

# **Bringing international students into the centre: transnationalism, agency and the city**

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## **Abstract**

International education discourse in Australia is dominated on one hand by the economics and politics of industry growth. On the other hand, less forcefully, we engage in discourses of academic practice, issues of international student experience, management and advocacy. It appears to many practitioners that the objectives of industry and education are contradictory, or that there is tension between these two dimensions. What we may have overlooked is the importance of context; the university precincts and cities in which most international students spend their time. Here, we see the dynamic conjunction of educational, economic, political, social and community infrastructure. Within these environments, international students in Australia actively engage in improving their experience, individually and collectively in groups and representative organisations.

The central question of this study is: What is the impact of international students on the City of Melbourne? The study uses methods including interviews and focus groups combined with document analysis to contextualise international student perspectives, in progression from a (perceived) vulnerable cohort to their key role as transnational subjects in the centre of international education. This paper discusses the complex role of the city in the lives of international students, particularly from 2000 in Melbourne. By refocussing on students as agents of change, we begin to see how economic and educational outcomes can be aligned. There are implications of this in terms of collaborative activities between cities and education institutions, common goals, and future development.

## **Key words**

International students, Melbourne, agency, transnationalism, place-space.