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The Challenge of Integration

Cultural heterogeneity and democracy in European Metropolises

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Immigration into Europe's Western democracies has resulted in greater racial, religious, and linguistic heterogeneity. For several decades, both political theory and empirical reality reinforced the assumption that homogeneity was if not a precondition, then at least an extremely beneficial factor promoting a democracy's stability. Yet, nowadays this assumption is hard to sustain because if European states want to remain democracies, they must explore ways of integrating the heterogeneity derived from immigration. The search for ways to achieve "Unity in Diversity," as proclaimed by the EU and other actors, has become a central task of contemporary politics.

Despite its importance for European democracies, scholars have failed to explore the possibility of political integration through new, overall encompassing identities. In particular, the scarcity of empirically-grounded models is remarkable and constitutes our departing point. In cities, institutions mediate between a heterogenous civil society and an encompassing political identity in order to create citizens. Our research project focuses on smaller and well-defined metropolitan areas because there the institutional embededness of the process is particularly visible. In cities, transnational immigration produces a heterogeneous civil society, as an expression of cultural pluralism. As a result, diverging identities and forms of interaction appear territorially concentrated and are expressed through languages and religions. Although these expressions of pluralism are widely considered as deserving protection, multiculturalism, the political theory approach best reckoning with diversity's added-value, has lately received harsh criticism. Allegedly, multiculturalism's emphasis on cultural differences set hurdles to the rise of a common identity based on citizenship. Critics of multiculturalism claim that modern societies should not favour the preservation of cultural identities as a strategy to integrate immigrants, but should instead emphasize the reduction of social inequalities. In particular, politics should pay more attention to contexts crucial for immigrants' transformation into citizens, like housing, labour market, and education policies.

Research Objective

Through a cross-country comparison of cities, this project aims to clarify the role of local actors in coping with the new forms of heterogeneity. The question is to which extent and through which means do cities contribute to immigrants' integration and peaceful coexistence. We assume not only that local governments are particularly exposed to the problems derived from transnational immigration, but also that, in a sense, they are pioneers trying out policies that the nation-state may subsequently adopt. Admittedly, cities possess only a limited leeway to implement their own policies. In order to account for this limitation, our project carefully examines the institutional arrangements restricting local governments' room for manoeuvre. An additional merit of our project lies in its analysis of the different EU and third-state immigrant status. The EU directives that establish "differences within the difference" discriminate between EU citizens and third-state nationals whose social and legal status, as well as their societal role, starkly differ.

In order to examine integration policy in west European metropolises, we will consider integration policy as consisting of an array of policies like education, media, and domestic policy aimed at promoting immigrants' transformation into citizens. Thus, the response of the political system to the increasing urban heterogeneity constitutes our dependent variable, which should cover a range of so-called multicultural policies. For the case selection, we will avoid global cities like London and New York where cultural heterogeneity resulting from mass immigration is not a recent phenomenon. As a result, global cities developed specific policies and responses, which make a comparison with other metropolises unsuitable.

In contrast to other studies, we stress socio-cultural factors as explanatory variables. Of course, the preceding should not be understood as implying that socio economic factors do not bear on political integration. Still, it is necessary to distinguish between both groups of causes. Our socio-cultural perspective considers that a group's ability to participate in poli-

tics, and not only economic well-being, constitutes a precondition for the group to surmount social disadvantage.

Our focus lies on three metropolises, Barcelona, Berlin and Brussels. The commonalities and differences between the three cities make them particularly suitable cases for our purposes. None of them can be considered as a global city. Furthermore, they all exhibit a clear distinction between a "higher" and a "lower" segment of foreign inhabitants. Similarly, in all three cities foreign population is divided into EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens. In addition, all cities show an inter-urban socio-cultural cleavage that gives a distinctive form to the challenge of incorporating immigrants. In Barcelona and Brussels, this cleavage is based on language while in Berlin the dividing line reflects different patterns of socialisation resulting from the division of the city up to 1989.

A number of differences between the three metropolises make them particularly suitable for an inquiry into cultural heterogeneity and political integration. For instance, Brussels is the only one of the three cities showing both a large share of EU-citizens, one out of every two foreign residents, and the presence of influential far right parties at a local level. Whereas the first fact indicates that the group of newcomers is extremely heterogenous, the second suggests that a significant number of *Bruxellois* considers immigration as a problem. Regarding Berlin, it is remarkable that although its immigrant population share is not particularly high, thirty percent of its youngest cohort is comprised of foreigners. An additional particularity of Berlin lies in the many structural changes the city is going through, derived both from being again the German capital and from the linking of the formerly divided East and West Berlin. For the purposes of this piece of research, Barcelona differs from the other two cities in the particularly rapid increase of its foreign population. Evidence from the three cities will be used to analyse how the new links between local governments and the EU multilevel structure and increasing cultural heterogeneity relate to each other.

Our research focuses on four groups of questions:

1. To establish the importance cities assign to the recognition of cultural pluralism when they set the aims of their integration policies. Closely related are the questions of how local actors perceive heterogeneity and which place occupies a city's integration policy along a continuum in which assimilation is at one extreme and multiculturalism at the other.

2. Closely connected is how the local public sphere deals with the characteristics of the different heterogenous groups, in particular their origin and their language and religion.

3. Immigrants' different legal status, i.e., EU or non-EU citizenship, possibly leads to problematic situations. Most probably, differing status determines groups' participation in the public sphere.

4. Finally, our project will clarify whether immigrants use the available institutional integration and participation channels and how or whether they use them to create segmented public spaces.

To answer the preceding questions, we resort to the following indicators: the treatment of linguistic and religious pluralism, the strategies for dealing with and representing diversity in the public sphere, the orientation of institutions involved in socialisation towards the continuum assimilation/multiculturalism, the existence of specialized institutions dealing with integration policy, and the presence of persons with immigration backgrounds as representatives and higher officials.

The first of our main hypotheses is that the three cities' integration policies substantially differ from those implemented by the respective member states. Metropolises' higher levels of cultural heterogeneity separate the local and nation-state public spheres. We further assume that the three local governments reacted hesitantly and through traditional instruments

to the problems derived from cultural heterogeneity. Our third hypothesis is that the improved position of EU citizens has ambivalent implications for the recognition of heterogeneity. On the one hand, the special status of EU citizens has led to the rise of different channels of interest representation for different types of foreigners. On the other hand, Europeanisation, by improving the status of EU citizens living in other member states, puts pressure on nation states. When dealing with heterogeneity, central governments should apply the same egalitarian criteria to all foreigners and recognize the same rights not only with regard to EU immigrants, but also to those coming from third countries. Our final hypothesis is that the success of integration policies depends less on the composition of the immigrants' groups, that is, language, religion, culture, than on the conditions created by political institutions. Thus, successful integration occurs when civil society and institutions incorporate diversity and promote collective learning processes.

Method

For several reasons, the period of research goes from 1995 to 2004. First, although the EU-citizenship was established in 1992, it is necessary to allow for a time gap of several years before its effects are perceptible. Second, in the selected cities cultural heterogeneity has not increased or has done so more slowly after 2004. Finally, Barcelona, Brussels and Berlin held local elections in 1995.

As an initial step, we will systematically collect social statistical data on our three cities in order to ascertain the respective levels and forms of cultural heterogeneity. During this first stage and in order to build a reliable base for comparison, we will also examine the three cities' institutional specificities relevant for their integration policies. Building on the preceding steps, we will then analyse the local governments' reactions to the increases in cultural heterogeneity.

The analysis of these sources will serve as a basis for conducting expert interviews, the kernel of the three case studies. The first group of interviewees encompasses politicians and officials active in the policy fields relevant for the integration of immigrants. The second group encompasses the specialized bodies established to tackle integration-related problems (*Beauftragten…*). The third group of interviews includes representatives from organizations active in the respective local public spheres, in particular foreigners' and immigrants' associations. The interviews will be conducted in two different phases. The first one, based on open interviews, will be useful for establishing more precisely how local actors perceive cultural heterogeneity and, if necessary, for adding new aspects to our research question. For the second phase we will rely on structured interviews targeting specific problems. In addition to the preceding, we will use materials from local newspapers in order to contextualize our research in local political developments during the research period.