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UNDERSTANDING INTEGRATION PROCESSES OF IMMIGRANTS AND LOCAL POLICIES IN EUROPE¹

Rinus Penninx*

ARTICLE

Introduction

Europe has become an immigration continent since World War II (Penninx, 2016; 2017) but this happened while at the same time European countries defined themselves as non-immigration countries. Within the European Union (EU) this has led to the paradoxical trend that ever more restrictive immigration policies for non-EU citizens go together with the promotion of movement across borders within an enlarged EU. In EU policies, the latter movements of EU citizens are not called migration anymore; it is (internal EU) mobility. It is this particular background of migration and migration policies that has also determined to a great extent the content of discourses and policies on integration. It explains the absence of national integration policies in most of the North-West European countries until the turn of the century, because the migrants were “guest workers” or other temporary sojourners whose integration was not pursued.² Also in the Southern European countries, it has been cities and regions that have started integration policies first and national policies have come later and partially. When integration policies were seen as necessary after the turn of the century, these policies were primarily aimed at the cultural dimension of integration in order to assimilate the newcomers.

The message of this brief historical observation is that the concepts of migration and of integration did take on different and specific meanings in the course of time, within specific policy contexts and on different levels. For scientists and those who want to understand these phenomena – before trying to influence their course by making policies – this means that one cannot take these concepts for granted. We need well-defined analytical definitions of concepts – independent of policy definitions to make a proper analysis of migration and integration processes: that will be the first part of this contribution. In the second part, I will define integration policies, meaning the intentions and efforts of actors to steer integration processes towards wanted outcomes. In the third section, I will ask what lessons we can take from the study of local policies.

The Study of Integration Processes

The term integration refers to the process of settlement of newcomers in a given society, to the interaction of these newcomers with the host society, and to the social change that follows

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¹ The concept of integration and the analytical approach to integration policies have been developed by the author in earlier publications (Penninx, 2005, 2007); this text draws particularly from Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas (2016, pp. 11-29). For the analysis of local integration policies the text draws on Penninx et al. 2014, European Cities and their Migrant Integration Policies.

² Swedish integration policies since 1975 and Dutch Ethnic Minorities Policies since the 1980s were exceptions to this rule.

immigration. From the moment immigrants arrive in a host society, they must secure a place for themselves. Literally, they must find a home, a job and income, schools for their children, and access to health facilities. They must find a place in a social and cultural sense as well, as they have to establish cooperation and interaction with other individuals and groups in society. They also have to get to know and use institutions of the host society, and the latter have to recognise and accept immigrants as political, economic and cultural actors. All of these elements are assumed to work as a two-way process, in which migrants adapt and change, but the host society also does not remain unaffected. It is the interaction between the two, the immigrants (on the left of Figure 1) and the *receiving society*, with its characteristics and reactions to the newcomers (on the right of Figure 1) that determines the direction and the temporal outcomes of the integration process. However, these two “partners” are unequal in terms of power and resources. The receiving society, especially its institutional structure and reaction to newcomers, is far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves are.

All of these elements and more are part of our definition of integration as “*the process of becoming an accepted part of society*.” This elementary definition is intentionally open in two regards. First, it emphasises the process character of integration rather than defining an end situation. Second, in contrast to the normative models developed by political theorists, it does not specify beforehand the degree of or even the particular requirements for acceptance by the receiving society. This makes the definition highly useful for empirical study of these processes. Measuring the degree of becoming an accepted part of society (or not) will allow us to capture the diversity of (stages of) the process. We do need to specify within this basic definition what should be measured; that is, what the indicators of integration are and where we might find them.

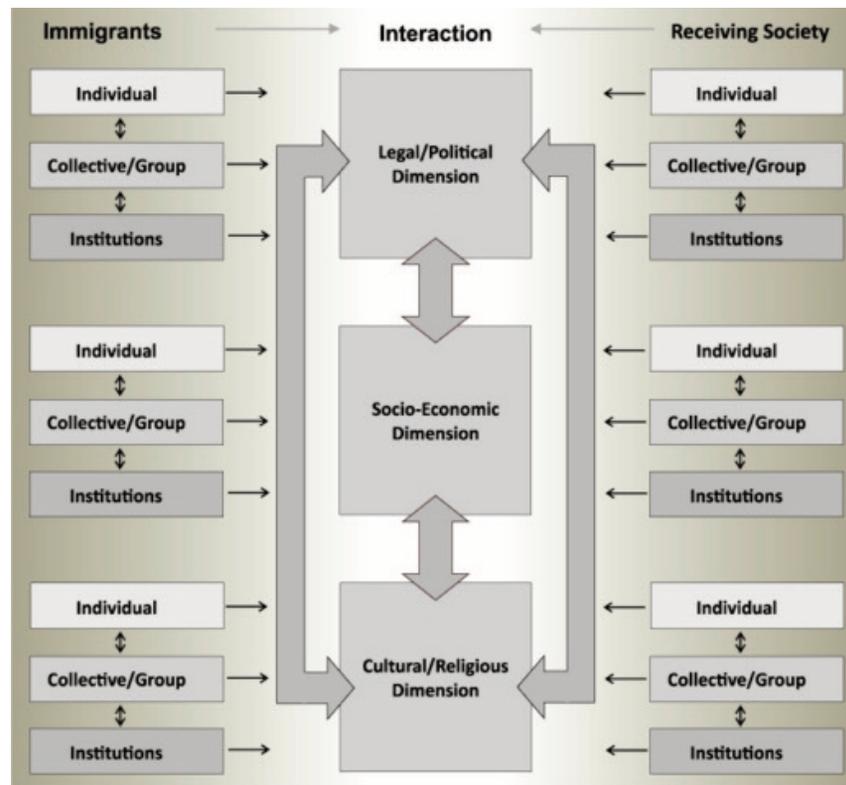
The basic definition of integration encompasses *three analytically distinct dimensions* in which people may (or may not) become accepted parts of society: (i) the legal-political, (ii) the socio-economic, and (iii) the cultural-religious dimension.

The *legal-political* dimension refers to residence and political rights and statuses. The basic question here is whether and to what extent immigrants are regarded as fully-fledged members of the political community. The position of an immigrant or the “degree of integration” has two extreme poles. One is the position of the irregular immigrant who is not part of the host society in the legal-political sense. The other is the position of the immigrant who is (or has become) a national citizen. In between there is enormous variety, which has increased in recent decades in Europe as a consequence of attempts of states to “regulate” international migration and the new statuses and rights stemming from the EU migration regime (among others, EU nationals versus third-country nationals).

The *socio-economic* dimension refers to the social and economic position of residents, irrespective of their national citizenship. Within this dimension, the position of immigrants can be analysed by looking at their access to and participation in domains that are crucial for any resident. Do immigrants have equal access to institutional facilities for finding work, housing, education and health care? Do they use these facilities? What is the outcome of immigrants’

participation compared to that of natives with comparable qualifications? Since needs and aspirations in these domains are relatively universal (basic needs are largely independent of cultural factors), access to and participation of immigrants and natives in these areas can be measured comparatively. The outcomes, particularly when they are unequal, provide useful inputs for policies.

Figure 1. A heuristic model for the empirical study of integration processes



Source: Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas (2016, p. 16).

The *cultural-religious* dimension pertains to the domain of *perceptions and practices* of immigrants and the receiving society as well as their reciprocal reactions to difference and diversity. If newcomers see themselves as different and are perceived by the receiving society as culturally or religiously different, they may aspire to acquire a recognised place in these respects. For their part, the receiving society may or may not accept cultural or religious diversity. Here again we find two extremes. At one extreme, new diversity may be rejected and immigrants required to adapt and assimilate into mono-cultural and mono-religious societies. At the other extreme, ethnic identities, cultures and world views may be accepted on an equal level in pluralistic societal systems. Between these two extremes again are many in-between positions, such as accepting certain forms of diversity in the private realm but not, or only partly, in the public realm.

This third dimension, and the specific positions of immigrants and immigrant groups, is more difficult to measure, basically for two reasons. Firstly, it is less about objective differences and (ethnic, cultural and religious) diversity than about *perceptions and reciprocal normative*

evaluations of what is defined as different and the consequences of such categorisations. Categorisations may become stereotypes, prejudices, and ultimately part of immutable racist ideologies. Moreover, the basis of categorisations may change. In the guest worker period (1955-1975), for example, the fact that an increasing share of immigrant workers implied Muslims was not seen as relevant; they were primarily temporary workers. It was only from the 1990s onwards that such migrants and their families were categorised as coming from Muslim countries and were primarily seen as Muslims. Secondly, categorisations and reciprocal perceptions manifest themselves differently at different levels (i.e., at the individual, collective and institutional levels), and the consequences may also differ. If contacts between individuals are coloured by prejudice, interactions may be uncomfortable but may have a limited societal impact. Yet, at the institutional level, if employers base their recruitment of workers on stereotyped or prejudiced perceptions and procedures, the negative consequences for individual immigrants may be substantial, as may be the broader societal impact.

It is important to realise that these three dimensions are not fully independent of one another. The legal-political dimension may condition the socio-economic and the cultural-religious dimensions (represented by arrows in Figure 1). From the perspective of individual immigrants, factors such as illegal residence, extended uncertainty about future residence rights and lack of access to local and national political systems and decision-making processes have negative implications for opportunities and participation in the socio-economic and political realms. From the perspective of the receiving society, exclusionary policies are an expression of a general perception of immigrants as outsiders, which inevitably adversely affects immigrants' integration. The cultural-religious dimension (represented by another arrow in Figure 1) may similarly impact the socio-economic dimension. For example, negative perceptions of certain immigrants may lead to prejudice and discrimination by individuals, organisations or institutions in the receiving society, and this may reduce immigrants' opportunities – even if access is legally guaranteed – in domains such as housing, education, health care and the labour market.

Processes of immigrants' integration take place and can be measured at different levels. The first level is that of *individuals*, both migrants and natives of the receiving society. For the first dimension, immigrants' integration at the individual level can be measured in terms of their legal status and political participation. For the second dimension, we can look at their socio-economic integration and position in the “hard” domains of housing, work, education and health. For the third dimension, we would measure their identification with a specific cultural-religious group and with the receiving society, as well as their cultural and religious practices and how these are valued. In our conceptual definition of integration, we should measure as much the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour (or acceptance) of native individuals towards newcomers and their consequences.

The second level is that of *organisations*. There are the organisations of immigrants, that mobilise resources and ambitions of the group. These organisations may be strong or weak; they may orient themselves primarily towards (certain aspects of participation in) the receiving society or to specific cultural and religious needs of the group. They may become an accepted part of civil society – and a potential partner for integration policies – or isolate themselves or be

excluded by the host society. There are also organisations of the receiving society. Their extent of openness to newcomers, their perceptions of and behaviour towards individual immigrants and their organisations might be of crucial importance for immigrants' integration.

The third level is that of *institutions*, understood as standardised, structured and common ways of acting in a socio-cultural setting. Two kinds of institutions are of particular relevance. The first are the general public institutions of the receiving society in the three dimensions: institutional arrangements of the political system; institutional arrangements in the labour market, housing, education and public health; and institutional arrangements for cultural and religious diversity. Laws, regulations and executive organisations, but also unwritten rules and practices, are part of these institutions. Though general institutions are supposed to serve all citizens in an equal manner, they may impede access or equitable outcomes for immigrants. They may exclude immigrants formally, either completely, as in the political system of most countries, or partially, as when social security and welfare systems offer only limited services to non-citizens. Yet, even if access for all residents is guaranteed by law, institutions may hamper access or equitable outcomes by virtue of their historically and culturally-determined ways of operating, for instance by failing to take into account immigrants' history, their cultural and religious backgrounds, or their language abilities. Thus, adequate functioning of general public institutions – and their potential to adapt to growing diversity – is of paramount importance. At this level, integration and exclusion are “mirror concepts” (see Penninx, 2001).

The second type are institutions specifically “of and for” immigrant groups, such as certain religious or cultural ones. Unlike general institutions, the value and validity of any group-specific institution is confined to those who voluntarily choose and adhere to them. Although their place is primarily in the private sphere, group-specific institutions may also manifest themselves in the public realm as civil society actors, as the history of churches, trade unions, cultural, leisure and professional institutions in European cities and states shows. Some migrant-specific institutions may become accepted parts of society, equivalent to institutions of native groups. Others, however, might either isolate themselves or remain unrecognised or even excluded.

Different mechanisms operate at the individual, organisational and institutional levels, but the outcomes at all of these levels are clearly interrelated. Institutional arrangements largely determine organisations' opportunities and scope for action, and they may exert significant influence on how immigrant organisations develop and orient themselves. Institutions and organisations, in turn, together create the structure of opportunities and limitations for individuals. Conversely, individuals may mobilise to change the landscape of organisations and may even contribute to significant changes in general institutional arrangements. In view of the uneven distribution of power and resources noted above, such examples are scarce but they are not non-existent.

The analytical concept of the process of integration can indeed also be used to evaluate research efforts, identify research gaps and see imbalances. For example, one sees immediately that “integration measurement” research is lopsidedly strong on the individual level of immigrants in the socio-economic and cultural-religious dimension, leaving out the interaction with three levels at the side of the society.

The Study of Integration Policies

The essence of policies is the intention to guide and steer processes in society, in our case, integration processes of immigrants. Explicit integration policies are part of a normative political process in which the issue of integration is formulated as a problem, the problem is given a normative framing, and concrete policy measures are designed and implemented to achieve a desired outcome. Other generic policies not specifically targeting immigrants (such as the education and health care systems, housing, the labour market and the public regulation of religion) may exert strong influence (positive or negative) on integration processes of immigrants. Therefore, a systematic analysis of integration policies should go beyond integration policies in the strict sense.

The study of policies is thus fundamentally different from the study of integration processes. When studying integration policies, the first question to be analysed is *how different political and social actors perceive and frame immigrant integration*. A frame is a reconstruction of the problem and a definition of a policy issue, including the underlying assumptions of the problem's causes and possible remedies. Studying policies means thus looking at how the problem is actually defined and explained and what is proposed that should be done about it.

Integration policies may differ significantly in *content* with regard to the three dimensions of immigrants' integration identified earlier. In terms of the first dimension, legal recognition and political participation, policies may recognise immigrants as permanent foreign residents, thus incorporating them socially but limiting their political rights, or immigrants may be accepted as full citizens, thus removing all barriers and even promoting naturalisation. In terms of the socio-economic dimension, specific policy measures may be devised to promote equal chances for immigrants (or even equal outcomes) in the hard domains of life: work and income, housing, education and health. Finally, the cultural-religious dimension may be given prominence in policies under two very different premises. The first is that integration demands the adaptation and learning of immigrants but also implies significant changes in access to and the working of institutional structures of the host society. The second is that societal rules and structures, including underlying norms and values, should be taken as a given and immigrants should (voluntarily or even as a mandatory task) adapt to them and assimilate.

Finally, the question to be addressed is *for whom integration policies are meant*. Migrant integration policies may designate specific groups of immigrants as target groups, or they may focus on all immigrants. They may also target all individuals regardless of their origin or even target the established civil society and the general institutions of society. In practice, these different approaches result in very different policies again with regard to the three dimensions of integration.

Policy documents may be closer to policy discourse than to policy practice. In this regard, it is fundamental to complement any study of policy frames with a concrete and detailed analysis of actual policy measures. This means looking at the programmes in place and again identifying in which of the three dimensions of integration they are to be categorised, what their main goals are, and who they target. The study of policy measures must also go beyond integration policy

measures in the strict sense, looking at the specific effects of general policies for the target groups of integration policies. It is also essential to examine the budgets allocated in each programme in order to get a concrete picture of what is actually being done.

In democratic societies, policies are part of a political system in which the majority decides. This brings an inherent danger of either a virtual absence of explicit integration policies and an avoidance of issues related to immigrants or one-sided patronising policies reflecting mainly majority interests and disregarding the needs and voices of immigrants. The political process in democratic societies furthermore requires that policies bear fruit within a short period, namely between elections. Such a policy-making context may lead politicians to make unrealistic promises that cannot be fulfilled in such a short period. This “democratic impatience” in turn often produces disappointment and backlash effects (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000). The debate on the alleged failure of integration policies – and of immigrants to integrate – that has been taking place in the Netherlands since 2000 is a good example (Prins & Saharso, 2010). Even more difficult than democratic impatience are situations in which anti-immigrant sentiments are translated into political movements, leading to strong politicisation of the topics of immigration and integration.

Local Integration Policies

How do local authorities frame their policies for immigrants and what is the actual content of local policies: what do they actually do? There is growing literature on the specific nature of local integration policies in relation to regional, national and EU-policies (Alexander 2007; Caponio & Borkert 2010; Penninx et al. 2015; Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas 2016; Gesemann & Roth 2018).

In terms of the emergence of local integration policies, cities and municipalities are historically more likely to start integration policies when they are stimulated and supported to do so by their national government, as is shown by the case of Swedish and Dutch cities since the 1970s and early 1980s. However, while an active integration policy at the national level might increase the probability of a local integration policy emerging, the absence of such a national policy does not prevent cities from developing local integration policies. Cities in the Southern European countries, like Barcelona, Milan and Turin, are good examples.

When it comes to the content, an important central orientation of many cities is to see immigration and its diversity as an asset for the city that should be used and exploited. The key terms in such a discourse and rhetoric are cultural diversity and interculturality (meaning primarily creating positive relations between culturally diverse groups and creating common ground).

If we look at policy measures, however, the key initiatives of many cities are in the socio-economic domain and relate to the structural integration of individual migrants in the domains of work, housing, education and health. Whenever possible, this is done in general programmes for vulnerable groups, adapting these programmes in the implementation to specific needs of migrants.



The legal and political domain is particularly important when national rules limit political rights and participation, and cities look for alternative pathways for participation and engagement of immigrants in policies. Significant tensions may arise with national policies, when it comes to undocumented migrants in cities. The fact that intra-EU migrants do not qualify for integration measures according to EU definitions is another problem for cities.

When it comes to the cultural-religious dimension of policies in practice, cities do in principle recognise individual cultural and religious rights for the private sphere (as long as they are within the law), but for the public sphere such rights are not leading. The key terms of cultural diversity and interculturality do not refer to individual rights but to the possible use of (certain forms of) cultural diversity for economic development or social cohesion. In the concept of interculturality a selectively used concept of diversity (not all diversity is positive) is combined with a strategy that mobilises different stakeholders such as public institutions, business organisations, media, NGOs and immigrant organisations to manage diversity both for economic purposes and for societal cohesion.

So, cities do make different choices both when it comes to the rhetoric and the practical choice of policy measures in the three dimensions of policy. In that sense, comparisons of local integration policies show a significant differentiation.

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