areas that it's really important for cities that want to be welcoming cities to kind of, you know, set their soul out. The first is around how they speak about welcoming and integration. So the kind of narrative that they have. Now, that might seem straight away like that's not on the sort of very practical end of policy interventions. And it wasn't something that I was looking to include at the start of this process. But that's one of the interesting things about when you work with city leaders, they were very clear that they felt that one of the things that was really important to this work is how you talk about it and understanding how you frame welcoming the type of stories that you tell and how you tell that in a way that honours the history of the place and thinks about its future. So that's the first one. Second one we've already talked about, which is having that kind of skills strategy and thinking about how newcomers contribute to inclusive economic growth in your place. The third one is about connecting communities. And this one is sort of probably the most traditional of welcoming work. So it's thinking about how you make that bridging contact between communities. But here, the really key thing that I wanted to say is that I think in a lot of circumstances, the main role for cities is to kind of get out of the way. So in the other four, I think actually local government has a really key role in doing, but in connecting communities, I think what you really want is to enable and create the conditions for people to meet and socialise and build connection. But what you don't

want is what I always think of as kind of organised fun. which is the state sort of trying to engineer contact between groups. The 4th area is about how you mainstream this work into all of the other different bits of work that a local authority is doing. So there are some things that in welcoming you can only do through kind of targeted work. So English language provision being a really obvious one, There's no need for that in the kind of broader community, but there is a need for amongst newcomer communities. So you can really focus on that. But there are lots of other areas actually where you want to have this balance between, I don't think it's a good idea for us to be creating lots of services that are just for newcomers. What you actually want is for that to be mainstreamed into the work that's happening kind of across the council. But there's a tension there because when things are mainstreamed, people can get lost. So how do you make sure that things are adapted so that they are inclusive, but they're also mainstreamed? And then finally, it's thinking about the same sort of nothing about us without us. So it's quite challenging if you're newly arrived in a place to have a voice in the governance of the place that you're in. but it's really important that voice is represented. And we talked about kind of democratic accountability, but how do you have democratic accountability if you're not eligible to vote in a place, right? So it's thinking about the ways in which you can kind of increase participation and empowerment. So those are the sort of five areas. The one thing that I'll say is that this book looks at the powers that local government has at the moment, but it sits in a context of there being no legal responsibility UK wide for cities to really do any of this work, no statutory responsibilities, no integration strategy UK wide and very little dedicated funding. So usually councils kind of cobbling together bits of funding dedicated to other things. So if I can have like an extra thing, it would also be, you know, thinking about what central government can do to kind of recognise this as a policy area and say, we understand local government is doing something quite important here's quite an important function and we want to make it clear what their responsibilities are and also give them some resource to be able to be able to kind of do this well.

Rob McNeil

Okay and so just moving on to that other question about like how do you make sure that this actually has a fundamental impact on the people themselves? How do we know that these sorts of things are actually making people's lives better? What are the ways that we can measure the success of this sort of policy making in terms of actually improving people's lives?

Jacqui Broadhead

Measurement is really tricky in this area, right? I think this is one of the questions that kind of vexes policymakers. You can sort of have population level questions. So it's the type of things that I talked about earlier, measuring sort of attitudes to how people feel in a place. And you also can measure the efficacy of specific interventions. Making the

link between those two is really hard. One of the things that I do in the book is at the start of each chapter sort of talk about what does good look like in this place? So what What sort of things would we expect to see in a place that was doing this type of thing? And then a number of kind of questions or practical questions for the city to ask itself. A lot of these are proxies, to be really honest with you. So they're proxies for that sort of broader measurement. I think there are kind of long-term, longitudinal things that we could do to understand kind of attitudinal shifts. One of the challenges that the cities have is that often their capacity to kind of collect that sort of data broken down to the city level is really inhibited and it's been really sort of cut back in the last 10 years. So I think building up some of that kind of local data capacity would be really important. we have really good resources for understanding migration data. I'd say we have a lot fewer resources dedicated to understanding integration and welcoming data. Partly that's because it is harder to measure, because a lot of the things that you're looking at are attitudinal rather than sort of somebody arrived or somebody left. But I still think, it's something, again, if we're taking this seriously as a policy area, it's something that you'd want to invest in.

Rob McNeil

So we should be optimistic about finding better ways of doing it, but not necessarily expected to happen straight away. Finally, I've had a swizz through the book and it's pretty accessible. You're targeting both policy makers and academics with this, but what's the message that you hope that both of those groups and anybody else who looks at it will actually take from this?

Jacqui Broadhead

So for policymakers, especially in the UK, city level policymakers, I really hope that this can sort of set out a framework for if you want your city to be a welcoming city and you're not sure what that means practically in terms of how should I organise that, what should I be thinking about that this is a framework to be able to do that. And it sets out both the academic research, but hopefully in an accessible way. but it also sets out case studies from other cities in the UK and then also internationally where there aren't great case studies from the UK of this is how it works, this is what could be done. That's my real hope for policy makers. On the academic side, I'm hoping that some of that is also useful, having the kind of link between what the academic principal is saying, but then some of the implementation challenges. So one of the things that we notice in a lot of work on welcoming or a lot of the kind of knowledge exchange work that we do is that it's great to have conversations between academics and policy makers, but sometimes they talk over one another because the academics thinking about the principle and the policy makers are thinking about the kind of implementation challenges. So I'm hoping that this book can act as a bridge for some of that. But I'm also hopeful that this book can say something about what it would mean to view welcoming as a lens for urban

governance. So when we think about how cities manage themselves, how can the frame of welcoming be a useful way to think about how cities operate?

Rob McNeil

I've got a last and hopefully simple and short question for you. Just going back to the beginning, we were talking about optimism and the fact that you hope that this is an optimistic book. Now, it's obviously easier to tell people to be optimistic than it is necessarily to feel it yourself. Did you come away from writing this book feeling more optimistic about the possibilities for welcoming in the future than you went into it? or do you have greater concerns? And I know you kind of have to pretend that you feel better even, but tell me the truth, fundamentally underneath it, after having done all of this work, did you come away believing that there is a better future or there can be a better future ahead of us here?

Jacqui Broadhead

So in writing the book, I definitely felt more optimistic because when you're kind of immersed in the case studies, what the research data says, what can be done, It doesn't feel that insurmountable. Like I came out of it feeling relatively confident about what could be achieved. I think what's been hard is holding on to that optimism outside of the world of the book. So when you're kind of looking at the conversation that we're having as a country around welcoming, that feels very, very distant from the type of things that we're kind of seeing on the ground. And so to me, the challenge is less about do I feel intensely like pessimistic about about what's possible. No, I feel optimistic about what's possible. What I feel is more of a challenge is how do we actually A, convince more people that optimism is an option and B, make that sort of bridge between what the research evidence says, what the work in these cities tells us is possible and what's considered possible, both by the general public, but also more widely by government.

Rob McNeil

Jackie, that's brilliant. Thank you so much. And I'm sure you and I will We'll be talking again soon.

Jacqui Broadhead

Thanks so much, Rob. It's great to chat. You've been listening to the Migration Oxford podcast. I'm Jackie Broadhead.

Rob McNeil

And I'm Rob McNeil.