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Article

# The Design of Migrant Integration Policies in Spain: Discourses and Social Actors

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## Abstract

Spain is one of the countries with the lowest social spending within the EU-15, and its welfare state has developed later and with less intensity. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain became an immigration country, reaching 5.7 million immigrants in 2011. This article explores how the definition of migrant ‘integration’ is based more on a concept of universal rights and social cohesion by the main actors (political parties, trade unions, third sector organizations and immigrant associations) than on a notion of a cultural type. We will also analyze how the influence of European policies and restrictive liberalism have led to the implementation of programmes which aim to make civic integration compulsory for the renewal of residence and work permits. The empirical evidence for this article stems from 60 qualitative interviews with social actors in migrant integration policies during 2010 and 2011. The impact of the economic crisis on the foreign population, especially regarding its position in the labor market, will also be considered, explaining the reduction of specific and general policies targeting the migrant population. This cut in social spending has involved a deinstitutionalization of this particular policy field.

## Keywords

actors; culture; discourse; immigration; institutionalization; integration; policies; political parties; Spain

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

In this article, we will analyze how various actors, mainly political parties, have defined their vision for the *integration* of the foreign population. But we will also comment on the vision that the different actors involved have for the implementation of these specific immigrant integration policies. These policies directed at the foreign population in Spain are characterised by two factors: a) their strong decentralization, which assigns to various government levels (state, autonomies and municipalities) a degree of power in the implementation of such measures; and b) the substantial number of actors taking part in the implementation, deliberation and creation of such specific policies (political parties, governments, specialists in the various public administrations, trade unions, third sector organizations and the immigrant associations themselves). The analysis shows that there is

a vaguely defined idea for the term ‘integration’ (Chari & Sandell, 2011, p. 146), which tends to be rooted in the social rights field rather than the cultural rights field.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain became an immigration country, reaching 5.7 million immigrants in 2011 (Arango, 2000, pp. 256–258; Fokkema & Haas, 2015, pp. 4–5; López-Sala, 2013, pp. 40–45). The economic growth that Spain experienced between 2000 and 2007 led to a widening of the labor market, along with a demand for intensive manpower in sectors such as construction and services with a low added value, and even in part-time jobs (Muñoz-Comet, 2016, p. 546). This need for manpower was largely satisfied by the arrival of immigrants (Mahía Casado, 2010, p. 10). The annual gross domestic product grew by an average of 3.4 points between the years 2000 and 2007, with immigration being responsible for 40% of that increase (Fundación Ideas, 2011, pp. 58–59, 83).

In Spain, at the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, there were 20.6 million people working. Of these, foreigner immigrant workers made up 13.8 percent of the total; almost 2.9 million workers. Following the reduction of the labor market in 2016, the working population rose to 18.3 million people, of whom 10.8 percent were of foreign nationality, amounting to nearly 2 million foreign workers (Labor Force Survey, 2016). Ultimately, this period saw the disappearance of 2.3 million employed people, of which 876.4 were foreign workers, that is, 37.3 percent of working people who lost their job in this period were foreigners (Labor Force Survey, 2016). Unemployment rates for the foreign active population are about 20.5 percent in 2016—based on data available for the second third of the year. The most significant change in this period was the unemployment rates among the Spanish population, which was at 18.8 percent in 2016. Understandably, differences between nationals and foreigners in the labor market are affected by variables such as gender, country of birth, educational level and social class, along with the tendency to prefer certain nationalities over others, for example, in the case of immigration from Latin American countries (Amuedo-Dorantes & De la Rica, 2007, pp. 263–267).

Prior to the crisis, immigration was perceived by nationals to be a temporary necessity, a labor need, but in the end, it came to be perceived as being a burden for an ungenerous Welfare State. Spaniards stratified their migration preferences according to cultural proximity and religion (Cook-Martín & Viladrich, 2009, pp. 155–161). Latin American migration became the most preferred, followed by migration from the EU-28 and, finally migration from Sub-Saharan nations, with Moroccan immigration being the least accepted of them all.

Spain is one of the countries with the lowest social spending within the EU-15 and its welfare state developed later and with less intensity (Arriba & Moreno, 2005, pp. 110–111; Rhodes, 1996, pp. 5–8; Sarasa & Moreno, 1995, pp. 26–28). In the case of Spain, joining the European Union in 1986 and the inclusion of immigrant rights in the political agenda of extreme left parties were the factors that led to the first aliens act. In 1994, the first state plan for the social integration of immigrants by the Ministry of Social Affairs was in the hands of a socialist government, a plan that established a set of administrative measures and proposals for the care of migrants.

The arrival of substantial flows of immigrants, starting from the year 2000, justified to a great extent the increase in measures specifically aimed at the immigrant population. In 2001, with a conservative government, the second immigration plan was approved, under the name Plan GRECO<sup>1</sup> and marked by a vision of immigration as border control and integration as assimilation (Gil Araujo, 2002, 2010, p. 106).

Since 2004, there has been an institutionalization process of this specific public policy. This has involved a

consolidation of this area in the political agenda (in the state, autonomous communities and municipalities), its stable presence in the parliamentary political discourse, a specialization in the management and implementation of this type of sector policy and, eventually, an extension of the responsibility of the implementation of these policies to various social actors throughout virtually all public administrations. In the years preceding the crisis, at a time when economic prospects were good and the government was in the hands of the social democrats between 2004 and 2008, there was an increase in social policy expenditure typical of the Welfare State, along with the development of specific policies for gender equality, youth, and the integration of foreigners.

The debate over the integration model for immigrants in Spain started in the late nineties and the beginning of the first decade of this century, when Europe abandoned both the assimilationist and the multiculturalist models. At that time, our political class seemed to be seeking a middle way between these two choices or, at least that is how the notion of *interculturality* that got conservative and left-wing political forces to work together, was perceived. This proposal continued to evolve, and the variety of forces taking part gradually adopted more reactive stances, under the influence of European trends, which were not very keen recognising the rights of immigrant people, favouring instead a restrictive liberalism, which enforces *civic integration* programmes aimed at the learning of language and values (Goodman, 2010, pp. 757–763, 2014; Guiraudon, 2008; Jacobs & Rea, 2007, pp. 270–274; Triadafilopoulos, 2011, pp. 865–890).

The following sections describe the methodology of this research, the main results, and finally, some brief conclusions regarding the policies for immigrant integration in Spain.

## 2. Methodology

This publication is based on data collected using qualitative methodology, which included in-depth interviews with key informants, as well as the revision of documents from the various social and political actors (programmes, regulations, memorandums, websites, leaflets, press releases, published news stories, etc.).

The interview technique was based upon a method expounded by Lewis A. Dexter in his classic work *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (1970) for four main reasons. Political and professional elites: 1) have busy schedules; 2) hold senior roles in their field, are considered experts, and as such, they like being the centre of attention. 3) Political and professional elites hold privileged, first-hand information and employing a technique which might compromise their treatment of such data might prevent them from publicly sharing it. Finally, 4) the interviewees were allowed to direct the course of the interview towards topics they considered more relevant. This made the inter-

<sup>1</sup> The Global Programme for the Regulation and Coordination of Aliens and Immigration, known as Plan GRECO, was passed on 17 April, 2001. Please see <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2001/04/27/pdfs/A15323-15343.pdf>

viewees more comfortable and lead to better empirical evidence being produced (Dexter, 1970, pp. 48–50).

The total number of in-depth interviews was 60: 22 of which were conducted with representatives of political parties; 14 of these interviews involved decision makers in the state and autonomous community governments; 4 interviews were with trade union decision makers; 10 were with the main third-sector organizations involved with foreigners; and another 10 were with immigrant associations with a wide presence in great part of the state territory. Of these, 23 interviews took place at the national level: 14 in Catalonia, 13 in Madrid and 9 in Andalusia. Fieldwork was conducted between 2010 and 2011 (see Table 1).

The following 3 characteristics led me to choose Catalonia, Madrid and Andalusia: a) they are 3 of the 4 regions in Spain with the highest concentration of foreign population; b) the three regional administrations have a substantial track record of addressing their needs; and c) their regional governments were in the hands of different political parties: Madrid was ruled by the conservative Popular Party, in Andalusia the progressive Spanish Socialist Workers' Party was in power, and finally Catalonia had a government made up of socialists, environmentalists and left-wing nationalists.

The interview sample was chosen to be representative, and so included political parties represented in the State government and in regional parliaments, majority trade unions or NGOs and immigration associations which were present in State and/or regional participation forums. Also, in the case of immigrant associations, the key factor was that they were representative of the various national groups.

These interviews were transcribed in their entirety and subjected to a discourse analysis, which focused on the topics relevant for this study, namely: integration, policies, assimilation, rights, and cultural rights.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. The European Influence (and its Resistances) on the (Cultural) Integration Model of the Foreign Population

Criticism towards multiculturalism as an option for immigrant integration, based on its essentialist vision of cul-

ture and the risk of the fragmentation of society, has become a prevailing discourse among conservative political forces, also being adopted by traditional left-wing parties across Europe (Huntington, 1996; Joppke, 2004, pp. 242–247; Sartori, 2001). The fall of multiculturalism has made most member states of the European Union return to assimilationist stands and it has also led to the withdrawal of so-called multicultural policies (Faist, 2009, pp. 174–177; Joppke, 2004, pp. 243–248; Meer & Modod, 2012, pp. 185–191).

When discussing multiculturalism, as it is linked to immigration, there are additional dimensions to consider: a) its philosophical proposal; and b) the actual *multicultural* policies that were implemented in the European states. These aspects are interrelated, but sometimes it appears that political discourses adopt the (diverse) 'philosophical' approach to multiculturalism—and, by association, to cultural relativism without distinctions—rather than addressing specific global 'policies' designed to foster the settlement of the foreign population.

The new assimilationist policies emerging towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are defined by the mandatory nature of civic integration for foreigners, where such integration can be measured as an effort to learn the language, the culture, the rules of social cohesion, in terms of the well-known *immigrant integration contracts* (Guiraudon, 2008; Jacobs & Rea, 2007, pp. 272–277; Triadafilopoulos, 2011, pp. 863–865; Wallace Goodman, 2010, pp. 760–764, 2014). Spain has not escaped this assimilationist twist, but its take on such contracts has remained in the category of 'willingness' to enrol in such courses when other criteria to renew residence and work permits are not met.

Such political measures call into question two paradigms within liberal democracies: the sovereignty of nation states over their interior politics; and the self-perception of liberal societies as institutions that can not only guarantee fundamental rights but also encourage the spreading of new rights to all citizens or to new sectors of the population (Freeman, 2003; Joppke, 2007, pp. 5–9; Loch, 2014, pp. 625–628; Triadafilopoulos, 2011, pp. 869–875).

The weakening of national sovereignty of states gives way to a greater geostrategic influence in the writing of policies and their design, resulting in a convergence

**Table 1.** Typological grid of qualitative interviews conducted in this research (2009–2010). Source: author's compilation.

	Spanish State	Catalonia	Madrid	Andalusia	Total
Political Parties	10	6	3	3	22
Immigration Decision Makers	4	4	5	1	14
Trade Union	1	1	1	1	4
NGOs	4	2	2	2	10
Immigrant Associations	4	2	2	2	10
Total	23	15	13	9	60

of discourses and in the type of similar responses in the various nation states (Freeman, 2003; Joppke, 2007, pp. 6–8; Loch, 2014, pp. 626–629). European policies for immigrant integration have been marked by the *modus operandi* of the *open method of coordination*, which respects the sovereignty of member states in their territory but tries to reach a consensus in discourses and policies for each particular area (Caviedes, 2004, pp. 290–294; Jacobs & Rea, 2007, pp. 268–272).

Liberal states are questioned for their role as institutions capable of expanding and granting rights, paving the way for a more restrictive liberalism that is ready to defend the values that they see as central to a society, reacting with coercive use of state power to the changes brought on by the rise of diversity in their societies (Triadafilopoulos, 2011, pp. 870–874). This shift involves an unprecedented attack on ‘multiculturalist’ policies. The reasons behind these new policies with such a strong assimilationist tendency are complex. We could talk about a loss of the economic and political hegemony of *western* societies which leads to breaching the political consensus (crises in the political party system with the emergence of populist far right forces), social factors (weakening of the Welfare State), and even cultural ones (diversity in our societies).

The alternative to multiculturalism in the field of cultural pluralism is the intercultural approach. This option seeks to counterbalance the rise of political xenophobia in Europe through the greater representation of parties that oppose immigration and assimilationism as the dominating model (Kymlicka, 2012, pp. 212–214). The accent on this policy lies in a further search for interaction and dialogue in the understanding that integration is a process experienced within each individual (Meer & Moddod, 2012, pp. 182–187).

The approval of the Common Basic Principles in 2005<sup>2</sup> was a turning point, giving rise to integration policies in the European Union countries which aimed to improve integration by stating that, for immigrants, “A basic knowledge of the language, the history and the institutions of the society is essential for integration”. Such principles have been fully adopted in Spain, in the first Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration of 2007–2010 (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2007), and subsequently incorporated in the following Strategic Plan of 2011–2014 (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2011).

In the Spanish case, consensus to go this ‘third way’ was apparently quite strong among conservative and progressive forces, because this was perceived as being a middle ground between assimilationism and multiculturalism; an indication of the lack of consistency within certain political visions. The empirical evidence collected in our fieldwork shows the existing difficulties experienced by the political class in accurately defining the meaning of the intercultural option, and it also illustrates how mul-

ticulturalism and assimilationism are perceived as disposable options. Without going into too much detail about the development of intercultural policies, within specific programmes they had their place in regions ruled by various political groups. In 2008, this lukewarm approach was formally broken when the main conservative force in Spain, the *Partido Popular*, promoted an *integration contract* at the time of the general election in 2008. Since then, interculturality has begun to disappear from documents and agendas produced by conservative forces and, at the same time, it has diminished in progressive policies due to fears of a *welfare chauvinism* effect among natives. In the Spanish case, such a turning point and the turn towards assimilation occurred later in comparison to other European countries such as Holland, France or Germany, which incorporated such programmes prior to 2011 (Michalowski, 2007, pp. 71–75), when an ‘effort for integration’ was added to the Spanish immigration regulations. In Spain, the ‘effort for integration’ was an optional choice concerning the most vulnerable immigrants, as it compensated for the lack of compliance with a requirement to renew the residence and work permit, and thus it was only implemented after the law on foreigners was passed in 2009.

The official definition of integration at state level established in the first Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007–2010), passed in the Council of Ministers on 16 February 2007, is as follows: “a bidirectional, dynamic process of mutual adjustment by all immigrants and all residents of member states”, where “integration implies the respect for the core values of the European Union” (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2007). As we can see, there is a clear influence of basic common European principles passed in 2005.

This notion has three key ideas: firstly that integration is, rather than a state of affairs at a given time, a dynamic social process that takes place over time, having to be continuously reproduced and renewed; secondly, integration requires mutual or two-way efforts to adapt to the new reality, such efforts coming both from immigrants and from the society receiving them; and finally, that these mutual efforts must be carried out within the framework of the core values of the European Union (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2007).

### 3.2. *The Discourse of Political and Social Actors on the Integration of Immigrants in Spain*

For a start, it should be acknowledged that multiculturalism as a critical approach is more easily linked to left-wing parties (Jupp, 2003), at least from the point of view of the most conservative parties. On the other hand, we find that left-wing parties perceive conservative parties as assimilationist forces, whose take on immigration involves the fear of the loss of the national identity. The left fears being defined as ‘woolly liberal’ and

<sup>2</sup> This communication [COM (2005) 289 final] of the Commission is part of the Common Agenda for Integration, within the Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/?uri=uriserv:l14502>)

the right dreads being labelled 'racist'. A good example of such perceptions can be seen in the following statements made by some members of parliament coming from various parties in the Spanish parliament:

"I believe that 'Izquierda Unida' [a left-wing party] defends multiculturalism. It does" (An MP of the Popular Party)

"The Popular Party is in the assimilationist model" (An MP of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party)

"The right, the Popular Party and *Convergència* [a conservative regionalist party can be said to be assimilationist in the sense that they want to impose an autochthonous culture—be it Catalanian or the Spanish—, with each person renouncing to their origins. I believe that is the path they would follow." (Decision-maker for Migration and Citizenship in *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, Catalanian Green Party)

The political discourse tends to classify and stratify foreigners, according to their proximity to the Spanish culture(s) perceived as static, and for this purpose, some ethnic markers are taken into account, such as phenotypic features, language or religion. In Spain, this aspect of political and social discourses means that some policies have more impact on certain communities, for example: religious diversity measures, hiring intercultural mediators specialised in a certain national community, or the teaching of Spanish and other co-official languages in Spain. We can see traces of such discourses in the following quotes:

"I think that people who come to a country such as ours have to adopt our values, our law and our Constitution, as well as all that we have done to construct our cultural heritage over time....That's why I believe that what the people who arrive to a country such as ours must do is to accept and respect all the progress that we have made; there are some nationalities that find that easier because of their culture to adapt to it and there are others that find it more complicated, more complex, because of their culture, because of what they have received and even, on many occasions, because of their lack of education, huh." (A member of the parliament from the Popular Party)

"Spain has always historically prioritised, and the Spanish laws have always prioritised, Latin America and the Philippines; former colonies. It sounds a bit outdated since Spain lost its colonies and so on. We believe we indeed should not break those ties with them, we have to further strengthen such ties. But, indeed, it's basically Latin American countries [meaning those with the right to vote in the municipal election], and some other country nowadays for reasons of relationships, security, for fishing even, or commer-

cial relations and so on—Spain is starting to open up to them, to deploy those options traditionally reserved for Ibero-American countries." (Coordinator of the parliamentary group *Izquierda Unida-Iniciativa per Catalunya-Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* in the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term)

"The good one is the one which is culturally or religiously closer to us. And the bad one is the other one." (Decision-maker for the Immigration Area of *Partido Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, an environmentalist-socialist party)

A characteristic of the discourse on the integration of immigrants in Spain which runs through the various Public Administrations and territories is a difficulty to integrate those foreigners who from a cultural point of view are the farthest away, more specifically, the Muslim population concentrated in Catalonia. The cultural debates that have the greatest impact with regard to religious diversity centre around the building of mosques and the use of the hijab or the burqa in public spaces. Islamophobia as a type of xenophobia has an oblivious echo on many public discourses, this concept being understood as viewing Islam as a compact, monolithic block opposing social change; isolated and sharing no common values with other cultures it coexists with. It is viewed as being inferior to Western culture and perceived as sexist, irrational or primitive; it is seen as being linked to international terrorism and engaged in a clash of civilizations (Martín Muñoz, 2012).

The political and social discourse in Spain usually links immigration to employment; therefore, this is seen as the initial point of integration. Such a discourse is stronger among conservative stances, leaving arguments such as cultural enrichment to progressive forces. The economic recession experienced in Spain could have been one of the main motives for changing the positive acceptance of immigration, yet the downturn encouraged stereotypes linked to the traditional xenophobic discourses related to labor competitiveness (Cea D'Ancona & Valles Martínez, 2015, pp. 136–137)

In the discourse of left-wing political parties in Spain, we find a vision of integration that highlights egalitarianism regarding access to rights, the defence of the extension of political rights—voting in local elections—to foreigners being the most extensive proposal from far-left parties. Such discourses include standardising access of foreigners to the Welfare State, defending the need to implement policies of immigrant integration and, finally, a certain lukewarm position of interculturality (directed more specifically towards migrant and specialised audiences). Interculturality is incorporated as a technical term directed at experts, and as a halfway point for political positions but with a little practical development. The comments of a member of parliament from a peripheral, conservative regionalist party of Catalonia illustrates this point:

“We are located within interculturality, as everyone else in Spain. Now the discussion is what we mean by interculturality....I think everybody is formally into interculturality and nobody would nowadays defend a position which is purely multiculturalist or purely assimilationist. But neither do I think there is a particularly well-developed doctrine from political parties, and I believe that the practices in government tend to be misunderstood multiculturalism. Differences tend to be trivially emphasised, there’s a tendency to pigeon hole people under their origins and, from this, to promote associationism or integration policies. This ethnic approach to sorting types of immigrants is used to garner votes. My feeling is that this is pretty generalised and that’s why I say the rhetoric is always intercultural, but practice is a bad version of multicultural.” (An MP from *Convergència i Unió* in the Spanish parliament)

Basically, if we cross the axes of ideology and national sentiment we will be able to find four ideal types (see Table 2):

- a) the assimilationist model associated with forces that adopt a strong Spanish nationalist sentiment, and can be defined as conservative, as is the case of the *Partido Popular*. This will be the first force to enact in Spain the ‘integration contract’ which demands that immigrants make an effort to get to know the Spanish language and culture. In exchange for this ‘duty’, it’s understood that they will be entitled to Welfare State rights;
- b) the model of defence of standardization of access to the Welfare State and integration, based on ‘constitutional patriotism’, or legislative patriotism, which defends interculturality in education and cultural areas as an enhancement of diversity. This is characteristic of political forces that define Spain as a nation-state and are ideologically located on the left, such as the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party and *Izquierda Unida*. The more left-wing the party is, the greater its defence of the rights of foreigners, particularly of their right to vote.

- c) the model of assimilationism for the immigrant population situated in regions perceived as ‘peripheral nations’ with a culture and language of their own. This includes a defence of interculturality for specific matters (education, social cohesion and community involvement) which derives from the a positive view of ‘cultural diversity’ and is characteristic of peripheral regionalist parties that identify themselves as progressive, such as *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* (in Galicia) or *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalonia). These forces also defend the provision of greater access to the Welfare State for the foreign population and the extension of political rights for immigrants.
- d) The assimilationist model for immigrants which advocates multiculturalism in the centre-periphery relationships, which is characteristic of conservative regionalist stances such as *Convergència i Unió* (Catalonia) and the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (Basque Country). It is important to keep in mind that the conservative *Convergència i Unió* advocated for there to be an ‘effort for integration’ from immigrants, in the 2011 regulations for aliens in the State, in exchange for parliamentary support to back those regulations.

Rhetoric on integration produced by trade unions, non-profit organizations and immigrant associations plays a role in mediation or symbolic approximation between foreigners and those responsible for governmental discourses on immigration. Trade unions in Spain characteristically have a low membership, those with a greater representation in trade union elections are *Comisiones Obreras* and *Unión General de Trabajadores*. Foreign members in the various territories still do not get close to representing foreign workers among the whole of the labor force, accounting for about ten percent of the total in 2016. At the national level, the percentage of foreign members in *Comisiones Obreras* is between 5 and 7 percent of the total, while these account for 3 percent of the total members of the *Unión General de Trabajadores*.

The view of trade unions on integration is mainly social, civic and political. Both organizations highlight that immigrants must be assured access to the Welfare State,

**Table 2.** Stances regarding political recognition of the identity of each migrant community (2008–2011). Source: Author’s compilation based on empirical data.

Ideological Axis (Left–Right)	Centralism–Peripheral Nationalism Axis	
	Centralism	Peripheral Nationalism
Left–Progressives	Defence of normalization and civic integration. Interculturality.	Assimilationism for immigrants at the cultural level. Defence of interculturality in specific areas.
Right–Conservatives	Assimilationism	Assimilationism for immigrants— Interculturality in the relationships of stateless nations (ie. autonomous communities of Spain).

which needs to be resized due to population growth. They also stress that the equality criterion must be central and advocate the normalization of services to foreigners. There is also a defence of increased political rights for the foreign population, and argument that is especially strong on the part of *Comisiones Obreras*. In terms of their cultural model, they advocate interculturality as a way to live together in a culture of diversity, rather than in a diversity of cultures.

Organizations that support immigrants, which are entities in charge of implementing integration policies, are the ones with the greatest level of development and influence on governments where immigrant integration is concerned. Such entities dominate discourses for the defence of human rights, they are key defenders of interculturality, are partially responsible for these kinds of programmes, and they fight for a standardised access to the Welfare State for foreigners. The standardization principle is present in the vast majority of discourses of all social actors, in terms of promoting foreigner's access to the general public services instead of establishing services and specific benefits which specifically respond to the needs of the foreign population; nevertheless, it is also true that this approach needs support in order to achieve integration and social cohesion in the host society.

Immigrant associations have less influence on governments than trade unions and immigrant supporting entities. These former groups depend on public aid to a greater extent than the latter, making their discourse more critical, albeit mitigated by their status as implementers of assistance programmes. Immigrant entities that represent more discriminated groups speak in terms more closely approaching the defence of positions favourable to positive discrimination, because their members suffer more intensely from the consequences of racism and xenophobia. They are the ones who embrace most vigorously the discourse of interculturality because it is in their everyday practices, while support entities are the ones who best know the theory supporting such claims.

Quantitative data show how the hegemonic picture that linked immigration to the need for manual laborers has collapsed in Spain. Academic literature shows that the perception of Spaniards has changed and that the positive side of the presence of foreigners is linked to cultural wealth. To this, we must add the emergence of identity policies challenging the serious redistributive crisis that is having an impact on social equity. This means that the debates on diversity management must be considered as core debates. In the absence of 'means' to implement policies, resulting from the failure to redistribute wealth, 'symbolic' policies emerge. The best example of this is discourse as a policy itself.

#### 4. Conclusions

Discourses are a prelude to policies; they precede and predict future actions. Restrictions start by being verbalised and subsequently solidified. A good example of

this was the exclusion from access to public health of immigrants in an irregular administrative situation that was made on the grounds of austerity policies and which took place under the conservative government of *Partido Popular* in 2012. Prior to this, there had been declarations defending different rights for immigration in a regular situation and foreigners in an irregular administrative situation (Royal Decree-Act 16/2012, 2012).

Just as austerity cut this social right from some of the most vulnerable foreigners, the logic of universal rights, access standardization, the fight for public health access and, finally, an organised and sensitised group of social actors was able to reverse this situation in 2015. The conservative government was pressured to reinstate foreigner's access in an irregular administrative situation to the primary health system. This may be the best demonstration of the existence of an egalitarian force in the vision of foreign integration.

At the cultural level, it is worth noting that differences are hard to accept in Spain, so talking about a shared identity is not easy given the considerable internal plurality of the Spanish state. Applying this ongoing debate to the arrival of immigrants allows for a certain *de facto* diversity, but it does not support it, at least on a national scale. Interculturality only takes a centre role when we talk about educational programs or when we consider immigrant communities that are culturally distant, such as Moroccans; where intercultural mediation does seem necessary to mediate. In this sense, much remains to be done if we wish to develop the kind of approach that is respectful of difference that forms the basis of any social cohesion project.

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