

THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION POLITICS IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, European countries are facing new waves of immigrants and refugees, who follow the classic immigration routes from east to west and from south to north. This social and demographic phenomenon, whose current dynamics could not be predicted, leads to multiple and various problems at the political and social level, as well as to challenges at both cultural and structural, macro-social level. The diverse contrasts between the native culture of immigrants and the culture of the host societies can generate dissensions and even social conflicts. That is why various discussions, both theoretically and practically, have emerged, dealing with possible solutions to such problems. Furthermore, the debates are not limited only to the field of culture and social interactions, but they also focus on the initiation of some actions at the social level of policies and concrete measures to facilitate the integration of migrants. The present paper is a sociological contribution to these discussions. The primary objectives are, on one hand, to conceptualize the terms of diversity and integration, and on the other hand to delimit the links between the cultural level of the practices, values, and symbolic representations and the structural level of integration policies. In this regard, the concept of “integration” is analytically and operationally approached, and the desiderata of integration politics are addressed.

Keywords: *Integration, diversity, immigration, multicultural societies, integration politics.*

INTRODUCTION

The waves of immigration to Europe in the last years have led to a number of challenges in the adoption countries, concerning both the cultural and the socio-structural level. As a consequence, discussions have emerged, focusing on possible

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solutions to the frequent problems and dissensions that the large number of immigrants brings along. As concerns the cultural debate, terms or ideas as acculturation, interculturality, interculturalization, and multiculturalism are brought up, while regarding the social level of policies, the necessity of prompt enacting of concrete measures to facilitate the integration of migrants is emphasized.

This paper is a sociological contribution to this debate, aiming primarily to conceptualize the main terms that are mostly used, such as diversity and integration, as well as to outline the main features and desiderata of integration politics. In this sense, the concept of “integration” is analytically and operationally approached and the challenges that occur in multicultural societies and the desiderata of integration policies are discussed. Furthermore, there is addressed the extent to which the public politics encompass not only an inherent socio-economic logic, but also a cultural, identitarian one.

IMMIGRATION AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE POLITICAL APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

Although human diversity has been acknowledged since ancient times, it was rarely a subject as such in the social and human sciences (Jucquois 2005). Diversity, as a reality and as a property of beings and things to exist in multiple and different forms, has over time been framed in taxonomies that followed the specificities of certain civilizations and epochs, and often these classifications had the role to clarify the differences and to justify the existing hierarchies and social order.

The scientific approach to diversity went through several paradigms since the first half of the nineteenth century, from the vision of linear historical progress that “scientifically”¹ justified colonialism to promoting the idea that not all human “races” have reached the same stage of development, therefore the “upper race” (whites) must assume the role of teaching and civilizing the “inferior races”, and to the deeper reflection that followed the two disasters created by world wars in the first part of the 20th century.

Currently there is no unified approach to diversity in the various socio-human sciences (Schultze 2009, Wieviorka 1998). However, there is an agreement that diversity is still the risk factor of potential major conflicts, and it finds itself in the nucleus of still persistent imbalances in the world, in ethnic and nationalist claims, totalitarian derivations or various forms of violence in societies, which leads to the need to create – or refine, where it already exists – systems of political and citizen regulation based on pluralism. However, this finding remains at the stage of a rather abstract goal.

¹ The quotation marks used in this paragraph for references to “races”, including the justification, considered at that time “scientific”, of different hierarchies, are meant to mark the distancing of the author of this article from these ideas.

Neither at a political nor at a scientific level, concrete answers were found to the question: which are the mechanisms through which the peaceful coexistence of groups and communities, whose values, beliefs, desires, projects and interests are different, would be possible? The stake of these answers is enormous, given the acute current problems that divide societies and threaten the existence of entire communities (Jucquois 2005, 214).

“INTEGRATION” – DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

As in other areas of society, also in the complex issue of cultural-ethnic diversity and the social problems generated by it, the social reality precedes the theoretical and methodological scientific developments. The answers to the current issues are various and involve trying to put more or less precise terms such as assimilation, insertion, acculturation, interculturalization, etc. into practice. All of these notions are often compressed under the umbrella term of “integration”. The conceptualization of the term “integration” is, however, more difficult than it seems at the first glance.

From a sociological point of view, integration can be defined, at a general and concise level, as “the set of social ties that make an individual enrol in a particular society and share its codes” (Therriault 2005, 355). Putting emphasis on the involved idea of process, S. Mezei (1993, 304) defines the integration as the processuality of the interactions between the individual or the group and the social environment, through which a functional balance of the parties is achieved.

Because such definitions are less operative and cannot aid for measurement, empirical sociological analyses seek to find a more precise definition of the concept, allowing it to be operationalized. For example, H. Esser (2004) delineates between the actual social integration of migrants, the integration in relation to the social structure of the host society and the “societal integration”.

On a general level, the actual social integration of migrants is understood as the inclusion of new individual actors in a social system by creating a mutual relationship between the members of the system and an attitude of them towards the system as a whole. Social integration involves conscious and motivated interactions, as well as the cooperation of individual actors and groups (Integration and Integration Policies 2006, 9). Particularly in migration research, social integration is defined as the inclusion of migrants in the core institutions of the host societies, and this process have structural, cultural, interactive, and identification dimensions.

Integration in relation to the social structure of the host society is defined as the reduction or absence of the stratification, respectively the diminution or even absence of the forms of social differentiation determined by the ethnic or immigrant status (*ibid.*, 2). Finally, societal integration is understood as the absence

of severe social conflicts associated with immigration, respectively the cohesion of major social groups.

We can note in these definitions a more precise and detailed understanding of integration, which is approached at each of the main levels of society: the social integration of migrant individuals comes under the micro and mezzo social levels, integration in relation to the social structure of the host society is a structural, macro-social issue, while societal integration regards to society as a whole, presuming a holistic vision of it. Between the three forms of integration there are established mutual relations of interconnection and interdependence, the societal integration being influenced by the other two forms of integration. Moreover, one can also state that from the three forms of integration, the first one, that of the social integration of migrant individuals, is the most complex and complicated one, involving not only structural aspects, but also cultural ones.

DESIDERATA OF INTEGRATION POLITICS

Given the complexity and the decisive role played by cultural factors in the problematics of migration and immigration societies, it has become increasingly clear that integration policies should not only focus on structural issues but also on cultural and identitarian aspects.

At the structural level, the integration of immigrants and the ensuring of their equality as regards to the rights and living conditions is a problem of democracy and democratization, processes specific to modern societies.

A modern democratic society gains its legitimacy by allowing its members to participate in social life and to have access to social positions and prestige not as a result of or based on attributes such as gender, ethnicity or social origin, but on the basis of their individual abilities (Schultze 2009, 5). This, of course, does not exclude social inequality, but that should not be based on ethnicity. However, this formal desideratum cannot be found in practice. The chances in society are still unevenly distributed, the balance still tilting against the groups that do not correspond to the widely accepted “norm”, among which ethnic minority groups. All this shows that Western democracies still have problems, deficits and essential ambivalences (Schulte 2000, 18). In this context, we talk about “democratization”, a process that involves the adoption of strategies and policies aimed to diminish the “structural defects” (ibid.) and to increase the possibilities of individuals and groups to decide themselves regarding their social participation.

In more and more Western societies, confronted with various immigration problems, it has become clear that integration policies must be state policies that target the whole of society and all institutions and social areas (Schultze 2009, 6). These policies can be characterized as *general integration policies* as they concern the entire society, all the social dimensions involved and the whole population.

They address, therefore, the problems that society as a whole is facing as a result of immigration, including inequalities, dissensions, social insecurity and conflicts.

In addition to these general policies, there exist also *special integration policies* that focus primarily on the political field, specifically on its sphere that regard or target the immigrant groups. Within these policies, one of the central themes is the integration of ethnic minorities (Schulte 2000, 19). Because in immigration states, the concrete problems of immigrants and all their implications have a stringent note, mostly the special integration policies have a pre-eminence over the general integration policies. That means that the special integration policies precede the general integration policies.

One of the central tasks of special integration policies is the dismantling of barriers that prevent the successful integration of migrants. Unlike some past prevalent viewpoints (ibid.), according to which integration barriers were generated mainly or even exclusively by immigrants, it is now considered that rather structures and processes within the host society are those that predominantly have a decisive role for the success or failure of integration processes. There is recognized in present, that integration policies should target primarily counteracting social marginalization, fighting social exclusion and structural disintegration of the members of the immigrant populations, as well as developing and offering formal and real equal opportunities to these people to participate in key areas of society. For this, it would be necessary from a legal and political point of view to reduce the period in which migrants with permanent residence have the status of “foreigners”, so that these people and groups of the population enjoy the same political and legal rights as the rest of the population. Many states still have restrictive policies on the granting of citizenship and therefore make this process difficult, so a useful first step would be to facilitate this procedure (Miteinander in Vielfalt, Leitbild und Agenda für die Einwanderungsgesellschaft 2017, 13).

Moreover, the special integration policies should include measures to help countering the multiple social disadvantages of immigrants. Particularly important are the measures of improving the general and professional skills of immigrant persons, promoting and supporting their employment and integration in the labour market, as well as some more effective measures to combat the different forms of social discrimination.

The socio-cultural field can also be regulated through special integration policies by structurally assuring the existence of the same possibilities for immigrants as for the local population to manifest, develop and participate, in an individual or collective form, in cultural life and in processes of cultural exchange.

If the tasks of preventing, controlling and reducing social conflicts have been successfully managed in multicultural immigration societies, special integration policies should be complemented by general integration policies. Within them, the main concern is the management of key social and political issues such as violent conflicts and clashes, mass unemployment, social inequality and threats or

endangering of the natural resources (Schulte 2000, 21). In this regard, the rule of law and the functioning of democratic processes are essential, because only through them the skills and abilities to solve the problems can be developed, and the measures aimed at the dismantling of the democratic structural deficiencies and the social inequalities can be implemented, at the same time with the development and expansion of social networks.

The efficiency of integration processes and policies also depends on factors that are part of the micro- and mezzo-level of policy. Here can be mentioned particularly the skills, attitudes and behaviours of individuals, as well as social communication and learning processes. From this point of view, integration policies should contribute to reduce political indifference and apathy, as well as to fight those attitudes and behaviours that highlight the authoritarian social character. Social development should therefore encourage the creation of a democratic profile of individuals (ibid., 22), which includes the strengthening of self-confidence and autonomy, but also competences such as the ability to reflect, and the communication and action skills. The “open” processes of social, political and intercultural learning of children, adolescents and adults, in school and out of school, can have an essential contribution to develop these skills. Learning at all levels, formal and non-formal, can make a significant contribution to the integration process.

Last but not least, special measures need to be taken to further implement and develop integration policies. It is important that this requirement is taken into account at all levels of society, given that at micro, mezzo and macro levels there are different institutions and organizations that can be part of the process, according to their various attributions and competences. In addition, relevant civil society initiatives and activities should be included and promoted in the same process.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to give an overview of the issues of cultural-ethnic diversity and immigration issues in contemporary societies. The focus was on conceptualizing the relevant terms for the analysis of these phenomena and on the delineation of the links between the cultural level of values, norms and practices and the structural level of integration policies.

Cultural diversity in societies that have received new waves of immigrants and refugees raises a number of practical and political difficulties. The problems faced by these societies show that, at least at present, the past models of the political approach to diversity are no longer working. That is why it appears currently as necessary to conceive new models, adapted to the new conditions and functional in the current situation. One should be also aware about the stringency

of finding such solutions. This process proves to be difficult, given that it implies not only solutions that involve structural changes, that can be decided at political and administrative level, but also – above all – solutions that involve socio-cultural changes, that is, at the level of values, norms, symbolic representations, mentalities, and this is the level at which changes are the slowest and most difficult in a society.

Due to the fact that the term of “integration” lies in the centre of political and scientific debates on this issue, this concept has been discussed more broadly, with the emphasis being placed on its analytical and circumstantial approaches, such as the one that distinguishes between the actual social integration of migrants, the integration in relation with to the social structure of the host society and the “societal integration”.

Because the political and structural level of society is the most likely to be faster subjected to transformation, being the first where concrete measures and changes can be implemented, there has been discussed the major role of public integration policies and their desiderata. There has been delineated between general and special integration policies and highlighted the priority character of the latter. While general policies target the whole of society, special policies focus on the measures, sometimes stringent, necessary for the social integration of immigrant individuals and groups, such as measures of a political and legal nature, measures to counter the multiple social disadvantages of immigrants, and measures which are related to the micro and mezzo level of politics, like those related to learning, education, communication, culture. Only if these latter aspects are achieved, special policies can be further supplemented by general policies, designed for the whole of society.

In any case, it can be certainly said that in order to be effective and successful, the public integration policies, both special and general, must have not only a socio-economic logic, but also a cultural, identitarian logic, because ultimately their stake must be the integration through identification of all the members of society, including immigrant ones.

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