

INTERCULTURALITY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS: FRAMING THE ISSUES

SIMONA RODAT*

ABSTRACT

The new waves of migrants and refugees which in the last years were coming to Europe led to multiple problems and controversies in the host societies, including polemics in the political sphere. In the academic field, various debates have also emerged, with regard to issues such as social and cultural integration, social inclusion vs. social exclusion, etc. Not only politicians, but also scholars try to find answers and solutions to the problems generated by the cultural impact and the various contrasts between the native culture of immigrants and the culture of the host societies. In this context, there are discussed, both theoretically and practically, views and concepts as acculturation, interculturality, interculturalism, multiculturalism and so forth. The present paper aims to delineate a general framework for addressing interculturality and social integration of migrants. In this regard, after outlining the terms of integration and inclusion and their significance for the integration policies, the various types and dimensions of the social integration of migrant individuals and groups are in-depth addressed, with particular emphasis on the issues concerning the cultural integration.

Keywords: Integration, inclusion, acculturation, interculturalism, multiculturalism.

INTRODUCTION

At present, many European countries face a number of challenges and problems caused by new waves of migrants coming from the east and south. Such challenges concern both the cultural and the socio-structural level. As for the cultural debate, topics such as the cultural integration of migrants and the prevention of the cultural dissensions are discussed, and terms such as acculturation, interculturality, interculturalism, and multiculturalism are brought into question. Regarding the social and structural level of policies, the necessity for expedient and

* Professor, Ph.D., Adventus University, Faculty of Theology and Social Sciences, Cernica, Ilfov, Romania. E-mail: simona.rodatt@uadventus.ro



swift adoption of concrete measures is underlined, in order to facilitate the social integration and inclusion of the new arrivals.

The main objective of this paper is to conceptualize the key terms that are used in these debates, such as those of social integration and inclusion, but also the notions of acculturation, assimilation, interculturality, interculturalisation and multiculturalism. In this regard, the concept of “social integration” is analytically and operationally analysed, and the various forms and dimensions of social integration of migrants are approached.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION: A CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

The conceptualization of the term “integration” is more difficult than it seems at the first glance. In a sociological general and concise conception, integration can be understood as “the set of social bonds that make a person part of a particular society and share its codes” (Theriault 2005, 355). Focusing on the implicated idea of the 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. However, in the empirical sociological analyses a more narrow definition of the concept is sought, allowing it to be operationalized.

Not only the necessity for measurement, but also the need to know the conditions that favour the increase or decrease of social integration and the consequences of a high or low degree of integration have led to more analytical approaches to the concept (Landecker, 1951, 332). The most common units used for the analysis of integration are social norms, on the one hand, and people and their behaviours, on the other hand (Mezei, 1993, 305). Resulting from the possible combinations of these units, there are three possibilities of integration: between norms, between norms and behaviours, between people. These are the elements that shape social integration as cultural, normative, communicational and functional (Landecker, 1951, 335–338). When the norms and values of a culture are consistent, one can speak of cultural integration. The correspondence between norms and behaviors, i.e. the extent to which group values become effective rules for members, states the normative integration. Interpersonal exchange of significations and meanings constitutes the communicative dimension of social integration, and integration in relation to exchange of goods and service is called functional integration. Each of these dimensions raises specific measurement problems, but only researching all of them may lead to the construction of a composite index, with several types of integration as units (*ibid.*, 332).

Referring to the social integration of migrants, H. Esser (2004) addresses integration 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.

As one can note, this conceptualization of social integration brings into discussion the notion of “inclusion”, which, in turn, requires clarifications. Although the term can be considered more political than analytical (Oyen, 1997), it however has its roots in the models of welfare and in principles of social justice and human dignity. According to World Bank (2013), on a general level the social inclusion refers to the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society. While this broad definition could be useful to guide policy makers, a sharper definition takes into consideration how the terms of social inclusion can be improved and for whom. Thus, social inclusion designates (World Bank, 2013, 3) the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. This process involves, therefore, the target of eliminating the existing barriers to inclusion within different contexts, so that disadvantaged individuals can enjoy equal rights and opportunities to participate in economic, social, cultural, and political life on an equal footing with others (UNDESA, 2009, 4).

Social inclusion is frequently defined related to its opposite, social exclusion (Oyen, 1997; Silver, 2007). In sociology, the concept of social exclusion designates the rupture that occurs as a result of a process of disqualification between an individual or a group of individuals and community (Lucrèce, 2000, 159). This disqualification supposes a double meaning: on one hand, the expulsion of those individuals from the production process and, consequently, their insolvency towards the market goods and services and, on the other hand, the moral isolation. Social exclusion is, accordingly, multidimensional: it comprises social, civic, cultural, political and economic dimensions, the lack of access of the excluded persons to social services, economic life, social networks, political decisions, cultural activities, etc. Social exclusion is a dynamic process that “precludes full participation in the normatively prescribed activities of a given society and denies access to information, resources, sociability, recognition, and identity, eroding self-respect and reducing capabilities to achieve personal goals” (Silver, 2007, 1).

Because social inclusion, as well as social exclusion, implies by definition the existence of a “mainstream” population and of individuals who are the “outsiders” (the excluded ones or those in the risk of being excluded) in a given society, social inclusion involves always a two-party relation and complex inclusive interventions (UNESCO, 2015, 21). Thence, as for the mainstream population, the targets of inclusion should focus on reverting exclusionary patterns, disabling negative beliefs and stereotypes, and triggering acceptance. As for the excluded individuals and groups, especially those who have long experienced

multiple deprivation and discrimination, the focal point of inclusion should be on improving their ability and willingness to gain access and to use opportunities, provided that this is happening on a truly equal base (ibid.). Nevertheless, the inclusion policies should not promote conformity and renunciation of identities and practices; on the contrary, their goal should be recognition, reconciliation and inclusion on favourable terms (Silver, 2007).

Turning back to the social integration of migrant individuals or groups, there can be delineated (Esser, 2004) four dimensions that can be conceptualized as four basic forms of social integration: integration as social position, cultural integration, integration through interaction and integration through identification.

TYPES OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Hereinafter there are addressed the issues related to social structures and positions, culture, interactions and identification approached as dimensions of the social integration of migrant individuals and groups.

Integration as social position

Social position refers to the place of a person in society, to his/her legitimate situation within the social structure and system. While in traditional societies this was predominantly assigned, the family being the one that assured the individual an initial social identity, in contemporary societies it has become more and more an acquired item. And yet, even though nowadays, thanks to the intense promotion of individualism's vision, dominates the perspective, that everything can be accomplished by its own forces, it can be assessed that the individual is not broken by his origins, his/her initial affiliation, culture and the environment where he/she grew up.

Analysis of biographies of immigrants and their descendants as regards social positioning confirms this idea. Often the access to certain high positions in society is restricted by subtle mechanisms, such as belonging to the dominant culture, as well as to a certain social class, which represent preconditions in this respect. That means that, for some, social ascension is much more difficult than for others. From this point of view, integration as a social position cannot be dissociated from cultural integration. Specifically, acculturation would be a precondition for social placement (Esser 2004, 48).

Cultural integration

Among the forms of integration outlined above, cultural integration is certainly the most complex. With reference to this, there are used, in socio-human

sciences, especially in cultural anthropology and sociology, terms as cultururation, enculturation, acculturation, interculturization, multiculturalism, etc.

Enculturation and acculturation

The term “cultururation” is used as referring to the transmission and acquisition of the knowledge and of the cultural standards and competences necessary for an individual to successfully integrate into society (Esser 2000, 272). In the same sense, in cultural anthropology the term “enculturation” is used to refer to the appropriation or “absorption” of culture, thus to the process by which the new members of society internalize all the components of culture: language, traditions, customs, myths, folklore. In sociology, the concept of “socialization” is used to describe this process.

While enculturation or socialization are notions that refer to the cultural integration of all members of society, describing the general, long and gradual process that begins at birth, is intense in childhood and adolescence, but continues throughout an individual’s life, the term “acculturation” refers to the appropriation of values and norms of the culture in another society. In some sense, this is a concept that corresponds to one of the meanings of the notion of “resocialization” in sociology.

At a more detailed and specific level, the concept of acculturation simultaneously designates, in different degrees or modalities, two phenomena. On one hand, it refers to the process of integrating an individual in an environment that is foreign to him, with all the learning and socialization mechanisms involved in doing so (Ferréol 2005, 11). With the same meaning, but specifically referring to immigration issues, P. G. Chadraba and R. D. O’Keefe (2011, 7) define acculturation as the process of learning the norms, values and behaviours expected by the culture in which the individual immigrated. Acculturation means, in this respect, what is socially expected from the immigrants who want to settle and stay in the host country. On the other hand, the term acculturation is used to indicate “the process of interaction of two cultures or types of culture, which are in a period of mutual contact” (Geană 1993, 18), or all the processes and changes caused by interactions or direct and prolonged contacts between different ethnic groups (Ferréol, 2005, 11). Thus, acculturation means equally taking over cultural elements, combinations and replacements, but also rejections and renunciations.

A controversial concept: “assimilation”

Over the time, acculturation has manifested itself as an epiphenomenon of conquests, colonisations, subjugations and political and economic domination (Geană 1993, 18), often having a forced character. In order to depict this imposed nature, the term of “assimilation” was used instead of that of acculturation. However, the notion of “assimilation” has now fallen into disgrace, and the

phenomenon to which it refers is politically repudiated due to the new ethical standards adopted in international relations.

The cultural assimilation, which was the dominant norm in USA until the second half of the 20th century (Gordon 1964; Farley 1982), was understood as unilateral process through which the immigrants and their descendants gave up their culture of origin and fully adopted the culture of the host country (the American one), with everything involved: language, traditions, customs, social structure, behaviours. In Europe, on the other hand, assimilation has become associated as early as the first half of the 20th century with ethnocentrism, cultural oppression, and even with the use of violent means to force minorities to conform, culminating with the Nazi methods. As a reaction to fascism and to extremist slippages of nationalism, to the oppression and even expulsion of minorities, on the one hand, and as a result of increasing of the relevance of human rights, as well as of self-esteem and cultural pride of minorities after World War II, on the other hand, assimilation has become a taboo, a rejected word and concept (Integration and Integration Policies 2006, 11).

However, lately there can be noticed a recovery of the term of assimilation and even a rebound of its reputation. For instance, R. Alba and V. Nee (2004) argue about the continuity of the relevance of the concept in the USA, understood in this case, however, as diminishing the differences and the social distance between the different groups. Nevertheless, given the past of the term of assimilation, the images and the perceptions that it still evokes and induces, in order to designate the above meaning, i.e. the diminishing of the differences and the social distance between the groups, there should be used the more neutral concept, at least in terms of its reputation, of “integration”.

From interculturality as unilateral acculturation to “interculturalisation”

Cultural identities are being constructed and reconstructed not only by learning the norms and internalizing the values within the own group, but, above all, by comparing with other groups, and the main sociological mechanism that allows this comparison is the cultural contact (Azzi and Klein 1998, 77). In this context, there are made references to interculturality, a term that has approximately the same meaning as the second sense attributed to the concept of acculturation, i.e., the interaction between two or more cultures, with all the involved exchanges, combinations, takings over, but also rejections and conflicts.

Until recently, Western societies denied to a greater or lesser extent the heterogeneity (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 334). Their interculturality or cultural contact with the so-called “primitive societies” during the colonization, or with the ethnic immigrant groups, on the occasion of the first immigration waves, materialized in the form of a rather unilateral acculturation, in which the relationship between the majority group and the minority ethnic groups was

unequal, and the reduction of the differences was always in favour of the dominant system (ibid.).

At present, however, another vision prevails: instead of imposing to the minority groups the cultural hegemony of the dominant collectivity, there is promoted the recognition of differences, which are valorised as such and integrated in the interactions of social actors (ibid., 335). This process and this perspective is called, at least in some conceptual delimitations (e.g. Blanchet and Francard 2005), “interculturalisation”. In a similar view, but not explicitly speaking about the recognition of differences, but about their awareness, C. Clanet (1998, 70) refers to interculturalisation as the set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when identifying oneself as being distinct from a cultural point of view.

In practice, interculturalisation is a complex and complicated process that involves a series of identitarian challenges. That is why it is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, because it would need a recognition of the cultural relativism, i.e. a recognition of own cultural limits, and such an acknowledgment is hard to find in practice.

As far as the identification of the social actors is concerned, interculturalisation involves more than just a mere juxtaposition of ethnic identities, which would mean an essentialist perspective. It involves rather a negotiation, within some multiple and varied interactions, of some “affinities and oppositions, proximities and distances, in order to constitute a new, identity-bearing reality” (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 335). From this point of view, interculturalisation is a challenge, since it involves at least a certain degree of identity fluidity (Camilleri et al. 1990) and the willingness to accommodate, by which the owners of different cultural luggage find a way to achieve a common form of intercultural regulation (Collès 1994).

Multiculturalism and its challenges

Such a project of “intercultural regulation” and finding the ways to achieve it is currently the subject of intense debate both in the scientific, political and journalistic environment. Questions such as: to what extent can a democratic society go with the recognition of cultural differences, to what extent this recognition concerns the dignity of individuals, or what concrete forms can actually embrace the theoretical and abstract project of interculturalisation, as well as many others, are topical concerns.

At the heart of these concerns is the notion of “multiculturalism” which, at a general level, designates the coexistence in a society of several different cultures, and at a more specific level the social response to the multitude of concrete problems generated by the coexistence of populations perceived as – or which consider themselves as – different (Polcar 2005, 451). The first experiences of institutionalizing of multicultural actions and implementing such policies took place in Canada, Australia and Sweden (ibid., 450). For example, in Sweden, an immigration country for Finns and Yugoslavs in the 1970s, the multiculturalist

policy adopted in 1975 was based on three fundamental principles (ibid.): equality between minority groups and the majority population in terms of living standards; the freedom to choose between the identity of the own ethnic group and the Swedish cultural identity; ensuring lucrative labour relations for the Swedish economy's productivity. As can be seen in this example, as well as from the Canadian and Australian experiences, there was an indissoluble link at the level of politics between cultural particularism and participation in economic life, which drew M. Wieviorka (1998) to talk about "integrated multiculturalism". By using this term, Wieviorka described the phenomenon through which the social and cultural demands of the minority groups are interconnected, as are the general economic needs of the host country and its political and moral values (Wieviorka 1998, 238).

Experiences in the USA, on the other hand, have determined other forms of policies, which Wieviorka characterizes as "crumbled multiculturalism" (ibid., 244). Thus, the institutionalization of multiculturalism followed in this country two distinct types of logic: one of a socio-economic nature, and another of an identitarian nature. The first logic characterized the so-called affirmative action policy, whose goal was social equality. In this logic, there have been taken, among others, measures of positive discrimination, such as quota policies and countervailing measures designed for ethnic minorities and women. And yet – and hence the associated criticisms and malfunctions – from such policies did not benefit individuals regarded as disadvantaged or impaired, but abstract collective entities. The second logic, that of policies of recognition, aimed at the acknowledgment of cultural differences as an essential expression of human dignity. Such policies implied obtaining political recognition of rights and privileges based on ethnicity, but also, at a meta-level, the acquisition of a better social visibility and a more equitable access to the public space arena (Policar 2005, 451).

Integration through interaction

As mentioned above, among the four forms of integration delimited by H. Esser (2000), cultural integration is the most complex, triggering the most debates, as can be seen in the brief overview of the main concepts used in connection with it. But in addition to cultural integration and integration as social position, two more types of integration can be identified: integration through interaction and integration through identification.

Interaction is a form of social action characterized by mutual orientations of social actors and forming relationships and social networks (Esser 2000, 274). Examples of social integration through interaction include the establishment of friendships, love and marriage relationships, or, in general, membership of primary groups. In other words, this type of integration refers to all the concrete social ties

within the community, but also through the workplace links, that unites the individual with the other members of society. In this sense, the term “insertion” is also frequently used, subtly differing from the general concept of “integration”, which has a more political signification, meaning rather effective participation in civic life (Theriault 2005, 363).

Integration through identification

Finally, identification as a dimension of social integration refers to the identification of an actor with a social system, in which he considers himself a part, perceiving himself as an element of a “collective body” (Esser 2000, 275). Identification has both emotional and cognitive components and has as a result the feeling of “us” regarding a group or a community.

Identification is closely related to culture and cultural affiliation, as it is largely based on cultural resources, and these are given by the interpretation and reinterpretation of the history of collectivity as a system of norms and values (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 334). Changing the cultural resources to which the individual relates takes place gradually, and not by directly adopting other resources under the influence or under the constraint of another community (Hofstede 2001, 12), although in human history there have been cases of brutal events such as wars or deportations, which have considerably influenced this “natural” process of transformation.

Given these aspects of identifying with the values, ideals and cultural models of the collectivity, it can be said that integration through identification is probably the most difficult part of the integration process of immigrants. As long as they feel part of that collective “us” within their own ethnic group (of belonging), identifying themselves with it, and not with the broader society in which they live, one cannot speak, at least in the theoretical interpretation opened by H. Esser, about a complete integration.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural diversity in societies that have received new waves of immigrants and refugees has not only raised a number of practical and political problems and difficulties, but has also generated many debates in the academic field, particularly on social inclusion and cultural integration. However, these concepts, as well as other terms related to them, have multiple meanings and are usually pluridimensional. For example, the social inclusion, as much as its opposite concept, social exclusion, comprises social, civic, cultural, political, and economic dimensions. Furthermore, social integration can be approached by taking into

account several dimensions, as cultural, normative, communicational, and functional ones. Particularly in the migration research, social integration is defined as the inclusion of migrants in the core institutions of the host societies, and this process implies multidimensional aspects. As it has been detailed in the paper, social integration of migrant individuals and groups can be operationalized in the socio-structural, cultural, interactive and identification dimensions, which in turn can be approached as forms of social integration of migrants: integration as social position or placement, cultural integration, integration by interaction and integration through identification.

In that regard, the present paper aimed to be an outline of the main dimensions, concepts and issues discussed in this context. Thus, there have been pointed out the complexity of cultural integration, the controversies related to acculturation and, above all, to the idea of “assimilation”, the challenges of interculturality, interculturalization and multiculturalism, as well as the fact that integration through identification, interconnected with the cultural integration, through which the feeling of “us” is created, is probably the most difficult part of the process of social integration of the migrants.

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