Chapter 4

Exploring Regimes of Immigrant Integration: Clustering Countries on the Basis of the MIPEX Data

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A. Introduction

Although various authors have claimed that integration policies are being harmonised within the European Union, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) data show a considerable amount of variation between states. While some countries devote considerable effort and policy attention to promote integration and equal opportunities, this effort seems to be missing in other European countries. This variation does not necessarily imply that we could refute the existence of a process of “Europeanisation” in this area, but it does seem to suggest that national traditions and policy options still play an important role that cannot be easily disregarded. The ambition of this chapter is limited: we want to investigate whether the MIPEX data reveal clear pattern of differences between countries. Basically this amounts to the question whether it is possible to distinguish groups or families of countries that have comparable patterns of integration policies.

By doing so, we want to shed new light on a long-standing discussion in the field of the study of integration policies. While Joppke (2007) has argued that national cultures have become largely obsolete to explain European integration policies, authors like Jacobs and Rea (2007) have taken an opposite position by arguing that national cultures and national policy traditions still have an important impact on contemporary integration policies. Since the MIPEX figures are cross-sectional and only have a bearing on the situation in the year 2006, this kind of analysis cannot be used to identify trends over time. But if a cluster analysis would demonstrate that national patterns can still be clearly identified, at least this would demonstrate that an alleged process of Europeanisation has
not (yet?) smothered all national differences. An analysis on future editions of the MIPEX data set should allow us to establish trends over time in this respect.

The current debates about the nature of European integration policies still is largely determined by the framework that was laid out over a decade ago now by Rogers Brubaker (1992). Although Brubaker himself has since qualified his position, the basic distinction between civic and ethnic integration models remains a structuring element within these debates. While civic models emphasize an adherence to cultural norms and a loyalty to the political institutions, ethnic models imply that full citizenship is only open for those who can claim national ancestry (Brubaker, 1992).

Since Brubakers’ original and seminal publication, various new models of integration regimes have been proposed, most of them based on a case study design containing only a limited number of countries. The strength of these research strategies is of course a very rigorous and detailed analysis of the immigrant integration policies. Nevertheless, the main drawback involved in the analysis into integration regimes based on only a small number of cases regards the extent of the generalizations of the findings. Certainly in a European context, it is far from evident to classify the wide range of European countries in the typologies that have usually been limited to France, Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands (Koopmans et al., 2005).

By gathering 140 indicators covering integration policies for six main domains, namely labour market access, family reunion, long term residence, political participation, access to nationality and anti-discrimination, and this for 28 countries, the Migrant Policy Group (MPG) has made it possible to reach beyond these limitations and has provided researchers with an opportunity for a more quantitative approach to figure out which countries can be seen as a “family” or a coherent cluster. By a “cluster” we refer to a group of countries that has common characteristics that separate them sufficiently from all other countries (or groups of countries). It has to be remembered that in this kind of analysis, clusters are not pre-defined: calculations based on country variables (like the MIPEX figures) will empirically determine which countries “belong” together or not. It also has to be acknowledged that cluster analysis always involves subjective decisions by the researchers. Except in those few cases where a cluster solution is immediately apparent, perennial discussions are possible about how many clusters exactly can be distinguished, and how the cut-off points should be determined. In the analysis reported in this chapter, and given the exploratory character of the analysis, we have opted for a rather data-driven approach toward the analysis, so we have tried to avoid any arbitrary decision about the specific definition of clusters.

The theoretical relevance of the cluster analysis is that identifying a cluster implies that the members of that cluster can be sufficiently distinguished from all other countries (in this case: based exclusively on the 140 measurements