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Immigrant Integration as a Two-Way Process: Translating Theory into Practice

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Abstract

Integration as concept is becoming contested. Simultaneously, there is an increasing focus on the role of the receiving society for achieving a higher degree of integration of immigrants. This paper investigates whether the policy aim of viewing integration as a “two-way process” is being translated into practice, based on 15 interviews with integration stakeholders in Barcelona and Stockholm. The conclusion is that though there is awareness among key actors as policy-makers, NGOs and municipal services, in practice integration processes are hampered both by structural factors as unemployment and labor market discrimination, and a lack of everyday inter-ethnic contacts on equal terms.

Keywords

Integration, Integration policies, Policy processes, Immigrant participation, Ethnic discrimination

Author's biographical note

Zenia Hellgren completed her PhD in Sociology at Stockholm University in 2012. She currently works as postdoctoral researcher in two international research projects, on migrant domestic workers (within the EU FP7 project FamiliesAndSocieties) and integration, respectively. Since February 2014, Zenia is visiting scholar at GRITIM, Pompeu Fabra, and currently lecturer at the course “The Welfare State and Public Policies” within the Master in Immigration Management program. Zenia has participated in several other research projects during her doctoral studies and after, and been active as teacher and lecturer at the undergraduate and Master levels at Stockholm University. She is also the author, co-author and co-editor of numerous international publications and conference presentations. Her most recent publications are the following:

Hellgren, Z. (2015): “Stakeholders between States, Markets and Precarious Migrant Workers. Agendas and Discourses on the Private Domestic/Care Services Sector in Spain and Sweden”. Forthcoming in *Social Politics* during 2015, in a special issue on “Policies, Politics, and the Political Economy of Migration and Care.”

Hellgren, Z. (2014): “Negotiating the Boundaries of Social Membership. Undocumented Migrant Claims-Making in Sweden and Spain”, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 40 (7-8): 1175-1191.H55

1. Introduction¹

Integration as concept is becoming contested both in policy-making and in academia. There is an increasing focus on the role of the receiving society for achieving a higher degree of integration of immigrants, both among policymakers and scholars. Some explicitly place the weight of the responsibility for integration on the majority society (e.g. Penninx and Garcés Mascareñas, 2014), while others state that integration is increasingly being considered a “two-way process” whereby both ethnic minorities and the autochthonous majority are expected to adapt to each other and create new, intercultural basis for mutual identification and solidarity (e.g. Zapata-Barrero, 2012).

Simultaneously, integration of immigrated ethnic minorities is a major concern across European immigration countries, many of which have experienced riots among second generation immigrant youth in marginalized housing areas, heated debates on the “integration failure”, and the rise of anti-immigrant right wing parties in elections over the past years. There is also recognition that ethnic discrimination affects immigrants’ chances to participate on equal terms (Penninx and Garcés Mascareñas, 2014). At the EU level, integration is a top political priority, and the General Directorate of Legal and Internal Affairs has defined the Common basic principles of integration, where integration -- in accordance with the apparent mainstreaming of this perspective throughout Europe – is described as “a dynamic two-way process” characterized by mutual adaptation between immigrants and the majority population. Employment, knowledge of the receiving country’s language and culture, equal access to goods and services, and political participation are highlighted as central areas when integration policies are formulated within the EU (Wiesbrock, 2013).

To define ‘integration’ is a complex and potentially politically contentious task. The ongoing European research project INTERACT defines the integration of immigrants as ‘*allowing them* to participate in the host society at the same level as natives’. The unequal power relation between immigrants and ethnic majority is underlined, with the

¹ This paper is based on findings from the ongoing research project “Immigrants’ perceptions on integration in two institutional frameworks, Sweden and Spain”, directed by Zenia Hellgren and funded by the foundation *Anna Ahlströms och Ellen Terserus stiftelse*, Stockholm University.

consequence that ‘the receiving society, its institutional structure and its reaction to newcomers are consequently far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves’ (Pasetti, 2014). This very formulation implicitly suggests that boundaries drawn by the ethnic majority are hindering integration to take place. In this paper, I assume that two dimensions are particularly important for the success of integration processes:

- 1) structures at different levels in society that may hinder or facilitate integration;
- 2) absence or existence of interethnic contacts in different arenas (neighborhoods, workplaces etc.)

How, then, can we empirically investigate whether new standpoints regarding successful integration processes are actually being translated into practice? Penninx (e.g. 2008; 2014) calls for more empirical research on *de facto* integration rather than integration policies. This can be done either by looking at *outcomes* or *processes*; my paper will focus on the latter dimension.

Before I proceed to describe my purpose and methodological considerations, I wish to highlight that there are at least two important aspects to bear in mind when studying integration processes, though I will not develop them further in this context. Migration is increasingly being understood as a circular process (Vertovec, 2007; McLoughlin and Münz, 2011). In a globally interconnected world with constantly changing, dynamic and insecure labor markets, transnational life projects become more common. There has already been a shift from the view on the immigrant as a *guest* worker, to a general recognition of immigration as a permanent feature of European societies (Schierup et al., 2006). Now, the permanent character of immigration is partially being altered by the ‘resurrection of the guest worker’ (*my definition*) in the shape of –often informal– migration to work in low wage sectors across Western countries (e.g. Bommers, 2004). These migrants often maintain close links with the country of origin; the main motive behind the migration project is often to send remittances back home.² Transnational migrants may well find themselves in a situation of ‘prolonged temporariness’, constantly mobile and ready to move where jobs are offered, and plans to return home

² Mothers leaving their children under the custody of other kin to work in domestic/care sectors in Europe is a topic that has been explored in recent research, within the framework of an increased interest in links between migration and care (e.g. Salazar Parreñas, 2001).

with capital may be hampered by insufficient earnings from precarious work in Europe. This reality is tangible in Spain, where unemployment among migrants has grown dramatically in the wake of the financial crisis, and points to another aspect of the instability of the migrant situation with implications for integration processes: the often fragile legal statuses of immigrants with short-term residence permits dependent on job contracts for renewal (Rodríguez, interview 2014). How to understand ‘integration’ in an increasingly mobile world is indeed a challenge, but here I shall not go any further than to highlight the need for more research on this topic.

Another central aspect of integration relates to the classical dividing line between a multiculturalist and a liberal-egalitarian perspective, assuming that there is an inherent contradiction concerning whether coexistence in ethnically plural societies should be based on ethnic minority groups’ rights to live in accordance with their cultural or religious traditions, or interpreted as equality of opportunities within a liberal framework (e.g. Banting and Kymlicka, 2006; Kymlicka, 1995; Barry, 2001). I would argue that the very concept of ‘integration’ presupposes a common societal framework; shared institutions, work places, etc. If one can say that these are two parallel debates – the multiculturalism debate that focuses on cultural particularity, and the liberal debate concerned with participation on equal terms—in this paper I position myself within the latter. This does neither imply negligence regarding the challenges inherent in large cultural differences, nor denying anyone the right to maintain cultural practices and identities.

1.1. Purpose and Methodological Considerations

My aim with this paper is to take the debate on integration as a two-way process further by investigating if and how this perspective is being translated into practice in two European immigration countries, Sweden and Spain, or more specifically, in Stockholm and Barcelona. Integration policies are formulated at the macro level, but practical integration work is carried out locally. Therefore, the city level, or even the neighborhood, becomes important. When asking how policy is translated into practice, this may thus vary significantly between different areas of a country or a region (Gebhardt, 2014).

I ask the following research question:

- How is the perspective on integration as a two-way process approached by integration actors (policy-makers, integration/anti-racist NGOs and trade unions) in Barcelona and Stockholm, respectively?

In order to investigate this, I have studied integration policies, agendas and discourses in both countries, using both written sources as policy documents and 15 interviews with stakeholders involved in the integration process as policy-makers, NGOs, ethnic organizations and trade unions performed in Stockholm and Barcelona. These interviews form part of my ongoing research project on integration processes and immigrants' perceptions on integration in Sweden and Spain. In the project, I conduct two qualitative case studies with a largely inductive approach. Indeed, qualitative case studies are generally inductive by definition (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (1989), the case study as research method is particularly adequate when research questions are formulated in terms of 'how?' and 'why?'. I use multiple sources of evidence, although emphasis lies on the interviews (all in all, I will conduct 80 interviews with immigrants and integration stakeholders). In defining my methodology, I have been inspired by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) classical work on grounded theory, which allows for the use of a theoretical framework to a far greater extent than that of other grounded theory researchers like Glaser (1998). To generate a body of empirical material, the researcher needs to start by defining the sampling method(s). According to grounded theory, the selection of what and whom to study should be made using *theoretical sampling*; that is, choosing the objects that are most relevant for developing the theory. This process is initially more explorative and becomes more clearly defined as the project progresses, for instance following the pattern: "sampling > interview > analysis > coding > sampling > improved interviews, etc." (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Yin (1989) also defines the main purpose of the selection as choosing theoretically interesting cases.

Based on these insights on theoretical sampling, I chose the respondents most likely to provide information of interest for developing my theoretical framework. The purpose, to investigate how the perspective on integration as a two-way process *is approached by integration actors* in Stockholm and Barcelona also set the basic requirement that the respondents should be key practitioners representing organizations involved in

integration work in these cities. From my doctoral work, I already had some information about central actors within the field of immigration and integration in each city. I started by contacting these actors –within policy-making and trade unions—and simultaneously talked to several NGOs and ethnic organizations to define which groups were most relevant for my purpose. This paper is based on preliminary findings as I am still performing the empirical work related to my research project, and more interviews will be conducted (particularly with ethnic organizations in Barcelona).

The interviews had an informative purpose and were unstructured, given my inductive approach and interest in finding out what views and practices on integration these actors apply without having defined beforehand what dimensions might be of particular relevance. I had however defined themes to guide them and asked them to talk about the following concepts: integration, reciprocity in integration processes, challenges and opportunities, belonging/national identity and racism/discrimination. I also explicitly asked if and how the perspective on integration as a two-way process is being applied in practice. The full transcripts were then coded and analyzed in Dedoose, an online software for qualitative and mixed-methods analysis.

In the following section, I will first situate the integration concept theoretically, with emphasis on obstacles for participation on equal terms. I will then proceed to the empirically grounded section on how integration policies are translated into practical work, starting with data that illustrates the gap between policies and outcomes in the area of integration politics.

2. Integration and the Boundaries of Belonging

I have already positioned my approach to the study of integration as departing from a liberal-egalitarian understanding of the multiethnic society. Assuming that integration ultimately is a question of equality of opportunities – and ideally, outcomes – I consider it necessary to assume a shared framework defined by the liberal, democratic welfare state within which people from different ethnic backgrounds aspire at participation and belonging (e.g. Barry 2001). I share Penninx and Garcés Mascareñas' (2014) definition of integration as *the process of becoming an accepted part of society*. This social change is produced as people with diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds interact, and affects all parties involved; ethnic minorities and the national majority. Penninx and Garcés

Mascareñas (2014) argue that the receiving society, as the main party defining the rules and norms for this interaction, may facilitate or impede the integration process depending on factors as how the receiving society's institutions work, as well as the attitudes of the majority population towards immigration and ethnic pluralism.

The sense of belonging appears essential to 'integration', understood as becoming a fully accepted part of society. Lödén (2008) poses two crucial questions to describe the integration of young people of immigrant descent: 'What makes young immigrants identify with the country where they live?' and 'To what extent is the majority population prepared to let them do that?' He suggests that national identity, as a means for integration, depends on this national identity being perceived as inclusive by both immigrants and by the native population. It also requires that those already identifying with the nation-state are prepared to let those willing to identify do so. To study integration processes, the analysis of national identities thus becomes relevant, as well as applying a bilateral view on belonging – it is hardly possible to experience belonging if one is not *allowed to belong* (ibid).

The boundaries of belonging that immigrants face may be expressed in myriad ways. In a country like Spain, where irregular immigration and the granting of short-term residence permits is common, legal boundaries between different categories of citizens, legal residents and undocumented migrants are perceived as thresholds for integration (Serra, Rodríguez, Rendón, interviews 2014). At another level, there are invisible boundaries of exclusion that many immigrants and citizens of immigrant descent face in European societies. Subtle forms of non-acceptance may translate into patterns of inequality at the macro level. Lamont and Molnár (2002: 168-169) describe the relationship between social and symbolic boundaries with the following words: "Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities". They also claim that only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon are they able to constrain the patterns of social interaction in significant ways. This is where the question of ethnic discrimination and (subtle, everyday) racism becomes essential in the debate on integration. It affects both social and individual dimensions: access to housing and employment, self-esteem and willingness to identify with the nation-state; motivation to 'integrate', etc. When national identity is perceived

as exclusive, the consequences of ‘not being allowed to belong’ may be serious. Symbolic boundaries turn into social boundaries with, for instance, economic effects. Poverty among ethnic minorities may be viewed as a sign of incomplete or failed integration, and points at the intersection between class and ethnicity (Arrighi, 2007).

Balibar (1991) has argued that class is more relevant for who is perceived as an immigrant than race or ethnicity. However, reversely, one may also argue that being defined as an ‘immigrant’, based on ethno-racial stereotyping, cements one’s position in the lower social strata of society. The most concrete example of ‘denied belonging’ may be expressed in terms of labor market discrimination – immigrants not getting employment, or far below their qualifications, because of their origin. Such boundaries of belonging impede integration in socio-economic terms and cement social exclusion in ethnic/racial terms. A recent study by Telles (2014) on ethno-racial classification, inequality and discrimination in Latin America shows that economic and social inequalities are at least as much related to skin color as ethnic identification. Status hierarchies with roots in colonialism operate worldwide based on the underlying racist logics of ‘the more light-skinned, the better’ affecting people’s opportunities in society and, ultimately, integration processes where immigrants are stratified based on ‘differentness’ in terms of skin color, ethnic culture and/or religion.

‘Race’ as concept has long been taboo in European discourse, assuming that as there is only one human race biologically speaking, and that highlighting differences in terms of race would be destructive and in itself reflect racist classifications. However, claims-making actors in Sweden who perceive themselves as ‘racialized’ have started to advocate for the reintroduction of ‘race’ in debates about inequality between people of different ethnic origins, as they argue that skin color is the most important marker of differential treatment in society and explains the particular disadvantage of the Afro-Swedish community (Afrofobi report 2014, Sabuni, interview 2014). Based on such statements, as well as preliminary findings from interviews with immigrants of different ethno-cultural descent (African, Muslim, Latin-American and Chinese) that I am currently performing in Sweden and Spain, I argue that attitudes toward people depending on their skin color need to be included in the analysis of (real and potential) obstacles for integration.

The intersection between ‘race’ and class in the (hampered) integration process is highlighted by Zakia Khan, a representative of the Swedish immigrant women’s organization Interfem, which informs recruiters about ethnic discrimination and advocates for merit-based recruitment. As many other activists, she rejects the concept of integration and rather speaks of obstacles for participation:

‘I feel that the whole idea [of integration] is outdated. The main problem from my point of view is that the class dimension is completely absent from the integration debate in Sweden. People don’t see that so much is about money and resources. There are no ways to take part. The white majority doesn’t live in the suburbs because they have enough money to buy houses, and someone who is unemployed and lives in a suburb just has no way out, no job, no money, and is discriminated against by tenants... That is the main obstacle. We prefer to talk of inclusion rather than integration.’ *Zakia Khan interview 2014*

Applying the perspective that integration ought to be a two-way process entails looking at obstacles for immigrants’ participation on equal terms among both immigrant groups and the ethnic majority. At the immigrants’ end, factors as sufficient language skills and education are doubtlessly significant to gain access; at the side of the majority society, discriminatory practices may block such access. In the following section, I will look at agendas and practical work on integration by different stakeholders involved in this process in Stockholm and Barcelona. The city –and sometimes even the neighborhood– is a highly relevant context as this is both where integration aims (formulated at the national or regional level) are translated into practice, and where processes of spontaneous interaction between people of different ethnic backgrounds take place or not (Holston and Appadurai, 1999).

3. To Bridge the Gap: Translating Integration Policy into Practice

Garcés Mascareñas and Penninx (2014) state that ‘the study of policies is fundamentally different from the study and understanding of the processes that such policies aim at.’ This point is perhaps particularly accurate when the study object is integration policies, processes and outcomes. To measure ‘how integrated’ an immigration country is a difficult, if at all possible, task. One may start by comparing the integration politics applied with the actual outcomes in terms of immigrants’ position on the labor and

housing markets, poverty, participation in political and cultural life, etc. The integration index MIPEX is currently the most established indicator on integration, comparing policies in 37 immigration countries across the world, including all EU member states (www.mipex.eu, October 2014). It is however only a measure of integration policies, and not the implementation or results of these policies (Wiesbrock, 2013).

Ambitious and extensive policies are no guarantee for actual integration (in this paper understood in the ideal case as a scenario where an individual's ethnic background is irrelevant for his or her position in society). Looking closer at the countries of interest for this study, Sweden and Spain, is illustrative. In Sweden, repeatedly ranked as number 1 in the world by MIPEX, numerous studies have stated that the gap between policy and practice is wide, which partly may be explained by widespread ethnic discrimination (e.g. Bursell, 2012; Burns et al., 2007, Hellgren, 2005). Also in Spain, recently ranked as number 8 by MIPEX (www.mipex.eu, March 2015), problems with marginalization of immigrants are big and growing as a result of the financial crisis that hit jobs sectors with large presence of migrant labor particularly hard (Rendón, Bosch, Rodríguez, Pulido, interviews 2014). According to Elena Sánchez, MIPEX 2015 Project Co-Director at CIDOB in Barcelona, they are currently elaborating methods to be able to also estimate outcomes, which would significantly improve the index as it would to a greater extent be a measure of actual integration, thus, the achievement of policy aims (Sánchez, conversation 2014). This change reflects recognition of the relevance to study outcomes in order to better understand how integration work may be improved.

Eurostat (2011) provides a thorough comparison of the integration outcomes of immigrants in all EU countries, considering four core areas: employment, education, social inclusion, and active citizenship. Elaborated within the framework of the Zaragoza Declaration from 2010, the objective is clearly formulated as to evaluate outcomes of policies, thus measuring actual integration. More areas than usually when integration is measured are included, for instance the share of employees who are overqualified for their jobs; self-employment rates³; language skills; experiences of discrimination and sense of belonging (ibid: 10-11). It is furthermore stated that

³ It is important note that the interpretation of self-employment as an indicator of integration is open to discussion, and the results should be analyzed very carefully taking into account the particular situation in the country concerned. For some migrants, self-employment may be seen as an escape from long periods of unemployment and from discrimination in the labor market (Eurostat, 2011: 90).

‘integration indicators need to show the social and economic situation of migrants (and their recent descendants) in relation to the overall population’ (ibid: 23).

It is widely agreed upon among policy-makers that the labor market is the one most important arena for immigrants’ integration and economic independence. If we, for instance, take a look at the unemployment rates of foreign-born aged 25-54, Sweden and Spain are among the eight EU countries with the largest gap compared with the native population. In Spain and Sweden, furthermore, this gap is particularly large for those born outside the EU -- only Belgium has a higher gap between the native and foreign-born population in this case (p 48-51). Integration, however, is not only about having a job, but what kind of job. High rates of labor market activity among immigrants may deviate attention from the fact that the large share of these jobs are low-skilled and that upwards mobility is rare (Carlson et al., 2012). Complementing the comparison of unemployment by looking at the measure of over-qualification rate in employment, we see that the gap between the native population and immigrants is large across Europe, and again, Spain and Sweden are among the countries where the gap is largest, particularly for those born outside the EU (ibid: 76). Immigrants’ position on the labor market is furthermore closely related to another key dimension of integration and social equality in multiethnic societies: the widespread poverty among immigrants. Both in Spain and Sweden, the risk of poverty among people born outside the EU is high⁴, and Sweden is among the EU countries where the gap compared with natives is largest (ibid).

To conclude, the problems with social inequality and exclusion affecting immigrants in Sweden and Spain (as in most other EU countries to a greater or lesser extent) are indeed a serious challenge for successful integration processes. If the emphasis of the responsibility for integration of immigrants increasingly is placed on the receiving society, it becomes central to look at obstacles impeding this process to take place successfully. As Penninx and Garcés Mascareñas (2014) point out, the mainstream into which immigrants are expected to merge is often not clearly defined. What is meant by integration? To function in society, have a job, to speak the language well? ‘To become

⁴ In Spain, the risk of poverty among those born outside the EU is 36%, compared with 33% in Sweden. The gap is however larger in Sweden, where 15% of the total population are at risk of poverty, compared with 22% in Spain (Eurostat, 2011: 170).

Swedish/Spanish’ some may say. Then, the complex task follows to define ‘Swedishness/Spanishness’, in the latter case further complicated by strong national minority identities. In the following, empirically based section, focus lies on whether and how actors involved in integration work at the city level in Barcelona and Stockholm translate the perspective on integration as a two-way process into practice.

3.1. Integration in Practice – The Case of Barcelona

a) Immigration Background and Current Situation: Spain and Catalonia

Immigration in Spain is overall a comparably recent phenomenon, and the country is considered a ‘new’ immigration country in a European perspective. The country started receiving increasing international immigration in the late 1980s, and from 2000, the country experienced a real immigration boom. By 2007, Spain received roughly half of all new migrants to Europe. Catalonia has been a main recipient of national immigration for most of the 20th century, and is the Spanish region with the largest share of foreign migrants followed by Madrid (Spanish government’s report, 2014). There is noticeable disagreement at the Catalan policy-making level with the national government in Madrid, not the least regarding current budget cuts for integration programs. Catalan immigration policy-makers underline how problematic it is for them not to be authorized to decide who enters their territory, but expected to integrate those who arrive (Bosch, interview 2014; Zincone et al., 2011: 301-312).

The rapid transformation of Spain into a major immigration country coincided with an expanding economy with a large demand for low-wage labor in sectors as construction, agriculture and service professions, and the application of lenient immigration policies. Immigration into Spain has furthermore to a great extent been irregular, and the systematic subsequent regularizations were adopted as ‘an irregular immigration model’ (Zincone et al., 2011: 294-302). The fact that immigration to Spain has mainly consisted of labor migrants who came to fill low-skilled positions that national workers rejected (Moreno and Bruquetas, 2011) makes it particularly vulnerable to recession and unemployment in these sectors. Currently, the country faces the typical integration challenges of all Western immigration countries, together with the growing

precariousness and marginalization caused by the financial crisis (Bosch, Rendón, Rodríguez, interviews 2014).

Parallel to continuous (though currently decreasing (www.ine.es, February 2015)) flows of –mainly irregular–migrants, there is an emerging second generation of immigrants. Xavier Bosch, head of the Immigration Secretariat at the regional Catalan government thinks that integration in Catalonia works well despite economic hardship among many immigrants. He also states that there are no resources to finance integration projects now; this is much left in the hands of civil society actors and, ultimately, everyday contacts between people of different ethnic origins. Bosch also adds that it is the second generation that determines ‘whether integration has failed or succeeded’ (Bosch, interview 2014).

A recent study of second generation immigrants in Spain (Aparicio and Portes, 2014) shows that the number of second-generation children who feel Spanish has increased from thirty percent in 2008 to fifty in 2012, and the rate is eighty percent among children of immigrant descent born in Spain. Simultaneously, less than ten percent of immigrant children claim to have felt discriminated against. In contrast to the perceived belonging, however, are the harsher economic realities. Though a majority of second-generation immigrants want to study at the university, fewer will be able to do so due to insufficient family incomes. The report lends support to the assumption that economic disadvantage, seriously aggravated by the financial crisis, is the main problem for (non-Western) immigrants in Spain and a major obstacle for integration. This crude reality significantly hampers the possibilities to fulfill costly educational projects (which may be compared with Sweden, where universities are free of charge), and reflects the economic dimension of integration.

Before shifting focus from the integration challenges in Spain overall, to the practical integration work performed by multiple actors at the local level in Barcelona, it is relevant to say a few words about ‘Catalanism’ and the role this strongly pronounced national identity plays in integration processes.

b) “Catalanism”: multilevel governance and integration

Integration of immigrants in countries with multilevel governance structures encounters specific challenges, which is striking in the case of Spain/Catalonia. Catalan regional autonomy after the end of Franco's authoritarian regime in 1975 is built upon a strong notion of Catalan language and culture. Zuber (2014) argues that Catalan "monoism" has marked regional integration politics, expecting integration to be based on the minority culture and language. She refers to two debates on integration in the Catalan parliament, in which immigration as such was welcomed by all participants of the debate, but the parties were concerned about how the language and culture into which immigrants are integrated and in which they are received should be defined, whether in Catalan, or in bilingual (Spanish and Catalan) terms. 'The key conflict in Catalonia when it comes to immigrant integration appears to be about defining the linguistic identity of the host community', Zuber claims (ibid).

Approved Catalan classes are compulsory for immigrants who apply for residence permits, and the importance of speaking Catalan for integration is emphasized by institutional actors (Bosch, García, interviews 2014): 'I think that integration in Catalonia in general is strongly related to the language. In the minds of people here, someone who speaks Catalan is integrated' (García, interview 2014). Simultaneous to nationalist linguistic politics that may be perceived as coercive by immigrants, Catalonia is also explicitly defined as pluralist and a 'country with a long tradition of integration that has grown economically and demographically through immigration' (Bosch, interview 2014). Though there is not enough empirical support to answer this for now, the case of Catalonia raises important questions about how the pronounced objective of interculturalism --which includes encouraging cross-cultural dialogue and challenging self-segregation tendencies within cultures-- harmonizes with nationalist politics (Catalan immigration plan, 2014). A strongly defined national culture may hypothetically serve as 'point of reference' for immigrants and thereby facilitate their integration -- and if it really would be enough to speak Catalan in order to be accepted as a full member of society, it ought to be considered a rather accessible membership-- but also operate exclusionary, as assimilation into 'our way of being' is expected.

c) Integration work in Barcelona

Any current analysis of immigration and integration in Spain will inevitably need to take the financial crisis into serious account. As discussed above, the economic dimension of integration becomes particularly salient in this context, with consequences as alarming unemployment rates in general and among immigrants in particular, and insufficient funds for integration projects (Rodríguez, Pulido, Bosch, Serra, interviews 2014). In the current scenario of continuing (though declining) and mainly irregular immigration, increasing poverty and exclusion, the focus on integration as a two-way process tends to become secondary in practice despite policy ambitions (Barcelona immigration plan 2012-2015). Several stakeholders describe the current situation as ‘stand-by’. Much fewer immigrants than expected are returning to their home countries, and both authorities and organizations as well as the immigrants themselves focus on short-term maintenance (Pulido, Rodríguez, Serra, Bosch, García, Saliba, interviews 2013-2014)⁵.

Yet, beyond the devastating effects of the crisis, policy-makers and other stakeholders involved in integration work in Barcelona, as NGOs, officials at municipal immigrant reception offices and trade unions, share the view that the myriad local efforts performed everyday by a wide range of voluntary grassroots actors (neighbor associations, local social centers, etc.) –ranging from basic assistance as food and housing to anti-racist campaigns and diverse initiatives to facilitate multiethnic coexistence and interaction in the local neighborhood – play a fundamental role to, in the words of Xavier Bosch, head of the Catalan regional government’s immigration office: “avoid a humanitarian catastrophe” (Bosch, Pulido, Rodríguez, Serra, García, interviews, 2014).

Magda García, researcher at the Catalan Government’s Immigration Secretariat, sees the risk with integration work that largely relies on local, voluntary efforts, but also believes that such work may be the most efficient in practice. Beyond integration policies and projects, both Bosch and García emphasize the importance of “Mediterranean life-style” for integration processes to take shape in practice. The spontaneous mixing of people in streets and squares is in their view key in understanding why Barcelona is not experiencing more serious problems with interethnic relations, comparable to those in many other large European cities:

⁵ This statement is further supported by 30 migrant interviews that I conducted in Barcelona in relation to an ongoing research project: *FamiliesAndSocieties* (funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme).

‘I believe in less politics and more mixing. We want to promote an urban structure that facilitates physical contact, the melting pot... so that people are forced to enter into contact with each other. Barcelona has much fewer ghettos than other European cities.’ *Xavier Bosch, interview 2014*

‘An advantage here in Barcelona is that despite the crisis and poverty and all alarming details, there are no serious problems with racism and xenophobia. There is much solidarity, local social initiatives, many NGOs perform a fantastic work helping with basic things, so that immigrant children can eat healthy meals for instance. [...] We are surprised about the absence of social conflicts. Despite all problems here, at the micro level, between neighbors in the same building, there is a social contact that is missing in other countries. For instance, here you enter a bar or a bakery and people talk to each other. I think the fact that a person doesn’t have to feel alone, that helps a lot. The human side of it all, that is.’ *Magda García, interview 2014*

Barcelona is however, naturally, not exempt from problems with racism and discrimination. Guadalupe Pulido, head of the Anti-discrimination office in Barcelona, states that the majority of cases that appear at their desk concern discrimination based on origin. She claims that about seventy percent of the complaints are resolved, generally through mediation, though the ‘solution’ is more often an apology rather than concrete actions as somebody getting a job or a rental contract for an apartment that she or he was denied based on ethnicity. Pulido also states that the complaints have decreased significantly, which does not reflect any actual improvement but the fact that people at present are too concerned with basic survival to bother denouncing discrimination. Questions as discriminatory structures impeding immigrants to climb upwards on the labor market are not given much attention, as this concerns very few migrants while the large majority is struggling for basic subsistence (Pulido, interview 2014).

Gloria Rendón, in charge of the immigration reception office SAIER in Barcelona, highlights the problems with the kind of low-skilled immigration that Spain attracted during the years of growth. Immigrants were established in the bottom strata of society, which fostered a view on immigration as precarious. This, she claims, had detrimental effects for people’s attitudes towards immigrants and thereby for their integration (Rendón, interviews 2014).

‘Immigration in Spain has been completely linked to a precarious labor market, and I would say that the main challenge for the new generations is what to do to make them participate with equality of opportunities. Now, the crisis has come

between this development, there are no jobs...the whole integration process is pending on what happens with the crisis.’ *Gloria Rendón, interview 2014*

To break the link between immigration and precariousness is fundamental for a more positive view on immigrants, according to Xavier Bosch and Magda García at the Catalan immigration secretariat. They refer to high-skilled immigration to Canada and consider it a model of inspiration for Catalonia, but also claim that valuing the knowledge of immigrants in general would favor integration (interviews, 2014). All in all, integration actors at different levels in Barcelona coincide in defining the emerging second generation as crucial: its failure or success regarding labor market participation and life chances in general will reveal whether integration fails or succeeds, and the financial crisis poses additional challenges to this development (Rendón, Pulido, Rodríguez, Bosch, García, interviews 2014).

3.2. Integration in practice – the case of Stockholm

a) Immigration background and current situation: Sweden

Sweden turned into an immigration country through large-scale, regulated labor migration during the economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s, until the oil crisis in 1973 ended this era. Instead, asylum and family reunification became the main reasons for migration. The non-European share of the foreign-born population increased from seven to forty percent between 1970 and 2005 (DS report 2007:4 pp. 14). During these decades, immigration policies changed from the initial assimilation objective, to the explicitly multicultural perspective in the 1970s and 1980s, and subsequently towards a focus on integration. In 1997, immigration politics were renamed integration politics. Its proclaimed goals were to support immigrants’ socio-economic inclusion and independence within an ethnically pluralist framework. An essential difference compared to earlier immigration politics was the statement that integration also includes the native majority population. Anti-discrimination and anti-racism agendas were included in the integration political aims in 1997 (Swedish governmental report 1999).

However, the view on integration as reciprocal was not applied in the formulation of integration policies, either in 1997 or later. Södergran (2000: 4-19) considers this a crucial mistake that explains part of the failure of these politics; they were created *for*,

and not in collaboration *with*, the immigrants. This critique is shared by the Cooperation group for ethnic associations in Sweden (SIOS), who has advocated for an inclusion of the ‘ethnic voice’ in these policy-making processes for decades (Mijatovic, interviews 2004 and 2014). According to Södergran, the result was ‘a destructive division between ‘us’ and ‘them’’, which in her view increased the exclusion of immigrants. Södergran argues that combating ethnic discrimination and subordination is fundamental both for a more successful integration process and for Sweden as a democracy and welfare state (ibid).

During the last decade, Swedish integration policies have shifted towards a more pronounced focus on labor market participation, indeed always considered a key dimension of integration. In 2010, a new integration policy program was approved. The main difference compared with 1997 was that part of the responsibility for integration work was transferred from the municipal level to the national employment agencies, with the objective of finding work for newly arrived migrants as the main priority. Unlike several other EU countries, as Denmark and Germany, Swedish integration politics are non-coercive, and there are no specific requirements in terms of integration to be granted a long-term residence permit or citizenship. Swedish courses are free of charge and voluntary, however economic support may be relative to participation in ‘establishment programs’ governed by the national employment agencies (<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/25/44/76/d5908718.pdf>, March 2015).

According to the main Swedish trade union LO’s spokesperson in immigration matters, Thord Ingesson, ‘the government has given up on integration’. He states that integration work was more active and multifaceted a decade ago; LO had two people working fulltime with promoting integration 14 years ago, now they have nobody. Ingesson considers it paradoxical that integration is not considered a priority anymore, particularly concerning the success of the anti-immigrant party the Sweden Democrats, and just as anti-racist actors he believes that integration is ultimately a question of social justice (Sabuni, Khan, Ingesson, interviews 2014).

The Social democratic government in Sweden, which was elected in September 2014 after 8 years of Conservative rule, has recently abolished the Integration minister post with the ambition to ‘mainstream’ integration issues so that they will, ideally,

impregnate all policy-making processes. Simultaneously, it is made clear that Swedish integration politics emphasize labor market incorporation among newly arrived immigrants:

‘The Labor market department is in charge of establishment for newly arrived, and we consider work and education the most important components. Therefore our ambition is to create politics that facilitate the establishment of newly arrived on the Swedish labor market. Work makes it possible for people to provide for themselves, participate in society and create an independent life. That is the key for integration politics.’ *Natalie Sial, Secretary of the Swedish labor market minister Ylva Johansson (e-mail interview, November 2014)*

If integration is made equal to labor market participation, and simultaneously understood as a reciprocal process (SCB, 2005), it ought to be top priority to reveal and eliminate obstacles for labor market participation on equal terms. Consequently, the problems with discrimination of people because of their name, skin-color, religious or ethnic background are widely recognized among academics, policy-makers and civil society actors and increasingly framed as an obstacle for integration (Burns et al 2007; Bursell, 2012; Afrofobi report 2014). Parallel to growing anti-immigrant sentiments, a new wave of anti-racist actors has entered the Swedish media. They are people of immigrant descent, in their own words ”racialized”, who speak for themselves and demand the authority to produce discourses. All in all, the political and public debate on immigration, integration –and race—is becoming increasingly contentious in Sweden (e.g. Molina, Khan, Sabuni, interviews 2014).

In this context, it is important to state that discrimination is not necessarily based on any overt anti-immigrant sentiments. It is instead the subtle preference for ethnic (Swedish) homogeneity that seems to persist and create subtle patterns of everyday exclusion, not the least on the labor market, as employers often prefer hiring native Swedes (Wiesbrock, 2013). The perceptions on national identity in a given context are inevitably essential to reveal obstacles and opportunities for integration.

b) “Swedishness” and its subtle forms of exclusion

In contrast to Catalonia, there is no official definition of national identity in Swedish integration policies, merely a statement that everyone who comes to live in Sweden has the right to maintain his or her cultural identity (<https://www.informationsverige.se/Svenska/Samhalle/Samhallsorientering/Sidor/Den-svenska-integrationspolitiken.aspx>, March 2015). The question of *Swedishness* is taboo in public discourse; this type of terminology is generally only used by anti-immigrant actors as the members of the anti-immigrant party the Sweden Democrats. There is however a strongly rooted and widespread perception of Sweden as a tolerant, egalitarian and humanitarian country among the population that could be considered to constitute a kind of national identity (e.g. Hobson et al., 2007), which according to anti-racist actors hampers the recognition of problems with structural racism (Burns et al 2007). Furthermore, representatives of anti-racist and ethnic minority groups who define themselves as *racialized* state that integration is primarily hindered through the fact that people with a different skin color are never recognized as ‘Swedish’ by the ethnic majority, no matter how much they adopt ‘Swedish values’ and customs (Sabuni, Delgado, Molina, Khan, interviews 2014). Physical attributes as white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes are intimately linked to the common perception of Swedishness. Kitimbwa Sabuni, spokesperson of the Afro-Swedes’ national association, is strongly critical of the integration concept, and argues that this debate should instead be framed in terms of justice, and race, a discussion that is ‘completely absent in Sweden’:

‘The main problem is that people with a foreign background don’t feel that they belong here, that they may be kicked out if the Sweden Democrats would win the elections. They do not consider themselves a part of this society and the ethnic organizations’ agendas are marked by this fact. They may be grateful or angry or distance themselves from the majority, but they are always in an inferior position, they never feel that they have the right to take their place just like any citizen.’ *Kitimbwa Sabuni, interview March 2014*

This perception is shared by Cristian Delgado, the spokesperson for the Chilean organization in Sweden, who believes that no matter what he does or how long he lives in the country, he will never be seen as Swedish and therefore constantly questioned. He mentions an illustrative example: some years ago he achieved a decision-making position within his trade union, but had to leave it as he was accused by members for favoring other immigrants. Delgado also points out the negative consequences for integration as the increasing support for anti-immigrant politics in Sweden decrease the

willingness to identify with ‘Swedishness’ among the immigrant communities (Delgado, interview 2014).

Milinko Mijatovic, head of the Cooperation group for ethnic organizations in Sweden (SIOS) argues that the Swedish majority society ought to change in a ‘cosmopolitan’ direction for integration to work. He emphasizes the importance of strengthening the cultural identity and home language of immigrant groups, and advocates for their recognition as national minorities after about 30 years in the country. Valuing their language skills and promoting a view on immigrants as ‘consultants’, for instance establishing business contacts between Sweden and their home countries, would also be a way to increase the status of ‘non-Swedes’ overall and simultaneously form part of an ‘internationalization’ of the Swedish society that should be necessary in an open, multiethnic society who does not cling to a myth of ethnic homogeneity. The solution would thus be a modification of national identity rather than the incorporation of immigrants into a predefined notion of Swedishness (Mijatovic, interviews 2004 and 2014).

c) Integration work in Stockholm

When approaching the field of practical integration work in Stockholm, the image that appears is that of a multifaceted network of actors: integration organizations, consultants and NGOs. Both policy-makers and NGOs state that there has been an expansion in the ‘integration business’ with competition over public funding, but also an emergence of local initiatives with new approaches and based on the recognition that the ethnic majority needs to be active in integration processes (Hart Carpenter, Sabuni, Johanson, Mijatovic, interviews 2014).

The County administrative board is responsible for the practical implementation of integration policies in Stockholm. Birgitta Hart Carpenter, head of the integration unit, describes their work as focused on the reception of newly arrived immigrants with residence permits and refugees with asylum. In line with the Swedish integration policy emphasis on labor market participation, their priority is to help newly arrived migrants to get ‘established’ (which refers to finding work and housing) as soon as possible. Moreover, the situation of the recognized national minorities is part of their work, particularly inclusion of the Roma community. Other efforts directed towards

immigrants are absent, as is the implementation of the stated policy aim of integration as a two-way process: 'I don't know [exactly what is meant by the two-way process perspective], some kind of reciprocity, a mutual adaptation... well I don't know' (Hart Carpenter, interview 2014).

Hart Carpenter thinks that discourse is starting to change among companies and organizations that they work with, though still very few apply the perspective that immigrants ought to participate when businesses and activities are created. There have been discussions on bringing xenophobia and discrimination into the integration work at the County administrative board, but so far it has not been done. She believes that big companies, as Ericsson, are generally better at working actively with inclusion of immigrants as they have a tradition of hiring international competence compared with public institutions. In more typically Swedish workplaces, the social codes may hinder inclusion of people with other ethnic backgrounds, she thinks, though she emphasizes that intentions are good and that there is progress, though slow, towards the practical implementation of a 'two-way perspective'. Several municipalities has for instance actively recruited Roma people as 'bridge builders' between authorities and the Roma community to better address their concerns, and one of them has then been employed as public investigator, which according to Hart Carpenter is a form of quota system. She does however acknowledge that there is a lack of collaboration with immigrant communities in general, and adds that 'you cannot focus only on changing structures. There are groups that have been discriminated for long, they expect to be discriminated and therefore they are. Then it is important to also work with changing this group's behavior' (Hart Carpenter, interview 2014).

There is a growing network of civil society organizations in Stockholm working with integration matters at the grassroots level. The reciprocal approach on integration is for instance pronounced at the expanding integration NGO *Internationella Bekantskaper* (*International Acquaintances*), whose principal work method is to facilitate interpersonal contacts between Swedes and immigrants with language as tool. Native Swedish volunteers meet and maintain conversations with both newly arrived immigrants and residents from ethnically segregated areas who have not learned Swedish well despite many years in the country. According to Sara Johanson, one of the

leading actors within the organization, the lack of intercultural contacts in everyday life is a main obstacle for integration in Swedish society:

‘Our organization started as reaction against an obstacle, the lack of contacts with native Swedes in everyday life. Pelle [the founder] got frustrated as he noticed that many immigrants never had any contact with Swedes because it is so segregated here so people only talk to their compatriots. They can often spend all day with no need to use Swedish, not even in the store. [...] People meet too little. It may of course be problematic to meet, people have different values and you are not going to love everyone. But one must see it in a larger perspective, what kind of country we want to live in.’ *Sara Johanson, interview December 2014*

Johanson considers it important to make clear that integration is not about immigrants having a lack of skills that they need to compensate for, but to value the knowledge and resources they come here with: ‘Many people lose their self-esteem when they migrate, they may have had status in their home countries and here they are not valued, that is fundamental for positive processes of inclusion’. She describes the relationship between some of the volunteers and the immigrants as unequal: Swedes may want to ‘educate immigrants in Swedishness’, tell them how things are supposed to be done here, which reflects a paternalistic dimension that may be implicitly inherent in the ‘two-way perspective’ (Johanson, interview 2014).

Besides efforts to facilitate incorporation of newly arrived migrants and the kind of contact-creating work represented by *Internationella Bekantskaper*, much work in the integration field in Stockholm consists of awareness-raising through anti-racist information and consultancy. Both Kitimbwa Sabuni, spokesperson of the Afro-Swedes association and Zakia Khan, spokesperson of the immigrant women’s network Interfem, work as professional consultants with the aim of influencing companies and organizations to hire people with immigrant backgrounds and promote more multiethnic workplaces. Irene Molina, an anti-racist scholar who introduced the concept “racialization” in Swedish debate, believes that there are both obstacles and advantages with the focus on discursive and attitude changes in Swedish society. From her perspective (which is shared by activists as Khan and Sabuni), ‘integration’ is a matter of justice and equality: significant social change is needed to eliminate structures that differentiate depending on origin and skin color and thereby cement poverty and exclusion among the ‘racialized’ minorities. She believes that quotas and positive action

would be concrete ways to achieve greater ‘ethnic equality’, but states that these policy measures are firmly rejected at the EU level (Molina, interview 2014).

4. Conclusions

I initially defined the aim with this paper as to investigate how the perspective on integration as a two-way process is approached by integration practitioners in Barcelona and Stockholm. I also assumed that two dimensions are particularly central for the integration process: societal structures that hinder or facilitate integration, and the absence or existence of interethnic contacts. Both Swedish and Spanish integration policies are explicit in defining integration as reciprocal, and integration actors in both Barcelona and Stockholm have adopted this view. At the discursive level, this appears particularly clear in Sweden/Stockholm, while in Catalonia/Barcelona, it is explicit among policy-makers that adaptation to Catalan culture is expected alongside the integration policy focus on interculturalism. Moreover, the harsh economic reality in Spain in general affects discourse and practical integration work, as well as stakeholders’ perceptions on what is priority and what is feasible. Policy-makers present non-intervention and ‘less politics’ as a political strategy rather than the result of insufficient resources. In Sweden, many actors focus on discursive change, and practical integration work is centered on promoting labor market participation of immigrants, though emphasis lies on preparing the immigrants themselves rather than eliminating potential structural obstacles for employment as ethnic discrimination.

All in all, it appears that integration work in Sweden/Stockholm to a greater extent addresses the structural dimensions –discourse, labor market participation, to some degree ethnic discrimination (though at least civil society actors start acknowledging the need of more interethnic contacts)—while in Spain/Barcelona it is more focused on interethnic contacts at the local level. In Barcelona, where the Spanish financial crisis indeed represents a serious structural obstacle for integration processes, much work is done at the grassroots level to both facilitate information and basic assistance to immigrants, and to favor relations between neighbors. NGO actors, grassroots networks and municipal integration work focus on encouraging contacts and participation in local and public activities (e.g. BCN Immigration Plan 2012-2015; several interviews 2013-2014). Ethnic mixing in public life does not necessarily mean that actual interethnic

contacts are established, but ethnic pluralism is visible. Beyond policy measures, climate and lifestyle are surely factors that stimulate encounters in public spaces. In Stockholm, ethnic segregation impedes everyday contacts between immigrants and native Swedes, and though there is political awareness of the problem, to change a housing structure where homes in more attractive areas are largely inaccessible for immigrants is not easily done; this is one of the dimensions where class and ethnicity intersect (Hårsman, 2006). In sum, integration processes are hampered both by structural factors as unemployment and discrimination, and a lack of inter-ethnic contacts on equal terms.

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