The concept of integration. Theoretical concerns and practical meaning

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1. THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION: THEORETICAL CONCERNS AND PRACTICAL MEANING

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1.1 Introduction

We will start with a summary historical overview of how the concept of integration and its cognate notions, like assimilation, acculturation and accommodation, have been and are used in the social sciences when dealing with the phenomenon of immigration and immigrant settlement and inclusion. The proper approach would be a sociology-of-knowledge perspective, in that we start from the proposition that social scientific thought is not an autonomous process determined by internal developments within the social sciences only, but a product of the time and the social context from which it emerges as well. Lack of space, however, precludes that we pay much attention to the shifting historical contexts of the different theories and notions discussed here. We should nonetheless keep in mind that the cognitive and normative domains of migration theorising are strongly interwoven. Theories of integration especially are influenced by, for instance, normative notions as the homogenous nation state, the classless society, or the multicultural society. Hopefully, our perspective will help us to focus on disentangling normative views from theorising on the basis of empirical observations.

Following on this outline, we will discuss the notion of integration as a general sociological concept. We will propose to use the social environment, in which individuals and groups form interdependencies, as unit of reference for the concept, which, used in this way, is sometimes specified in the literature as systemic integration or system integration. We will, however, use these generic terms only in an alluding sense, by way of an introduction to specifying three levels (the micro, median and macro level) and discerning four dimensions, departing from a classification by Hartmut Esser (2001)1. These levels and dimensions will supply us with a framework in which it will be possible to develop focused concepts that can be made operational in our research and analysis.

1.2 The changing assimilation paradigm

This short overview will take us from the notions of the Chicago School, through classical assimilationism and situational ethnicity, again to the new assimilationism, in which there is a more explicit purpose to keep the old ideal on the one hand, and scientific observations and propositions on the other, apart.

American sociology has been greatly influenced by researchers, originating from various disciplines, at the University of Chicago. The Chicago School, as it became known, developed into an integrated, collective intellectual enterprise that would dominate American sociology until the 1930s, and is, to this day, of continuing importance to sociological theory (Ritzer 2000b: 51-64). In 1918, W.I. Thomas published, together with F. Znaniecki, the landmark-study The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. The book was mainly a study of

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1 Friedrich Heckmann introduced Esser’s dimensions in his paper for the first workshop of the IMISCOE B5 cluster in Lisbon, July 2004 (Heckmann 2004).
social institutions (and the lack of them) among Polish immigrants in the United States. Although it was macro-sociological in its scope, its methodology – the data collection included extensive autobiographical and other qualitative resources - set, in many respects, the trend for a sociology that put the actor at the centre of the stage. In this same vein, Robert Park, who had been a student of Simmel, and was influenced by the focus of this European scholar on micro-level interaction, combined an interest in urban problems with a felt need to collect data through personal observation. Among immigration students, Park has become best known for his theory of the race relations cycle and is seen as one of the founding fathers of what is often impressionistically called ‘assimilation theory’. However, even in the name of the theory, which conceives of the development of a sequence of contact, competition, accommodation and, in the end, assimilation, it is clear that the focus of analysis is on the relations between people, especially between immigrants and indigenous inhabitants of urban spaces (Park 1950). The ecological emphasis, taking the social environment as unit of analysis, and the interest for the life world of actors2 - stressing the importance of meaning and motives - is at least as manifest in the work Park and others of the Chicago school. Contrary to what often is believed, these early theorists on migration and integration understood that assimilation, however ‘apparently progressive and irreversible’, would proceed best if immigrants could keep to their own pace adapting to life in the new country, building on existing attitudes and memories. Also, Park and his collaborators saw assimilation essentially as a two-way process in which the sharing of experiences and history in the longer term would incorporate people of different origin in a communal life, achieving ‘a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence’ (Park 1930).

The concept of ‘straight line assimilation’ was introduced at the end of the 2nd World War by Warner and Srole in their Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups (1945)3. All groups in American society, they contended, would evolve towards the same, existing universal culture of reference: the American way of life. However, the authors conceived of great differences in the pace in which this one-sided process of adaptation would come about. Warner and Srole invoke cultural distance (the Anglo-conformity gap) and even racial categorisation to explain the differential tempo of assimilation they observe and predict.

In 1964, Milton Gordon coined some extremely influential notions in the subsequent scientific and public discourse on the integration of immigrants in his Assimilation in American Life. Although he did not develop a theory of assimilation in the proper sense, he did codify the process with a rigour formerly unknown, and identified several dimensions, for some of which he posited time-sequential relations. Acculturation, or the mastery of English and the adoption of some core behavioural patterns, values and goals, is a process that typically preceded incorporation into the status groups of the middle class. Gordon discriminates between extrinsic and intrinsic traits. The extrinsic traits are the ones required to engage in fruitful interaction with the host society; these also are the ones that can be easily accepted by the immigrants themselves. Though a prerequisite, acculturation is not a sufficient condition for further socio-economic integration. According to Gordon, assimilation in all domains of life will only happen if immigrants and their descendants are accepted, and are willing, to join the primary groups within the host society (Price 1969). Entry into the socio-economic mainstream, and subsequent internalisation of intrinsic traits will only follow suit if immigrants and their descendants join these primary groups. Gordon calls this structural assimilation. Although Gordon’s hypothetical formulations suggest a full-blown theory, his concepts are not always clearly enough defined (what is precisely the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic traits? What are primary groups?), and how suppositions on diachronic sequences should be understood in causal terms, is not clear either.

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2 See for instance Park’s essay on the marginal man (Park 1928).
3 This is the meaning most people nowadays (opponents and supporters alike) attach to assimilation.
Less influential, but empirically and theoretically more profound is the study by Shibutani and Kwan, which appeared simultaneously (1965). Central in their comparative analysis, extensive in geographical and diachronic scope, is that ethnic groups – majority and minority groups alike – are to be studied in terms of their mutual ‘ecological relationships’, considering the functions and dysfunctions they represent for each other. The unit of analysis should be the territorial space the groups occupy together, in which the struggle over the distribution of ecological niches within and across groups takes place; an idea Shibutani and Kwan took from Barth’s study among the Swat in Northern Pakistan (Barth 1956). Here the concept of power (a relational concept) enters the analysis of integration or assimilation (Alba and Nee 2003: 31-35).

In ‘Beyond the Melting Pot’, Glazer and Moynihan (1963; 1970) discuss the position of several immigrant groups (including the African Americans, then still called negroes) and observe that, although all these ‘ethnicities’ have become Americans in so many respects, they have not ‘melted’ together with the (Anglo-American) ‘old stock’ into the mainstream. Although the authors, in their exposé on the different groups, highlight the different pace of upward mobility between them, Glazer and Moynihan’s most central point is that, in the socio-economic and political context of New York, all groups have interests in keeping, developing and claiming their ethnic origin, while at the same time becoming very American. Their observations and theorising, although in some respects flawed when considered with the knowledge of hindsight, are in fact a convincing refutation of Warner and Srole’s straight line assimilation theory which had become extremely popular in public discourse at that time. Processes of ascription and self-ascription are political processes, started off by events on an institutional or international level, prompted by collective interests, and directed by relations of power.

Another early critic of straight-line assimilation is Herbert Gans. Gans took a different lead, in that he questioned Warner and Srole’s assumption of a positive relationship between acculturation and social mobility. Gans posited the ‘bumpy line theory’: decline for the second generation in terms of their socio-economic position was very well possible. He also claimed that today, the connection between acculturation and mobility could be opposite to the one proposed by Warner and Srole. The relationship between ethnicity and economy needs to be re-thought: acculturation might, in his view, in fact be connected to downward, not upward mobility (Gans 1979, 1996). From here, it is only a small step to the now famous notion of segmented assimilation, introduced by Portes and Zhou (1993). Development of this idea is based on the recognition that immigrants are incorporated in different strata of the host society. They, or rather their offspring, may join the middle class by a process of – often intergenerational – upward social mobility. Others and their offspring may, however, link up with disadvantaged societal strata, because for instance they have come to live with them in adjacent neighbourhoods, and children take over the oppositional frame of reference of their disappointed peers from these disadvantaged groups. The third possibility is not so much assimilation in yet another stratum or segment of society, but a strategy to keep the influence of the disadvantaged groups and their disillusioned behaviour at bay. These groups create their own self-supporting communities and networks, and find their way upward in the host society by development of own their economic niches. The theory lacks clarity in several respects. One of the difficulties is, that we do not know if the three possibilities pertain to final positioning in the process of immigrant incorporation, or that these are, or also could be, merely stages in a process that eventually leads to assimilation in ‘the mainstream’ for most. The temporal and intergenerational dimension is not worked out, and in this sense the theorizing of Gans (1996), and that of Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) for instance, seem more developed.
The new prominence of the assimilation concept in social scientific discourse can best be explained by the ever-growing availability of hindsight for students of migration. In the US, the time span over which immigration and incorporation of immigrants can be studied has by now extended to such a degree, that different migration epochs, and the accompanying public and scientific discourses can be compared (Foner 2001, Alba and Nee 2003). Fears, expectations, analyses and policy recommendations then and now notwithstanding, a considerable shrinking of socially relevant differences between groups over time has undeniably occurred, which makes the process of assimilation a legitimate subject of (comparative) research and analysis. Also, multiculturalism and constructivism, often propagated simultaneously by some scholars, seem to have lost their attractiveness for many, not in the least because these positions seem to be mutually incompatible on several grounds.

In Europe in the public and political discourse, the term assimilation experiences a comeback in a rather different way. Contrary to the insight gained by American scholars over the years, that assimilation is an intergenerational process which takes place largely inadvertently, which ‘happens while you are planning other things’ (Rosaldo 1989, Alba & Nee 2003), the European debate is triggered by events, and indicative of a growing fear that, without staunch policy measures, immigrants an their descendants will not integrate and will pose a serious danger to the cohesion of the respective European societies, and for Europe as a whole. After having stressed the contested character of the concept of assimilation in especially Europe, Heckmann (2004) observes a growing awareness that minority formation among migrants is leading to and reinforcing ethnic stratification, which lends support to positions and policies that are critical of multiculturalism and minority formation among immigrants. He gives the telling examples of The Netherlands, Great Britain and Germany where – nationally different – manifestations of multiculturalist thought are giving way to policies of assimilation. ‘There is growing awareness that incorporation on equal terms necessitates the acquisition of cultural competences for participating in the core institutions of society. Otto Schily, the German minister for interior affairs and ‘father’ of both a new citizenship and immigration law, two years ago was quoted as saying ‘Die beste Form der Integration ist Assimilierung’ (The best form of integration is assimilation)4’ (Heckmann 2004: 4).

The convergence of, at the one hand, European public and political interest in the concepts of assimilation and integration and, at the other, the renewed, chiefly American attention for the concept in the social scientific debate seems to have almost opposed causes. This should make us all the more cautious to use these concepts. Studies on immigration and integration processes that are informed by policy goals, often eclipse what is going on in the lives of immigrants. Policy discourse and policy measures still assume a more or less linear path of ‘integration’ (the Warner and Srole model), ignoring that the complex interplay of culturation, identification, social status and concrete interaction patterns of individuals may produce many ‘outcomes’, much more varied in fact than a more or less linear shift from ‘immigrant’ to ‘host’ ways of doing things and of relating.

1.3 Integrating Social Environments

In classical sociology, integration derives its meaning from evolutionary theory, signifying a progressive change from a less coherent to a more coherent form. Later, the concept became

4 Quoted in Die Welt, July 7, 2004, p. 3
central to classical structural-functional theory (e.g. Ritzer 2000a: 118, 432). Coherence is seen to be advanced by increasing functionality of the parts for the whole; this implies a growing differentiation of roles (groups of) actors play. An integer - the whole in which the parts are integrating - is presupposed here, although the integer might be conceived of on an ever larger plane, incorporating formerly relatively independently functioning social systems, which have been formed by integration processes on a smaller scale.

Since we, informed by the structure of our languages, tend to reduce processes to states, the image of a systemic whole, functioning independently from, and bounded by, its surroundings is hard to avoid, in everyday language as well as in our specialised scientific discourses (Elias 1978: 112). In line with the idea of boundedness and autarky is the functionalist axiom that, within the system, only stable and cooperative relations signify integration. As process, the concept of integration indicates on the one hand the further strengthening of relations within a social system, and, on the other hand, relating additional actors or groups to an existing social system and its core institutions (Heckmann 2004: 4). The second meaning is the one attached to the concept when it is used within migration and ethnic studies. Leaving aside the problem of what we should understand to mean core institutions, and other definitional problems, we have additional reasons to focus on the connotation of systemic integration. Firstly, since we will concentrate on the development of interdependencies between individuals and groups in certain territorial spaces, we should approach our subject-matter as a relational issue, and not as a feature of a category or group of actors. One qualification is in order here: we see the development of interdependencies not necessarily as a process towards more cooperative relations, or growing mutual understanding. Interdependencies can grow stronger and more conflict-ridden simultaneously. Secondly, perceiving of integration as the development of interdependencies in a more or less defined environment, gives us the opportunity to identify different ‘levels’ at which relations – be they consensual or conflictual – may develop.

Recently, in an extensive reappraisal of the concept of assimilation broadly defined as ‘the attenuation of distinctions based on ethnic origin’, Alba and Nee (2003) have discerned two main categories of mechanisms that influence the process of assimilation: proximate (micro and meso level) and distal (macro level) causes. They distinguish three proximate causes for assimilation: purposive action, in the sense that the adaptation of individuals to society is affected by their limited and context-bound rationality, social networks and the concomitant group sanctions, and differentially distributed forms of capital. The distal causes are the institutional mechanisms that form the context of the context-bound rationality. These can be society’s largely implicit norms, values and ideals, but also formal and enforced legislation. Incentives to act are structured in an institutional way and can lead to either blending or segregating behaviour (Reisel 2004). More or less analogous, Barth (1994) identifies the micro, median and macro level of analysis. The micro level focuses on identity formation and interpersonal interaction. At the median level Barth places the processes that create collectivities and mobilise groups – entrepreneurship, leadership, establishment of stereotypes and structural contexts and constraints. The macro level encompasses state policies, law making, the creation of bureaucracies, ideas of the nation and global discourses (21).

5 The term ‘core institutions’ is either used without exemplification, or some instances are variably referred to, be it the political structure, primary groups of the middle class or the local or national elite (family, informal networks), access to social privileges or access to economic niches. We will come back to these definitional objections – and other considerations concerning the use of the concept of integration in this way – in the next paragraph.
1.4 Dimensions and Levels of Interdependence

Surveying theories on integration and assimilation processes makes one aware of the generality and indefiniteness of these concepts. There are several reasons why, when focusing on processes of social and spatial mobility, intra-generational as well as intergenerational, and on developments in the health situation and health behaviour, concepts as integration, incorporation, or assimilation might perhaps better be avoided. First of all, it is not clear what they mean in concrete terms: the measuring stick, the point of reference, is often indicated with vague vocabulary like ‘the society in general’, ‘the mainstream’, or ‘the middle class’. These reference units are not only vaguely circumscribed – being socio-demographic entities, their character and size have changed and will continue to change in the course of time (Alba & Nee 2003). Secondly, without explicit qualifications, concepts like assimilation and integration not only cover different dimensions of behaviour and experience, they pertain to a multitude of social fields as well. Behavioural and experiential dimensions can be identified regarding socio-economic position and status, interaction, and identification. And these positions/dimensions should be discerned on several social sub-fields (in our case: education, housing and spatial mobility, health). Using these general concepts does not help us to distinguish between processes and their causes. It tends to engage us in a tautology of facts and causes, and in circuitous reasoning. 6

Finally and perhaps most importantly, these terms do not only refer to a process, but to the end-stage as well. This is the way they are used in public and academic discourse; our experience is, that many scholars find it difficult to get away from the image of inescapability (and really the desirability) of destination and goal of the process. Using concepts as integration, incorporation, etc., almost unavoidably invokes the normative dimension, not only stating that the referred to processes are desirable, but that their appropriateness is self-evident, and goes without saying. At the same time, the use of these concepts stresses difference in terms of incompatibility, as being detrimental to society as a whole, and because of this, as disadvantageous to its members.

Keeping these caveats in mind, the first thing we should do, is bringing the concepts down in size, changing them to a format we can handle in research, and making them operational as tools we can use in answering the questions we find important to pose. If we depart from the general sociological notion of integration as the process in which people and their activities become intertwined in social life and form mutual interdependent relations of some form and to a certain degree, we should further specify this process of becoming interrelated. We can identify several dimensions in this developing entanglement within and between categories of actors in a certain space. Esser’s dimensions of, what he calls, social integration: culturation, placement, interaction and identification, could be a useful starting point (Esser 2001: 16) 7. Esser’s conception of social integration is, however, not central in our analytical frame of reference. He defines social integration as ‘the inclusion [of individual actors] in already

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6 Alba and Nee’s recent book is a case in point here. Although they distinguish several groups of causes for assimilation, dimensions like status or social position and ethnicity remain confusingly intertwined, with the result that assimilation becomes indistinguishable from socio-economic mobility. Their merging of human and cultural capital into one concept (‘human-cultural capital’ - 2003:48) is telling of their lack of attention to this distinction. Besides, their concept of ‘distal causes’ is too broad to have much explanatory value (Reisel 2004). In this same vein, Mollenkopf has been criticised for his comparative analysis of immigrant integration in New York and Amsterdam (Mollenkopf e.o. 2000). It seems that national traditions of public and scientific discourse lead to a use of concepts that are self-explanatory for insiders, but invoke confusion internationally (see also Asselin 2004).

7 See Heckmann (2003) for a comparable distinction in four dimensions.
existing social systems\textsuperscript{8}. As we propose a relational focus, and the social environment in which (groups of) people interact as the unit of analysis, we need to define these four dimensions in a relational way. Before we further introduce the dimensions, we should first examine the different levels of scale on which processes (in all different dimensions) can be analysed. In concentrating on the space in which individuals and groups interact, we take the spatial focus of our cluster to be an opportunity and a challenge. As different process levels not only depict differences in the character of a process, but almost always differences in its (spatial) magnitude as well, one of the challenges is to accommodate these different levels with the methodological format of our endeavour: the (comparative) focus on urban spaces with a specified scope. We will refer to this problem in the discussion that follows.

We can discern between the micro, median and macro level. The micro level treats the, more or less consciously motivated, interaction between individuals, as well as their attitudes towards each other and towards the institutions that rule inside subgroups and the social environment as a whole\textsuperscript{9}. The median level concerns the development of institutions within (sub-)groups, and (institutional) relations between groups, as well as languishing and developing institutions in the social environment, as a consequence of arising interdependencies (be they conflictual or cooperative) between (groups of) newcomers and indigenous inhabitants. Also, on this level, we can observe a variety of initiatives taken collectively by actors to counteract developments, or to grasp opportunities, that present themselves ‘from outside’, being a product of larger socio-economic trends in society, or of political decision making. Processes we assign to the macro level often are felt to intrude on the life of individuals and groups of people. As these processes, most of the time, are not the expected product of goal-oriented action of individuals or groups locally, people generally do not feel to have command over them. However, instances of initiatives to guide or confront these processes in a creative and effective way, individually or collectively, have been identified in many places, although interaction patterns unwind in ways unexpected by most parties involved.\textsuperscript{10} The differential distribution of power in all domains and levels of society, and in the social environment under study, is of overriding importance here. Within an urban context, the implementation of local and national policy measures can lead to physical changes (e.g. urban renovation projects of all sorts) that have an enormous, although variable, impact on the lives of inhabitants, which may lead to population movements and changes, that in themselves can be seen as belonging to the macro level, as these in outset individual reactions build up towards trends that have unanticipated and often unwished-for consequences for these same, and other, individuals. Besides such physical and demographic transformations, changes in formal institutions and legislation on the local and national level, economic (e.g. labour market) developments, events on the national and international plane, and discursive processes attended and channelled by the media create, often unexpected, conditions for individuals and groups and elicit reactions among these. The developments of all these entanglements together is sometimes referred to as system integration (see also Heckmann 2004: 4), but we should keep in mind that this kind of integration does not necessarily entail an immediate levelling of differences between categories of the population.

\textsuperscript{8} See Esser (2004: 46; author’s translation). Esser’s distinction between system integration and social integration does not only identify separately institutional processes on a macro-level at the one hand, and processes concerning individuals and groups (micro- and median level) on the other, but signifies simultaneously the difference between ‘integration of’ and ‘integration into’. This seems an unhelpful fusion of analytical categories, at least for our purposes.

\textsuperscript{9} Following Lockwood (1963), Heckmann calls this social integration (2004: 4).

\textsuperscript{10} See Lindo (1999) on a protracted conflict over the establishment of a mosque between the council of an Amsterdam borough and a group of Muslims of Turkish origin, in the macro-level context of urban renewal to which all local actors respond in a purposeful way, without however being able to predict the actual outcomes of these multi-stranded and multi-leveled processes of interaction.
an increase in cooperative interaction between social or ethnic groups, or an improvement of living conditions of newcomers.

Of course, the discerned levels are analytical devices, tools to unravel the accumulation of interactions and entanglements of individuals. The processes which we identify on these three levels, differ in the first place in character because we look at them from different vantage points in terms of scale and historical depth, use different concepts, and refer to different data sources for evidence. Processes we identify on the micro, median and macro levels are not mutually independent. They also transgress the boundaries we have drawn around our locus of research, and which are therefore not closed systems. This is the case with processes on all three levels. Besides being multidimensional, the chains of interdependency are, socially and spatially, extensive. This is why processes at the macro level – in their mutual relationship with processes on other levels – often remain hidden for actors in society, and outcomes of possible causalities appear unforeseen, arbitrary and anonymous. Actions might be intentional in their own right, but often aim at a different resultant than the one that eventually comes into being. In this sense, processes develop independent of motives and interests. We should however keep in mind that the independence of ‘higher level’ processes is relative to the omnipresent unequal power balance between groups. The question rather is how much leeway exists for the development of deviant social relationships that run counter to the dominant institutional patterns of the ‘system’ (see Lockwood 1963:251). If there is room (spatially or otherwise) for behavioural patterns that are seen to be ‘non-standard’ or even conflicting, the next question is, how well do local groups with vested interests in the maintenance of the social order succeed in coping with the strain that arises because of this, to their eyes, incompatible behaviour. In his 1994 reappraisal of his famous ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries’ statement, Frederick Barth contends that there is a multitude of processes which shape ‘arenas of convergence’ in which people organise or associate collectively, based on an idea of shared values. These arenas involve building and maintaining boundaries through symbols of identity. He discusses situations where differences between groups become critical in their adaptation to a particular environment, and the role of states, influencing the development of ethnic distinctions and group identity (Barth 1994: 16-20). This symbolic behaviour, which can be situated at the micro and median levels, often refers to other spaces than the one in which it is acted out. To the symbolic-behavioural and identificational side of what have been called ‘decentred attachments’ (Vertovec 1999) and ‘heterolocalism’ (Zelinski and Lee 1998) we will come back below.

One more thing should be said about the articulation of the different levels in our analysis. Immigrant integration is often seen as the resultant of the interplay between structural factors in the receiving society (‘structure of opportunity’, ‘allocation processes’) and purposive behaviour of immigrants (informed by ‘cultural’ characteristics, especially when they are referred to as a group, or ethnic category). When focusing on the interchange of processes on different levels, it is inevitable that we combine concepts that refer to these different vantage points. We should however be careful not to assign volitional, or ‘culture-inspired’ concepts only for understanding the behaviour, position and orientation of (relative) newcomers in our societies, and reserve the more structural-processual terms for everything immigrants and their offspring encounter in ‘the receiving society’.

The often extended and tight networks of immigrants, for instance, generate ‘domestic’ structures of constraint and opportunity that cannot be conceived of as purposive behaviour, or as consolidated by cultural transmission only. On the other hand, the ideological dimension of large-scale processes

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11 As social relationships are implicit in material conditions – a wear-proof Marxian doctrine - some groups prevail over others concerning influence over material means of production, organisation and violence (Lockwood 1963).
within the local and national society, as well as of global processes, should not be disregarded (Lindo 1995).

We will now progress to the discussion of the four dimensions. We take culture to refer to the acquisition, development, and mutual transmission of knowledge and competences, and the degree to, and way in which these are variably distributed in the social environment under study. This raises immediately the question what knowledge is regarded as essential, and necessary for adequately and successfully interacting in society. Here the problem of definitional power makes its appearance, which is of course related to the issue of power (a relational notion par excellence) in the other dimensions. As highlighted above, we should also be aware of the fact that extra-local institutional developments, events, relationships and identifications can play a crucial role. This is why, in our actual analyses, we should not just refrain from using the concept of integration, but likewise its composite derivatives ‘system integration’ or ‘systemic integration’. These latter concepts should merely point out that we research interdependencies and other relational issues in a certain social environment, and not reify any system-like whole. Culturation is emphatically not restricted to the process of acceptance of practices that brings one ahead in the world; culturation refers in equal measure to the borrowing of practices that commonly are seen as, for instance, anti-social, unhealthy or detrimental to upward mobility.12 Neither should it be conceived as a taking-over of complete behavioural or ideational codes. Often bits and pieces are mutually borrowed and reworked in a creative way, to produce a certain consistency with ‘traditional’ patterns, thus becoming transformed in the process into something different from either the borrowing or the lending ‘culture’.

Placement we define to refer to the process of occupying different positions in society, and of gaining, maintaining, defending or loosing access to resources that are relevant for the position of an individual or a group, especially on the substantive domains of education, income, housing, mobility and health. Although these domains are generally regarded as more ‘objective’ and substantial as, for instance, knowledge, communicative skills or positions concerning identification and representation, the issue of definitional power plays nonetheless an important role here as well. Concentration and segregation processes seem a case in point. The attractiveness of certain parts of the city to live in above others, or particular schools to send your children to in comparison to others, is of course related to the quality of dwellings, or the relative excellence or inferiority of institutions of education. Nevertheless, the reputation of neighbourhoods and schools in most large European cities has become to a greater or lesser extent dependent on the composition of the population of residents or pupils in terms of ethnic background.

An instance concerning a specific placement variable that has not been given much attention13, is of great importance when concentrating on a concrete social environment as locus of analysis. This is the possibility for (groups of) actors to access various resources that are, in their nature, to a greater or lesser degree spatially dispersed within the ecological space under study.14 The spatial constellation (the mutual proximity or distance) of relevant resources conditions its access. We propose to regard it as a resource in itself (albeit a relational one) as its quality is obviously variable. Geographical placement, as we propose to call it, has two derivatives, geographical mobility and geographical proximity, which can both be regarded as resources as well. The ability to access equally easily housing, work,

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14 Some resources might even be positioned outside the spatial unit of research, which is almost never a closed systemic whole.
education, health and leisure facilities – to name but some of the most important resources - demands the possibility to overcome the obstacle of the geographical dispersion of these resources, or to defend their accessibility, by creatively combining the ‘assisting’ resources of proximity and mobility. The possibility to do so successfully is of course dependent on the often unequal power balance within the existing interdependencies between individuals and groups of people, and their differing influence in various socio-economic and political institutions. The quality of the institutions that give access to resources as education, or health, obviously vary. The unequal distribution of the resource of geographical placement among groups of urban populations in Europe\textsuperscript{15} should not only be measured by mobility and proximity indices, but of course also by the quality of the institutions that are ‘spatially available’ to offer the relevant resources.

\textit{Interaction} is a third dimension, and obviously connected to the others. The relational character of this dimension is evident. We can discern many different kinds: in terms of intensity, multi- or single-strandedness, positive versus negative emotive content, institutional context, social environment, formal or informal communication, intra- versus inter-group character, individual opposed to collective exchanges, gender make-up, and contacts across or within generations. Interaction has many sides, and space is lacking to highlight all relevant aspects. We would like to mention here, as a category, interaction across different social or ethnic groups in the framework of competition over access to resources. To what degree is social closure taking place at the local level, and what form does it take? Do certain groups attempt to form monopolies, or at least attempt to restrict the open competition for resources? Which groups are affected in their social and economic opportunities? The use of symbolic capital is essential in entanglements with an unequal power balance, for dominant and subordinate groups alike. Symbols are a free-flowing resource, they have been called a weapon of the weak, but the influence of imagery of dominant groups and institutions is formidable. We should, however, not forget, that interaction in which a local population is involved, is not confined to the particular urban spaces on which our comparative inquiries focus. Indigenous and newcomers alike often develop, formally and informally, significant relationships with others outside research contexts, and the impact of these relationships should be taken into consideration.

\textit{Identification} as a dimension of the development of interdependencies within a certain social environment has to be regarded not only as an act of self-ascription, but of other-ascription as well. It comprises acts and feelings of belonging besides representational processes and mutual stereotyping, and has individual as well as collective aspects. Having broadened the scope of the dimension in this way, we will have to take into account the public discourses on ‘integration’ that prevail locally, and which might have become to constitute a more or less dominant part of the ‘local identity’, as Matthieu Giroud in fact could observe for a part of the greater urban area of Grenoble. However, underneath the dominant public imagery of cosmopolitan openness in which the area and its local authorities take pride, Giroud detected negative views, concerning especially the northern African local population (Giroud 2004). Such negative views could be instances of a discourse of closure, which accompany attempts to, more or less, restrict the open competition for resources on the local level, and could even be an indication of efforts of certain groups to form monopolies or to defend niches.\textsuperscript{16} In this respect, it is important that we make the connection with a dimension treated earlier, and point to the symbolic manifestations of collective and individual

\textsuperscript{15} See for examples in different cities in France: Asselin et al. (2004).

\textsuperscript{16} The control or domination of local resources (be it economic niches, social privileges or public spaces) is not a matter of contention between indigenous inhabitants and those of immigrant origin alone; Giroud for instance mentions the struggle over public space between Tunesians and more recent Algerian immigrants, and its accompanying vernacular, in a suburb of Grenoble (Giroud 2004: 5).
interaction. The relations between status and power groups of all kind, cannot be comprehended without giving attention to the struggle over symbolic capital. Symbolic behaviour and power relationships are mutually and dynamically interrelated (see Cohen 1976). This is broadly accepted when it refers to processes of other-ascription of minorities by dominant groups in society, but processes of collective self-ascription can equally be regarded as (often defensive, but nonetheless creative) moves in the power game. Symbolic behaviour can be largely political, attendant on strategies towards a collective goal. However, most often it can be assumed to serve several purposes simultaneously. Identity formation, or the ‘negotiation’ of identity as it stylishly is called, is often studied in relation to music consumption, clothing, or leisure styles in general. Çaglar, writing on young people of Turkish origin in Berlin, establishes that they identify not only, or not even predominantly, with ‘Turkish culture’ in general, but especially, across urban and ethnic space, with cosmopolitan practices in cities like Istanbul, but also their home town Berlin. Talking to Çaglar, a customer in a cosmopolitan Turkish bar in trendy downtown Berlin (not in Kreuzberg!) confided that, in that particular place, he felt like he was ‘…in Istanbul, Berlin, Europe and New York at one and the same time’ (2001: 609). Apart from the enjoyment people derive from leisure activities and the associated images they cherish and exhibit, it is obvious that the latter are a statement towards outsiders as well. These statements may underline social boundaries and help maintain or encourage entrenchment of groups with specified behavioural patterns in particular social spaces, but they may also generate inclusion of outsiders (people of non-Turkish origin in this instance) at specified ‘arenas of convergence’ (cosmopolitan-Turkish nightlife), while simultaneously accentuating, and visualising in a dynamic (creolising) and acceptable (downplayed) way, the presence of newcomers (young people of Turkish descent) in spaces that used to be self-evidently monopolised by the dominant societal strata (‘downtown’ in former West Berlin). So, symbolic behaviour in entanglements between individuals and groups in urban spaces expresses itself in many different ‘figures of speech’, and may have different outcomes for these entanglements.

All kinds of hypotheses can be derived from considering relations between the different levels and dimensions discussed above. Esser, for instance, sees culturation as a precondition for placement, while interaction acquires its character as a consequence of placement (Esser 2001:16-17). However attractive and commonsense such general assumptions may seem when thinking of particular instances, it is not difficult to find examples that contradict them. As we will not propose any such de-contextualised theories or hypotheses here, we will not presuppose any causal relationships between the dimensions.

For research on these different dimensions, these concepts need further fine-tuning and sub-categorisation, as for instance Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have convincingly argued for the concept of identity. In this process, we should however be aware that such differentiations and nuances within one dimension, in their turn blur the distinctions between the larger categories, as becomes clear when we consider Brubaker’s subcategories ‘identification’, ‘self-understanding’ and ‘groupness’. When we take stock of all the different possibilities and combinations, we can well ask ourselves if the concept of integration, defined as the process of being merged with all the core institutions of, and primary relations in society, is such a practicable yardstick in research. A more fruitful point of departure is ‘…to think of the relationship between ‘them’ and ‘us’ in terms of a continuum, where the relationship between ethnic category and pattern of association varies from one dimension of social life to another’ (Waldinger 2003). An open question is then, to which extent we can observe relationships between positions taken up on the different social fields, regarding the different dimensions we have identified, and of what character they are. Many variables are in play here, and we should make the ones explicit that are related most to the subject matter of our cluster.
Integration in the context of the subject matter of our cluster seems to depict a rather straightforward meaning. Housing, education and health are situated above all in the ‘placement’ dimension, and do not concern the other dimensions to that degree, one might be inclined to think. However, we hope that the above has made plausible that, pertaining to our central themes, a myriad of possibilities are available to explore the interrelationships and entanglements between the proposed dimensions and process levels in a contextualised and comparative perspective. To summarise, in our research we should distinguish between several dimensions of ‘integration’ as for instance exemplified above. Then we should make these concepts operational for the different fields on which we think to make inquiries in terms of one of the dimensions. Also, we should be clear and sensitive in considering the different process levels: 1) purposive behaviour of individuals; 2) collective behaviour between and within formal and informal groups, including the development or maintenance of role behaviour and institutions 17; and 3) the ‘invisible hand’ of institutional developments that often transgress the horizons of the life world of individuals and face-to-face groups. In the course of our analyses, we should keep the ecological, relational focus in mind. We should always realise that any findings pertaining to the inter-linkages between individuals and collectivities - the merging, or the carving out, of different institutions and representations, cases of individual mobility and collective mobilisation, the closure or opening up of offices, niches and privileges - are the result of an interactive process between actors and agencies on the different analytical levels. In the last instance, it always concerns interaction between individuals; among immigrants and their descendants, among the established, and between immigrants and their children at the one hand, and those that claim indigenous origins in the social environment under study. As regards to all these processes, we should be sensitive to the imbalance in terms of power and influence that characterises many of the interdependencies on the different levels. As regards to the ‘outcomes’ we will observe, we should be aware that a convergence of orientations does not necessarily entail ‘integration’, nor can every form of segregation or even ethnic stratification be seen as an indicator that a society is disintegrating.

Focusing on spaces as the locus of developing interdependencies, we should try to conceptualise the issues for inquiry in processual terms. What form does the integration process of the social life of individuals and groups take in the different spaces under investigation? Can a movement towards a blurring of social boundaries be observed, and if so, under which conditions and in which social fields is this taking place? Once again, our focus of research should not be any category or group of people, but the relations of interdependence between individuals and groups, and their development over time. We should be attentive in particular to the shifting asymmetrical power balances between groups and individuals. These figurations (to lend a term of the sociologist Norbert Elias) are constellations of integration of social life as can be observed in a territorial space 18.

As immigration in some countries is a more recent phenomenon than in others, local situations in different countries can be expected to differ in terms of the time in which various interdependencies within and between groups, and their concomitant behavioural patterns and attitudes, have been allowed to take shape. In some spaces, the development of a complex of entanglements in different dimensions of social life - be it the social position of (groups of) actors, the skills they exhibit in fulfilling the roles that are expected of them in these positions, the actual interaction that results from the fulfilment of these roles, and the identification of

17 Following Lockwood, we could call this ‘normative integration’ (1963).
18 However, as we have underlined earlier, social life in a certain territorial space cannot be regarded as a closed social system.
individuals ands groups and the representations that are mutually formed - runs to a history of several decades. In these cases, we should be prepared to encounter a considerable variety of outcomes. In locations where mutual contacts, of whatever form, are of very recent date, patterned (role) behaviour and mutual representations that might guide relations between indigenous inhabitants and newcomers have just started to develop.


& T. Sunier (ed.) *De-essentializing Post-Migration Ethnicity: Cohesion, Commitments, Comparison*, 144-164. Amsterdam: SISWO/IMES.


