A NYELVTANULÁSTÓL A POLITIKAI RÉSZVÉTELIG – BEVÁNDORLÓK INTEGRÁCIÓJÁT TÁMOGATÓ PROGRAMOK AZ EURÓPAI UNIÓBAN
(From learning the language to political participation – Migrant integration projects in the European Union) Edited by Anna Borbála Bodolai and András Kováts, Budapest, ICCR-Budapest, 2013, 199. p.

Gábor Attila Feleky[1]

The book entitled *From learning the language to political participation* is the result of a vast research program named 'European Integration Modules – Exchange of Experience' carried out by the ICCR-Budapest Foundation. The aim of this initiative was to select and explore European good practices of migrant integration which could be used as models for implementing integration projects in Hungary. The rationale behind the program is quite straightforward. Lists of integration good or 'best' practices are not hard to find. However, as a rule, only short descriptions are available, which makes it hard – if not impossible – to get to know the details of a given project and even harder to examine whether its success is related to a specific social or cultural environment. Moreover, questions may arise concerning whether projects baptized 'good practice' by some experts have been implemented exactly as they appear in descriptions, or if these portrayals omit the least successful aspects of a project.

In order to gather detailed information about migrant integration projects that could serve as role models, the program's coordinating team singled out 6 examples of good practice. Afterwards, a jury of experts selected 12 researchers and other professionals who were interested in the topic of the integration of migrants. Each project was dedicated to two researchers, who – working together

---

1 Gábor Attila FELEKY is a Ph.D. student at the Sociology Doctoral School of Corvinus University of Budapest and an assistant research fellow at the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office; e-mail: *felekygabor@gmail.com*

– processed the pieces of available information, examined the background and the environment and planned a structured study visit to gain personal insight into the content – and the results – of the project. Both data gathering and study-visits were anticipated by a workshop which was designed to elaborate appropriate hypotheses and find professional ways to validate them.

The framework of the book is supplied by the European Modules on Migrant Integration (European Commission 2011a), which features three main policy domains. The first one is focused on 'Introductory and language courses', the second one sheds lights on the important role of a 'strong commitment by the host society', while the last one envisages the 'active participation of immigrants in all aspects of collective life'.

The prelude for the summaries of the 12 researchers is composed of two sections. The book starts with a foreword (titled 'From strategy to implementation') written by co-editor András Kováts, in which he explains the details and framework of the program. This is followed by a chapter by Anna Borbála Bodolai (co-editor of the book and head of the research program), who introduces the integration policy of the European Union, with a brief overview of the national policy of Hungary. In this section the author stresses that the migrant integration framework strategy of the EU focuses exclusively on third-country nationals, thereby losing sight of intra-EU migrants, and shows that the European Union treats migration not as a threat but as an opportunity, a potential that can be exploited only if migrants are integrated. Legal migration can help to address problems derived from demographic changes. Bodolai presents several initiatives that have managed to measure migrant integration on a national level, and introduces several European documents about immigrant integration. The author dedicates part of the chapter to the Hungarian situation; however, instead of reviewing relevant policy documents one can only read about their absence, as well as the lack of a comprehensive migration and integration strategy, of the insufficiency of relevant social discourse and of the necessity of political consensus about the role of migration.

The first two sections pave the way for the following ones which present the results of the six study visits. Although the title of the book is 'From learning the language to political participation' the order of the chapters is exactly the other way around. Concerning the modules, the first of these chapters is of 'the third kind' (focusing on participation), while the last two chapters deal with introductory courses.

The chapter *Bridgebuilders for Integration: Leadership Programme in Germany* – written by Rita Páva and Zoltán Somogyvári – aims to map how the social and political participation of immigrants (and immigrant

organizations) can be increased. The authors describe a German project in which young members of several immigrant organizations were involved in skill-building and networking activities in order to enable them to change their organizations and enhance their political and social activity. Members of the target group were to become role-models for other migrants and bridge-builders, a nexus between immigrants and majoritarian society. The project wanted to create a pool of talented and decent immigrants who could be presented in the media. What makes the project really interesting are two basic features – not totally independent of each other. First, the project was carried out by a private foundation that is – according to the authors – ideologically biased; second, it was not based on the needs of the migrant organization (as perceived by its leaders), but on the ideas of some experts about how migrant organizations should work. This latter factor significantly contributed to the fact that it was not the leaders of organizations but young (35 years old or less) ambitious members who were recruited, with the following requirements: they should be committed to migrant issues, envisage the future of migrants to be integrated members of the host society and have both migrant and German identity. Those selected were invited to participate in a four-weekend course where they learnt about communication, efficient group leadership, democratic and constructive methods of decision making, conflict management and leadership in a non-leadership position.

What this project achieved was the creation of several dozen young enthusiastic migrants whose organizations were not ready for the changes envisaged. Individual empowerment was indeed enhanced; nevertheless, this did not result in the heightened activity or visibility of migrant organizations. Older members were satisfied with the ways things were going and for them it sufficed to organize events where people of the same cultural background could meet and undertake common activities related to their culture. No wonder that some of the ambitious young adults – after realizing the barriers which existed – even decided to leave their organizations. The chapter concludes by saying that it is especially hard to influence an organization by affecting non leader members, and that maybe it would be more productive to find other ways to enhance the participation of migrants, such as focusing on migrants who are already successful in certain domains and who are known for what they have achieved as processionals, not as migrants.

The next chapter – *Technical and financial Support for Migrant Associations in Portugal* by Adrienn Kiss and Béla Soltész – describes a Portuguese project that also aimed to promote the social participation of migrant organizations. After letting the reader know that migrant self-organization has a long tradition in Portugal, the authors present the welfare

system of the country and its migration-related governmental institutions, focusing on the work of the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue that has been responsible for migrant integration since 1996. This body incorporates a Technical Support Office for Immigrant Associations (GATAI) which is responsible for providing technical and financial assistance to migrant organizations. It provides financial support by means of publishing calls for tenders on a regular basis, in which formal migrant organizations with a suitable history and a minimum of 100 members can apply for funds for certain, predefined purposes. However, its scope of activity is not limited to economic aid: the 'technical support' component in GATAI's name is there for a good reason. It provides all kinds of assistance (counseling, consultations, free rooms, training) that can improve the work of migrant associations. It also reaches out to informal organizations and assists them to become officially acknowledged (and thus eligible for funding).

The authors identify an important problem for migrant organizations: their operations are in many cases based almost exclusively on the work of only one person who defines both the organizational culture and its external relations. This poses an important threat: when the key-person moves back to their homeland, or leaves the organization for another reason, all the know-how and an entire network of contacts disappears all of a sudden and the organization is doomed to narrow down its activity, or even to cease to exist.

One of the most important points Kiss and Soltész make is that migrant self-organizations act either 'offensively' (trying to change the legal, economic and social situations of migrants, and fighting to reduce discrimination) or defensively (putting emphasis on a common identity and culture) and that both approaches have serious drawbacks. Although the offensive approach can indeed provide a common umbrella for migrants of all backgrounds, it guarantees a conflict-driven relation with the government and governmental institutions – and in certain cases with members of the host society. Defensive organizations are able to safeguard traditions of a specific migrant group; however, they contribute to the segregation of migrants – they not only separate their members from the host society but also from other migrants. Therefore, active migrant organizations can always be criticized. Even EMMI does this when stating that (European Commission 2011a:75) 'migrant organizations are not always the best agents for social cohesion and do not serve the interests of all migrants equally'.

The subsequent chapter – *One-Stop-Shop: A Single Window Service Delivery System in Portugal by Ildikó Barcza and Anita Nádasdi* – brings us back to the Iberian Peninsula, but takes us forward to Module 2 – strong

commitment by the host society. It describes the work of National Immigrant Support Centers (CNAIs), which give a holistic and integrated response to the need for better access to public services. These centers are created exclusively to deal with the issues of migrants and bring together numerous services. Due to lack of information or difficulties with the Portuguese language, migrants would have a hard time mapping the structure of public services, identifying the relevant ones, visiting state institutions and undergoing cumbersome procedures. The solution lies in an element of the new public management (NPM) offering, since this offers a single widow service for migrants in order to encourage them to use public services. In a friendly environment, each migrant is interviewed by a cultural mediator who 'translates' the issue which requires resolution, not only to Portuguese but to the language of public administration. Afterward, the migrant is sent to one of the other departments: a number of ministries and the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue have offices at the same place and they share a common information system. In order to avoid overlaps, each unit has a clearly defined range of tasks it can deal with. Intercultural mediators – who come from different immigrant communities – work in all of the offices, alongside employees of the ministries. They do not consider themselves to be public servants but bridge-builders between public administration and migrants.

A 'low threshold' is not just a slogan for these centers. They can be contacted by phone and they even have outreach groups whose members visit migrant communities on a regular basis. What is more, more than fifty interpreters are available (by phone) to help with translation issues. Even undocumented migrants are encouraged to use the services. Although the organization in charge of expelling migrants has an office in the building it is the only body that has no access to data about the immigrants, and – due to a tacit agreement – data about illegal migrants who use the center services are not reported to it. Although the authors praise the system they also raise the question whether dealing with migrants in a segregated environment can ensure their integration.

In the following chapter – *Encouraging Immigrants' Civil Participation in Sweden* – Gábor Attila Feleky and Emese Márton present details about how refugees are encouraged to participate in associations in Southern Sweden. The project described is connected to all the three modules of EMMI: it helps with learning the language, it enhances social participation, and – through the Swedish members of associations – it contributes to stronger commitment from the host society. By promoting the practice of using the Swedish language and the building of personal relations with local people it seeks to enhance the probability that migrants will get a job. The recruitment process takes

place during a language class – participation in Swedish language courses is obligatory for refugees and is free to all migrants – where the idea and advantages of becoming a member of an association are presented in detail. During this presentation significant emphasis is put on the fact that – although they are very tolerant – Swedes do not really open up to immigrants in normal situations. However, by participating in shared activities the ice can be easily broken. This is not only the theory but an everyday experience for Swedish people. Being a member of an association has a long tradition in the country – there are about 200 thousand Swedish associations with 31 million members (in a country with a population of less than 10 million). Nevertheless, it must be added that the associations often work as clubs, and if a refugee becomes a member of – just to name an example – a football association, this can be hardly interpreted as civil participation.

The authors call the attention of the reader to the downside of the acclaimed Swedish migration policy. Each refugee is supplied with a tailored Integration Plan which consists of specific activities – e.g. participation in language and cultural courses – to do for 8 hours a day on each workday. Refugees are entitled to allowances if they complete the activities. The state formally supports these ways of helping with integration and therefore can be said to excel where numerous other countries lag behind. However, in practice this system keeps the refugee busy and in a segregated environment – basically, in a classroom – and limits the chances that they will meet with Swedes. This is exactly why the presented project came into existence and why it may have added value to the complex integration system in Sweden.

With the next chapter – *Language and Labour Market: Migration and Integration in Denmark by Julianna Faludi and Ildikó Schmidt* – we arrive at Module 1, which focuses on introductory and language courses. Denmark has an obligatory Integration Program which aims at preparing refugees for the job-market (or the education system). Migrants sign up for a job plan which includes attending intercultural introductory courses, a labor-market program (training, counseling, job-searching) and free language courses.

The researchers examined the VSK language center which – with about 1500 students – is a sophisticated system adapted to the need of migrants. In the center, advisers assess the language skills of immigrants and they follow-up and mentor them during the whole process of language learning. They put them in the appropriate group, monitor their progress, personally advise them and take special care of those whose progress is insufficient, or who miss a significant number of classes. Current and targeted competencies are taken into account when defining which classes should be taken. Input competencies include the level of education, level of use of the Danish language and the development of

cognitive competencies, so the language courses can be adapted to the specific needs of migrants. There is only one indicator which measures the success and the quality of the center: the number of those who pass a language exam. It should be highlighted that the municipality pays the full tuition fees of migrants only in the case that they successfully pass an exam at the end of the course (or half of the cost is owed to the municipality). This facilitates the center to enhance the quality of teaching and encourages it to support students in many ways to keep attendance high at the language school. The certificates that are awarded for passing a Danish language exam are important for many reasons: they are requirements for applying for certain kinds of documents or gaining legal status (like residence permits, or citizenship).

What is highlighted by the authors is the autonomy of the teachers of the school. They are organized in groups and there is no boss – they decide on the methods, schedules, vacations, and all other aspects of teaching. This approach is based on the principle that teachers themselves know best how to organize their work most efficiently. Faludi and Schmidt remark that this method of leadership is indeed efficient at a group level; however, it can contribute to burdensome divergence between groups when a student moves from one group to another and finds a totally different teaching environment.

The last chapter – *Civic, language and cultural education in Belgium by Nóra Judit Kocsis and Eszter Magyar* – presents how the official integration program is carried out in Flanders. The first, introductory part of the two-phase program includes a social orientation program, a basic language course, a carrier-orientation program and personal counseling (the second phase offers more advanced language courses as well as trainings, based on individual needs). The social orientation program teaches about the history, political situation, education, health and social security system of Belgium and the values of Belgians, but it even covers minor everyday issues, like selective waste management. These courses are available in numerous languages. In order to adapt to the needs of immigrants, groups are based not only on the language but on the level of education.

The carrier orientation program includes counseling and coaching. When entering the integration program each migrant chooses a trajectory based on what he or she wants to achieve. The migrant receives training, a job-specific language course, the opportunity to do an internship and job search services in order to realize this goal. They receive personal counseling as social workers mentor migrants through the whole period of the integration program. Since migrants can see that the program helps them to realize their goals, motivation is enhanced and the drop-out rate is reduced. Moreover, even this tailoring of services to the needs of migrants – taking into account personal skills,

education, qualities and goals – is not deemed sufficient by the management of the project who have created a networking team whose aim is to enhance the social participation of immigrants, based on the slogan that integration does not happen in classrooms. Team members create opportunities to practice the language by organizing events which engage both migrants and Belgians. Here we can clearly see how all the three module of EMMI are present. In an introductory phase, with the commitment of members of the host society, migrants get a chance to actively participate in certain aspects of collective life.

As it has been shown, the book contains unique descriptions of integration projects which are based on – in addition to other sources – on-the-spot experience. Chapters are not limited to only describing projects, but – in most cases – the authors briefly present the history of migration in the given country, along with a description of the immigration policy and relevant institutions. This helps to put the projects into a broader context and to see in what kinds of environment these projects may be feasible. The contributors take an important step by discussing what can be learnt from the projects and whether they can be implemented in Hungary.

Clearly, a 200-page-long book cannot fully present the complex environment and individual details of all the selected projects. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the authors have selected the most important details based on their research. The fact that study visits were carried out ensures that the pieces of information presented in the books have been validated.

In is noteworthy that in the autumn of 2013 – based on the studies presented in the book – a conference was organized where representatives of migrant institutions, government bodies and researchers discussed the results of the research program and the potential adaptation of these projects and services to Hungary. The importance of this discourse is clearly reinforced by the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (European Commision 2011b:2), according to which "if the full benefits from migration are to be realized, Europe needs to find a way to better cope with its diverse and multicultural societies through more effective integration of migrants".

REFERENCES

European Commission (2011a), *Draft European Modules on Migrant Integration*, last accessed: 15.10.2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl_25494_793453556.pdf>

European Commission (2011b), *European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals*, last accessed: 15.10.2013, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/ LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0455:FIN:EN:PDF>