Centre on Migration, Policy and Society

Working Paper No. 89
University of Oxford, 2011

Conceptualizing the Integration
of Immigrants and Other Groups

Didier Ruedin

WP-11-89

Abstract

This paper addresses the integration of immigrants and other societal groups from a conceptual point of view. There are many operationalizations of the concept of integration in the literature, but the fundamental question of how integration should be conceptualized is rarely addressed. This makes it difficult to assess whether a particular operationalization is suitable for measuring integration. The aim of this paper is to develop a formal understanding of the concept of integration, and not to review the existing literature. With increased conceptual clarity and by working toward an objective definition as far as possible, the paper creates a possible foundation on which indicators of integration can be built. Integration is conceptualized as proximity, and a distinction is drawn between the integration of groups and individuals. It is argued that integration should be understood as assimilation in relevant dimensions, whereas in other dimension significant differences are accepted.

Keywords

integration, theory, concept, assimilation, proximity, statistical analogy

Author

Didier Ruedin, Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies, University of Neuchâtel, Faubourg de l'Hôpital 106, CH - 2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Email didier.ruedin@unine.ch

Introduction

Immigration to countries in Western Europe is not new, but over the years, the perception has changed over how immigrants should be received and managed (Zincone, Penninx, and Borkert 2011). In many places, there was long an assumption that after some time new arrivals would assimilate to become so similar to the receiving society[1] that they could no longer be recognized as immigrants. In other words, the expectation was that the speech, behaviour, and even attitudes of immigrants would become indistinguishable after some time. However, it became increasingly clear that assimilation does not happen in all cases, it may not happen spontaneously, or it may take longer than widely assumed. These insights, together with increased concerns for minority rights that developed in parallel, led to an interest in multiculturalism (Ley 2010). Instead of expecting differences to disappear, differences between groups were increasingly valued and nurtured. The underlying intuition in this case was that there is nothing fundamentally wrong if immigrants speak a different language or dress differently from the receiving society, for instance.

Recently a change can be observed in the way immigration is perceived, sometimes referred to as a 'backlash against multiculturalism'. This change is reflected by the fact that nowadays references to assimilation and multiculturalism are very rare in official documents and public policy. Indeed, multiculturalism is widely considered a failed policy that jeopardizes the social cohesion of society (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Zincone, Penninx, and Borkert 2011; but see Kymlicka 2011). Instead of aspiring to a multicultural society, it is widely touted that the integration of immigrants into their so-called receiving society is important (Heckmann 1992; Papademetriou 2003; Remennick 2003; Jiménez 2011).

Despite its wide use, or perhaps because of it, the concept of integration is poorly defined. Different authors seem to understand the concept differently, and often do not appear to think carefully about its meaning. Rather than focusing on fundamental debates aiming at clarifying the meaning of the term, most discussions seem to focus on how to measure the concept. Related to discussions on measurement are the lists of indicators that are produced, often distinguishing different dimensions of integration. There are a number of typologies in use (e.g. Heiniger & Piguet 2002; Haug 2006; Kasprzycki 2009; Wichmann and D'Amato 2010), but it is often unclear what exactly these typologies classify. A common distinction found in most typologies is that between

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[1] I use the term receiving society to describe the society established at the time when immigrants arrive. As should become apparent in the remainder of the text, I do not intend to imply that the receiving society is static, but indeed that it is itself subject to change.

cultural integration and structural integration, and for each dimension a range of indicators may be used.

There is, however, a danger of circularity because the definition of integration is implicitly reduced to the indicators that are used to measure the concept. Put differently, the conceptualization and its measurement become identical, despite the implicit recognition that integration potentially comprises more than a list of indicators. The indicator-based approaches tend to use ad-hoc conceptualizations of integration and focus on measurable indicators rather than conceptual issues. In some instances, considerable thought might go in to choosing the indicators, but the underlying assumption that the sum of the indicators captures the concept of integration is rarely challenged (Alboim 2010). In the process, it appears that the meaning of integration is often lost (Haug 2006; D'Amato 2010; Stolz 2010). This paper attempts to address this gap by explicitly addressing how integration can be conceptualized in a formal manner. The aim of this paper is not to review the literature and the different ways in which the term integration can be understood, but to float research in progress on how to conceptualize integration.

In order to achieve a better conceptualization of the concept, the paper will address two problems in the existing literature. First, as aforementioned, the terms related to integration are not used in a consistent manner. This will be addressed by providing explicit definitions of how the terms are used in the paper, avoiding common-sense approaches. Second, there are national and regional debates that shape the use of the terms in question. The paper will not directly engage with these debates and will instead provide a formal understanding that can be applied to these contexts.

To begin with, it is useful to limit the concept of integration by looking at the boundaries of the concept. A distinction can be drawn between the civic integration of immigrants, and the anti-discrimination efforts in the receiving society (Joppke 2010). This paper focuses on the conceptualization of integration and it remains quiet on the specific methods by which integration might be achieved. As such, the paper does not treat anti-discrimination measures, nor does it assume that the actions of immigrants are the only way to achieve integration. Throughout the paper there are references to the integration of immigrants, although concerns of integration also affect other potentially marginalized groups in society (Schnapper 2007). The conceptualization developed in this paper can be applied to all groups in society.

Classic assimilation theory assumes a more or less linear progress, which may be divided into different stages (Alba and Nee 1997; Waters *et al.* 2010). The first stage of assimilation is contact between two groups, which is thought to be followed by competition, then accommodation, and eventually assimilation of the minority group. The result of the process is that the minority group becomes like the majority population. This outcome is referred to as assimilation. The classic approach to integration is challenged by the concept of segmented assimilation, which recognizes that different paths of assimilation are possible (Portes and Zhou 1999; Vermeulen 2010; Stepik and

Stepick 2010). The assimilation of a group can be to the dominant middle-class culture, as assumed in classic accounts. It is also possible for a group to assimilate to the underclass of the receiving society (Vermeulen 2010), or for specific immigrant groups to focus on economic advancement whilst at the same time actively reject efforts to assimilate to the dominant culture and maintaining a distinct immigrant culture. Assimilation to the underclass can be found in many inner cities, and the complete rejection of assimilation is only possible where a parallel world offers enough economic opportunities to members of the closed community. The focus on assimilation in classic approaches means that they spend too little time on the concept of integration, often regarding it as an intermediate or incomplete stage of a process that invariably leads to complete assimilation.

For the purposes of this paper, integration is best understood vis-à-vis assimilation on the one hand, and separatism or living in parallel worlds on the other. Assimilation is defined as the situation where differences between groups have disappeared. If a minority group is assimilated to the receiving society, the minority group is only identifiable by a specific marker such as a name indicating membership in the minority group. Apart from the marker, there are no apparent differences in dress, speech, behaviour, and so on. By contrast, parallel worlds are defined by the absence of contact. The social, economic, and political organization of the minority group is in this case independent from the receiving society, and can be used to identify the group in question. As aforementioned, there are other terms used in the literature to define these extremes, and the terms used here may be used differently in other papers. What is more, the distinctions between alternative terms in the literature and their definition are often unclear and overlapping (Bosswick and Heckmann 2007; Heckmann 1992). Since this paper is solely concerned with the concept of integration, it does not seek to establish the precise meaning of related concepts where this is not necessary for clarifying the concept of integration.

Integration of Groups and Individuals

In order to develop a formal understanding of the concept of integration, this paper uses analogies to statistical concepts. This is not done for the direct use with specific indicators, but as a conceptual aid. The argument is that without conceptual clarity, indicators will be unable to measure integration adequately. Developing indicators and finding appropriate data to measure integration are a different task and are not within the scope of this paper. It is explicitly acknowledged that certain dimensions of integration will be difficult to operationalize.

The fundamental premise of the argument is that integration is about proximity. Proximity is here understood in a social sense – such as in the sense of sharing social networks – and does not necessarily mean spatial proximity. The proximity between immigrants and the receiving society can be determined both for groups and for individuals. The approach outlined in this paper is generic and

does not specify how groups are defined. It can equally be applied to immigrant groups, ethno-racial groups, or sociological groups. The way groups are determined needs to be defined by individual studies in accordance with the research question.

By regarding integration as proximity, it follows that integration can be expressed in degrees: integration can be partial or incomplete. The term incomplete is appropriate particularly if integration is regarded as part of a process. If integration is approached using a single snapshot, changes in proximity are both unattainable and irrelevant. In studies that follow the fate of immigrants over time, changes in proximity can be understood as changes in integration. Although the illustrations in this paper are based on a snapshot, the argument applies to changes over time in the same way. By focusing on a snapshot, no assumptions are made about the processes that are involved in integration, and their dynamic nature is explicitly acknowledged.

In the literature, it is often insisted that integration is a process (e.g. Papademetriou 2003; Steiner 2004; Haug 2006; Bosswick and Heckmann 2007). The argument presented here differs and regards integration as the result of a process. In many cases, this process is ongoing, and the degree of integration is determined using a snapshot. Insisting that integration is a process does not add anything to the recognition that integration does not happen instantly, or that the degree of integration can change in the future. The former would be the case if a person were to be considered fully integrated because he or she is naturalized. The latter is important to stress, because the degree of integration can decline over time. This can be the case if an immigrant who was previously considered well integrated begins participating in cultural practices considered unusual in the receiving society, for example, perhaps in search of identity.

By approaching integration as proximity, the degree of integration has clear bounds. As outlined above, on one extreme, proximity may be total in the sense that no difference is apparent. In this case, we can talk of *assimilation*. On the other extreme, there is the case where different groups live with no point of contact or overlap (Schnapper 2007; Schneider and Crul 2010). In this case, there is a complete lack of assimilation or complete segregation, and we can talk of living in *parallel worlds*. The way the terms are defined in this paper is not intended to imply that there is agreement in the literature on how to use them. As will be outlined in some detail below, in this paper the terms *integration* and *assimilation* are not used as synonyms. Using the generic definition presented here, the *degree of integration* in theory can be determined for any two groups in society, regardless of whether the groups consider themselves distinct from each other.

In some of the literature, the term integration is used in a way that means access to a social life (Haug 2006; SSIM 2010). For example, individuals are considered integrated if they participate in politics, are members of organizations, or engage in activities considered central to a decent social life. Whilst such activities are laudable, they do not necessarily tell us anything about the integration of immigrants. It is conceivable that immigrants engage in such activities without contact to the

receiving society. For example, political participation can occur exclusively in an immigrant association, club membership can be in an association open only to a specific ethnic group, or labour force participation may not coincide with contacts with the receiving society. It is for this reason that in this paper the total lack of integration is considered as living in parallel worlds.
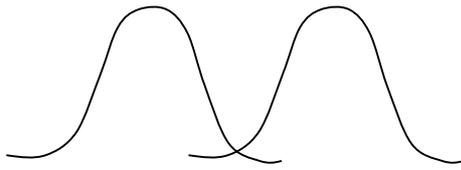
Integration of Groups

The integration of groups is sometimes described as being part of a society without the need to be assimilated. Different cultural communities of a society are regarded and treated as equal: differences are respected (Banting 2010). Such approaches highlight that different ethnic identities need not be given up in order for a group to become integrated, but they fail to provide a positive definition of the concept. Furthermore, the tension between being part of and being separate from the receiving society is not resolved.

The assumption made in this paper is that within a group, the range of possible behaviours is distributed in a given form. There is some degree of variance in the behaviour and attitudes of members of a particular group. The outlined argument will be kept an abstract level, but behaviours span the entire range of social interaction, participation in the workplace or politics, or cultural practices such as dress or language. Attitudes are included to cover attitudes and values, as well as norms. Such attitudes include views on how society should be organized, or the kind of behaviour considered acceptable for various members of society.

For the purposes of the argument presented, no assumptions are made about the distribution of behaviours, but possible forms include a normal distribution around the mean, or a skewed distribution, bipolar distributions, or a Poisson distribution. Regardless of the distribution, the midpoint is understood as the *typical* position of the group. As will become apparent further below, the midpoint is understood in a statistical sense, and does not refer to idealized stereotypes applied to groups. The paper will use normal distributions to illustrate the argument, and initially only a single behaviour is looked at. The argument outlined applies to all possible behaviours and attitudes. Each individual kind of behaviour can be considered a *dimension* of one's overall behaviour, a definition which is useful when examining whether a particular kind of behaviour is relevant for integration.

It follows the assumption of distributions, that parallel worlds exists where there is little or no overlap between two groups (**figure 1**).
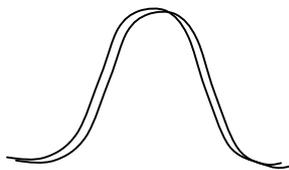
Figure 1: Segregation

When the distributions in a dimension do not overlap, members of the two groups are considered to live in parallel worlds (segregation)

In contrast, assimilation is characterized by no visible or significant difference between groups. In other words, the two curves have become indistinguishable (figure 2). Empirically, it is important to have a definition of what indistinguishable means: the point at which differences between groups are considered insignificant. Since the distributions of groups are likely to vary, it might be useful to look at the distance from the midpoint in terms of standard deviations rather than absolute distances. The approach outlined in this paper has the advantage that standard approaches of statistical significance can be applied to the concept of integration. In other words, two groups are considered indistinguishable if the difference is statistically insignificant. Making use of standard statistical methods, we can define integration for instance as the case where the mean of one group lies within one standard deviation of the other.

Figure 2: Assimilation

When the distributions in a dimension lack significant difference, members of the two groups are considered assimilated

Following the classic approach implicit in assimilation theory, groups that are considered integrated are placed somewhere between the two extremes outlined in ***figure 1*** and figure 2, and it is unclear where the boundaries to assimilation and parallel worlds are. For this reason, this paper refers to a degree of integration, rather than approach integration in a binary fashion. What is commonly referred to as the process of integration can be defined as the case when the area between the two curves becomes smaller. Put differently, the proximity between the two groups increases. However, the approach in this paper leaves open the possibility that the degree of integration stagnates or even decreases.
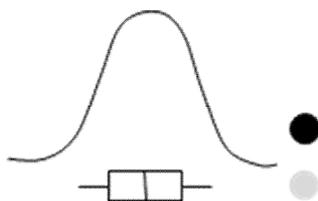
Following the argument of statistical similarity, integration can be considered in a binary fashion. Rather than trying to begin with a broad approach of integration overall, integration is looked at dimension by dimension. As far as it makes sense to talk of integration in a single dimension, integration can be considered as achieved where groups are assimilated. For example, if there are no significant differences between an immigrant group and the receiving society in terms of

workforce participation, the immigrant group can be regarded as integrated in this regard. As further outlined below, the argument presented in this paper, however, does not equate integration with unconditional assimilation, because it is recognized that there are multiple dimensions of social life. Whilst the integration of groups may be policy-relevant, integration can only take place at the individual level. This is the case because only individuals are able to change their behaviour or attitudes; the position of the group is the aggregate of its members. In other words, if we speak of integration at the group level, we necessarily refer to an aggregation of individual behaviour. The behaviour of individuals may be influenced by incentives and sanctions to change behaviour, or signals in society. These incentives and signals affect the individual's evaluation of their own behaviour (also of their thoughts, values, and attitudes), which may lead them to change their behaviour.

Integration of Individuals

The case for individuals is a bit different from the integration of groups, but the general argument of proximity and statistical difference can equally be applied. Being segregated – that is a lack of assimilation – can be defined as being outside the range of common values in a distribution of behaviours (figure 3).
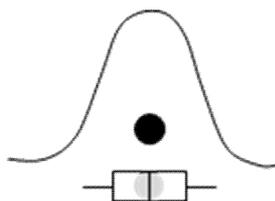
Figure 3: Lack of Assimilation

Lack of assimilation of an individual: The individual (represented by the dot) is outside the range of common values (represented by the curve and box plot).

The opposite case, in contrast, is assimilation. This means that the individual in question is close to or on the midpoint – to the extent that the difference is not significant (figure 4). In other words, the individual is close enough to the typical position that he or she cannot be differentiated from it. Given that extreme values can influence mean positions, the typical position can for example be defined as the median – a robust statistic.

Figure 4: Assimilation

Assimilated individual: There is no significant difference between the midpoint of the group and the individual. The individual is represented by a dot; the midpoint is given by the central line in the box plot.

As in the case of groups, difference can be expressed in statistical terms. One approach is the use of standard deviations. Being sufficiently close to the midpoint can be thought of as being for instance within one standard deviation of the midpoint. In other words, the individual is located within the area shared by 68 percent of the population the individual is compared to, assuming a normal distribution of values. In the case of immigrants, the population an individual is compared to is the receiving society. Statistically speaking, the individual ceases to be an outlier in the dimension examined, and is undistinguishable from the receiving society. There are different means to determine outliers, such as approaches based on the inter-quartile range. This paper does not suggest any of the methods as inherently preferable, although some of the approaches might be more suited to the task.

This approach of comparing the position of an individual to a specific population can be useful to determine whether an individual is assimilated to the dominant middle-class culture of the receiving society, or whether he or she is assimilated to the underclass. In order to do so, the position of the individual is compared to the sub-population of interest. In this sense, the approach outlined can cater for arguments of segmented assimilation or integration.
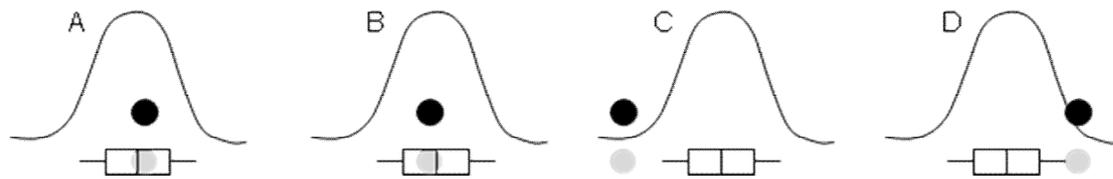
Multiple Dimensions

Difficulties in the definition of integration arise, because there are multiple dimensions in which assimilation can occur (Schnapper 2007). This is reflected in the literature where different dimensions of integration are commonly recognized, but little effort is normally made to examine the relationship between different dimensions. It is important to recognize different dimensions, because an individual may be assimilated in some dimensions, but not necessarily all. Up to this point, this paper focused on assimilation in a single dimension, and equated assimilation with integration. This assumption is now explicitly challenged, and integration is defined as *assimilation in relevant dimensions*. This means that differences in other dimensions are considered acceptable. The question that remains is which dimensions are relevant.

The distinction between different dimensions in which assimilation can take place has a number of advantages. It is possible to recognize degrees of integration, in the sense that assimilation does not necessarily take place in all the dimensions concurrently. This has the advantage that at least on a theoretical level a degree of overall integration can be expressed. If we look at how integration changes over time, it is in fact likely that integration in different dimensions occurs at different speeds, or perhaps not at all for some dimensions. To some extent, this can be understood as segmented assimilation at the individual level.

Considering integration overall by examining assimilation across different dimensions, some aspects of social life are considered irrelevant. Difference from the receiving society is accepted and tolerated in these dimensions, and an individual is still considered integrated. Integration requires

assimilation only in the relevant dimensions. In contrast, *overall assimilation* in a multidimensional space means assimilation in all dimensions, even those where difference would be accepted.

Figure 5: Integration: Assimilation in Relevant Dimensions

Integration as the assimilation in relevant dimensions (A, B), with lack of assimilation possible in other dimensions (C, D): Overall, the individual (represented by the dot) is considered integrated, but not completely assimilated.

As will be highlighted below, the question of which dimensions are relevant deserves serious consideration. The following examples should therefore be considered an illustration and not an indication of which dimensions are relevant. Considering only four dimensions, if A and B are relevant dimensions (e.g. language, attitudes on equality), and C and D are irrelevant dimensions (e.g. dress, food preferences), then the individual in figure 5 is integrated. Conversely, if A, B, and C are relevant dimensions, then the person in figure 5 is not (fully) integrated.

In a multidimensional space, an individual is thus either assimilated or not for each dimension (i.e. a statistical outlier, or within the range of common values, such as within one standard deviation of the midpoint). The situation in each dimension is aggregated into a degree of integration across dimensions. To achieve overall integration, assimilation in all relevant dimensions is required. It is possible that an individual is assimilated in many dimensions that are not considered relevant, but not assimilated in some relevant dimensions. In this case, the individual is not considered (fully) integrated. To continue with the example above, an immigrant may speak and dress like members of the receiving society (A, C), but differ in attitudes on equality (B).

Whilst the definition of overall integration as assimilation in relevant dimensions solves the question of when an individual is or is not integrated, it does not solve the problem which dimensions are relevant. The focus of the question has shifted to which dimensions of everyday life are relevant for social exchange and the kind of society aspired to.

Integrated Individuals but non-Integrated Groups

By drawing a distinction between the integration of individuals and groups, it becomes clear that group membership does not provide us with information on the integration of individuals. Moreover, it is possible that all the individuals of a group are integrated (i.e. assimilated in the relevant dimensions), but that as a group they remain distinguishable from the receiving society in a substantive sense. This can happen when the individuals of the group in question are within the bounds of normal dispersion of the population (e.g. within one standard deviation of the midpoint), but are concentrated on one side of the midpoint. In this case, the midpoints of the immigrant group

and the receiving society may be substantively clearly distinct. Since integration can only happen at the individual level, it could be argued that group-level indicators are inappropriate as they highlight irrelevant differences. On the other hand, group-level indicators may point to potential problems, such as issues of transition, discrimination, or ethnic penalties.

In this context, it might be useful to consider whether all immigrants, or immigrants from the same country of origin should be treated as a single group, or whether there are significant internal differences to treat them as separate groups in terms of integration. For instance, it might be beneficial to look at the speed of integration of subgroups, or the dimensions in which assimilation occurs. Differences in socio-economic status within a group of immigrants from the same country of origin may be just one reason to look at differences within groups in more detail. In this sense, lack of integration at the group level can be a reason to examine the situation of individuals of this group in more detail.

Theoretically, it is possible that the receiving society moves, and a group of previously integrated immigrants does not. It is in this case possible that the individuals or the group become statistical outliers, despite having been previously integrated. The same can also happen if a group or individual immigrants significantly change their position after being considered integrated.

What Does Relevant Mean?

Current approaches to the integration of immigrants tend to focus on economic and linguistic integration. In the case of language competence, the underlying assumption is that language skills are essential to overcome other hurdles in the path to wider integration (Nigg 2005). In the case of economic integration, the assumption is that paid work invariably means contact with members of the receiving society, and thus essential social links. Since the early 2000s, in most European countries, there is increasing emphasis on cultural integration and attitudes that might act as hurdles to wider integration (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010).

Approaches focusing on language and paid work use a coherent narrative as justification – at times implicitly rather than explicitly. The reliance on a common-sense narrative means that such approaches are unable to convincingly differentiate between relevant and irrelevant differences. Rather than choosing indicators on an ad-hoc basis, the argument should be based on empirical evidence of the relevance of chosen indicators. Part of the distinction between relevant and irrelevant is invariably a political decision, as it is linked to the kind of society aspired to. Aims of a multicultural society come with different demands than those of a monocultural society.

One partial solution is to focus on enabling aspects initially: things an individual can do when he or she is integrated, but cannot do when not integrated. Such an approach separates the definition of the desired outcome from the actual indicators used. For example, it could be argued that the individual should be able to obtain paid work in the labour market. Such an argument would

be made based on the larger vision of what society should be like, and where paid work may be a key aspiration for everyone. The question of measuring is separated, and the definition of integration is not confused with the measurement thereof.

Rather than focusing on ability, another approach is to focus on important factors of social life: aspects of social life that are necessary for a normal life. For example, it can be argued that an individual should have a network of friends and feel part of society. Again, these criteria would be based on the larger vision of what society should be like. There are likely to be other criteria to establishing relevance, and the aim in this section is simply to sketch possible approaches. Rather than changing the question, this analysis helps to distinguish between politics and political science. The kind of society aspired to is a normative, and thus political, question. There are different citizenship regimes that reflect different visions of society. The visions vary in the extent to which deviance from the receiving is tolerated, accepted, or even positively valued. The tolerance of deviance implies a certain level of pain and hardship which is absent in acceptance of difference. The literature on different citizenship regimes (e.g. Bauböck et al. 2005; Weldon 2006; Manatschal 2010) can be useful to guide us on the kind of society aspired to. The identification of factors that define such a society and their measurement, in contrast, is a task for political science. Future research is required to identify the relevant dimensions for different societal visions and citizenship regimes.

Rather than simply drawing up a list of what politicians and researchers can measure or consider beneficial, the focus should be on empirical evidence and counterfactuals. By focusing on evidence, it becomes apparent that outlining a list of desired features or characteristics does not actually address the question of relevance. For instance, it is possible that immigrants in European countries are required to have knowledge of the Latin alphabet. Rather than accepting the underlying assumption, researchers should ask whether it is really the case that without knowledge of the Latin alphabet, a person cannot (fully) function in a European society. It is not enough to observe that a person lacks language skills that the majority of the population has. The question is whether this is relevant for their social life. In other words, in order to establish relevance, empirical evidence is required that without being able to read the Latin alphabet, people cannot function adequately in our society.

Problems with Ad-Hoc Approaches

The problem with the many existing ad-hoc approaches is threefold. First, they focus on the situation of immigrants without considering the variety within the receiving society. Second, there is a tendency to compare the situation of immigrants to an ideal type of citizen rather than the real positions in the receiving society (Achermann and Gass 2004). Third, questions of relevance and empirical evidence are not asked. This means that politicians may take action without evidence that

the measures they take might actually work, or whether they are actually conducive to achieving the kind of society aspired to.

In practice, indicators of integration are heavily debated, and they are more likely to be chosen based on political agreement than empirical evidence. It appears that many hope that by measuring certain variables, correlates for better integration can be found. Unfortunately, this approach lacks theory, and correlates may of course be misleading. Without theory, there is a great danger to fall into circular logic, as mentioned above: integration is defined by a series of indicators, and the same indicators are used to determine the extent of integration. In other words, no definition independent of the indicators seems to be used.

Another aspect lost with purely indicator-based approaches is that they ignore the question of sustainability. For example, sports are often highlighted as a dimension for integration, especially one where integration seems to happen rather effortlessly. In sports clubs immigrants may participate alongside members of the receiving society. This situation is similar to adults who engage in paid work. At the workplace, they tend to have contact with members of the receiving society. The question is, however, whether this kind of contact is relevant. What is the significance of contact with the receiving society when this contact is not maintained beyond the context of the sports club or the workplace? What happens when the individuals leave the club or change the workplace?

To take account of the variety of positions that exist within the receiving society, and to avoid the danger of comparing to an ideal type, it can be useful to look at counterfactuals. For instance, speaking the local language in itself is not sufficient to warrant overall integration. This is well illustrated by some French-speaking African immigrants to France who are often considered poorly integrated. Another example is the perceived need of having to know the Latin alphabet as a prerequisite for integration in European countries. In this case, it might be useful to look at functionally illiterate and blind people. There are two aspects to be considered. First, without making a judgement of relevance, it is important to test whether individuals with these characteristics are statistical outliers. This is a purely numerical exercise to test whether knowledge of the Latin alphabet is as common in the receiving society as implied by the ideal type. Second, the relevance of the observed difference is examined. The identification of counterfactuals can be helpful with this question. How do functionally illiterate and blind people cope with the everyday tasks we examine, for example? Perhaps functionally illiterate and blind people are effectively marginalized, and they may be unable to function in society as is expected of them. In this case, action for both immigrants who do not know the Latin alphabet and the equivalent group in the receiving society seems appropriate. It might be that knowledge of the Latin alphabet is not necessary in a society so dependent on images and icons, in which case this factor is possibly not relevant.

Actions, Behaviour, Attitudes

Having defined (full) integration as the statistical assimilation in relevant dimensions and sketched possible approaches to determining relevance, there is one final consideration for the measurement of integration. When attempting to measure integration, there are different approaches, which reflect different philosophies of integration. Integration can be understood to be about actions, behaviour, aptitude, attitudes, or a combination of these. Actions describe conscious acts, irrespective of whether the individual considers them beneficial or not. For example, an immigrant may speak the local language in public whilst at the same time resent the fact that he or she feels forced to do so. Behaviour is contrasted with conscious action. For example, an immigrant might find that he or she now walks more slowly on the pavement. Aptitude describes the potential to carry out a task. For example, an immigrant might be able to speak the local language, but choose not to use it in everyday life. Attitudes are about values and ideas that describe what is appropriate. For example, an immigrant might consider public nudity inappropriate.

Which of these possibilities are taken as relevant depends on the kind of society aspired to. Again, there is a danger to compare immigrants to an ideal type and not the reality of the receiving society. For example, the ideal type in most European countries is tolerant towards homosexuality, whilst a significant proportion of the population is not (Joppke 2010). Depending on the society aspired to, it is or not appropriate to speak of integration when public and private behaviour differ significantly. Once again, the relevant criterion is the receiving society and not an idealized version of it. It might also be appropriate to make a distinction between private and public integration. Overall assimilation, that is assimilation in all dimensions, including irrelevant ones, does not allow for such a distinction beyond what is found in the receiving society.

In common with the distinction between integration at the individual and group level outlined above, it is important to keep apart the norms of individuals and their group, or the behaviour of individuals and that typically found in the group.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that integration is assimilation in relevant dimensions, whilst assimilation in other dimensions is not required. A distinction between the integration of groups and individuals was drawn, and it was highlighted that integration can only occur at the individual level. The question of which dimensions are relevant depends on the society aspired to: a normative and thus political question. Given any such model of society aspired to, however, the tasks of measuring integration is one for political scientists. Instead of relying on ad-hoc indicators, it was suggested to examine empirical evidence and analyze counterfactuals. With ad-hoc approaches, there is a real danger that

ideal typical behaviour is imposed, and consequently immigrants are expected to behave in a manner that might not reflect the variety of behaviours found in the receiving society. Such expectations are not about integration.

There are two additional dangers for scholars and policy-makers when talking about integration. For integration at the individual level, there is the danger that the absolute distance between the individual in question and the midpoint of the society is looked at, rather than taking into consideration the distribution of positions that might exist in society. Integration exists where the individual is not significantly different from the receiving society, and therefore is not necessarily dependent on close proximity to the midpoint in cases where a wide range of positions can be found in the receiving society. The second danger is to use ad-hoc definitions of which dimensions are relevant for integration without empirical evidence that the measured outcomes are associated with the kind of society aspired to.

Whilst it is easily perceivable that different degrees of integration exist, this paper did not address the question whether all relevant dimensions are of equal importance when quantifying such a degree of integration. Statistical weights can be integrated in the outlined approach to cater for this issue.

A key advantage of the outlined approach is that it can be used to address assimilation into different subgroups of the receiving society. This means that the receiving society can be perceived in a more segregated manner, whilst it is still possible to speak of integration. With integration into different subgroups of the receiving society, the approach to integration outlined may be useful when it comes to determining the kind of assistance (if any) that is needed. Such assistance can be based on a more specific criterion than just being an immigrant. For example, reading courses may be offered to everyone needing such assistance, whether they are immigrants are members of the receiving society with poor reading skills.

At the same time, the difference between integration at the individual and group level in this paper means that we can divide potential problems of integration – being an outlier in a relevant dimension – into more generic issues of integration in society that are not directly linked to immigrant status. The concept of integration as outlined in this paper can be applied to all kinds of groups in society, not just immigrants. From a theoretical point of view, there appears to be no reason to prioritize immigrant status over other aspects of marginalization. The aim of integration policies should therefore probably focus on the integration of all marginalized groups and individuals, including groups of the receiving society that are marginalized, such as homeless people. Put differently, having an immigrant background might become an irrelevant label. Lack of integration is understood as the absence of assimilation in relevant dimensions, which can be addressed accordingly.

Acknowledgements

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