Identifying the factors affecting social integration in local societies: A literature review

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Abstract

The paper focuses on factors affecting social integration of refugees staying in European countries. It consists of an extensive literature review in terms of the definition and the origins of the term "social integration" as well as various aspects affecting the degree to which newcomers can be incorporated to local communities. Results prove that social integration is a complex procedure lying not only to housing policy but also to a series of issues that may be part of an integration policy. This review is the first part of a wider research on exploring the degree to which refugees living in Greece have been integrated to local society as well as the degree to which they feel incorporated to it.

Keywords: social integration of refugees, factors affecting integration, refugee policy, housing policy, local community, literature review.

Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed large migration flows, at a global level (Silove, Ventevogel & Rees, 2017; Catchpole & Coulombier, 2015), that affect all countries in the world (Martin, 2016). By reviewing UNHCR's (2022) data we observed a continual increase in the number of displaced people across the world who have fled their home countries to escape violence, persecution and conflict. Today their number is 36.0% higher than the one in 2015; this was the year when refugee flows reached a top-level benchmark. During that year, the highest number of victims of forced migration since 1960s was recorded (53 million people, in total) (Rodier, 2016). Indeed, more than 1.25 million refugees arrived in the European Union within this year (2015) (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017), as a result of the conflict escalation in the Middle East (Kotsiou, et al., 2018; Rodier, 2016). Many of them were found in the European countries surrounding the Mediterranean, as they were the entry-points to the European Union (EU) (Fotaki, 2022; Diamantis-Balaskas, 2021; Valenta, et.al., 2019).

Their majority (around 860,000) arrived from the Turkish coasts to the Greek islands (Rondos, Nagopoulos, Panagos, 2017); refugees arrivals from Africa to Italy were also numerous (Heisbourg, 2015).

In response to this situation, EU faced the moral obligation (see in Abbasi, Patel & Goodlee, 2015) to help these people, complying with the international conventions of human rights and refugee protection (Rondos, Nagopoulos, Panagos, 2017). Thus, in summer 2015, and after the two deadly shipwrecks close to the Italian island Lampedusa (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017; Rodier, 2016) special measures were taken (Fernandez-Juertas, Moraga & Rapoport, 2015) to deal with the so-called "refugee crisis"; it should be noted that this term formulated to describe the movement of large groups of displaced people who left their home countries, under extremely -or even hazardous- conditions (Kalogeraki, 2022). The European Agenda on Migration developed by the European Commission (EC, 2015) was the basis of the established policy. This particular agenda is based on four pillars: (a) reducing the incentives for irregular migration, (b) a common asylum policy, (c) a new policy on legal migration and (b) border management (see more in Winiarska, 2020). This context demonstrates Europe's interest in controlling and containing the refugee flows (Guild, et.al., 2015). This specific approach follows the framework of the establishment of the European organization Frontex, which, in addition to its competences for combating cross-border crime and terrorism (Franko, 2020 in Bachiller Lopez, 2022) starting in 2019, has been in charge of border surveillance since 2004 (Rodier, 2016). By applying a revised and evolved option of the Copenhagen School's securitization framework (Léonard & Kaunert, 2022), this mechanism "has become the focal point for the sharp critisism of pro-migrant and human rights groups" (Léonard, 2010: 232). In the above context, therefore, the containment of flows is realized through the externalization of immigration controls. This practically means that the responsibility for managing part of the migration flows as well as refugees is being transferred to non-European countries, since the ultimate goal is their expulsion. For this purpose, agreements are offered to third countries in which financial compensations or visa facilitation are offered for their nationals (Rodier, 2016).

The above results in an initially negative attitude towards the refugees staying on the European soil, and much more towards their integration in the local communities of the member states. However, the above view (reception of refugee and hospitality actions) was criticized when it was decided to relocate asylum seekers from the Mediterranean countries to the rest of the European states, based on a quota. Although the measure was not immediately implemented (Rodier, 2016), with some countries like Hungary maintaining a hardline stance, others, like Germany and Sweden, welcomed thousands of refugees (Martin, 2016). The opinion of the European Commissioner Dimitrios Avramopoulos (in Phillimore, 2021) who underlines that the whole migration policy would be a successful one only in case

integration of migrants and refugees will also be successful, is moving in this direction.

In this context, this paper theoretically approaches the issue of social integration by looking into the various parameters that influence the integration of refugees. For this purpose, an extensive literature review is carried out (Section 2), achieving both the conceptual delimitation - as far as possible – not only of the research objective but also the various factors affect it. The result of the literature review (Section 3) is utilized in the context of a research activity for the social integration of refugees in Greece. However, it can be used as a framework for understanding the issue and conducting other empirical research, given the special importance is given to the issue of integration in dealing with the refugee problem.

Refugees Social Integration: A Literature Review

Social integration is one of the four dimensions (the other three being legal, economic and cultural) of wider integration, according to UNHCR (2014). It is a quite debated concept (Cheung and Phillimore, 2016) as it is a complex issue that prevails in a community in case bonds of attraction and values unite its members (Blau, 1960). It refers to the process of forming social consensus which is based on a common system of values, meanings, culture and language (Rodier, 2016). Although the existence of differences between individuals or individual groups of each society is not excluded, agreement on certain fundamental principles is nevertheless necessary for the harmonious coexistence of the social whole as well as for the "sense of belonging" (Schnapper, 2008 in Kourahanis, 2019).

Emile Durkheim is one of the main scholars having written on the issue (in Pillemer and Glasgow, 2000). In Durkheim's work, social integration is associated with social cohesion (Berkman, et al., 2000). Although he does not define the concept clearly, he makes clear that integration has to do with the bonds of the individual to society - and its individual formations, such as the family, religious and political groups and organizations (Pillemer and Glasgow, 2000) - and the stability of social relations within it (Hassan, 1998). In his work he recognizes two types of solidarity to ensure social cohesion (see in Mishra and Rath, 2020), which Alpert (1940) identifies as the two principles of social integration that correspond to two extremely different forms of social organization (Thilakarathna, 2019): (a) mechanical and (b) organic solidarity. The first was evident in primitive societies (Mishra and Rath, 2020; Pope & Johnson, 1983) - in which Durkheim was particularly interested (Schiermer, 2014) - and was based on the shared beliefs and consensus that exist in the collective consciousness (Koucrahanis, 2019). With the structural changes resulting from industrialization and urbanization, mechanical solidarity was destroyed and the second form came to the fore (Kanu, Ezeji & Alaribe, 2020; Çağirkan, 2019; Siu-kai, 1976). The second type of solidarity is created "on the basis of the interdependence of economic ties that would result from the differentiation and specialization of the

modern economic pattern" (Kourachanis, 2019). This kind of interdependence creates the right conditions for increased social integration and, as a result, for weakening social conflicts (Kourachanis, 2019).

Therefore, by studying Durkheim's theoretical point of view, one understands how he defines the concept of social integration through the processes by which the individuals of a society connect with each other and develop relationships of mutual dependence (Souza, 2018). These processes strengthen the social relationships between people, groups and institutions (Kourachanis, 2019). Through processes of integration into a collective body, social groups are recognized as capable of participating in social life and the political community (Turner, 1981).

Due to the fact that, in modern times, social cohesion is treated with different meanings in scientific discourse (see in Miciukiewicz, 2012; Chan, To & Chan, 2006), establishing a commonly accepted definition of social integration is not easy (Bakker, Cheung & Phillimore, 2016), since social integration is conceptually included to social cohesion (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012). A typical example of this is the project of Bakker et al. (2016) who have conducted an extensive literature review concerning the terminology and the meaning of social integration. Having studied the work of various scholars, with an emphasis on Berry, Bhatia and Ram as well as Schneider and Crul, they argue that the social integration of refugees can be perceived by some as a linear process while by others as a multi-dimensional and two- way process (Berry, 1997 in Bakker, et al., 2016). Focusing on Bathia & Ram's study (2009), social integration is understood as a clear two-way approach where the cultural characteristics and conditions of the country of origin and the host country are in constant interaction. The same happens between present and past. The basic point at this dialectic connection, is the questioning of the initial identity and its evolution for both involved subjects. Schneider & Crul (2011), relying on the conceptual framework of segmented assimilation, present a different perception of achieving social integration since they consider that there are various pathways leading towards multiple mainstreams.

Given the multidimensional character of the process of integrating refugees into local societies, the parameters that contribute to its achievement are numerous. By identifying these parameters, it is possible to promote social integration and social cohesion, which is a policy goal for projects focused on refugees (Ager & Strang, 2008). For this reason, much research has been conducted to identify these factors (Bakker, et al., 2016).

The most widespread research paper regarding this issue is the one of Ager & Strang (2008) who identify ten influencing factors which they classify into four broad categories: (a) Markers and Means (employment; housing; education; health), (b) Social Connection (social bridges; social bonds; social links), (c) Facilitators (language and cultural knowledge; safety and stability) and (d) Foundation (rights and

ISSN 2601-8632 (Print)
ISSN 2601-8640 (Online

European Journal of
Social Sciences

January - June 2024
Volume 7, Issue 1

citizenship). Fundamental areas for fulfilling social inclusion are access to goods and the development of social networks, ties and relationships. Achieving social integration is facilitated by developing linguistic and cultural knowledge of the host society, as well as ensuring a sense of security and stability. Finally, the acquisition of citizenship functions decisively in promoting social integration (Kourachanis, 2019). This specific model is generally accepted by most researchers and thus, it has partially been applied in policy development in various countries like New Zealand (Marlowe, et al., 2014).

The categorization of influence factors formulated by Esser (1999) is of a similar logic. According to this earlier categorization, social integration can also be differentiated into four basic types: structural, cultural, interactive and identificational integration. The first one -quite a similar perception to the one Ager & Strang (2008) presented- is about the access people have to main services like education, health and insurance as well as labor market. Cultural integration is related to the acquisition of competencies and knowledge concerning cultural aspects like language and accepted behavior patterns. Interactive integration refers to the various social aspects, such as partnerships and friendships. Finally, sense of belonging to a society characterize the identificational integration.

Beyond such broad-ranging approaches, much of the literature focuses on specific dimensions of social inclusion by projecting specific factors as primary or focusing on them because of thematic interest of their empirical study. Typical are the examples the studies conducted by Hamza (2021) and Korac (2003); in those papers there are mentioned factors that approach the ones included in the categories "Markers and Means" and "Social Connection" (see in Ager & Strang, 2008), respectively. Especially, the first group of parameters, according to Ager & Strang (2008), which includes employment, housing, education and access to health facilities, is the object of identification in many studies, such as those of Czischke & Huisman (2018), Kousoulis , et al. (2016), Choi, et al. (2015), Plillimore (2011) and Ratha, et.al. (2011) (Table 1). At this point, it is worth noting that "housing" is evaluated as a particularly important factor; however, this does not mean that other parameters are underestimated (see in Kourachanis, 2019). In addition to the documentation resulting from empirical data, this particular view is also documented through various theories about human needs, such as the hierarchical theories of Maslow (1943) and F. Steele (Stadler-Atlmann, 2015). On this basis, Kourachanis (2018) underlines that access to housing is a necessary condition for the development of other social integration actions, a fact that is manifested through social policy that primarily aims to secure housing (Clapham, et.al., 1990) or Venieris, 2015).

Factors affecting Social Integration	Published Research (Author(s)' Names – Year of Publication)
Housing Type	Hamza (2021) – Kousoulis, et al. (2016) - Ager & Strang (2008)
Housing Location (Accessibility to the city centre)	Haugen (2019) – Hugo & Morén-Alegret (2008) – Waters & Jiménez (2005) – Korac (2003)
Healthcare	Plillimore (2011)
Studying Opportunities	Hamza (2021) - Ager & Strang (2008)
Educational Level	Barreto,Oyarzun & Conklin (2022)
Working Opportunities	Czischke & Huisman (2018) – Ratha, et.al. (2011) - Ager & Strang (2008) – Korac (2003)
Income	Korac (2003)
Social Coherence	Hanza (2021) - Ager & Strang (2008) – Barreto,Oyarzun & Conklin (2022)
Social Behavriour	Block & Gibbs (2017) - Ager & Strang (2008)
Social Intercourse	Czischke & Huisman (2018) - Ager & Strang (2008) – Korac (2003)
Bonds with the city	Korac (2003)
Recreational activities	Block & Gibbs (2017)
Adequate Institutional Framework	Plillimore (2011) - Ager & Strang (2008)
Quality of Life	Absence of documentation– **need for further study**

Table 1. Factors affecting Social Integration.

An important observation regarding the role of the residence is that, apart from the type of residence, its location is considered an important parameter, since it affects the degree of access to services and social interaction. This specific theoretical point

of view forms the basis for criticizing the development of hot-spots as places for refugees to stay. Indeed, although this specific policy was promoted with the aim of recording the arrivals, in practice it appeared to malfunction (Rodier, 2016), acquiring the character of internment camps; in such places conditions are produced that devalue human existence (Kourachanis, 2019). Given their location in extra-urban areas, by priority (Marmani, 2018), the main criticism focused on the fact that they function more as practices of spatial and social control rather than as policies to provide cheap and mass housing (Speer, 2018). The social dimensions of integration are in the core of various research projects such as the one of Beirens, et al. (2007). These scholars note that integration is a multidimensional process that, at the same time, is mainly connected to social networks. In this direction, Daley (2007) underlines the key role of the local community and the social cohesion it seeks.

Cultural parameters, such as cultural and sports activities, are recognized as social activities and at the same time as facilitators (Lewis, 2015; Amara, et al., 2005). One the one hand, the first reading lies in their contribution to the social integration of the newcomers; on the other hand, there is another side of the coin. According to a deeper perception of the topic, the various activities are associated with the norms and lifestyle of the host society. The cultural parameters include, therefore, musical preferences and clothing choices, while critical factors are those of learning the language (Sorgen, 2015) and dealing with the gender inequalities that characterize refugee populations (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017).

One parameter for which no theoretical documentation was identified is "quality of life". The reason why something like this is done is assumed to have to do with the perception that "quality of life" is a result of social integration and not a factor that affects it. However, it was considered appropriate to include it in Table 1 in order to empirically investigate the issue and confirm or not the above hypothesis.

From all the above, it is clear that social integration of refugees is a complex process that is not limited to the refugees' access to public administration services, bureaucratic control mechanisms and their formal inclusion in the institutions of the state (Kamali, 1999), which are parameters of the threshold of social integration, according to Ager & Strang (2008). On the contrary, it seems to be more related to the various dominant socio-economic, institutional, political and cultural environments of the host societies (Phillips, 2006), which must be taken into account when implementing integration policies of the specific social groups.

Discussion and Conclusions

The massive inflows of refugees and immigrants in Europe in recent years - especially after 2015 - brought to the fore a debate around the question: Would it be better to help these populations stay where they come from, instead of moving to a European area? This debate harkens back to the 1980s, when major industrialized countries pledged to the UN to provide public assistance to achieve the goal of development

(Rodier, 2016). Such an approach would, apparently, allow the mobile populations to stay in their country since they would have a better standard of living. However, Rodier (2016) counters this view by emphasizing that higher levels of development imply greater mobility. So, it seems that the need for integration is the only option, although there are groups of the population that express either their fears or their opposition to such a policy, especially in a period of economic hardship for Europe.

In that context, this paper has focused on reviewing the literature concerning social integration of refugees; our aim, at the initial step of the research, was to identify the factors contribute to social integration. Through this overview, a multitude of parameters emerged that must be taken into account in the context of implementing an integration policy. These factors appeared to largely follow the categorization formulated by Ager & Strang (2008), although some other parameters were identified; they should be studied further in order to ascertain how important they are in integration process. Quality of life consists of such a parameter; although it is assumed to be perceived as a consequence of social integration, nevertheless, its reverse affective dynamics have not been explored, yet.

Particular emphasis is placed on the role of housing, since both in the distant and recent past, it was the focal ingredient of integration policies of newcomers into the local communities. The Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) Program consists of a typical case: the term "integration" is included in its initials since such a goal is expected to be achieved by improving housing living conditions of the beneficiaries. However, the reference to the other dimensions of social integration (see in Section 2) is particularly limited; their satisfaction has been left to the discretion of the implementing partners of the program. This is the main reason why strong criticism against this program has been attracted (Kourachanis, 2019). Christopoulos (2019) also agrees on that point of view considering that the lack of inclusion of social integration actions, disables the program, which, however, is characterized positively for the provision of housing. It is critical to note that regardless of the type of residence, an important factor that enhances social integration is the location of the residence, since it may allows or limits (a) social intercourse with compatriots, (b) mixing with locals and (c) and access to services and facilities.

All the above constitute the framework for preparing an empirical research regarding the degree of integration of refugees in Greek cities. This issue is crucial since the number of refugees that are located in Greece nowadays is particularly large taking into account the insufficient resources. At a next stage, results are expected to be published resulting from empirical research in two medium-sized Greek cities in order for the following two issues to be investigated: (a) to what extent the identified factors affect the integration of refugees, and (b) what is the importance of housing (type and location) in achieving the goal of integration.

Finally, one issue that is worth noting is the distinction between "implemented" social integration and the "sense of social integration". Although in several studies the two variables are identified, it seems appropriate that they are explored through separated methodologies, namely, whether and to what extent there is variation between the agencies' perception of refugee integration and the point of view of the refugees themselves.

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ISSN 2601-8632 (Print)
ISSN 2601-8640 (Online

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January - June 2024
Volume 7, Issue 1

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