

Mapping integration. Understanding immigration

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Abstract

Each historical period was confronted with population movements across territories, displacements that were not always peaceful. Nowadays, peoples' positioning in a certain area and the movements between territories are related to concepts as nation, country, citizenship, and migration, all performing within a given formal framework. Besides this preestablished setting, a series of soft, cultural aspects, individual abilities, beliefs systems, attitudes, perceptions, values, all together shape such issues regarding both emigration and immigration.

When analyzing migratory flows, Romania can be clearly defined as an emigration country, after the revolution of 1989. Nevertheless, a phenomenon started to gain terrain in the last years, as more people, from diversifying countries are coming to Romania. Immigration could be seen as bringing both advantages and disadvantages, challenges and opportunities to the host country, thus both facets of the coin must be addressed. Therefore, the core concept when discussing immigration is “integration”, as a smooth and successful immigrant integration process brings gains for the receiving country (brain gain, counterbalancing the demographic decline or the lack of workforce, contributions to the national budget, for example) and for the immigrants also.

Considering the above-mentioned issues this paper aims to provide a theoretical framework that fosters immigrants' integration measuring and understanding. Thus, integration levels and dimensions are presented, doubled by an analysis of the factors that can determine or moderate integration.

Keywords: *immigration; integration; integration dimensions; attitudes towards immigrants.*

1. The Context

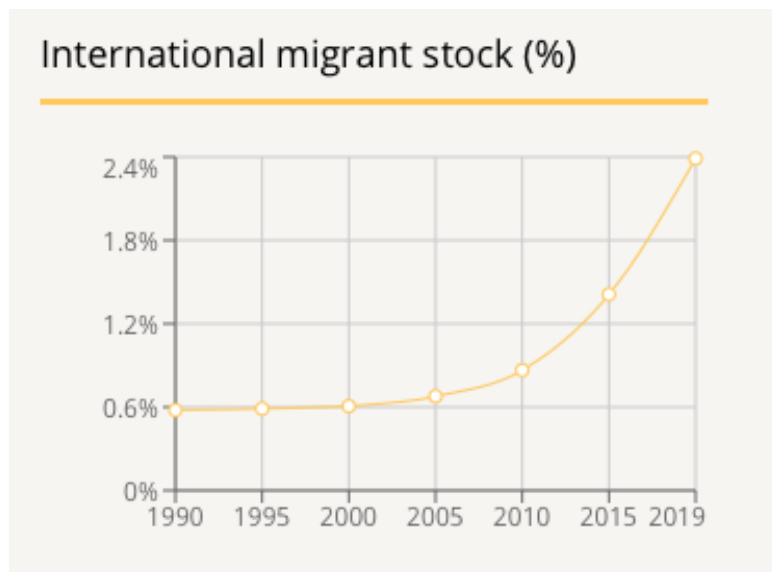
For the last 30 years, Romania was mostly defined as an emigration country. Official data show us that over three and a half million Romanians lived abroad for periods longer than six months (UN DESA 2017). This phenomenon was largely and extensively analyzed in the scholarly literature or debated in press, as it impacts labor market, demography, family life and other important sectors (Ilie Goga 2020; Porumbescu 2019a; Coşciug 2018; Anghel and Coşciug 2017). Brain drain, depopulation of rural areas, population aging, lack

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of qualified labor force, reduced contributions to the national budget, are among the most frequently mentioned consequences of Romanians` emigration.

Nevertheless, migratory flows are permanently changing, and immigration becomes an actual phenomenon for Romania also. Furthermore, it should be noted that “the developments in the field of international human migration, along with the new regulations Romania needed to follow as member of the European Union enrolled this country in the list of states that also receive various types of migrants, including refugees” (Porumbescu 2019b: p. 57). Recent statistics show us that more than two percent of the Romanian population consists of foreign citizens. What is worth to be mentioned here is the accelerated increase of immigrants` proportion in the last five years from 0.6% in 2005, to 2.4% in 2019, as visible in Figure no. 1.

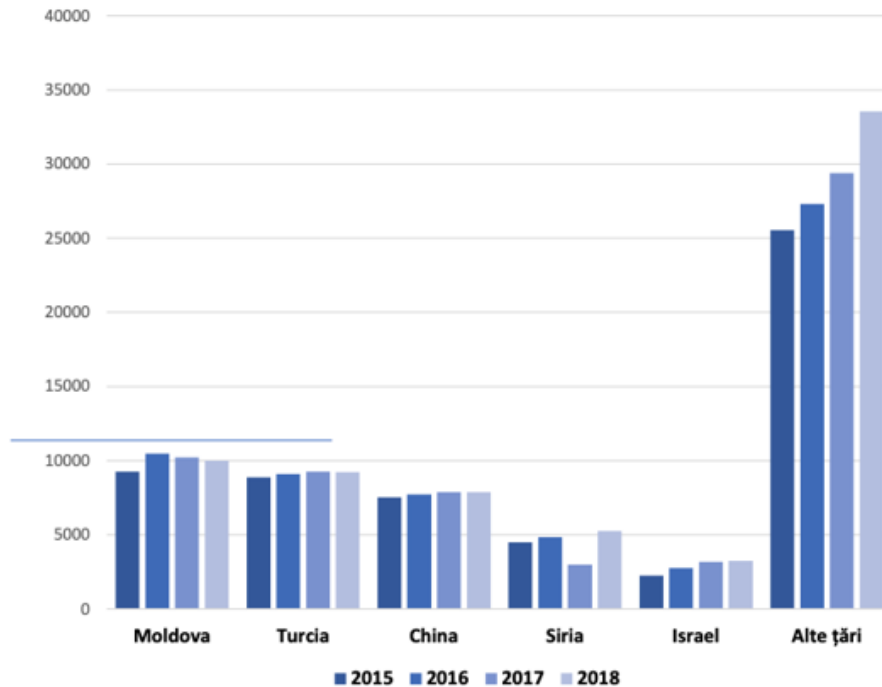
Figure no. 1: International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population at mid-year 2019 for Romania



Source: UN DESA (2019) “International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population at mid-year 2019”

Furthermore, we can see immigration towards Romania as a diversifying process looking at the countries where the immigrants come from or the reasons for choosing Romania. The first three main reasons when asking for permits are, in a descending hierarchy the followings: work, study and family reunification. The next figure presents a comparative longitudinal perspective regarding the main origin countries – Moldova, Turkey, China, Syria, and Israel, together with other countries, whose share is increasing between 2015-2018.

Figure 2: Main countries of origin for immigrants



Source: Romanian Immigrants Integration Index 2019

At the same time, Romania is also considered a country of transit for the illegal immigrants, as asylum seekers may be. Previous works draw attention on the fact that “field data analyses reveal the fact that Romania is being used as a space of transit for illegal immigration towards more developed western European states. A characteristic of the phenomenon of illegal immigration in the Romanian territory is represented by its bipolarity: on the one hand, illegal immigration of third countries nationals coming, mostly, from the countries that also represent the share in legal migration (Moldavia, Turkey, China). This category is characterized by certain continuity and by “conventional” illegal immigration methods, represented by the exceeding of the sitting period granted by the visa or the resident permit (Porumbescu, 2019a: p. 41)”. The same author addresses migratory flows towards Romania that are a result of war context defining the Middle East area: “on the other hand, there are the temporary illegal immigration flows caused by social and economic events in the countries of origin, representing “new waves” of immigration” (Idem).

2. Theoretical framework

Immigrants` integration could be understood as a medium - long term process that is shaped by individual aspects and country level factors. Harder and collaborators (2018: p. 11484) defined integration as “the degree to which immigrants have the knowledge and capacity to build a successful fulfilling life in the host society”. They emphasize later the differences between integration and assimilation, which brings a greater adherence to the

host country culture, to the detriment of the origin country cultural norms (Idem: p.11484). While Harder's view addresses integration from an individual perspective, the country-level aspects also shape integration through culture (attitudes, beliefs, values, cultural norms) and structure (institutional factors, public actors, stake holders, policies).

Therefore, in the following section, trying to understand integration, both individual characteristics and country level factors will be addressed. Thus, the individual level is understood from the perspective of Harder and collaborators regarding the six dimensions of integration, reuniting both knowledge and capacity.

Regarding the country-level factors, the structural aspects are translated into policies regarding immigration and institutional actors involved, while the cultural component is portrayed by the locals' attitudes towards immigration.

Successful immigrant integration is targeted at various levels and in the last few years became a major topic for governments, policymakers, national or regional organizations, frequently present on the research agenda. Studying and understanding integration serves multiple finalities, as a successful process brings benefits for immigrants and host countries also. When assessing the impact of certain policies regarding a specific social issue, as the integration of immigrants, measuring is a core step, that may rise several challenges (Coşciug 2018; Harder et. al. 2018).

3. Integration dimensions – assessing the individual level

Continuing the already briefly defined trajectory, becomes easily to understand that integration is firstly understood as an individual path towards the elements of a host country. Therefore, socio-demographic characteristics and other aspects reflecting the situation of the immigrant are usually analyzed when trying to understand immigrants' integration (Coşciug et al. 2019). The following lines of the present section will therefore sketch a proposal of a multidimensional measure of integration.

The IPL Integration Index built by Harder and collaborators (2018) proposes a six dimensions approach. Thus, the authors distinguish between the psychological dimension, the economic one, the political dimension of integration, the social dimension, the linguistic and navigational dimensions also (Harder et. al. 2018: p. 11484). Computing the scores for each item of the survey a total score is obtained, indicating the level of integration, or intermediate scores, for each dimension, can be calculated.

The psychological dimension of integration examines aspects as the feeling of connection and belonging in relation with the host country, or future plans concerning that territory. Elements as employment status and satisfaction regarding the current situation, income level, are composing the economic dimension of integration.

When investigating the political dimension, the authors propose items regarding the understanding of the major political issues from the host country, discussing political aspects or participating in such political activities. The social dimension of integration is captured through items that assess relations with the locals or involving in locals' organizations. In order to investigate the linguistic dimension, the authors refer to writing, reading, speaking and understanding the language of the host country. The navigational dimension of integration targeted immigrants' skills to address basic, usual issues in the host country, as medical assistance, legal matters, how to find a job or a house, for example.

The authors of the above-described instrument targeted the construction of a measurement tool which can be used in different contexts, investigating each of the six integration dimensions, the possible relations between them and the general level of

integration (Harder et. al.: p. 11487). As the team that elaborated the previously briefly presented tool mentions, the instrument tries to meet in a pragmatic and useful manner the requirements of “construct validity, ease of use and wide applicability. The measure is short but comprehensive and designed such that it can be applied across countries, immigrant groups time and survey models” (Idem).

4. Country – level factors

After studying the individual level characteristics that have an impact on the integration of immigrants, this section is investigating the country level factors. Here, the two interplaying variables are culture and structure. At structural level, the public actors, stakeholders at national level, the institutions which are responsible for immigration related issues, together with the social, economic and legal policies in the field, are among the independent variables that influence the integration of immigrants. Sometimes, a certain delay between the occurrence of a trend that has to be addressed at national or regional level through public regulations and actions and the issue of such regulations or creating the legal frame for action in the field is noticeable. Besides the time required for creating the necessary instruments, the people that are going to implement such policies need to be prepared and institutions also in order to cooperate and engage in an integrated and coordinated process.

Country level characteristics are not translated only into the structural, hard dimension. The soft, cultural dimension plays a same important role and the reciprocal influences and connections between the two levels are worthy to be mentioned here. When addressing the cultural component of the country level factors, the locals` attitudes towards immigration are frequently analyzed (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Gorodzeisky 2011; Preston et. al. 2001). Moreover, surveys as European Social Survey, European Values Survey or Word Value Study also investigate such issues and the data they provide allow for comparison between countries, individuals and cohorts, transversal or longitudinal approaches, as they keep a core of key items to which additional questions are added for new waves.

Regarding attitudes towards immigration, the team elaborating the “Round 7 Module on Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents” of the European Social Survey (2015) “distinguish between opposition to or support for immigration by different types of migrant, attitudes towards different criteria for accepting or excluding migrants and attitudes towards policies for integrating migrants into the new country of residence” (European Social Survey 2015: p. 4).

The authors rely on variables as perception of economic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup contact, national attachment, fraternal relative deprivation, racism and ethnicity when explaining attitudes of opposition or support for immigration, differently according to immigrants` characteristics. Their assumptions are based on previous works that link realistic or symbolic threat with opposition to immigration in general or for certain groups (Raijman et. al. 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007).

The two types of threat perceptions described by scientific literature in relation with immigration are realistic or material ones and symbolic or value ones (European Social Survey 2015: p. 6). Scarcity hypothesis comes in this equation attempting to explain realistic threats that may include areas as jobs, economic prosperity, or welfare services. The symbolic threats refer to the beliefs that the country's cultural life may be undermined by immigrants because of differences concerning beliefs or values, for example.

Additionally, contact theory tries to explain different attitudes regarding immigrants based on the social distance concept. The contact theory assumes that contacts with outgroup members will foster more tolerant perspectives towards them, thus positive interactions with immigrants may contribute to greater support for immigration.

National attachment is divided into nationalism and constructive patriotism (Raijman et.al. 2008), concepts that could be translated to the ethnic - civic distinction. National uncritical attachment together with superiority perceptions of one's nation compared with others, conceptualized as nationalism is expected to be associated with rather negative attitudes regarding immigrants.

In relation with nationality, ethnicity is also taken into consideration as a useful tool for understanding attitudes towards immigration. Therefore, in the European study previously presented, items investigating the respondents' ancestry are used (European Social Survey 2015: p. 29).

Linked to the above explained concepts of symbolic and realistic threat, another complex concept targeted by The European Social Study is fraternal relative deprivation. The authors of the module investigating attitudes toward immigration see fraternal deprivation as the feeling that "the group with which the individual identifies is at risk of losing opportunities or privileges to which they are rightly entitled" (Idem: p.7).

Racism is another concept analyzed when addressing immigrants integration. The authors of the European Social Survey define racism as "a set of negative beliefs and attitudes against ... racialized outgroups" (Idem: p.8), also discussing about the distinction between racism and racial prejudice on one hand, and biological and cultural racism on the other hand.

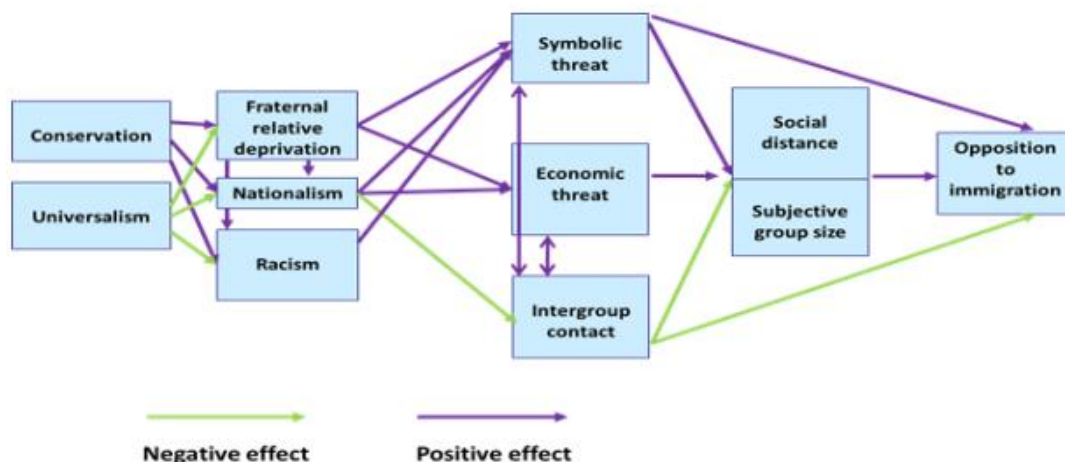
5. Discussions

Migratory flows are undoubtedly changing across time and territories. The contemporary social functioning of groups and individuals living in a certain area is crystallized around concepts as country, nations, nationals, foreigners, or locals. Such interactions between groups and individuals divide the actors in emigrants or immigrants, the territories can be host country, transit country or origin country and given the actual formal setting, such interactions require a legal framework. National and regional policies, institutions, together with other type of organizations and public actors aim to address such migration related issues.

Humanitarian aspects are brought into discussion when dealing with refugees, for example, while the inhabitants of the host country confront with threats, in some cases regarding the public services or the economy, other times the beliefs or axiological systems are threatened. Ethnic minorities also come in this complex equation and defining their attitudes and expectations can be sometimes difficult, depending on each particular context and the relation with the majority population.

As shown in the previous sections, integration should be understood as a multiple layers process, involving immigrants, locals, institutions, governments and other stakeholders. At individual level, immigrant's socio-demographic characteristics, abilities and other personal features can influence the integration process. The country – level aspects are also playing an important role here, through policies regarding immigration, public institutions dealing with immigrants and the capacity to manage such issues at a given time. Attitudes of the local population are the third key element, that may foster or not integration, as seen in the next figure.

Figure no. 3: The relations between the concepts used by the European Social Survey in measuring attitudes towards immigration and their antecedents



Source: European Social Survey (2015)

The figure above captures in a synthetic manner the relations between the variables that impact opposition or acceptance of immigrants, previously discussed. While symbolic and economic threats, social distance or perceptions of fraternal relative deprivation have a negative influence, positive contacts with immigrants and constructive patriotism (as a form of nationalism) foster acceptance attitudes.

Given the actual social, economic, and demographic context, defined by rapid changes, and the fact that migratory flows are influenced by the same transformations, addressing and understanding immigration and immigrant integration are necessary. Considering that measuring is a main challenge for social sciences, a shared conceptual framework and common instruments are needed, for comparable results, across countries, territories, and individuals. As shown above, some steps were already implemented towards the possibility of unitary research tools, which can bring benefits for academia and stakeholders also.

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