

POLICY BRIEF

*POLITIS - Building Europe with New Citizens?
An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised
Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries.*



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Project Overview

POLITIS was funded by the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-Based Society from June 2004 to September 2007.

Website: www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe

About the project

Populations of immigrant origin are growing and changing in Europe. In this project, the positive potential of immigrants for the development of an active European society was explored, starting with foreign students' perceptions of Europe and focusing on sustained social and political activities of immigrants. Particularly, POLITIS sought to understand why temporary migrants and permanent immigrants from Non-EU countries become active in the receiving societies, what influences their choice of activity, and which factors promote or inhibit immigrant activism. Civically active immigrants were defined as foreign-born persons that

- give a voice to societal concerns, e.g. by engaging in political parties, local committees, parent associations or migrant lobby organisations.
- organise solidarity and self-help, e.g. by taking leadership functions in religious associations, ethnic associations or informal self-help networks.

Main partners in POLITIS

Three research institutes worked together in the POLITIS project:

- the University of Oldenburg, Interdisciplinary Centre for Education and Communication in Migration Processes
- the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) in Athens;
- the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence.

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in Brussels is a European NGO with links to churches and migrant organisations. As a fourth partner, it consulted the research partners and promoted the dissemination of results, coordinating about 80 dissemination activities all over Europe.

In addition, thirty-five experts were involved in the production of Country Reports on Immigrant Civic Participation for all 25 EU Member States. These 25 country reports present information on national migration, integration policy, and civic participation.

Including the perspective of third-country nationals

The innovative character of POLITIS relied largely on the participation of international students. More than 70 students and PhD-researchers from 40 different countries of origin in Africa, America, Asia and Europe were recruited in an open call. In 2005, they were trained on issues relating to EU immigration, intercultural dialogue, civic participation, and particularly interview techniques. They identified civically active immigrants and conducted a total of 176 interviews. In this way, they made it possible to collect a wide variety of immigrant experiences across 24 EU Member States. One year later, interviewers had the chance to discuss preliminary results and bring their own perspectives to the analysis during a second summer school in Germany. POLITIS was honoured to be chosen as best-practice project for involving intercultural dialogue at the community level in 2006.

Policy Recommendations

In a highly interactive dissemination phase, research design and results were discussed with academics and civil society actors. We have identified three main areas of concern: research priorities in migration studies; recommendations regarding the practices and policies of mainstream and immigrant organisations; issues related to public discourse and integration measures at the local and national level.

- Researchers and funding institutions should be encouraged to use truly transnational and interactive research, not only *about* but also *with* immigrants.
- Organisations should check their recruitment and training policies. Sensitive, open, diversity-aware, welcoming and participating conditions do matter and favour the inclusion of immigrants in their active membership.
- A respectful public discourse on migration and integration issues encourages immigrant engagement in public life in their country of settlement. Immigrants – also those without a long-term staying perspective – should be invited to take part and to contribute to policy developments on all levels.

Research Priorities in Migration Studies

In this study, we have chosen an innovative approach. The research was designed to be truly European – involving experts for 25 EU countries, joint recruitment and training of an international interviewer team, decentralised interviewing with coordinated monitoring, the creation of European qualitative databases and analysis by individual researchers in different countries with partially harmonised approaches. More conventional international studies usually rely on the comparison of country cases or city cases within countries.

Our experience suggests that organising a truly transnational study such as the POLITIS project with research partners from different countries is more demanding and involves a higher risk than a comparison between country or city cases. It requires more intensive discussions, more frequent communication between meetings, and generally more time and energy for promoting understanding and avoiding misunderstanding. We hope to have demonstrated that such an approach is feasible, leads to more intense integration of research, and yields results that usefully complement more conventional types of comparisons. We would encourage researchers to experiment in this direction and consider our experiences, which we have tried to document transparently and in detail, including technical aspects and problems that may attract critical attention to our work, and we would encourage the European Commission and other research funding institutions to support such experiments.

The POLITIS findings also underline the need to look more closely into the civic activity in EU member states, and therefore we wish to recommend more research, qualitative as well as quantitative, into the role and factors of civic activity of migrants, certainly also beyond first generation immigrants. For such research, we recommend wider use of a participation perspective, favouring the participation of all members of the society including immigrants. Framing it only in the integration perspective that asks for conditions of a successful integration of immigrants in receiving societies implies the danger to overlook or discredit multiple and transnational relations.

Policy Recommendations for Immigrant and Mainstream Organisations

A recent survey of 30 000 Americans in cities with differing degrees of diversity shows that levels of ethnic diversity are negatively correlated to indicators of social trust and social capital (Putnam 2007). Putnam (2007:163) suggests that we need to learn more about the mechanisms that link diversity and ‘hunkering down’, but also under which conditions the mechanisms are weak or non-existent. This study made a contribution to address this concern. This transnational research on immigrants’ activism that uses explorative and horizontal sampling approaches on the basis of a multipurpose European database of qualitative interviews is particularly helpful in discovering new facets of established topics and exploring and developing the idea of universal processes that underlie individual and national differences. Here, the importance of recruitment chains and the probability that they were interrupted had lead us to the hypothesis of such general aspects to immigrants’ activism. Knowing that recruitment processes are very important for the initiation and continuation of civic activities, we had examined the processes of initiating civic activity after international migration interrupted recruitment chains. The POLITIS study reveals that such an interruption does not play a large role for some immigrants, either because they belong to transnational organisations that make it easy to resume activities with new networks, or because they belong to migration networks with civic links, or because they have incorporated activism so firmly into their self-concepts that they actively search for opportunities and ways to become involved in civic activities, even, if necessary, by founding their own organisations. Others were ‘activists in waiting’, only reluctantly or critically indicating a willingness to contribute, and for those people, the interruption of activation chains really mattered.

Immigrant organisations are often – but by far not always – an entry gate to civic activism in the receiving societies. Leading immigrant activists should be aware that they become the gatekeepers for new activism of people from their country or region of origin. If they find productive ways to face the challenges involved in their activities, they are more likely to pave the path for more participation of people from a similar background. Particularly, they have to clarify their skills and qualifications in an environment that is likely to overlook them, without overemphasizing them; and they have to find a way to act as a spokesperson on behalf of immigrants of their background, without claiming to be the equivalent of a democratic representative. In addition, what is laid out below referring to mainstream organisations also applies to immigrant organisations.

Some organisations that are dominated by the majority population of the receiving societies such as trade unions, political parties, churches or voluntary fire-brigades would be interested in attracting more immigrants as active members. Officials and leaders in these organisations ask themselves what they can do to achieve this goal. We argue that the incorporation of immigrants in mainstream associations is a social process that entails a sequence of steps towards active membership – involving the image of the organisation, which should communicate a clear message, a welcoming sensitive first contact for immigrants (including reactions to unusual, unexpected and critical forms of expressing interest), and fair treatment in their ‘career’ in the organisation, neither expecting too much nor too little and appreciating prior experiences and country of origin qualifications of the immigrant. Training and awareness-raising particularly for members who may be the first contacts for immigrants, as well as for leadership of mainstream organisations will be helpful not to miss the chance to broaden the basis in European societies. The study of immigrant activists is also instructive for the inclusion of native population groups underrepresented in specific organisations, e.g. people with working class background. An organisational approach designed to improve the

inclusion of immigrants will definitely raise the general capacity of civic associations to win new members and thus be useful for all residents.

General Policy Recommendations at the Local, National and EU level

One thing is fairly clear from the analysis of the interviews. For active immigrants, not only the contents of European, national and local migration and integration policies do matter, but also the discourse about them. In other words, it is not only important *what* policies are eventually implemented but also *what kind of debates* take place during the policy making phase and afterwards. A respectful discourse in which immigrants are invited to take part is favourable for encouraging their engagement in the receiving societies in all fields.

Immigrants should not only be consulted on integration policies, but also with regard to efforts to enforce migration restrictions, prevent illegal entrance and ensure the return of foreign nationals without valid documents. Within a general trend towards more restrictive migration policies and more consistent enforcement, there is the danger that a public discourse featuring immigrants as threats leads to unnecessary restrictions in laws, discriminatory control-minded implementation practices of authorities and attitudes of native populations that exclude immigrants. Such tendencies are deeply deplored by active immigrants.

The inclusion of immigrants can be promoted by the elimination of unnecessary restrictions for foreign nationals, by transparent and short naturalisation procedures and consultative structures that are adjusted to country-specific conditions. Consultation processes are no substitute for political rights, but political rights neither exclude the need for specific consultation processes. Active immigrants' proposals in these processes will be as varied as that of members of the majority society. When comparing interviews, the most common denominator seems to be the demand for fair treatment and transparent, respectful bureaucratic procedures. Promoting such policies facilitates immigrant participation at local, national and EU-level. In a considerable number of EU member states, third country nationals have voting rights at local level, which is much appreciated and highly regarded by active immigrants.

Generally, the discourse on integration focuses on the long-term integration of immigrants. However, many immigrants do not originally foresee to stay for a longer period. Thus, if one looks at possibilities to engage immigrants into decision making procedures or social activities, one may have to acknowledge this fact. While naturalisation and citizenship remain important for the integration of migrants, citizenship ought not to be an inhibiting factor for becoming active: founding an association or becoming a member of an association, the eligibility to become an – accountable – board member of an organisation should not depend on the decision to become a citizen of a country. EU member states could have a close look at stipulations in their country whether there are inhibiting factors, such as opening bank accounts or joining necessary insurance schemes for migrants.

In spite of restrictive migration control policies, Europe is perceived by a considerable number of immigrants as a symbol or model for diversity, recognising various identities and developing cooperation between states. At the same time, the interviews raise issues of exclusion, violence, unfair treatment, and ignorance. The interviews underline the role of policies which are developed at EU level, like the anti-discrimination legislation. However, it is also observed by immigrants that equal treatment does not sufficiently cover the treatment

of third country nationals. It may be of importance, if the European Parliament supported initiatives which look at possibilities for the inclusion of third country nationals in policies against discrimination but also at policies which underline the equality before the law.

For more information

Books

Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas (editors): Who are Europe's immigrants? European immigration. A sourcebook forthcoming 2007 (www.ashgate.com)
This volume provides a comprehensive overview of the immigration situation in 25 EU countries.

Dita Vogel (editor) Highly Active Immigrants – A resource for European civil societies Frankfurt a.o.: Peter Lang. forthcoming 2008 (www.peterlang.com)
This is the first book that focuses on the crucial group of intensely active first generation immigrants.

Working papers (www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/16084.html)

Anna Triandafyllidou, Dita Vogel: *Civic activation of immigrants - An introduction to conceptual and theoretical issues*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS-WP No. 1/2005

Norbert Cyrus, Ruby Gropas, Ankica Kotic and Dita Vogel: *Opportunity structures for immigrants' active civic participation in the European Union: sharing comparative observations*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS-WP No. 2/2005

Dita Vogel: *Methodological and organisational aspects of the POLITIS-interview study on active civic participation of immigrants*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No.3/2006

Dita Vogel: *What does Europe mean to Third Country students in the European Union? An explorative essay analysis*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No.4/2006

Berit Rinke: *Gehört die Türkei zu Europa?* University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No 5/2006

Carol Brown, Norbert Cyrus, Ruby Gropas, Ankica Kotic, Anna Triandafyllidou: *A presentation of the POLITIS interview database: Structure, quality and hypotheses*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 6/2007

Joao Sardinha, *Providing voices? Civic participation opportunities for immigrants in Portugal*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 7/2007

Yan Wu and Xinyue Wang: *Gendered Active Civic Participation: The experience of Chinese immigrants in Europe*. POLITIS WP No. 8/2007

Norbert Cyrus and Dita Vogel, *POLITIS interviewer training manual. Based on Qualitative Interviewing by Herbert and Irene Rubin*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 9/2007 POLITIS-WP9-2007

Dita Vogel and POLITIS team, *POLITIS project experiences*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 10/2007 POLITIS-WP10-2007

Ankica Kotic, *Motivation for civic participation of immigrants: the role of personal resources, social identities and personal traits*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 11/2007 POLITIS-WP11-2007

Bruno Larralde Velten, *Civic Participation and Voting Rights of Immigrants: The Case of Catalonia*. University of Oldenburg. POLITIS WP No. 12/2007 POLITIS-WP12-2007

Film

POLITIS – Introduction to an unusual partnership gives an insight into the objectives of the project and the preparation of the field phase during the first summer school. The film has been produced by Benjamin Arnold and Almuth Wetzstein with support by Ana Castaneda. (<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/9810.html>)

WinAct- Grundtvig Training course

Parties and trade unions in many EU countries show a growing awareness that it would be important to recruit more immigrants as active members. Officials in these organisations often do not know how to approach immigrants adequately and how to motivate them for long-term membership and collaboration in the organisation. WinAct addresses these demands. The project aims at promoting active membership of immigrants in political parties and trade unions in Europe. To realise this objective, it develops training programmes for professionals in adult education in Europe for 2008. WinAct builds on results of POLITIS. (contact norbert.cyrus@uni-oldenburg.de)