

DeMIIS

ASG 2019-2020

Deconstructing Measures of Immigrant Integration in Sweden – towards a typology of models.

In his Christmas speech 2017, the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven claimed that the integration of immigrants into the Swedish society had been working poorly for a long time. The statement is just one manifestation of the ways the term integration is adopted when addressing immigrants and their settlement in countries of reception. In many countries of the world, it is used by policy makers, academics and civil society actors without vigorous explication or critical evaluation. In practice, national policies often reflect different definitions of what is meant by integration.

Generally speaking, the term integration refers to processes of making “insiders” out of immigrants. Normative debates and empirical vagueness, however, have resulted in subjecting the term to much interrogation and critique among academics during the last decade or so. Normatively, the connections of integration to assimilation and acculturation have put into question the desirability of integration. Additionally, placing the onus of integration on immigrants themselves and gauging the efficacy of policies in terms of immigrants’ success and failure have come under criticism. Furthermore, a number of scholars have pointed that discussions and assessments of integration are often based on a narrow understanding and a rigid expectation that focuses mostly on the degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of idealized citizens and their normative and behavioral standards. Thus, to the extent that immigrants earn as much as native-born citizens, they are deemed to be economically well integrated. Similarly, successful social integration implies immigrants’ adopting the native language, moving away from ethnically concentrated immigrant enclaves and participating in social and political activities of mainstream society.

Empirically, there exists a number of indices for measuring integration with significant differences in the policy dimensions that relate to these indices. There is a lack of consensus in the literature over whether integration policies help, hinder, or have a limited effect on immigrant integration outcomes. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of clarity in the expected outcomes of integration as much of the immigration discourse takes for granted the

components of desirable integration. In a number of national contexts, including Sweden, integration discourses nominally endorse cultural diversity, but specific cultural differences, especially those deemed to be far removed from the local standard, are viewed as obstacles to integration. In the absence of shared definitions and clarity in the expected outcomes of integration, problems of interpretation and inference muddle our understanding of the process.

About the ASG

The goal of DeMIIS is to go from a vague sense of “integration needs to be better” to a more critical engagement with the concept in ways that can have wider societal and academic benefits. Focusing primarily on the Swedish context, we aim to deconstruct policy statements, immigration debates and academic writings, and differentiate normative and empirical discussions of integration. In doing so we wish to develop a typology of different scenarios of integration in order to develop a toolkit that is beneficial to policy makers, academics and civil society actors. By developing a typology of integration policies, practices and discourses, we can differentiate those components that are assimilative or pluralistic, uni- or multi-directional, normative or operational. The typology can then be communicated in form of a toolkit that conveys policies and their impact to non-academic audiences. In order to tackle the normative nature of integration as a concept, we will engage with the assumptions about a well-integrated society that are integral to the different policies and discourses. Along the way, we expect by-products such as a network for researchers of integration across all faculties at Lund University.

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