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Keys to inclusive cities: benchmarking immigrant integration policies at a European level

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Second publication in a series of articles on the theme of the integration of migrants and refugees in cities linked to the European INCLUCITIES project.
Brulocalis supports the municipality of Schaerbeek and the City of Brussels, which are acting as mentor cities (sharing good practices) for two 'learner' cities, Jelgava in Latvia and St-Jean-de-la-Ruelle in France.

To read the articles in this series, please view the previous issues: #119 (July-August) – The integration of migrants into European cities: issues & perspectives of the European project IncluCities 2020-2023

The integration of migrants, refugees and applicants for international protection (asylum or subsidiary protection status) in European cities is not a new phenomenon, although it is viewed in various ways, depending on the policies in place at national, regional and local level. The concept of integration poses many problems. It may be rejected by the people concerned, fiercely debated by researchers and public authorities, oversimplified by the media and called into question when compared with other countries: all the more reason to consider it carefully. In this context, benchmarking integration appears to be one of the most thorough and accessible tools for charting integration and defining its scope, challenges and results.

Integration and integration policies: what are they all about?

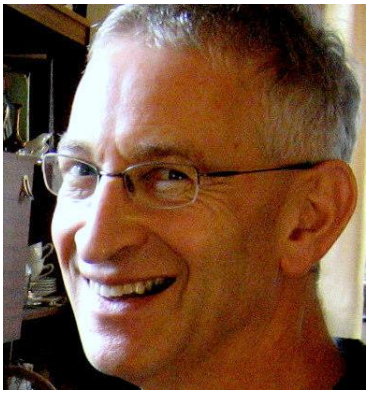
At the root of this process of reflection is the realisation that there is a proliferation of new integration policies that aim simultaneously to increase and to evaluate immigrants' capacity to integrate, in terms of acquiring language skills and adopting the values of the destination country (reception and integration processes, language tests, etc.). From an academic perspective, these policies have been called 'civic integration policies',[1] expressing a new interpretation of the integration process and its outcome. Success is not simply linked to the migrant's integration in the labour market and enabling him or her to participate in political life (the right to vote); it also involves the person's 'ability' to be part of society and their 'willingness' to share its values. In recent years, the term 'social cohesion' has become widely used as an equivalent to integration, as a characteristic of a society[2]. When it comes to immigration policies and integration policies, reference is made to two subtypes of public policy: the first involves managing migratory flows; the second involves the integration of foreigners and citizens of foreign origin after they have settled in the destination country.

Integration is one of the tools used to guarantee cohesion within society. In the spirit that it is presented by European institutions, integration appears to represent a process that is both dynamic

[1] Caponio Tiziana, Testore Gaia. "L'intégration : nouvelle frontière de l'immigration ? L'analyse du lien entre les politiques de contrôle et d'intégration en Italie et en France", *Migrations Société*, 2012/2 (N° 140), p. 285-294.
[2] Carrera, Sergio. Benchmarking Integration in the EU. 2008. "Analyzing the debate on integration indicators and moving it forward", Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, [Online], available at https://www.ceps.eu

and mutual, an interrelationship between the individual and society[3] and a political goal to be attained that ensures equal treatment and aims to offer third-country nationals rights and duties comparable to those of European Union citizens. When it comes to immigration and borders, the image that comes to mind is that of crossing a line that separates two countries. However, in a migrant's journey, the border represents more than that. Once they have arrived in the destination country, migrants have to deal with other types of 'border' or barrier, located within society itself, that proliferate as they acquire different ethnic, normative, cultural and socioeconomic connotations. These internal borders retain their function of exclusion and inclusion and act as identity markers. From this perspective, integration is the process of crossing these different barriers to acceptance within the community. Let us look at how these barriers can be crossed and the key factors and types of process that enable people to do so.

MigrationWork's experience of benchmarking integration



To provide a specific illustration of what is at stake, what is created and what happens in a benchmarking process, we interviewed **Richard Stanton, the co-founder of *Migration Work CIC***.[4] Richard Stanton has managed many transnational learning projects for *MigrationWork CIC*, as the former president of the organisation he co-founded in 2009. After working in international development and holding a position as an elected local councillor in a British town for 9 years, he worked on local community funding in Great Britain and in other countries until he began to focus on issues of migrant reception and integration in cities in the 1990s. From 2000 onwards, he **led the development of a policy on immigration and asylum issues for the Mayor of London** in Europe's most diverse city, before launching MigrationWork.[5]

What does 'benchmark' mean?[6]

"The term has existed for decades, although it is used in very different ways. It started off as a management tool in the private sector, which was then imported into government institutions in the 1980s and 1990s. Then, in the 2000, the EUROCITIES network of major European cities[7] began to adapt a version of the public sector's toolkit for migrant integration policies."

It is worth reminding ourselves of the context of international migration. After the postcolonial phase of migration that brought immigrants to Europe primarily as sources of labour, without any major efforts to ensure their integration, the 1990s ushered in an era of more extensive movements of migrants from the Balkans and the 'global South', many of whom applied for asylum and settled in European cities.

"A far more active approach to integration was obviously necessary. That was when city leaders realised that they urgently needed to transform practices in their cities and to get the European institutions involved in settling and integrating refugees and other [categories of] migrants. Whilst other mayors' initiatives also began tackling these issues, EUROCITIES took the initiative of coming up with benchmarks for different aspects of integration, and then – with the European Commission's

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[3] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. European agenda for the integration of third-country nationals., Brussels, 20 July 2011, 15 p. COM (2011) 455 final,

[4] CIC: *Community Interest Company*. MigrationWork is a non-profit advisory organisation based in London (UK): https://www.migrationwork.org/work/

[5] MigrationWork CIC is not responsible for the opinions expressed in this interview, which are those of the person being interviewed.

[6] The Oxford Dictionary defines 'benchmark' as 'a standard or point of reference against which things may be compared.'

[7] EUROCITIES is a network of 190 cities in 39 countries, representing 130 million people. Through joint work, knowledge-sharing and coordinated Europe-wide activity, it ensures that cities and their residents are heard in Europe https://eurocities.eu/.

support – putting them into practice in cities, in a series of mutual learning projects from 2007 onwards."[8]

*"These projects started off by using **peer-reviewed benchmarks**, but this method has since evolved towards **approaches based on mentoring and a 'community of practices'.** At MigrationWork CIC, we started applying benchmarks in 2009 in our capacity as moderators in a peer-review project for DG Employment [at the European Commission], assessing the effectiveness with which resources from the European Social Fund were used to promote migrants' access to the job market. Since then, we have worked directly with EUROCITIES on several benchmarking projects, **culminating in INCLUCITIES with the CEMR** (Council of European Municipalities and Regions)."*[9]

Is benchmarking currently useful for the development of migration and integration policies at a European level?

*"To resolve a challenge as complex as the integration of migrants, a whole series of tools will need to be developed, rather than a single approach that is supposed to become a 'panacea'. Experience has shown that benchmarking is a **powerful tool to reinforce integration work** in Europe. It enables us to achieve two things that are crucial to this work: firstly, it establishes **norms or standards for best practices** that also incorporate European values; secondly, it permits a **mutual learning process between practitioners** in different Member States."*

How can we create benchmarks that correspond as closely as possible to practical realities?

*"In various iterations, our benchmarks have shared a similar basic concept. **They all focus on a specific subject or area within integration**, such as the governance of integration, jobs or civic participation for migrants, the fight against discrimination in the provision of services, the attitude of the public to immigration, etc. Within this area, experts use literature and discussions with practitioners to study European experiences of projects at a local level to determine what has worked best to promote good results and to achieve the European political objectives in this area. In other words, we are **searching for the European standard for best practice in every area of integration**."*

Benchmarking or indexation

To emphasise the importance of benchmarking in the integration debate, it is worth comparing it to a fairly well-known technique with which it is sometimes confused: **indexation**. An index is a **way of measuring the variation of a set of quantitative parameters or 'indicators'** – over time, or at a given moment between stakeholders such as cities – and then summarising the results as statistics or a graph.

Measuring the difference between city A and city B on a numeric scale will **not explain in terms of actual organisation** the systems that each city has created to tackle migrant integration or the dynamics of these processes, or the way in which these systems interact in real life of their risks of failure, nor will it show the relative importance of the city's values, its budgets, its staff training or community mobilisation to explain the variation shown by the indicators.

An index may help to **monitor the progress of integration** (as a quantitative monitoring tool), at least in theory. However, it is necessary to look beyond these results, because **it is fundamentally important to reflect analytically on the way in which things work and the reason for their existence**. This is precisely what benchmarks help to clarify. By guiding users in this exploratory process within a specific area of integration, the benchmark encourages them to ask questions and to share their own experience of how things work. In this way, benchmarks as a European standard also encourage mutual learning.

[8] See http://www.integratingcities.eu/ for the calendar of these projects based on benchmarks. To design the benchmarks, EUROCITIES started by working with the Migration Policy Group and the board of the British Ethics Committee etc., and then with MigrationWork CIC from 2010 onwards.

[9] Details of the IMPART project for which MigrationWork started using benchmarks: https://www.migrationwork.org/work/impart-increasing-the-participation-of-migrants-and-ethnic-minorities-in-employment
Other projects coordinated by EUROCITIES, with MigrationWork CIC acting as a moderator or facilitator, have also used benchmarks: MIXITIES (2010-12), ImpleMentoring (2012-14), CitiesGrow (2017-19), VALUES (2019-21) and currently CONNEXIONS. More information here: https://www.migrationwork.org/work/ and http://www.integratingcities.eu/

How does this standard become a benchmark?

"First of all, we dissect this successful experience into a series of essential elements: the actions required to put this best practice into effect. In the benchmark, each of these elements is identified as a key factor.[10] When MigrationWork started working on benchmarks, however, it made a significant change. Several previously completed projects had identified benchmarks with a wide range of distinct indicators, many of which were quantitative. Today, they are designed on the basis of a ***small number of key and essentially qualitative factors that describe what people do to ensure the success of their integration work****. In general, they contain between eight and twelve such factors. Each of these is introduced in a short paragraph, supported by a few extra lines of text explaining why this factor makes an essential difference and how this factor will interact with other factors. Thus, in simple, transparent terms that are familiar to practitioners and activists,* ***the benchmark enables these users to begin the analysis of what makes a successful integration practice****."*

Since the main aim is to help them to learn from each other, whether face to face or during 'visits' (which may be physical or virtual), a certain number of questions or guidelines are added to each key factor. An indicative list of evidence is also provided, which may illustrate the responses to these guideline questions from a counterpart in the other city, showing whether or not the key factor works there. Relevant evidence may include quantitative data but the most useful evidence is often found in this city's documentation of the stakeholders involved in this area, the policies intended for them and the way they actually go about their work.

"The goal of benchmarking is to work for change in the real world, not in a utopia!"
Richard Stanton, co-founder of MigrationWork CIC

"None of this learning happens in isolation. When applying the benchmark to improve its practices, the city or regional authority needs to be capable of demonstrating the independent conditions of its intentions that affect its chances of success. Lastly, an explicit list of these contextual factors is added to each benchmark, along with an invitation to users to refer to them: from conditions in the labour market to national legislation and budgetary constraints."

How can or should benchmarking processes use the experiences and practices of migrants and refugees, by considering them as stakeholders in integration, in the context of benchmarking?

"In all our benchmarks for integration work, no key factor recurs more often than the need to listen to the voices of migrants themselves to improve these projects. The same should apply to the task of benchmarking and transnational learning between cities. However, two reservations should be expressed:

- **Migrant participation cannot be achieved overnight.** The identification of migrants who are genuinely representative of local communities – in terms of their gender, age and other categories of representation – and who also have time to engage in these discussions can only be possible **if there are existing links between the world of public authorities and that of the community (or volunteers)**: formal structures such as forums for migrants or informal links with women's support groups or youth clubs, for example. Once the representatives have been found, they generally need an introduction to the concept of transnational learning.

- Integration is a two-way process. More fundamentally, it is about ensuring that the entire city becomes a more egalitarian and friendly place. **Consequently, we need to try to listen to non-migrant or 'welcoming' communities as well.** Some parts of this 'host' population are already fully represented in local government, but others may be marginalised, with voices

[10] In previous versions, it was called 'the critical factor' and this expression has been retained in places where it is more accurate.

that are rarely heard. Giving them a place at the table in debates on integration practices can strengthen the learning process and can benefit all stakeholders.

What steps are needed to achieve this?

"The priority is to ensure that the transnational learning process can benefit from the expertise of refugees and migrants. In theory, this can be done by following the three steps below:

- **Preparation of the benchmark:** this is the initial phase and involves researching what has worked best in projects at a European level. Clearly, we stand to gain a huge amount at this stage from comments by observers from migrant communities. The problem is that because each learning project is defined by its own benchmarks, these benchmarks must be devised at the outset. *"Thus far, it has proved to be impossible to identify migrant participants in partner cities, to recruit them and to train them in time for this drafting work, when the project has just been launched,*" Richard Stanton admits.

- **Joining the team to apply the benchmark:** every mutual learning project needs people from a partner city or region to visit their counterpart's location (physically or virtually) to explore the latter's integration practice and to compare it with the benchmark. Migrants are included in these visiting teams as often as possible and are often among the most dedicated participants. This role, accompanied by preparatory training, gives them great scope to comment on the benchmark they have used and to suggest how it can be improved.

- **Bringing back information after 'mutual learning' visits:** the final phase of the project involves an assessment of the benchmark. At this stage, given that the project activity and exchanges between the partner cities should have involved the participation of migrants and their associations in most of these places, we may hope to obtain feedback from some of them about the benchmark. *"In practice however, the feedback has been minimal, whether it comes from migrant communities or the authorities and partner NGOs, unless we organise a special workshop on 'revising the benchmark'."*

"The long-term solution to this challenge seems fairly clear. In the context of a broader evolution towards more participative forms of local democracy for all residents, town councils and other service providers must start involving the representatives of communities of refugees and other migrants in regular, structured monitoring of the services and activities linked to their integration. This seems ambitious. The people recruited for the monitoring role will also need support, of course (including remuneration). However, by including this in local democratic practices, it should be possible to ***create a group of experts on migration who are better prepared to engage in transnational learning****, specifically in terms of benchmarking."*

What are the two or three genuinely vital prerequisites to ensure a city's successful benchmarking, whatever the area of integration work?

"In general, as I have said, benchmarks are intended for use in the context of collaborative enquiries by government bodies that are learning from each other. Most of the time, we and the other participants have found these exercises extremely rewarding. But there have also been disappointments."

Here are three important factors in ensuring that a benchmark works well in transnational learning projects:

- **A political direction:** developing an integration practice involves a process of change over many years. If the mayor or local authorities do not believe in it, or if they are enthusiastic but are about to lose an election to politicians who oppose it, there may not be much point working to improve this practice. *"All our experience in integration has confirmed that the*

specific change a city is trying to bring about through benchmarking will only happen if it is conducted consistently over time by politicians who have been elected to represent this city."

- **Staff capacity:** this seems obvious but it is crucial. The goal of benchmarking is to explore the practice in depth. Whatever the mutual learning model they adopt, the benchmark users will have to meet with many bodies and groups (and migrant communities in particular) to collect the information in the chosen city or region. They will need meeting rooms, digital connections, interpreters and maybe even accommodation. *"A dedicated team in the 'host' city is a prerequisite to set all that up. You can't leave one desperate staff member on their own to do the work of three people!"*

- **Commitment to external stakeholders:** the key factors in each benchmark include the municipality's capacity to engage with a series of stakeholders from outside its own structure: migrant communities, local volunteer associations and social partners of all kinds, other public service providers in the city and probably agencies at other levels of government. *"If its relationship with the external stakeholders is poor, it may be very difficult to benchmark its practice. If the relationship is strong, benchmarking is likely to yield valuable results."*

Making cities more inclusive for – and with – migrants and refugees is the goal of the European project INCLUCITIES[11]**.** Benchmarking the integration of migrants will be employed as a tool and process throughout the project, with two cities, the City of Brussels and the municipality of Schaerbeek, acting as mentors to mentee cities. These two cities will have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the approach at both conceptual and empirical levels. This work will be carried out in partnership with MigrationWork CIC, enabling a general benchmarking of integration and a specific benchmarking of the mentoring process for each of the 'learner' cities. The results will certainly be used by other municipalities in Brussels that are keen to take action with regard to the integration of migrants.

Next article → Towards a local shift in the governance of the integration of migrants?

Co-funded by the European Union

The 'INCLUCITIES Project' is a three-year project funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), aiming to improve the integration of third-country nationals through city-to-city cooperation in small and medium-sized towns and cities.

[11] For more information about the INCLUCITIES project, see the article "The integration of migrants into European cities: issues & perspectives of the European project IncluCities 2020-2023", TUB #119, July 2020.

The economic impact of immigration in Belgium: a study by the National Bank of Belgium

This study provides an overview of the economic impact of immigration in Belgium, distinguishing between first- and second-generation immigrants as well as between immigrants with an EU or non-EU origin. This study focuses on the economic aspect of immigration. A broader assessment should also take into account other considerations such as human rights and international law, particularly with regard to the protection and reception of refugees.

Find the study at https://www.nbb.be/en/articles/economic-impact-immigration-belgium

The new Pact on Migration and Asylum has been launched! "A new approach to migration, building confidence and striking a new balance between responsibility and solidarity", the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, declared.

The European Commission has proposed a new Pact on Migration and Asylum, covering all of the different elements needed for a comprehensive European approach to migration. This pact sets out **improved and faster procedures** throughout the asylum and migration system. What's more, it **strikes a new balance, based on a fair share in terms of responsibility and solidarity**. This aspect is crucial for rebuilding trust between Member States and confidence in the European Union's capacity to manage migration.

Find the Pact, explanatory memos and statistics on migration to Europe at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

At the CEMR's invitation, the INCLUCITIES partners have been consulted on the European Commission's new action plan for the integration of third-country nationals

Home is always local: why towns and regions need to be at the heart of the next EU plan on migrant integration → https://www.ccre.org/en/actualites/view/4094

The Commission has launched a debate on a new action plan for the integration of migrants. This roadmap will establish how the European Union intends to support national, regional and local governments in welcoming newcomers, including refugees, over the next four years.

In collaboration with several of our national associations and the partners of the IncluCities project, the CEMR shared communities' views of the integration of migrants with the Commission. In brief, the new action plan should fully recognise the territorial dimension of this issue: after all, every successful integration happens within a community, a municipality, a territory. The municipality of Schaerbeek and the City of Brussels have had the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission consultation by means of the CEMR's contribution.

To read the 2016 action plan on the integration of third-country nationals: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/integration/action-plan-integration-third-country-nationals_en

The new action plan on integration and inclusion for the **period 2021-2027** was published on 24 November 2020, presented by the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, and the Vice President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2178