

NECE Conference 2016
Crossing Borders. Migration and Citizenship Education in Europe

10 - 12 November 2016
Zagreb, Croatia

www.nece.eu
#NECE2016

A keynote by David Goodhart

Anywheres and Somewheres – NECE Essay

Brexit and Trump and the steady rise in support for populist parties in 2016 has caused dismay to most liberal-minded Europeans.

But democracy was never a guarantee of permanent rule by liberals. Too many educated, middle class liberals have confused their own preferences and interests with those of the whole of society. What we are experiencing is a democratic readjustment. It is not always pleasant, and sometimes downright irrational, but it is largely a consequence of liberal over-reach over the past generation. (I draw mainly, but not exclusively, on British experience, some of the trends apply in most rich countries.)

Liberals blame the masses. I blame the two masses for this readjustment – mass immigration and mass higher education. The two have combined to leave too many people in the bottom half of the income and the ability spectrum feeling demoralised and devalued.

What lies behind this political upheaval in most western countries is a value divergence. The old divides of class and economic interest have not disappeared but are increasingly over-laid by a larger and looser one – between the people who see the world from Anywhere and the people who see it from Somewhere.

Anywheres dominate our culture and society. They tend to do well at school – they have been called the “exam-passing classes” – then usually move from home to a residential university (at least in the UK) in their late teens and on to a career in the professions that might take them to London or even abroad for a year or two. Such people have portable “achieved” identities, based on educational and career success which makes them generally comfortable and confident with new places and people.

The Somewhere people are by definition more rooted and usually have “ascribed” identities – Scottish farmer, working class Geordie, Cornish housewife – based on group belonging and particular places, which is why they often find rapid change more unsettling. One core group of Somewheres have been called the “left behind” – mainly older white working class men with little education. They have lost economically with the decline of well paid jobs for people without qualifications and culturally, too, with the disappearance of a distinct working-class culture and the marginalization of their views in the public conversation. However Somewhere ambivalence about recent social trends spreads far beyond this group and is shared by many in all social classes, especially the least mobile. Despite recent increases in geographical mobility, about 60 per cent of British people still live within 20 miles of where they lived when they were 14.

Of course, few of us belong completely to either group and there is a large minority of Inbetweeners. But although I have invented the labels, I have not invented the two value clusters that are clearly visible in a host of British opinion and value surveys – with Anywheres making up 20 to 25 per cent of the population, compared to around half for Somewheres (and the rest Inbetweeners).

Extrapolating from those opinion surveys, and adding my own judgments and observations, I have assembled a loose Anywhere ideology that I call “progressive individualism”. This is a worldview for more or less successful individuals who also care about society. It places a high value on autonomy, mobility and novelty and a much lower value on group identity, tradition and national social contracts (faith, flag and family). Most Anywheres are comfortable with immigration, European integration and the spread of human rights legislation, all of which tend to dilute the claims of national citizenship. They are not in the main anti-national, indeed can be quite patriotic, but also see themselves as citizens of the world. Work, and in fact life itself, is about individual self-realisation. Anywheres are comfortable with the achievement society; meritocracy and most forms of equality (though not necessarily economic) are second nature to them. Where the interests of Anywheres are at stake – in everything from reform of higher education to gay marriage – things happen. Where they are not, the wheels grind more slowly, if at all.

By contrast, the Somewheres are more socially conservative and communitarian by instinct. They are not on the whole highly religious, unlike their equivalents in the US, and only a small number on the far-right fringes are hard authoritarians or consistent xenophobes. They are moderately nationalistic and if English quite likely to identify as such. They feel uncomfortable about many aspects of cultural and economic change—such as mass immigration, a meritocratic achievement society in which they struggle to achieve, the reduced status of non-graduate employment and more fluid gender roles. They do not choose closed over open but want a form of openness that does not disadvantage them. They are also, in the main, modern people for whom women’s equality and minority rights, distrust of power, free expression, consumerism and individual choice, are part of the air they breathe. They want some of the same things that Anywheres want, but they want them more slowly and in moderation. Their worldview – as with Anywheres I have assembled it from opinion surveys and my own observations – is best described by a phrase that many would regard as a contradiction in terms: “decent populism”.

The relative powerlessness of British Somewheres in recent times is shown by, among other things: the miserable state of vocational education and apprenticeship provision in a graduate-dominated society, the failure to keep immigration to moderate levels, the bias against domesticity in family policy.

Both of these worldviews are valid and legitimate and their divergence from each other is neither new nor surprising. What has changed is the balance of power, and numbers, between them. Until 30 or 40 years ago the Somewhere worldview remained completely dominant. It was commonsense in Britain and most developed societies. Then in the space of two generations another Anywhere commonsense has risen to challenge and replace it.

This is thanks, above all, to two things –the legacy of baby-boomer “1960s” liberalism and the expansion of higher education, which has played a key role in disseminating that legacy. We are now entering a third phase – Brexit might be said to mark its beginning – in which neither world view is so clearly dominant.

The helter-skelter expansion of higher education in the past 25 years – and the elevation of educational success into the gold standard of social esteem – has been one of the most important, and least understood, developments in European

societies. It has been a liberation for many and for others a loss of status and respect.

The Anywhere world of geographical, and often social, mobility, of higher education and professional careers was once the preserve of a small elite; it has now become general, though not universal. For Somewheres, meanwhile, post-industrialism has largely abolished manual labour, reduced the status of lower income males and weakened the national social contract – neither the affluent nor employers feel the same obligation towards “their” working class that they once did.

In a democracy the Somewheres cannot, however, be ignored. And in recent years in Britain and Europe, and in the US through Donald Trump, they have begun to speak through new and established parties and outside party structures altogether. In Britain they helped to win the Brexit referendum and then the vote itself and by constantly telling pollsters how worried they are about immigration, they have kept that issue at the centre of British politics.

The Anywhere ideology is invariably a cheerleader for restless change. Consider this from Tony Blair, again, at the 2005 Labour conference: “I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalization. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer... The character of this changing world is indifferent to tradition. Unforgiving of frailty... It is replete with opportunities, but they only go to those swift to adapt, slow to complain, open, willing and able to change.” This from the leader of a party which historically represented the people who benefitted least from capitalist modernisation.

When change seems to benefit everyone – such as broad-based economic growth or improved healthcare – the conflict between the two world views recedes. But when change does not seem to benefit everyone the restrained populism of Somewheres can find a voice.

One of the implicit promises of modern democratic citizenship is some degree of control over one’s life. This translates most easily into a right to stop things happening, the right, at its most basic, to some stability and continuity in the place and the way one lives. Given the nature of the modern world even this is not a promise that democratic politicians can easily deliver, especially when committed to an economic liberalism that has exported factories and imported foreign workers. Consider the extraordinary ethnic and physical changes in London and Birmingham in the past 30 years.

Somewheres are often said to be myopic, unable to see that accepting change brings longer-term advantage. Yet it is also the case that the people from Anywhere with more fluid identities and an educational passport to thrive are well equipped to benefit from change, while the people from Somewhere are often not, even in the long run.

Anywheres tend to see Somewhere conservatism as irrational or as a backlash against the advance of liberal social values. It can be that but it is also to be expected that people who feel buffeted by external events with little political agency, social confidence or control over their destinies will cling all the harder to those spaces where they can exercise some control – in the familiar routines of their daily lives and beliefs. Somewhere conservatism may have shed many of the historical trappings of mid-20th century classic working-class conservatism – the protestant faith, jingoism, white supremacy – but the instinct to stick with the familiar and to those small zones of control and esteem means Somewheres are often hostile both to market change and to top-down state paternalism.

Most Somewheres are not bigots and xenophobes. Indeed much of what is sometimes called the “great liberalization” of the past 40 years in attitudes to race, gender and sexuality has been absorbed and accepted by the majority of Somewheres. But compared with Anywheres the acceptance has been more selective and tentative and has not extended to enthusiasm for mass immigration or European integration. Somewheres are seldom anti-“immigrant” but invariably anti-mass “immigration”. They still believe that there is such a thing as society.

I am often taken aback at the lack of awareness on the part of Anywheres at just how peculiar their views are to middle ground Somewhere opinion. Let me describe a scene that has become all too familiar to me over the past few years.

At the end of 2015 I was at a conference about the refugee crisis. It was a grand gathering in a country house with many experts and a few people from the front line providing alarming glimpses of Europe’s southern and eastern borders – then looking increasingly like Europe’s version of the Mexican-US border.

At several points during the two day discussion the academics, NGOers and government officials talked about migration flows as if they were generals moving troops around the battlefield. There is, for example, a big youth bulge in the Western Balkans and in many of the 40 African cities with more than 1m residents and, at the same time, several Western European countries have rapidly ageing populations. So, hey presto, argued several delegates, let’s make it easier for the former to move to the latter and we have a “win-win situation” if only European politicians would show political leadership: code for ignoring public opinion.

This idea appeared to have the support of many people in the room. Yet it blithely ignores the fact there is such a thing as society. Societies are not just an aggregation of individuals who happen to live in physical proximity and into which millions of people from elsewhere can be easily transplanted.

Successful societies are based on habits of cooperation, familiarity and trust and on bonds of language, history and culture. In modern times successful societies have also been relatively open to movements of ideas and people. But if our European societies – a magnet to millions of refugees – are to continue flourishing they need to retain some sense of mutual regard between anonymous citizens, which means keeping inflows to levels that allow people to be absorbed into that hard-to-define thing called a national culture or way of life.

Most people in Britain and the rest of Europe when faced with images of desperate people in the summer of 2015 did feel compassion – many acted on it as individuals by donating to charities and most of us wanted our governments to do something to alleviate the suffering. But there are also clear limits – both financial and emotional – to this compassion. Most of us wanted to be generous without encouraging further flows and without damaging our own country’s social and cultural infrastructure. High levels of normal immigration in recent years means Britain is already struggling to properly integrate some incomers especially those from traditional, often Muslim, societies.

This ought to be common sense, especially to the sort of idealistic people at my conference who were mainly on the political left. Yet when it comes to immigration the left abandons its normally social and communitarian instincts and becomes libertarian in its individualism. Why not another 100,000 desperate people? After all what is there to integrate into? We are all just individual human beings are we not? The universalism of the left—based on its historic commitment to race equality – meets the “there is no such thing as society” individualism of the liberal right.

Yet not only do we know that there is such a thing as society we also know that good societies are characterised by high levels of trust and what social scientists call social capital. As the American political scientist Robert Putnam has, reluctantly, conceded, the effect of high levels of immigration and ethnic diversity is to reduce trust and familiarity, especially when the people arriving come from places that are culturally distant; absorbing 100,000 Australians is very different to 100,000 Afghans.

Rapidly increasing diversity can also reduce the readiness to share. This is based on the common sense assumption that people are readier to share with people they have a fair amount in common with—this does not have to be based on ethnicity or religion but it does have to be based on *something*, shared interests and experience most obviously.

We do not all have to be the same, or have the same values, to successfully share a public space. After all, national social contracts and welfare states evolved in European societies that were sharply divided by class and region but a sense of national solidarity, of sharing a common fate, transcended those differences.

Ethnic differences too can be, and are, absorbed into the national “we” but it is not always a swift or easy process and liberal societies are reluctant to force the pace. The evidence suggests that ethnically heterogeneous societies show lower levels of support for redistribution and thus in the longer run have weaker welfare states. This has long been evident in the US but is now emerging in Europe too.

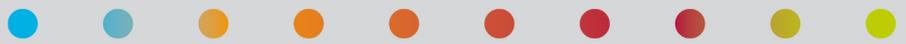
And what if the Anywhere v Somewhere divide is itself contributing to the feeling that we are no longer a single society? That as social class divisions become more blurred we are replacing them with this new divide based on education and mobility. Large social groupings which do not comprehend the intuitions of the other side on some of the most important issues of our times.

Eric Kaufmann, a leading authority on nationalism and ethnicity, has shown that the Brexit and Trump backlashes were not only about education and mobility but also about a core divide, relating to order and authority, that cuts across age, income, education and even political party. There is a cluster of questions that pollsters ask about the importance of children being obedient, support for capital punishment and so on – known as the authoritarian-libertarian axis – and a position closer to the authoritarian end of the axis turns out to be the key predictor of whether someone voted Brexit or not.

Strong authoritarianism is the instinct of only a small minority but the broader desire of Somewheres for a more stable, ordered world, is now being heard in the parliaments and chancelleries of the developed world. And Generation Z, everyone born after 2001, seems to confirm this new tilt towards caution and conservatism.

Kaufmann emphasizes the ethnic aspect of this shift: “As large scale immigration challenges the demographic sway of white majorities, the gap between whites who embrace change and those who resist it is emerging as the key political cleavage across the west. Compared to this cultural chasm, material differences between haves and have nots... are much less important.”

Populist politics is certainly here to stay and though many of the parties themselves are unstable and often dominated by furious personality clashes the demand for their product shows no sign of fading. This demand is primarily motivated by cultural anxiety and hard to measure psychological loss. Economic loss is a factor too – a significant majority of the 56 per cent of British people who describe themselves as “have nots” voted Brexit – but if it was primarily about economic loss the populists of the left would surely be stronger.



If decent populist sentiments and interests are not better accommodated by our Anywhere dominated society we will experience more Brexit-style revolts.

Even in our richer and more mobile societies people are rooted in communities and families, often experience change as loss and feel a hierarchy of moral obligations. Too often the language of contemporary Anywhere liberalism looks past, or down upon, such people, but their affinities are not obstacles on the road to the good society, they are one of its foundation stones.

The holy grail of politics for the next generation is therefore the quest for a new, more stable settlement between Anywheres and Somewheres – the two halves of humanity's political soul.

