Chapter 14
The Contested Concept of 'Integration'

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A fundamental problem in the study of 'integration' has been a failure to separate the empirical *is* from the normative *ought*: that is, to study what is happening in society separately from implicit assumptions on a desired end-goal. A crucial question, Castles et al. (2014, p. 264) write, concerns how immigrants and their descendants "can become part of receiving societies and nations". This process, they note, is most commonly referred to as *integration*, "but this can imply a specific idea of where the process should lead, so we prefer the more neutral term 'incorporation'".

This preference of some scholars to avoid 'integration' in favour of alternative terms has necessarily led to a lack of coherence in terminology across the literature. It is not clear, however, that alternative words have avoided the pitfalls that the critics of integration have identified. Some of those critics have argued that the concept is so flawed it should be abandoned (Rytter, 2018; Schinkel, 2018). Yet, it is important that we do find both a common language and conceptual clarity. As Klarenbeek (2019) argues, a failure to find a way to conduct research in this area would leave the power inequalities and issues of membership that arise from migration unstudied and unresolved (see also Hadj Abdou, 2019).

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14.1   Evolution of a Concept

Early twentieth-century sociologists used the concept of '*assimilation*' to explain the evolving relationship between immigrants and other residents and institutions in the country in which they live. Some scholars continue to do so. Initially, assimilation was conceived as a uni-directional journey undertaken by immigrants—largely of cultural adaptation—into a culturally homogenous majority society. Responsibility for outcomes was, in effect, laid at the immigrants' door. The process was measured by how similar the attitudes and behaviour of immigrants became to other residents ('natives') (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003; Park & Burgess, 1921).

In policy discourse, that process of becoming similar was—and continues to be— seen by some as a desirable end goal. The perpetuation of cultural difference is deemed a potential threat to the shared loyalties of the nation-state, so that assimilation is a necessary part of the nation-building process (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Policy measures such as ethnic monitoring or consultation with 'community leaders,' which can reinforce cultural diversity and the retention of minority identities, are then discouraged, albeit less rigidly in practice than policy rhetoric can suggest (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012; Simon, 2007).

Critics of assimilation theory argued that the processes in which immigrants are engaged equally engage the individuals and institutions of the 'receiving' society (a 'two-way' process). Society, moreover, is not homogenous but highly diverse. Far from being confined to a process of cultural change, this engagement occurs across multiple spheres of life—not least in the labour market. These are processes of interaction, furthermore, that do not take place in a level playing field, nor solely reflect the human and social capital that the immigrants bring to the table. Rather, structural economic and social inequalities shape the outcomes that emerge (Schneider & Crul, 2010). Scholars took these criticisms on board. Acknowledging the diversity of society, for instance, and the impact of socio-economic opportunity structures and discrimination, the theory of "*segmented assimilation*" was developed in the 1990s to take account of the varying trajectories of the children of immigrants into different socio-economic groups, with differing economic and cultural outcomes (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Stepick & Stepick, 2010).

Brubaker (2001, p. 544) argued that while the "old, analytically discredited and politically disreputable" understanding of assimilation had rightly been rejected, it remained valid to study a process of becoming similar as well as persistent differences, in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. We can do this, he argued, whether we "applaud or lament" the emerging similarities that are found. Bommes (2012, p. 111) agreed that studying the process of becoming similar is a legitimate focus, but in the context of a society which we now understand as diverse, characterised by structural inequality and by organisations which mediate opportunities for participation and access to resources. The concept of assimilation in its later forms is thus more nuanced than as first conceived, but the process of becoming similar remains too narrow for the study of the complex processes at play.

Moreover, as the critics would later say of 'integration', it is a concept which undoubtedly posits immigrants as 'other,' reinforcing the perceptual divide that, in policy discourse, assimilation was intended to overcome.

14.2 Integration: Recognition of Complexity But Conceptual Challenges Remain

Many scholars who moved away from assimilation developed a broader concept, integration; albeit "often used as a term, but rarely defined as a concept" (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003 p. 6). Common among authors is the recognition that this is not a single process but a series across different spheres of life ('dimensions'). Scholars group these differently: Maxwell (2012), for instance, posits social (including cultural), economic, and political dimensions; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) suggest Legal/Political, Socio-economic and cultural/religious.

Heckmann (2006, p. 2), in contrast, identifies four dimensions: *structural* (as in relation to core institutions such as healthcare, housing, education and employment); *cultural* (attitudinal and behavioural change); *social* (relationships) and, a dimension not always highlighted separately, '*identificational*', relating to individuals' multiple senses of identity and belonging. While scholars of integration emphasise the two-way nature of integration processes in each dimension (so here, for instance, referring not only to migrants' sense of identity but also to that of other residents), there often remains an emphasis on the trajectory of the migrants in that process rather than on a more holistic process of societal change. Thus Heckmann refers to integration as "the inclusion of individual migrants into the core institutions of the receiving society", while Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016, p. 14) would refer to it a decade later as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society".

Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas' (2016, p. 17) understanding of integration, illustrated in their heuristic model below (Fig. 14.1), nevertheless encapsulates much of what we now know about the processes of interaction which take place: the importance of recognising the impact that processes in one dimension may have on another (one could give as an example, racist attitudes in the cultural dimension impacting on opportunities to obtain employment); that these processes do not necessarily take place at the same time (social engagement may come before participation in the labour market); and may reverse (through redundancy, perhaps, or a sense of belonging diminish in face of repeated experiences of discrimination). They also argue that the participants in these processes are fundamentally unequal in terms of power and resources. The receiving society, especially its institutional structure and reaction to newcomers, is far more decisive for the outcome of integration processes than are the migrants themselves.

Alba and Foner's (2015) comparative work on integration in the United States and Europe shows with empirical data the extent to which integration processes can indeed take place at a different pace in different spheres of life, and how the
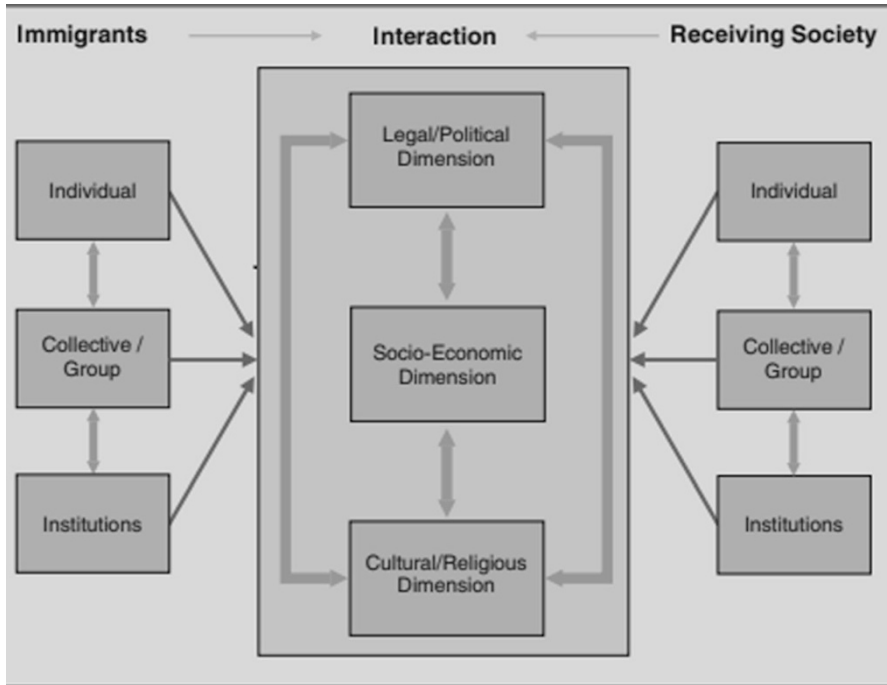
Fig. 14.1 Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas' (2016, p. 16) heuristic model of integration processes

outcomes can vary between countries. While the United States is judged to be relatively inclusive of immigrants in terms of political representation and national identity, for instance, some European countries are judged to be more inclusive in indexes measuring economic inequality and residential segregation. Those differences cannot be understood without a close examination of the institutional structures which impact on them. Crul and Schneider (2010) also emphasise the ways in which institutional structures, such as those in the labour market and in education, shape integration outcomes; while others have looked at the impact of welfare state regimes (Sainsbury, 2012) and of spatial segregation (Phillips, 2015).

It was initially thought that engagement in one dimension would be mirrored by engagement elsewhere: labour market and social integration, for instance, going side by side. Evidence shows, however, that this is not necessarily the case. Working anti-social hours can limit opportunities to take language classes or develop social networks outside of work (Charsley et al., 2020). Portes et al. (2005, p. 1013) found that limited engagement in the cultural dimension can facilitate engagement elsewhere, such as access to jobs and housing: "the social capital grounded on ethnic networks provides a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation". Such trade-offs run counter to the implicit assumption that retention of cultural or transnational connections impedes integration processes elsewhere. That finding

demonstrates the importance of taking a broad lens to the study of integration: outcomes are not consistent across cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions (Maxwell, 2012, p. 17).

14.3   Multiculturalism and Interculturalism

Some national and local policymakers similarly adopted the term integration, seeking to distance themselves from any suggestion that their goal was to require immigrants to assimilate. As long ago as 1966, a UK Home Secretary insisted that he saw integration

> "not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance" (Rose et al., 1969, p. 25)

This was a concept of integration that required some adaptation by both minority and majority and one intended to achieve a multicultural society: a society which would value diverse traditions and give this some recognition in institutional form, but in which community and cultural boundaries would be permeable, not set in stone (Rudiger & Spencer, 2003).

In contrast to assimilationists, *multiculturalists* prioritised policy interventions to reduce discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, overcome barriers to participation in society, and foster acceptance of cultural pluralism and understanding (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000, p. xvii; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p. 4). Critics of multiculturalism argue, however, that such interventions can overemphasise group differences, foster separateness, stifle debate, ossify cultural practices that would otherwise adapt over time, and create vested interests in ethnic and faith-based groupings, thus reinforcing divisions rather than what people have in common (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

The Common Basic Principles on Integration agreed by the European Union in 2004, reflecting long discussions to reconcile differing Member State approaches, state that "integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States", but go on to assert that "integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union", and to emphasise the importance of frequent interaction between immigrants and the citizens of Member States (EU, 2004).

'*Interculturalism*', in which there is an emphasis on dialogue and social mixing across communities as well as on valuing diversity and equality, has emerged as an alternative to both multiculturalism and assimilation. Arguably its advocates target popular misconceptions of multiculturalism, not the versions of those who advocate it; so that rather than offering an alternative approach to multiculturalism it actually emphasises aspects of it (Modood, 2017). Interculturalism has proved popular with policymakers, particularly among European cities (Zapata-Barrero, 2015), part of a growing divergence between national and municipal approaches and between those of municipalities themselves (Entzinger, 2019; Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

14.4   Critiques of 'Integration'

The similarity between the *concepts used by academics and policymakers* has led to criticism that scholars have embraced their integration paradigm instead of interrogating it. In a hard-hitting critique in 2001, Favell argued that academics (whether wanting to be able to engage critically in policy debates or "chasing after ethnic relations policy consultancies"), had entered into the logic of mainstream, normative, integration discourse. Reading their work, it could be difficult to remember that they were not speaking from the same location as the policymakers (Favell, 2001, p. 354). He went on to argue that:

> The reproduction of ideas of integration and citizenship in academic discourse, for all their progressive veneer, thus may be just reproducing a certain vision of a unitary modern nation-state or nation-society that corresponds closely to what those who speak from a powerful position in society most want to hear, but *not* how these societies really function. (ibid., 2001, p 358; see also Favell, 2016; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Recent critiques of integration have returned to this concern, as part of a broader insistence on the need for greater reflexivity on the paradigms in which migration research is conducted (Dahinden, 2016). In essence, critiques "centre on ways in which normative underpinnings combine with conceptual fuzziness to produce migrant-blaming depictions of social processes within distorted notions of nation-states and homogenous majority populations within them" (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). While some critics call for rejection of the concept (Rytter, 2018; Schinkel, 2018) others argue that it is time to "renew" or reclaim it (Anthias & Pajnic, 2014).

Five core criticisms have been made. While some are couched in sweeping terms that do not do justice to the breadth and depth of scholarship in the field (Penninx, 2019), they undoubtedly identify pitfalls that need to be avoided: that integration research is pervaded by normativity and by an outdated imaginary of society; of methodological nationalism; negative objectification of migrants as 'other'; and of a narrow focus on migrants when identifying the factors shaping the outcomes of integration processes (Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

14.4.1   Normativity

Normativity refers, first, to the ways in which implicit assumptions are made that certain actions or outcomes are desirable while others are not. The normativity that pervades academic writing on integration begins in the definitions of integration used, as here by Alba and Foner (2015, p. 5), for whom integration is:

> the processes that increase the opportunities of immigrants and their descendants to obtain the valued 'stuff' of a society, as well as social acceptance [...] Full integration implies parity of life chances with members of the native majority group and being recognized as a legitimate part of the national community.

While many will find that goal laudable, it can be argued that the concept of integration used for academic research and analysis ought not to include any normative connotations on the desired end goal: rather, "the concept of an end goal is itself a normative construct" (Wieviorka, 2014, p. 637). The aim should be to study what *is* happening, the actual processes, not to prescribe what *ought* to happen, which is a matter for those in the policy field.

The challenge extends beyond the definition of integration used. As Crul and Schneider (2010, p. 1265) write:

> normative ideas of preferred integration outcomes seem to slip most easily into academic integration models. Implicit normative connotations of terms and concepts frequently prevent us posing the right scientific questions and developing analytical models that address integration dynamics in order to understand and not to judge them.

A reflexive approach thus has to be taken in the design of research, selection of data, and analysis, to interrogate the implicit assumptions on which they are based. Race and class, for instance, must be built into the analysis, rather than simply taking 'migrant' as the key analytical category (Hadj Abdou, 2019).

14.4.2 Objectification of the Migrant as 'Other'

Anthias and Pajnic (2014) highlight the way in which discourse on integration serves to posit the immigrant as 'other', the outsider; separating the deserving, well-integrated (though still not one of us) from the undeserving who have failed to integrate. Thus, a discourse that is concerned with the inclusion of migrants contributes to their marginalisation. Engaged in this discourse, scholars of integration are providing the factual architecture in which problematisation of the migrant other takes shape (Schinkel, 2018).

If work on integration processes is to avoid reinforcing this sense of difference and separation, it has to contextualise individuals within—not apart from—society. It has to reorient the focus of study away from migrant populations to the population as a whole (whether at the neighbourhood level or at a larger scale); as a process of boundary change in which all individuals are engaged (Klarenbeek, 2019). Thus, as Dahinden (2016, p. 2218) writes, "the research question loses its migration-specific focus while remaining sensitive to the role of migration and ethnicity in the phenomenon being investigated".

14.4.3 Outdated Imaginary of Society

Criticism also focuses on the way in which the 'receiving society' is often portrayed: as culturally homogenous, bounded, and self-contained. It is Durkheim's nineteenth-century notion of an "integrated society" unified by common values and replete with

constructions of members (citizens) who belong and those who do not (Favell, 2001; Rytter, 2018). It harks from an age before we understood the complexity of contemporary societies; a nostalgic concept evoked by those who long to return to former times (Wieviorka, 2014, p. 636).

Research on integration needs to recognise society as diverse, segmented (not least by class, faith, and ethnicity), fluid, and evolving, with porous internal and external boundaries (Urry, 2000). It has institutional structures which shape access to them and interactions within them. The opportunities society presents and the barriers it imposes are the context for the engagement of those who have newly arrived as well as for those who have never been away.

14.4.4   Methodological Nationalism

A consequence of an outdated imaginary of society in integration research is *methodological nationalism*: that is, it often takes the nation-state as the natural social and political form of the modern world, focusing on the engagement of individuals within one country to the neglect of their simultaneous, continuing, economic, social, and cultural ties abroad (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 302). Yet integration is not a national project in a society bounded by the borders of the nation-state: the global and transnational must be built into our understanding of the processes in which migrants and other residents are engaged. The implications of *transnational connections* have indeed been a recent focus of study by integration scholars—with recognition that integration processes are not after all two-way but at least three-way with country of origin, and beyond (Fokkema & De Haas, 2011; Mügge, 2016).

14.4.5   Narrow Focus on Migrants in the Factors Shaping Integration Processes

With the focus on immigrants as 'other' and a sanitised notion of society can come a narrow focus, in the factors shaping integration processes, on those relating to migrants to the neglect of the societal opportunities and barriers they can face. In turn that leads to the attribution of blame if integration 'outcomes' are poor.

Rather than focus solely on factors related to migrants, such as their human and social capital, research needs to capture the multiple and systemic factors which shape the processes of engagement over time.

## 14.5 Avoiding the Pitfalls

If it is accepted that these five criticisms are indeed pitfalls to be avoided, is it possible to carry out research which does so? It is certainly a methodological challenge. It is easier to secure data on individuals' human and social capital, for instance, than to identify the opportunities and barriers that they faced at particular points in time, across the spheres of life in which they and fellow residents were engaged. What were the openings in the labour and housing markets in the parts of the country in which they lived? Were opportunities for civic engagement available? Were the individuals and institutions with whom they engaged, in country of residence and transnationally, welcoming or rejecting? How can we avoid objectifying the migrant as 'other' when securing data on these wider factors is much more difficult to obtain?

The starting point is a definition of integration which does not identify migrants separately from other individuals, nor makes reference to any normative end goal, such as:

> Processes of interaction, personal and social change among individuals and institutions across structural, social, cultural and civic spheres and in relation to identity; processes which are multi-directional and have spacial, transnational and temporal dimensions (Charsley et al., 2020: Chapter 2; Spencer & Charsley, 2021)

Operationalising that definition can be facilitated, as in Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas's work (2016), by a heuristic model of integration processes (Fig. 14.2)—in this case categorising those processes across five dimensions—and identifying from the research literature the groups of factors which are known to impact on the integration processes within them. In the model below, the dimensions are *Structural*—as in participation in the labour and housing markets, education, and health systems; *Social*—as in social interaction, relationships, and networks; *Cultural*—changing values, attitudes, behaviour, and lifestyle; *Civic and political participation*—in community life and the democratic process; and *Identity*—the processes through which individuals may develop a shared identity and sense of belonging with the place, nation, communities and people among whom they live. The model does not prioritise one dimension over another; the aim is to understand, not to judge.

This categorisation of dimensions is not a literal depiction of integration processes but a heuristic device; a tool to operationalise in research design and analysis. It enables us to visualise that the processes in one dimension could develop differently to those in another; and that interactions in one could impact on interactions in another (as depicted by the green arrows), including 'trade-offs' where less engagement in one dimension can facilitate engagement in another. Separation between dimensions is less evident in practice in some contexts, as where employment in a family business blurs the boundary between engagement in the structural and social spheres. In each case, any indexes measuring the processes of interaction, personal and social change are measuring those processes for all residents, wherever possible to do so. Outcomes derive not from one set of actors but from those interactions. The selection of indicators used is necessarily a normative choice.
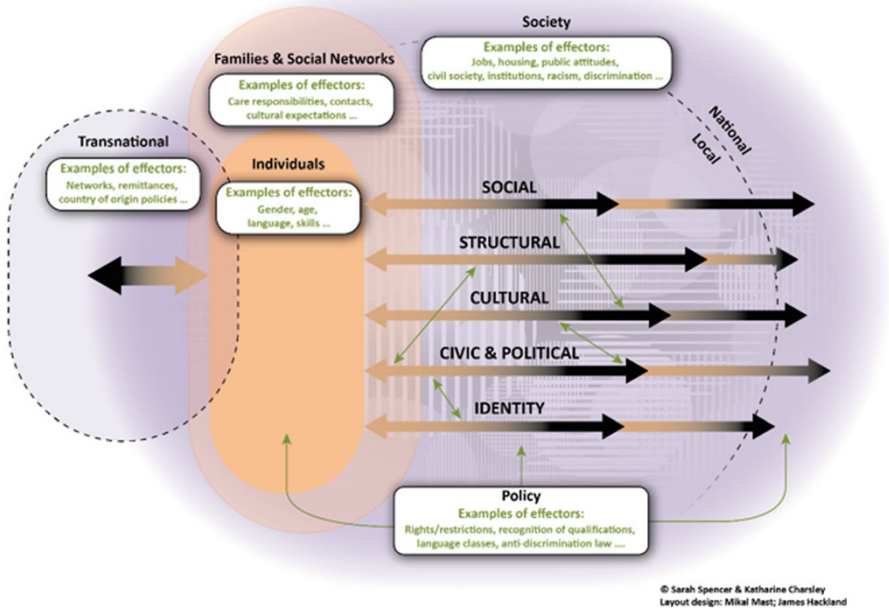
Fig. 14.2 Heuristic model of integration processes and effectors. (Source: Spencer and Charsley (2016), as revised in Spencer and Charsley (2021))

The diagram provides a framework for researchers to identity the factors (or 'effectors' as they may facilitate or limit engagement) which have been found to impact on integration processes in their area of study: relating (as shown in the white boxes) to individuals, such as gender and language skills; to families and social networks, such as care responsibilities; to opportunity structures in society, such as job vacancies; to transnational effectors, such as trading opportunities, or responsibility for remittances; and, finally, to policy interventions. Policy interventions may impact on integration processes (including restrictions on rights *to* participate), but the model does not assume that policies determine outcomes. As Charsley et al. (2020, ch. 2) point out:

> Researching and writing about integration is rather like untangling a complicated knot – identifying the various strands and teasing apart their relationships to each other. Pulling one strand or another first will expose particular sets of inter-relationships in a different order.

The heuristic model facilitates that process.

It remains entirely legitimate to study the processes in a single dimension (or domain within it, such as voting practices within the *civic dimension*), but it is necessary to acknowledge the wider context, that individuals may simultaneously be engaged in integration processes in other dimensions which may be impacting on the focus of study. Likewise, where the focus of study is local, it is necessary to recognise that the integration processes under the microscope may be impacted upon by structures and processes at the national and transnational level.

14.6   Conclusion

Understanding processes of engagement is important, including the impacts of migration on them. Scholars of integration have contributed to a rich literature on these processes, but there is no consensus on the terminology and concepts used. Sharp criticisms have been made of the use of the concept of integration in research, citing the impacts on it of policy paradigms. This chapter has categorised these criticisms as: (1) focusing on normativity; (2) an outdated imaginary of society; (3) methodological nationalism; (4) a negative objectification of migrants as 'other'; and (5) a narrow focus on migrants in the factors shaping integration processes. While addressing these pitfalls brings significant methodological challenges beyond the intellectual challenge of changing the paradigm, the chapter argues that it is possible to do so, proposing a definition of integration and a heuristic model of integration processes capable of empirical application. Neither will end the debate on whether the concept of integration should be 'written against' or renewed but they could assist those who wish to study the processes of engagement to find a constructive way forward to do so.

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