Rethinking integration:
new perspectives on adaptation and settlement
in an era of superdiversity

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This paper explores how super-diverse sites encourage people to develop cosmopolitan attitudes, skills and competence (Vertovec 2009; Wessendorf 2014; Devadson 2010; Müller 2011). Drawing insights from an ethnographic study conducted within a leading management school in one of the UK’s most diverse boroughs, we argue that undergraduate management education provides an enhanced context to explore how people learn through coping with contrasting cosmopolitan narratives. Findings show touristic cosmopolitan narratives reliant upon privileged geographical mobility that are reproduced by transnational students can provoke informal learning for those with limited geographical or social mobility (Bauman 1996). Unable to
leverage the same resources, local and home students find their own personal trajectories minimized by the white trashy English girl stereotypes they face in Managing Diversity seminars. Marginalized as if ‘vagabonds’ without choice of attending the school, they develop critical attitudes toward rich transnational students and legitimate their own mobilities by drawing on their own and others’ diversity as a narrative repertoire (Bauman 1996). This failure is significant because clear interest is placed upon preparing management students for globalized workplaces, although current approaches are largely found wanting (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Taras et al., 2009: 415; Eisenberg et al., 2013: 604; Rosenblatt et al., 2013: 356; Ng et al., 2009). Today emphasis is placed upon developing management students’ cultural intelligence because “the context for action is constantly changing and students must learn to adapt swiftly” (Blasco, 2009: 177). Such aspects of managerial know-how or tacit knowledge however are harder to recognize “in action” and notoriously more difficult to represent and transmit through traditional teaching methods (Chia and Holt, 2008;
Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka and Toyama, 2007; Blasco, 2009; Taras et al., 2009). In response, emphasis is now placed upon ‘experiential learning’ interventions perceived to offer greater opportunity to develop more obscure aspects of management activity (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Armstrong, 2008; Jones, 2003). “Cultural awareness”, for example, has been found to be most effectively learned through “direct, experiential exposure to intercultural situations where students are affectively as well as cognitively engaged” (Blasco, 2009:177). They also aim to cultivate management students’ cultural intelligence through inviting critical reflection upon cultural stereotypes, or develop multicultural competencies through apparently intensive direct contact with other cultures via technological global virtual classrooms that link up seminar classes around the world. Other interventions aim toward developing students’ diversity awareness through study-abroad programs, or awareness to new management approaches through volunteering in different countries (MacNab and Worthley, 2012; Berger, 2001; Eisenberg, 2013: 616; Taras et al., 2009;
Schwabenland, 2011; Erez et al., 2013). But although such approaches are popular they still lack relevance to management graduates’ experiences of globalized workplaces (Blasco, 2009: 176).

Concluding, the paper argues super-diverse sites do not in themselves encourage cosmopolitan learning but can provide contexts within which learning arises informally between the sometimes conflicting narratives of different groups. As a result, research tends to ignore diversity within everyday management learning contexts and implications for student experiences. This also means most researchers presume management learning experiences are restricted to “purposefully designed experiential learning interventions” (Eisenberg, 2013: 616). The “construction of learning from experience” thereby appears to be “an intentional act” in which “learners must be (consciously) engaged for learning to occur at any level” (Fenwick, 2001: 4). There is little interest in day-to-day implications of diversity and management students might cope with, and learn from these. Instead, it appears management students can only
learn to “manage diversity” through experien-
tial learning interventions deliberately designed
by educators who specify “the experiences to
make figural for the day” (Yballe and O’Connor,

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