

Integration of Migrants - Ideas and Perspectives from Hungary

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Integration is a fluid and complex concept which has become known over the past 30 years for its opposition to concepts such as assimilation and acculturation. Integration basically means the construction of transnational social spaces connecting the sending and receiving communities and the migrants themselves but without privileging any of these segments. This space is a common space and cannot be subdivided into further segments, thus there is no such thing as the receiving space in itself regardless of the fact that Europeanism (the idea that Europe is civilized and this is mainly due to its own achievements) and nationalism work very hard to establish such an idea.

The key issue is the need to avoid the loaded question underlying integration research and policy: “...*who or what is integrating whom and with what?*”**[1]**. Nonetheless, we have to note that in public and scholarly discourses this question remains the fundamental question even today. The best way to avoid this “activist” type of concept would be to focus on the complex interaction (spaces) of migrants, migrant groups, host groups and institutions, and sending groups and sending societies whose interaction is shaped by various social conditions, norms and public discourses.

The “proper” migrant

There are several reasons for the maintenance of the exclusive and rigid Europeanist and nationalist perspectives. The deeply institutionalised competition between nations and blocks of countries today results in the idea that there is a need for closer management of population and migration in order to secure a better position in the global economic competition. In this pattern “proper” migrants serve as a group for providing: (a) better skills, (b) the willingness to work for lower wages and/ or in worse working conditions, (c) a lowering of a country’s ageing and the improving of its demographic conditions, (d) a higher number of co-ethnics. So migrants should be selected accordingly and those who do not serve the above purposes should adapt to the criteria or should be excluded. This means extensive selection mechanisms embedded in policy mechanisms and discourses.

In terms of exclusion the most important factor is that EU migrants enjoy the social and political rights that come with EU citizenship, and this is why the EU can reject and suppress all ideas that would go beyond the “club logic” and would provide better rights for documented and most importantly undocumented migrants. Such thinking rejects solidarity between “European” citizens and Third Country Nationals (TCNs). TCNs are subjected to various controls over entry into and residence in the EU and it is a rather definite aim to maintain strict exclusion from the rights associated with citizenship.

This missing solidarity link is compensated for by formal “equal” non-discriminatory treatment in some welfare services and very importantly in the labour market, and there is a definite attempt to better integrate them into the labour force (into the so-called workfare regime) without providing larger scale welfare services. Thus it clearly serves to increase

the receiving country's global competitiveness and capital accumulation.

In this management and control of migration there is an emphasis on the willingness of the migrant to become integrated and more and more there is the idea of providing legal residence only to those who integrate and adopt "key European" values. We can refer to the 2008 Vichy Declaration by EU Justice Minister on the integration of immigrants, which set cultural adaptation as a requirement. This also appears in the German "Leitkultur" discourse initiated by the Social Democrat Thilo Sarazin and eventually adopted by Angela Merkel. We may talk about a "conservative" turn in this respect, moving more and more towards the defence of European values and placing the greatest integration requirements on the shoulders of migrants. Europeanism and nationalism prevail.

Discourses and practices of integration in Hungary

Hungary does not have any overall policy document on migration policy and the integration of migrants. In Hungary there was an attempt in 2007 to at least produce a white paper, but the leaking of the document led to outrage from right-wing opposition politicians. This outrage was based on the false claim that the then ruling socialist government was actively seeking the immigration of millions of Chinese people. Right now a new policy document is being formulated which has not yet been made public.

As an institutional practice, Hungarian migration policy can be understood as being built on three pillars. The country is supporting the free movement of people within the EU and it fully respects the Schengen agreement. Citizens of the EU are welcome and there are hardly any examples of criticism directed towards migrants from Germany, for example.

This pro-Western and pro-large scale immigration attitude has been made clear during recent debates on North African immigrants, but from qualitative studies we know that this is also case for Hungarian visa policy. It actively excludes would-be migrants coming from certain regions and countries (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa). And we know very well (even from interviews) that visa policy does matter in terms of the ability of migrants to integrate.

Hungary follows a rather hard and non-supportive policy toward TNCs of non-Hungarian origin. This is most clear in the case of refugees, who now face an increasing rate of rejection of their applications and an increasing hostility toward them (such as regular rallies against their presence organised by the far-right). Hungary handles them mainly as a security risk; it provides little legal or linguistic support; it is biased against non-European and/or lower class immigrants and migrants with family members face great difficulties.

Connecting to a different type of migrant

As already noted above, the Hungarian state clearly endorses migratory and other links with Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries. It is not alone with this approach as most Eastern, Southern and South Eastern states follow a somewhat similar line and due to historical colonial links even France and Britain have such inclinations, but in Hungary it seems that the motivation behind such an approach is somewhat clearer. Hungary imagines itself as a state fully responsible for the maintenance of "historic" Hungary in terms of ethnic composition and cultural historic legacies even beyond its borders, and in a gradual process it has built up legal links with "affiliated" people living outside Hungary.

Special legislation has been passed for incoming Hungarians from neighbouring countries being extended as far as now offering citizenship without residing in the country itself. In terms of granting special ethnic privileges the country has been a pioneer, where opinion polls are sharply divided in attitudes toward immigrants of Hungarian ethnic background and those without such status. In the early 2000s it was national policy to offer special ID cards to ethnic Hungarians. These cards provided a privileged status with the Hungarian state, such as help in visa issuance to third countries. Now the country offers full citizenship to all Hungarians who can claim some ethnic background and/or one ancestor who live or lived in Hungarian territories.

Competing discourses

Regarding public discourses, different strands can be identified which, taken together, show a very interesting discursive framework of public discussions. First, there is a clear nationalist discourse which discusses the relevant laws as a national collective act for the empowerment and the virtual “reunification” of the nation across borders. Second, we can identify a liberal discourse, which defines its main themes as the fight against discrimination, the extension of rights to wider groups, the acceptance of multiple identities and transnational rights, and the fight against the racism of the majority. The other major discourse is based on social exclusion and is concerned with the defence of domestic employees and the protection of the state against an “Eastern” flood. In this way migration policies are embedded into a civilizational and very importantly related ethnic discourse.

Emancipation denied

The provision of citizenship is most emancipatory to those from outside the EU. Such emancipation is beneficial on many levels, but it does not exclude the fact that this population is used for purposes that are political (voting rights, quasi-imperial claims on neighbouring countries), demographic and economic. So their emancipation comes at a price.

Furthermore, it is clearly stated that this emancipation should not be extended to other non-nationals, whose second class status is now obvious in a state which openly celebrates its “ethnic character”, which can be extended to religious grounds also as traditional churches are lynchpins of this loose hybrid empire-like system. It is revealing that when senior government officials are interviewed they claim that Hungarian citizenship for non-Hungarians is attractive due to the “beauty” of the Hungarian language. Surely in this atmosphere of imperial heritage non-Hungarians find themselves rather strange animals. This division is further sharpened by the fact that Hungarian public opinion seems to be even more xenophobic than most European countries. It is not surprising then that no integration policy has been developed fully as migration has been squeezed into an almost segregated dual system of Hungarian versus non-Hungarian immigrants without offering an overall discourse or approach which sees migration as at least a developmental tool.

A silver lining

Concerning integration practices, it can be clearly stated that the country is lagging behind some other regional countries like Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in developing an integration policy. But there are very positive elements also. Hungary scores 45 overall on

the MIPEX (www.mipex.org) scale, a composite index of integration compiled in 2010. It is in the middle range concerning labour market access, family reunion and long-term residence policies for legally-resident third-country nationals. Regarding political participation and access to nationality there are however serious problems. In contrast anti-discrimination policy stands out as a definite area of strength and Hungary places third best in the 28 MIPEX countries. Hungarian authorities seem to have a formalistic and legalistic approach, which can be clearly alienating but it can also be neutral.

And this is the last point where the Hungarian experience deserves some attention. Repeated empirical analyses have shown that in education and in various institutionalised cultural encounters the local population and teachers are basically trying to downplay the importance of cultural diversity and especially the need for handling such problematic social relationships. They avoid these questions and with this they basically push them into the “individual” characteristics of immigrant (and minority) children. Foreignness is a handicap, and integration is the responsibility of the immigrant only.

Concluding remarks

This is how the circle is complete. Co-ethnic and non-co ethnic migrants are seen as resources in various competitive games. However when any of the issues (their acceptance, cultural conflicts) are to be handled then all the burden should fall on them as the local population is already preoccupied with its own struggle for survival, especially in an era of continuously difficult labour market conditions and deskilling. But even this last element fails to ring the bell for solidarity between “Europeans”, “Hungarians”, co-ethnic Hungarians, Third Country Nationals in an era when the whole continent is losing its relative strength. Historic reflexes of European and national pride might lead to a trap in which the wrong enemies and problems are targeted.

References

[1] Favell, 2000 IN: *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices* edited by T. Alexander Aleinikoff and Doug Klusmeyer, Washington, DC: Brookings Institute/Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001, p 351



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