

Dimensions and Determinants of Immigrant Integration. The Role of Origin and Settlement

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Short Abstract

The difficulty of arriving at a definition of the concept of fully shared integration of immigrants certainly has not been exceeded; the debate is still open, even if there is the common consensus on the dynamic and multidimensional nature of this important social process. Starting from the literature, this paper aims to define a *reasonable* indicator of the immigrant's integration in the host country. Promoting the idea that the integration is a two way process, where both the immigrants and the context of arrival are involved, the results of this paper will not only contribute to measure the immigrant's integration, but it will also underline the importance of the nested structure of the subject of interest. Using the sample survey promoted by the Foundation ISMU, the aim of this paper is to study the impact of individual and contextual characteristics on the levels of integration of immigrants in Italy.

1. Introduction

Researcher's attention, from different disciplines, to the *adaptation* of immigrants in the hosting countries is certainly not recent, particularly in the United States of America. For over a century researchers have been debating about the definition of terminologies and concepts, as well as on models and theories, but without reaching unanimously shared solutions due to the complexity of the phenomenon, the different dimensions involved and the different perspectives of observation and analysis. In recent years, more attention has been paid to this issue in the European context, in which was the predominant use of the term *integration* of immigrants to indicate the phenomenon of interest. The difficulty of arriving at a definition of the concept of fully shared integration certainly has not been exceeded (Piché, 2004), the debate is still open, even if there is the common consensus on the dynamic and multidimensional nature of this important social process (Piché, 2004; Cesareo, 2005; 2009; Heckmann et al., 2010; Bijl, Verweij, 2012). The European Commission defined integration as 'a two-way process' and this implies 'on the one hand that it is the responsibility of the host society to ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place in such a way that the individual has the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural and civil life and on the other, that immigrants respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their own identity' (2003: 17-18). This definition underlies the importance of the place of arrival. In this

direction, the Zaragoza Declaration (2010) has identified a limited number of policy areas of relevance for integration: employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship.

In the last decades, Italy has experienced a significant transformation of the foreign presence towards a more permanent settlement. This transformation has highlighted the need to measure and monitor the inclusion of immigrants into various aspects of the Italian society. Starting in the 1990s and continuing until the most recent years some researchers have focused on the integration of immigrants through the construction of specific indicators for the main nationalities present in the country (Birindelli, 1991, Cagiano de Azevedo et al. 1992, Natale, Strozza, 1997 Golini et al., 2006, Cesareo e Blangiardo 2009).

The Italian *Commission for Integration Policies* had identified several aspects to be taken into account for the construction of an adequate system of measurement of the process of integration of foreign communities (Zincone, 2000). The main dimensions that have been proposed are: social, spatial and demographic aspects; relations with the host and origin's community; inclusion and achievement at school and in the workplace; living conditions and active participation in the daily life. More recently, the *National Council of Economy and Labor* (CNEL) in collaboration with the Italian Caritas published the report "Integration Index of immigrants in Italy" in order to establish a ranking of Italian provinces and regions according to the level of integration of foreigners. They have identified three dimensions (spatial concentration, social stability and labor market position) and calculated a single new indicator that allows ranking the different areas based on the level of potential integration of immigrants (CNEL, 2007).

Starting from the literature, this paper aims to define a *reasonable* indicator (or indicators) of the immigrant's integration in the host country. Promoting the idea that the integration is a two way process, where both the immigrants and the context of arrival are involved, the results of this paper will not only contribute to measure the immigrant's integration, but it will also underline the importance of the nested structure of the subject of interest. This allows us to exploit the natural hierarchical structure of the data (individual nested Italian's areas) and use a multilevel approach.

Using the sample survey promoted and coordinated by the Foundation ISMU of 32 territorial units (municipalities, metropolitan areas or provinces) covering all Italian divisions, the aim is to study the impact of individual and contextual characteristics on the levels of integration of immigrants in Italy. The idea is that the context of arrival is a key priority for the interpretation of the individual phenomenon under consideration.

2. Data & Methods

The ISMU Foundation has coordinated a national research project on “Measuring the level and differential characteristics of integration- Year 2008” which involved 20 local units among Italian universities and research institutes. The survey has been carried out using a centre sampling technique (Baio et al., 2011). More than 12,000 foreign citizens over 18 year old, coming from Less Developed Countries (LDCs) and Central European Countries (CEE), including the new EU-27, in 32 different Italian provinces or municipalities were interviewed.

Four thematic indices, concerning cultural, social, economic and political integration, as well as an overall index of integration, will be calculated at individual level (for each interviewed foreign) on the basis of the information collected. Once the thematic indices of integration are identified, they will be used in asymmetric methods of multivariate analysis to test the importance of socio-demographic variables on the degree of settlement in Italy. Our aim is also to investigate how the context of arrival affects and changes the relationships between the characteristics of the individual and its integration process. We use multilevel techniques that allow the interaction between the individual¹ and contextual factors².

3. Preliminary Results

Descriptive analyses show that there is large variation in the degree of integration (cultural, social, political and economic) by country of citizenship and place of living in Italy. Chinese immigrants, for example, are integrated well economically, while retaining a low degree of political, social and especially cultural integration. A preliminary analysis points also out a positive relation among level of integration, length of stay, and gender: women are more integrated than men.

First regression analyses following a stepwise multilevel approach (table 1) tested that individual factors, even representing the most important correlate of integration, do not completely explain intra-province heterogeneity, confirming the existence of an autonomous contextual effect. But most important the contextual effect varied depending on if we consider cultural, social, political or economic integration. Passing from the multilevel null model to the multilevel adjusted for individual level covariates we observe the reduction in the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICCs) also varies by the four spheres of integration. This decrease shows that a large part of the low geographical variability is actually due to a different composition of individual characteristics of the immigrant population living in different provinces.

¹ Socio-demographic and migratory characteristics.

² We introduce in our analysis as contextual effect economical dimension (i.e. GDP, unemployment rate) and foreigner's dimension in the territory (i.e. percentage of foreigners, percentage of family permits).

Composition effects explain many differences between provinces in economic and cultural integration, while no differences in social integration are explained by composition of individual characteristics within the provinces. Individual characteristics do not completely explain intra-province heterogeneity and some unexplained variability in integration remain, advocating the existence of a contextual (second level) as well individual (first level) effects. The introduction of some contextual explicative variables further reduces the second level variability. The share of variability reduces differently depending on the sphere of integration, making clear that our attempt to approximate this residential variability through contextual covariates is useful and, in particular, more for the political integration than for cultural, social and economic Integration

Table 1: Multilevel linear regression: Intraclass correlation coefficient- ICC

Rho*100-ICC	Cultural Integration	Social Integration	Political Integration	Economic integration
<i>Model Null</i>	3.88	3.05	6.95	4.15
<i>Model with individual covariates</i>	2.76	3.00	6.71	2.20
<i>Model with individual & contextual covariates</i>	2.23	1.89	4.22	1.32

4. Conclusion

Preliminary results have shown the importance of country of citizenship and ties with the country of origin as well the place of arrival and juridical status of the presence. The final results and conclusion will be available in time for the PAA meeting; however these preliminary results confirm that the multilevel approach is useful to shed light on some very relevant aspects of integration. In fact, individual factors, even representing the most important correlates on integration, do not completely explain intra-regional heterogeneity, confirming the existence of a contextual effect. And the impact of contextual effects changes when we consider the diverse dimensions of integration.

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