

# Integration as a Solution to Depopulation? Producing the Moral and Loyal Resident in Policies Aiming to Attract and Retain International Migrants



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## ABSTRACT

Combining two streams of literature, this article is framed within critical migration studies and local migration and integration studies. Making integration discourses the object of research, I use county-oriented policies that aim to attract and retain international migrants in the north of Norway to question in what context and with what purpose the concept of integration is used in an area experiencing depopulation. Using the analytical concepts of the moral and the loyal resident to develop my arguments, I find that (1) the concept integration is primarily used within the context of participation in organized, voluntary activities and the labor market that produce ideas of the moral, active resident, and (2) the concept integration is used with the purpose of retaining residents, producing notions of the loyal resident. Here, there appears to be an assumption that a moral, active resident will or is more likely to be a loyal resident, who not only comes to an area but stays despite possibilities to move. Within this context, integration is not framed as a goal in and of itself, but rather may be better understood as a means to an end: a solution to depopulation.

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In this article, I examine integration discourses in county-oriented policies that aim to attract and retain international migrants in the northern Norwegian County of Nordland, particularly related to the Resident Recruitment Project *Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet* (2013–2017), its forerunner project (2009–2012), its follow-up project (2016–2019), and outcome reports. This context is interesting as critical studies on integration are usually focused on the nation-state or larger cities; however, one difference in the northern Norwegian context is that it is facing challenges relating to depopulation. Yet, like in many other Northern European areas (e.g., [Karlsdóttir et al. 2020](#); [Rye 2018](#)), the population in Nordland County has remained rather stable for many years due to international in-migration ([Aure 2012](#); [Nordland fylkeskommune 2018b](#)). Inspired by critical migration studies that aim to make integration discourses the object of research (e.g., [Rytter 2019](#); [Schinkel 2017](#); [Schinkel 2018](#)), I respond to Rytter's (2019: 690) call to ask critical questions when the concept integration is used in policy, specifically: In what context is the concept integration used and with what purpose? I find that in these policies, the concept integration is primarily used within the context of organized, voluntary activities and the labor market, with the ultimate purpose of retaining residents. Conceptually, the article first draws on ideas of the 'moral citizen': 'an *extra-legal normative concept* of the good citizen' ([Schinkel 2008: 17](#); [Schinkel 2010a: 167](#); [Schinkel 2010b: 268](#); [Schinkel 2017: 198](#); [Schinkel & van Houdt 2010: 697](#)). Second, the concept of the loyal resident is developed: an individual who not only moves to but importantly chooses to stay in a particular geographic area. Through the production of both moral and loyal residents, international migrants are framed as having the potential to create stability in an area facing challenges related to depopulation.

In agreement with other critical migration scholars, this article argues that integration discourses are not neutral or innocent, but reflect specific understandings of social problems and solutions (e.g., [Rytter 2019](#); [Schinkel 2017, 2018](#)). There is research that traces the changing discursive nature of integration within the Norwegian context (e.g., [Hagelund 2002](#); [Ihle 2014, 2017](#); [Stein & Fedreheim 2022](#)), yet there is a tendency to focus on the national level. This article begins with the assumption that national policy goals and discourses are not necessarily the same as more localized policy goals and discourses (e.g., [Jørgensen 2012](#); [Søholt & Aasland 2021](#)), which may have implications for how integration is framed within these discourses. For the purposes of this article, integration is understood as an emic concept: one that is used as a 'category of practice' ([Brubaker 2013](#)) in popular discourse. In this way, I understand integration not as an analytical concept, but rather view it as a concept that is employed in public and political discourses and use these discourses as a starting point of inquiry. Therefore, this article makes integration discourses the object of analysis by questioning in what context and with what purpose the concept is used within a particular form of popular discourse: county-oriented policy documents. These documents are thus approached as 'policy-as-discourse,' interested in the discursive constructions, framings, and political uses of concepts ([Bacchi 2000](#)). This article contributes a local perspective to critical migration studies that make integration discourses the object of research by bringing the case of an area experiencing depopulation and may promote a more nuanced discussion of the concept integration considering the importance of local context.

The article is framed within local migration and integration research and provides information about the northern Norwegian context before presenting the conceptual framework of the moral resident—building off Schinkel’s analytical concept of moral citizenship (Schinkel 2008; Schinkel 2010a; Schinkel 2010b; Schinkel 2017; Schinkel & van Houdt 2010)—and the loyal resident. The moral resident builds on ideas of the ‘good’ and ‘active’ resident, while the loyal resident builds on ideas of place loyalty; together, I argue that the moral and loyal resident provide deeper reflections relating to integration discourses within this particular policy context. A brief overview of the material for data and methods is then provided before presenting the findings and analysis. The article concludes by arguing that within these policy documents that aim to attract and retain international migrants in the north of Norway, integration is not a goal in and of itself. Rather, integration discourses may be better understood as a means to an end: a solution to depopulation, where international migrants are presented as one potential way to create stability. The policies reflect the concerns and interests of the county itself more than the international migrants who are moving there, supporting Hadj-Abdou’s (2019: 1) assertion that ‘integration has to be understood and approached as a phenomenon that reveals more about those who articulate ideas about integration and decide on integration measures that it does about those who are the target of integration.’

## BACKGROUND

Research in and on Norwegian local communities and the threat of out-migration was extensive in the 1960s and 1970s and remains a relevant topic today (Haugen & Villa 2016). Resident recruitment work (*tilflyttingsarbeid*) has been present in many Norwegian municipalities (Grimsrud & Aure 2013), yet few recruitment projects have been studied and evaluated (Aure, Nilsen & Ringholm 2011). International migrants—in particular refugees and labor migrants—are often not defined within the scope of resident recruitment projects (Grimsrud & Båtevik 2016), although a Norwegian-based online questionnaire from 2011 found that 41% of resident recruitment work had all types of in-migrants as the target group (Grimsrud & Aure 2012). In Nordland County, the Resident Recruitment Project (2013–2017), its forerunner project (2009–2012), and its follow-up project (2016–2019) differ, however, in that these projects have explicitly aimed to attract international migrants, including those who come for work, refuge, love, studies, or lifestyle (Nordland fylkeskommune 2018b). In 2022, international migrants comprised 9.6% of the population in Nordland, which is lower than the national average (IMDi 2022). Of the international migrants residing in Nordland in 2022, 30% have come as refugees, 29% as labor migrants, 25% via family reunification, and 5% for education (IMDi 2022).

The Resident Recruitment Project, which is the focus of this article—*Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet*—sits at the political intersection of depopulation, migration, geographic dispersal of refugees, and rural development. When it comes to the settlement of refugees in Norway, municipalities have the autonomy to decide whether they will settle refugees, how many, and how to arrange accommodation (Søholt & Aasland 2021; Steen & Røed 2018). Municipalities are encouraged with economic incentives from the national government, and refugees are presented as a possibility for municipalities experiencing depopulation to attract new and younger residents (Kristensen & Sætermo 2021). Kristensen and Sætermo (2021) illustrate tensions between the national dispersal policy for refugees—with the intention to steer settlement and spread refugees geographically—and local realities; for example,

many smaller municipalities may lack translators, qualified language teachers, and health personal with competencies in refugee health, and have few work possibilities.

In addition to the national dispersal policy, the region is heavily dependent on labor migrants. Søholt, Stenbacka, and Nørgaard (2018) examine the receptiveness of rural elites to labor migration in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, their findings promoting the idea that immigration is perceived as important for local development. Similarly, Kristensen and Gullikstad (2022) find that in interviews with mayors in relatively small Norwegian municipalities, international migration is seen as positively contributing to demography, local industry, and that they describe diversity as enriching for the local community. Depopulation has also been examined within the Nordic context of immigration, with international migrants filling labor market vacancies, adding to younger population structures, and ensuring the continuation of public and private services (e.g., Aure, Førde & Magnussen 2016; Aure, Nilsen & Ringholm 2011; Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014). While mobility is key to getting international migrants to come to the region, integration may be understood as a vital concept connected to creating stability by encouraging more permanent settlement. Yet, there can be many challenges in using mobility in the form of migration in order to create stability in local communities; for example, the long-term movement of many individuals may be connected to work and not necessarily attachment to a place, international migrants may experience social and economical segregation, and not all attempts to create social meeting places necessarily achieve the desired results (e.g., Aure, Førde & Magnussen 2016, 2018; Rye 2018; Valenta 2007).

## RESIDENT RECRUITMENT PROJECTS IN NORDLAND, NORWAY

Prior to the Resident Recruitment Project (2013–2017), a pilot project loosely translated as 'Newcomers, Recruitment, and Integration: Examining Potential of New Residents and the Integration of Immigrants and Other Groups of Newcomers in Chosen Small Communities in Nordland' (2009–2012) received funding from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (*Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet*). The main goal of the project was to increase access to a workforce, and the need for 10,000 newcomers was suggested (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013b: 1). The project resulted in a debate on migration, where the goal of 10,000 new international migrants was found provocative; the debate was also described as highlighting the importance of communicating that migration includes more than refugees and asylum seekers (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013a: 3). While 10,000 new migrants became a political goal throughout these projects, it is important to highlight that this goal was contested (Nordland fylkeskommune 2020a: 18).

As a result of the preliminary Newcomers, Recruitment, and Integration Project (2009–2012), a Resident Recruitment Project was formed (2013–2017). The project had a goal that increasing in-migration and decreasing out-migration would result in 10,000 new residents by January 01, 2018 (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013b: 2, 19). As part of the project, there were four subgoals: to increase in-migration from abroad to give Nordland access to a necessary workforce; to increase in-migration from abroad in order to have a more balanced age distribution in the population, increased internationalization, and a well-functioning local community; to put measures in place so that newcomers could bring their family with them, officially register their move to the county, and stay longer; and to better utilize the competencies of international migrants who were already living in Nordland (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013b: 2, 15).

This project was followed-up by a Pilot Municipality Project (2016–2019). As the centrality of municipalities was highlighted in the final reports of the first two projects, the county shifted focus toward the local level (Nordland fylkeskommune 2017). Of the 41 municipalities in Nordland, eight participated in the initial Resident Recruitment Project (2013–2017),<sup>1</sup> while seven municipalities participated in the Pilot Municipality Project (2016–2019).<sup>2</sup>

The policy documents related to these projects form an interesting case to study integration discourses for at least three reasons. First, these policies aim to actively attract and retain international migrants in a time where national policies have become more restrictive (e.g., Hagelund 2020; Staver 2014). Second, there has been a tendency for critical research on integration discourses to focus on the nation-state or in larger cities; less has been done relating to more localized areas experiencing depopulation. Third, by investigating integration discourses in new contexts, it may add insights and nuances into critical literature in migration studies.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ON THE MORAL AND THE LOYAL RESIDENT

The idea of the moral resident explored in this article is inspired by Schinkel's (2008; 2010a; 2010b; 2017) analytical concept of moral citizenship. The notions of a 'proper citizen' in Western Europe, Schinkel (2008: 17, 21; see also 2010a; 2010b; 2017) argues, are marked by a moralization of citizenship, where the discursive framing is that 'the *real citizen* is an *active citizen*.' In this way, citizenship is not only restricted to formal membership and juridically codified rights and duties within a nation-state, but also includes a moral aspect; this is particularly evident in integration discourses, where there has been a shift in emphasis from formal citizenship to moral citizenship as a marker of membership within 'society' (Schinkel 2010a; Schinkel 2017; Schinkel & van Houdt 2010). The moralization of citizenship is not only evident at the national level, 'but also on the local level of cities and municipalities that construct their own notions of the "active citizen"' (Schinkel 2010b: 274; Schinkel 2017: 204). For the purposes of this article, the interest is less on the concept or notions of citizenship per se and more on how the moral resident is framed as the active resident vis-à-vis integration discourses in county-oriented policy documents.

One contribution of this article is in developing the concept of the loyal resident, building on the concepts of place loyalty and place attachment. Place loyalty may be understood 'as residents' [subjective] choice to continue living in a place over other places,' even if it is possible for them to move (Gilboa & Herstein 2012: 143). Outside of studies within the academic fields of marketing and tourism destination, research using the concept of place loyalty is fairly limited, but is evident in the work of Florek (2011: 347), who discusses city loyalty through 'the role of [place] attachment.' Place attachment, a more popularized concept, may be understood 'as the bonds humans form with places' (Budruk 2010: 29) and involves a sense of place, identification with, and belonging to place (Berg 2016). In the Norwegian context, local affiliation plays an important role in defining identity and belonging (Zhao 2019). While place attachment is a fruitful concept for understanding the human relationship to place and belonging

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<sup>1</sup> These eight municipalities included Bodø, Flakstad, Hadsel, Herøy, Narvik, Nesna, Rana, and Vågan.

<sup>2</sup> These seven municipalities included Bodø, Flakstad, Hadsel, Herøy, Narvik, Nesna, and Rana.

is useful for looking at relational micro- and macro-level structures and processes, I choose to use the concept loyal resident built more strongly on the idea of place loyalty, as the interest is in exploring the discursive production of the loyal resident vis-à-vis policy documents. This choice is based on the initial analysis of my empirical material—in dialogue with existing literature within critical migration studies, place loyalty, and place attachment—and through a conversation with this literature aims to explore and further develop the concepts of the moral and loyal resident in light of more local forms of integration discourses. When it comes to international migration and loyalty, the concept of loyalty is most often framed as national loyalty in relation to the nation-state (e.g., Ruget & Usmanalieva 2008; Schinkel 2008; Schinkel 2010b; Schinkel & van Houdt 2010) rather than other, more local-focused scales. This article understands the concept of the 'loyal resident' as discursively framed, as an individual that exhibits place loyalty in terms of a geographical, physical place—in this case, to the County of Nordland—in that they will choose to continue living in the area in question, even if they have the option and possibility to move elsewhere. As this is a discursive framing, it may not reflect actual mobilities or motivations, but rather operates in an ideal, essentialized form.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The material this study is based on consists of a first-hand analysis of ten policy documents within the governmental bodies of Nordland County, Norway. All of the publicly available documents related to the Newcomers, Recruitment, and Integration Project (2009–2012), Resident Recruitment Project (2013–2017), and Pilot Municipality Project (2016–2019) were included in the sample (Table 1). While there are other policy documents in Nordland that use the concept integration, the included documents were related to one of the most significant series of projects relating to migration and integration in the county since 2009. These projects are interesting and relevant to study as they are explicitly interested in attracting and retaining international migrants to a county that has, in general, been facing challenges related to depopulation. The policy documents were collected in November 2021 via an online search and are publicly available in the archives on the official Nordland County homepage. Policy documents in this case are understood as interpretative documents that give meaning to the concept of integration, offering contested usages that reflect differing understandings and logics. Inspired by Bacchi (1999: 33, 36), I understand integration as a concept that needs to be analyzed as policy documents provide a 'strategic representation' of a situation; representations do not only involve images and interpretations, but also reflect how, in this case, integration is produced, created, or constituted as real vis-à-vis the policy documents (Bacchi 2009).

A discursive approach to policy analysis was used in order to gain a broad understanding of how the concept of integration is represented in the policy documents. I first read through the documents to develop an understanding of the material as a whole. As my interest is in integration discourses, particular attention was given to when integration is used within the texts. Although inspired by Bacchi's approach to policy documents, I did not conduct a pure 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) analysis departing from her six questions. Rather, in a first analytical step, an initial analysis was conducted departing from Rytter's (2019) questions: In what context is the concept of integration used? With what purpose? which bear many similarities to WPR. After analyzing the individual policy documents in response to these questions, the individual analyses were compared across the entire data set. In a second step, I

apply two relevant analytical concepts that aim to provide a further understanding of integration relating to the context and purpose in which it is used: the moral and the loyal resident. These concepts were selected based on a dialogue between my empirical data and my theoretical approach. I argue these concepts are useful in providing more in-depth insights regarding the expectations relating to integration within this particular policy context and that they frame international migrants as having the potential to create stability in an area facing challenges related to depopulation. All policy excerpts have been translated by the author.

YEAR	DOCUMENT NAME
2013	Resident Recruitment: Strategy for Further Work ( <i>Tilflytting og rekruttering—strategi for videre arbeid</i> )
2013	Report from the Resident Recruitment Project 2009–2012: A Pilot Project between the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Nordland County ( <i>Rapport frå Tilflyttingsprosjektet 2009–2012. Et prøveprosjekt mellom Kommunal og regionaldepartementet og Nordland fylkeskommune</i> )
2013	Resident Recruitment: Project Plan for 2013–2018 ( <i>Tilflytting og rekruttering—prosjektplan for 2013–2018</i> )
2015	Resident Recruitment from Abroad: Halfway Report ( <i>Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet—Halvvegsrapport</i> )
2015	Project ‘Resident Recruitment from Abroad’ Halfway Report ( <i>Prosjekt «Tilflytting og rekruttering frå utlandet» Halvvegsrapport</i> )
2017	Resident Recruitment from Abroad: Pilot Municipalities ( <i>Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet—pilotkommuner</i> )
2018	Resident Recruitment from Abroad: Final Report and Future Commitment ( <i>Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet—Sluttrapport og videre satsing</i> )
2018	Final Project Report ‘Resident Recruitment from Abroad’ ( <i>Sluttrapport prosjekt «Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet»</i> )
2020	Pilot Municipality Project Report—Resident Recruitment from Abroad—Experiences and Recommendations ( <i>Rapport pilotkommuneprosjektet—tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet—erfaring og anbefalinger</i> )
2020	Pilot Municipality Project Report ‘Resident Recruitment from Abroad’ ( <i>Rapport pilotkommuneprosjektet «Tilflytting og rekruttering fra utlandet»</i> )

**Table 1** Overview of studied documents.

## THE MORAL RESIDENT: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AND THE LABOR MARKET

This section addresses the question, in what context is the concept integration used within the selected policy documents? Within the policy documents, integration is primarily and most consistently used within the context of participation in organized, voluntary activities and the labor market, reflecting ideas of the moral—‘good’ and ‘active’—resident. The 2009–2012 pilot project was built around four pillars: language, housing, recruitment, and integration. Integration here was primarily understood in relation to organized, voluntary activities:

Integration through voluntary organizations. [...] Organized free-time activities are an important social arena in Norway. Immigrants and children of immigrants are often underrepresented in sporting activities. This can be because of a poor economic situation and cultural barriers/

differences. The integration project has a goal to integrate refugees and other immigrants in Nordland municipalities through sport and other physical activities within the municipality and voluntary organizations, with a special focus on children, youth, and their parents. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013a: 7)

The underrepresentation of immigrants and children of immigrants in these activities is problematized as organized free-time activities represent ‘important social arena[s] in Norway’. Physical activities may often relate to outdoor recreational activities in the Norwegian context, which have been argued to be ‘inscribed with sociocultural value systems’ (Taff & Aure 2021: 385). Therefore, the use of integration discourses here is one that produces ideas of and expectations for a moral, active resident, reflected by a particular form of participation within the local community. In other words, integration discourses within the context of organized, voluntary activities can be interpreted as reflecting a culture-centered way of thinking when it comes to the moral resident and how free time and social life are organized. Here, the moral, active resident in Nordland is reflected by the ‘dominant cultures’ practice (Schinkel 2008; Schinkel 2010b; Schinkel 2017) of participating in organized, voluntary activities, particularly sports and other physical activities.

Civil society organizations have been seen as an important partner in order to achieve real integration. In order to thrive and be active in a local community, there needs to be people-to-people relations; there are limits to how much the public systems can contribute to this. [...] Sport organizations have had the most focus, but the project has been aimed at all types of voluntary organizations. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013b: 14)

The relationship between civil society organizations and integration, within the policy documents, is explicitly linked to both thriving and being active within the local community. Relationships may be understood as necessary to thrive in a place, where participation in voluntary organizations may be one way to create these relationships. While one intention of the policy is for residents to thrive in Nordland, it is paired with the idea of being ‘active’. In this way, ‘real integration’ is linked to ‘be[ing] active’ within voluntary organizations as important sites of people-to-people relations. Here, being active in organized, voluntary activities may also serve as a marker of membership (Schinkel 2010a; Schinkel 2017; Schinkel & van Houdt 2010) within the local community, reflective of an ideal moral resident that ultimately becomes produced within the policy documents. Compared to national expectations relating to integration discourses, this is a more locally constructed notion of the ‘good’ resident, where the policy documents produce discourses that shape an ‘attribution of belonging to society’ (Schinkel 2017: 206). Belonging to the local community—a ‘real integration’—comes through active participation in voluntary organizations.

As the project developed within the policy documents, however, there was a shift from a primary focus of integration within the context of organized, voluntary activities toward the context of the labor market:

The County Plan for Nordland 2013–2025 (*Fylkesplanen i Nordland 2013–2025*) points out that increased immigration is necessary to obtain the needed workforce and a balanced development within the population. Including and integrating immigrants and other newcomers in the workplace and in the local community is crucial to creating viable local communities and a positive development in Nordland. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2018a: 11)

Although the need to obtain more individuals for the local workforce was discussed in the earlier policy documents, integration was primarily used in the context of voluntary organizations. Within the later policy documents, integration is framed as crucial so that ‘immigrants and other newcomers’ are included and integrated within the workplace and local community. The moral resident is one that is active in the workforce; this is framed as a necessity for filling vacancies within the labor market, addressing the challenges related to the population structure and aging, creating viable local communities, and resulting in positive development. This may be reflective of (1) the wider Nordic welfare state context in which the integration of international migrants has primarily focused on the labor market (e.g., Aure, Førde & Magnussen 2016; Djuve & Kavli 2019; Pyrhönen, Leinonen & Martikainen 2017) where ‘conforming to the ethos of wage labor as means of [...] signaling the right kind of commitment to collective goals’ reflects important moral expectations (Bendixsen, Bringslid & Vike 2018: 23), as well as (2) the more local context where international migrants may be framed ‘as essential for economic growth’ (Hadj-Abdou 2019: 5) and positive demographic developments (Kristensen & Gullikstad 2022). Here, it is not international migrants who are framed as benefiting from integration, but the local communities and Nordland County as a whole. The integration discourses related to the labor market carry heavy normative and moral weight, where the moral resident is the active resident. Yet, there are also silences within the policy, where more systematic challenges or difficulties in entering the labor market—including discrimination (e.g., Midtbøen 2015), employer stereotypes (e.g., Friberg & Midtbøen 2018), and lengthy asylum and settlement procedures for refugees (e.g., Djuve & Kavli 2019)—are absent within these integration discourses. To have the opportunity to become an active resident first requires that one has a chance and possibility to participate.

With an increasing focus on people staying, rather than an influx of individuals that quickly move out again, the tasks we are already working with in the county become even more important. Investments in the local community in small municipalities and urban municipalities, with an emphasis on place development, good and suitable housing, and good meeting places are important so that individuals can thrive, meet, and be seen. [...] All these elements are important so that newcomers, both Norwegian-born and from abroad, can thrive, be integrated, and active participants in social and working life. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2020b: 10)

In this case, to ‘be integrated’ involves being the moral resident: active in organized, voluntary activities, active in the labor market, and active in social life. These notions are explicitly linked to the context in which integration discourses are used. This understanding of the moral resident reflects the dominant culture, where organized, voluntary activities are seen as important social arenas and the ethos of wage labor weighs strong. Importantly, although the wider policy goals are explicitly interested in attracting and retaining international migrants, the target of these integration discourses is not necessarily international migrants; while occasionally the discourses explicitly address integration in relation to ‘immigrants,’ ‘refugees,’ or ‘children of immigrants,’ they often address *tilflyttere* (all individuals who move to a place, both internal and international)<sup>3</sup> at large. Yet, when considering the purpose that the concept integration serves within the policy documents, it is not a goal in and of itself; rather—argued in the next section—integration discourses may be better understood as a means to an end.

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3 *Tilflyttere* is translated as newcomers within the policy excerpts.

## THE LOYAL RESIDENT: RETAINING INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN THE NORTH OF NORWAY

This section addresses the question, with what purpose is the concept integration used within the selected policy documents? Here, integration is primarily used with the purpose of retaining international migrants, producing ideas of the loyal resident: an individual that exhibits place loyalty, in this case to the geographical place of Nordland.

The purpose of integration discourses as retaining international migrants in the north of Norway is evident in the early policy documents when the context of integration is organized, voluntary activities:

Integration through voluntary organizations. Many municipalities in Nordland County settle refugees, something that has resulted in a positive development relating to population growth in several municipalities. Yet, we know that many of the settled refugees move to more central locations when the Introduction Program [courses in Norwegian language, social studies, and preparation for further work and education] is complete. This can be for many reasons, but perhaps the most important is a desire to live where they have family and other countrymen. [...] This [the integration of refugees and other immigrants through sports and other physical activities] should contribute to more settled refugees wanting to stay in Nordland and that the voluntary sector in general is more open to newcomers. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2013a: 7)

In this excerpt, it becomes evident that integration into organized, voluntary activities is not the end goal. Rather, the purpose of integration is that, in this case, settled refugees will thrive and enjoy living in Nordland, with the hope that they will exhibit place loyalty by voluntarily choosing to stay in Nordland after the Introduction Program is complete. This involves demonstrating an affection for, faithfulness, and dedication to a place (Grimsrud & Båtevik 2016) by residing there even when the possibility exists to, for example, move for a job opportunity or closer to family. While the policy is interested in the individual's enjoyment of place, the ultimate hope reflects a loyalty-centered way of thinking (Schinkel 2008; Schinkel 2010b; Schinkel 2017): that Nordland will become a permanent place of residence. Thus, in these policy documents, both the culture-centered way of thinking and the loyalty-centered way of thinking in integration discourses suggested by Vermeulen (2007, as cited in Schinkel 2008: 19) are present: 'on the one hand, a culture-centered way of thinking—practices exemplifying the 'active citizen' are practices normalized according to 'the dominant culture'—and on the other hand, a loyalty-centered way of thinking—the "good citizen" has "loyalty" toward "society"' (see also Schinkel 2010b: 269–270; Schinkel 2017: 200). Rather than being focused on national loyalty, however, these policy documents reflect a more localized form of loyalty to a particular county. There appears to be an underlying assumption that a moral, active resident in organized, voluntary activities will also become a loyal resident who voluntarily chooses to continue residing in a place even when other options arise. Yet, in practice, plans to move elsewhere do not necessarily mean that one does not enjoy or thrive in a place, just as plans to stay do not necessarily indicate a high level of enjoyment or thriving (Munkejord 2010).

As the context of integration shifts from organized, voluntary activities to the labor market within the policy documents, the purpose of retaining international migrants remains:

With an increasing focus on people staying, rather than an influx of individuals that quickly move out again, the tasks we are already working with in the county become even more important. Investments in the local community in small and urban municipalities, with an emphasis on place development, good and suitable housing, and good meeting places are important so that individuals can thrive, meet, and be seen. [...] All these elements are important so that newcomers, both Norwegian-born and from abroad, can thrive, be integrated, and active participants in social and working life. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2020b: 10)

Thriving, 'being integrated and active participants in social and working life' is again not the goal in and of itself. Rather, this element becomes important due to the purpose of integration within the policy: retaining people in Nordland. This is reflected in the first sentence in the excerpt: 'with an increasing focus on people staying'. In the policy documents, this involves a two-step process: first, there is an emphasis on investment within the municipalities to develop housing and meeting places with the intention of becoming desirable and attractive places to live. This is seen as a necessary investment in order for, second, newcomers to 'be integrated and active participants in social and working life' so that they will ultimately stay in Nordland. Although one intention of the policy may be in creating desirable and attractive places for residents to enjoy and thrive, this is also a place where the moral and loyal resident become intertwined, again with the underlying assumption that the moral resident will or is more likely to be the loyal resident who stays in Nordland. This is also the case when it comes to the systematic recruitment of international labor migrants in order to fill vacancies within the labor market:

Systemically recruiting [international labor migrants]. [...] This initiative has embraced important measures to get labor migrants to stay [in Nordland]. This applies to Norwegian language training, housing, integration, and information. The goal is to include recruited candidates with families and to put the conditions in place so that they will stay [in Nordland]. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2015: 12)

Integration with the purpose of retaining international migrants in Nordland was not only seen within the contexts of organized, voluntary activities and the labor market, but was also used more broadly:

Population growth is a difficult and complex field of work and integration and international migration are also complex. It is therefore necessary to collaborate in order to succeed in retaining more residents in Nordland. (Nordland fylkeskommune 2018c: 3)

As the purpose of integration is to retain more residents in Nordland, this frames integration as a solution to depopulation. This framing is only successful, however, if the international migrants who the policy aims to attract to the area also become 'loyal residents' who voluntarily continue to reside in Nordland. While international migration may often be seen as presenting a moral and monetary cost to local society (Schinkel 2022), here the economy of migration is framed as the potential costs of *not* having

international migrants come to the county. In this way, migrants are individuals ‘who might not have been here’ (Schinkel 2022: 5), but are individuals that the county is dependent on, especially in terms of contributing to positive demographic developments and filling labor market vacancies. Within this context, the policy documents frame integration as a tool ‘to foster and to maintain economic growth’ (Hadj-Abdou 2014: 1875); yet, migration still appears to be a ‘modality of debt’ (Schinkel 2022: 5) in the sense of a moral debt to become a loyal resident. Integration within the context of organized, voluntary activities demonstrates that, despite having an ultimate interest in regional development, there is more than a purely economic understanding of integration. Still, the purpose of integration discourses reflects Hadj-Abdou’s (2014: 1891) findings that ‘immigrant integration is not necessarily or exclusively about granting immigrants a better position in their societies of settlement,’ but rather is driven to a large extent by the goal of regional development.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: INTEGRATION AS A SOLUTION TO DEPOPULATION

Within the studied policy documents, integration is primarily used within the context of participation in organized, voluntary activities and the labor market with the ultimate purpose of retaining residents. Here, there appears to be an underlying assumption that a moral resident—active or ‘integrated’ in organized, voluntary activities and in the labor market—will produce a loyal resident, an individual that not only moves to Nordland County but thrives and therefore stays despite possibilities to move elsewhere. This is reflective of a more localized notion of loyalty to a place. Quite naturally, these policies reflect the concerns and interests of the context at hand and reflect specific understandings of problems and solutions. At the same time, they also represent more localized understandings of how new residents should behave and demonstrate belonging. In line with previous research, these findings suggest that ideal residents within Norwegian resident recruitment projects should exhibit an affection for, faithfulness, and dedication to place (Grimsrud & Båtevik 2016), with international migrants presented as positively contributing to demography and local development (e.g., Aure, Førde & Magnussen 2016; Kristensen & Gullikstad 2022; Søholt, Stenbacka & Nørgaard 2018).

Two main contributions are presented by this article: First, in terms of developing the concept of the loyal resident, intertwined with but analytically distinct from the moral resident. Here, the ideal loyal resident is one that exhibits place loyalty, an especially important feature for areas attempting to attract and retain international migrants in the wake of depopulation. Second, the article contributes to the literature within critical migration studies that make integration discourses the object of research by studying a local context actively trying to attract and retain international migrants. Often national and local debates frame international migrants as a threat or potential burden to the welfare state, with questions such as who should be admitted, on what grounds, and their rights (e.g., Brochmann 2008; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Hovden & Mjelde 2019). Thus, while public debates on migration may often be focused on the monetary cost of having international migrants come and settle in Norway, within the studied policy documents for this article, international migrants are not framed as a problem but as a resource for the county. This feeds into a wider framing of international migrants as potential producers of welfare: that international migrants may fill labor market vacancies and consequently constitute a resource to the welfare state (e.g., Brochmann 2008). The understanding of integration as a

means to an end, as presented in this article, may shed light on the situation of many rural areas experiencing depopulation within the Nordic countries and across Europe that may be looking toward international migrants for revitalization (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2023; Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014; Karlsdóttir et al. 2020).

Although the economy of migration is, in this case, presented as the potential cost of *not* having international migrants come and settle within the county, I argue that migration is still presented as a ‘modality of debt’ (Schinkel 2022) in the sense of a hope or expectation that the international migrants who come to Nordland will become loyal residents. Ultimately, the integration discourses within the studied policy documents rely on the production of the moral resident—reflective of the culture-centered way of thinking—and the loyal resident—reflective of the loyalty-centered way of thinking—where community membership reflects being active in organized, voluntary activities, the labor market, and finally choosing to stay within the County of Nordland. In this way, integration is not a neutral term (e.g., Rytter 2019), and studying one of the multiple meanings of integration within an area aiming to attract and retain international migrants may nuance critical understandings of integration. As opposed to integration as an end goal in and of itself, integration discourses operate in these policy documents as a means to an end: a solution to depopulation, where international migrants are presented as one potential way to create stability.

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