

**EUROPEAN SEMINAR – TRANSVERSAL POLICIES AND LOCAL PLANS FOR THE
INTEGRATION: WHICH STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT?**

Namur (BE), Theatre Royal, 8th and 9th November 2010

**Set of social indicators: tools for appropriate governance and
support to the local managers on integration policies**

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1. Policy localisation and integration dynamics

Positive integration of migrants needs norms and policies that recognize the relevance of different ways of life in a social community and that try to promote useful exchanges within a unique and common system of citizenship rights and responsibilities (Giddens, 2007).

In this perspective, the idea of integration is inspired, first of all, by the main principle of justice: reciprocal rights and duties of institutions and citizens. In other words, the principles of equality, respect and non-discrimination for all citizens, as suggested by the *Basic Principles of Integration* of the European Union, are guaranteed by the fact that as public institutions perform their duties of justice, they can reasonably ask to “new candidate citizens” reciprocity and loyalty to the democratic society.

In detail, it is necessary to require from foreign citizens the full compliance with the values and constitutional principles of the host Country in agreement with the fundamental dialectic “rights-responsibilities”.

In this sense, the goal of social policies is to encourage the capacity building of individuals and to promote the “field of opportunities”. Reducing and, gradually, erasing asymmetries, that are an obstacle to the free construction of people’s lives, should be the main aim of political planning, which assumes as priority the fight against exclusion and which is able to promote an effective model of positive cohabitation.

The safeguard of migrants’ well-being, the objective of “low-conflict” interactions among immigrants and host-population and the analysis of integration processes cannot ignore the process of changes in the European welfare systems and the central role acquired by local authorities in social planning. In this sense, it is necessary to put at the center of discussion the local dimension of integration.

Over the last two decades, in all European countries we have observed an increasing difficulty of the central governments in managing, both administratively and financially, social and inclusion policies and, at the same time, we have witnessed a regionalization process of integration paths.

Also the literature on integration policy and social inclusion stresses the new relevance of regional and local dimensions. The crisis of the so-called “general model” has accelerated the emergence of empirical studies on actual integration policies carried out at local level (Regions, Provinces and Municipalities), so as to overcome abstract and general models at the advantage of policies related to a certain place and time.

The empirical and contextualized approach is strategic and a “*cultural chance*”. It is crucial for the development of social planning tools that are appropriate to modern societies characterized by continuous social change and that should become able to redefine the dynamics of cohabitation within specific territories. The analysis of migrant integration should be always contextualized because its characteristics and peculiarities are strictly connected with the context in which it takes place. For example, as shown by empirical studies, practices of migration flows management are appropriate and effective in some areas but not in others. This suggests, first of all, a significant heterogeneity of integration processes in the different European contexts and, secondly, the relevance of having analytical tools able to describe and measure, on one hand, the multi-dimensionality of integration paths and, on the other hand, the dependence of the integration from structural, cultural and geographic factors. The spatial contextualization of social problems of immigration involves a multidimensional vision. The review of the different ways in which the integration concept has been interpreted in Europe and the central role that the concept of integration assumes in different policy fields (from employment, to social affairs and equal opportunities, to urban policies, to local development and so on), underline how cross-sectional and multidimensional is the concept of migrant integration and therefore how wide is the range of dimensions that have to be monitored.

Consequently, the empirical monitoring of migrant integration factors needs to take into account the elaboration of measurement tools. They have to refer to legislative and integration policies, but also to continuous changes in the phenomenon and to the specific interaction of migrants and host population. In addition, the tools have to consider the opportunity and constraint structures of the different local contexts and, at the same time, the individual and subjective perceptions by migrants of their own integration path and finally host population’s perceptions of migrants’ presence.

2. Indicators as tools for decision making

In order to take effective decisions for local integration policies, appropriate information able to answer to knowledge needs and give cognitive and technical elements for decision-making is necessary. Stable, systematic, validated and shared information flows are to be put in place (Mauri, 2007).

We need knowledge tools that are suitable to obtain updated information about migration trends, that is exhaustive and can be compared, with an eye to variability and multidimensionality.

Among the existing methodologies, the construction of sets of indicators is one of the most interesting and effective options, on which the Council of Europe and the European Commission are currently investing. Many experiences have been developed in different European countries in this respect, as recent results of the European Survey on national integration monitoring systems (Dietrich, Kapphan, 2009) and as the process of construction of a common set of indicators promoted within the Ministerial Conference demonstrate.

May I also remind that an indicator can be defined as a statistical datum able to describe a concept to which it is strictly related, with the aim to analyse the variation in time and space of a wider and more complex phenomenon, which is the object of study.

However, the relationship between each indicator and the concept is defined in probabilistic and not deterministic terms. That is why it is necessary to use, if possible, an adequate amount of indicators (P.F. Lazarsfeld, 1965).

A monitoring system that uses indicators is effective if its aim is not only to describe, but also to measure and interpret social processes in the light of both sociological models and local social policy goals.

It is important to clarify that the European debate on sets of indicators for integration is focused, at the same time, on the issue of monitoring migrants' integration and evaluating the effectiveness of actions in favor of such integration. These two activities are strongly related but require different technical and methodological procedures and lead to different types of problems.

On the side of monitoring integration we usually talk about objective/quantitative indicators, built through the use of official statistics, that need to be elaborated on, with special attention to:

1. *Heterogeneity of available sources* and their explication potential.

It is still difficult, in fact, in many countries, among which Italy, to have integrated and organic information sources about immigration. Adequate information systems able to collect, process and return detailed data about foreign citizens, useful for secondary analysis, are still unavailable. At the same time data are collected by sources that use very different collection methodologies, something that is an obstacle to the possibility of basic data processing. The needed effort is both technical and

political, so as to increase the production capacity of information of the various national/regional statistical and sociological systems.

2. *Differences in legislation* defining the target population. The object of monitoring is defined by national migration policy, which define the statistical criteria of inclusion and data collection tools.
3. The necessity to *contextualise* indicators and *compare* migrant and indigenous population. The explanatory potential of an indicator is always relative, in the sense that it can give a useful indication only if it is related to other values that the same indicator assumes in time and space (Mauri, 2003; Gregori, 2006). In particular, in order to measure the level of integration it is incorrect to analyse only indicators referred to migrant population, leaving aside the context and the comparison with other social groups.

The final goal of building a set of indicators about integration with such warnings is to synthesize a large amount of data in a more manageable and at the same time theoretically significant way and to answer to the need of extrapolating those properties whose explanatory potential can support effective decision-making.

The set should be composed first of all of a selected number of significant indicators that can easily be calculated on the basis of available or easily obtainable data and which have a strong descriptive value. Some European experiences have shown that a claim of excessive descriptive specificity and a high level of breakdown of the indicator are virtually incalculable, not statistically representative and often not useful for the purposes of public discussion and decision-making. A set of indicators of integration built according to these parameters allows to obtain time series of consistent data for the interpretation of trends of phenomena but also to compare highly heterogeneous local contexts among each other (eg, cross-section transnational comparisons). In this respect, it is useful to remember that the effectiveness and the information potential of a set of indicators are maximized when in different contexts we have access to a robust system of legal, conceptual and semantic shared definitions, that are uniform, homogeneous and with a strong discriminating capacity. Based on the results of this first level of monitoring, policy makers can set priorities, specific objectives and actions in favor of integration.

For what concerns evaluation activities, process (i.e., input and output) and performance (i.e. outcome and impact) indicators are used. On this front, it is important to develop at local level *ex ante* and *ex post* experimental research methodologies, despite the difficulties, costs, complexity that this entails. The evaluation of processes and impacts of interventions in favor of integration requires that proper methodological procedures are followed, in order to enable evaluators to obtain:

- agreement about objectives of the evaluation and the foreshadowing of the outcome with the policy maker from the very first stage of planning;
- a clear explanation of the aspects to be assessed;
- the sharing of methodology and tools with other key actors (participatory evaluation) through the creation of places for planning and verification;
- identification of indicators on which to carry out the assessment of impacts.

Finally, we can remind a proposal of the main analytical dimensions that we have to take into account if we have to measure the concrete paths of integration of migrants. These dimensions are articulated (Zincone, 2009) by:

- a) Objectives
 1. Positive impact
 2. Integrity and well-being
 3. Low conflict
- b) Areas
 1. Public and civic
 2. Cultural and religious
 3. Social and economic
- c) Levels
 1. Rights and policies
 2. Opportunities and life conditions
 3. Perception and identity

The results obtained from this work represent a step forward for the development of decision-making processes that are self-conscious and supported by good information.

3. Not only monitoring but also analysis, planning and evaluation of integration interventions: the role of Social Observatories on Migration

The monitoring instruments mentioned above have to be flexible tools for setting up a positive virtuous circle of continuous feedback between supply

and demand of information, between social needs and ability of the context to answer to local problems.

We have to create positive interactions between knowledge and decision making. Policy planning, services organization and the management of social phenomena need reliable, not-improvised and not-only intuitive information and knowledge. The achievement of these aims is possible by setting up local Social Observatories on Migration, that are stable organizations which support policy makers in the implementation of policy-oriented multidimensional analysis.

We can define an Observatory, in the social field, as a system of activities (e.g. planning, training, information, sharing of experiences, socialization, etc.) finalized to draw attention of policy makers, social workers, mass media, citizens etcetera to specific and significant problems of a certain geographical area.

The activities carried out by the territorial Observatories allow to create a set of instruments which support policy makers, help the coordination of the different actors involved and support the interaction among them, within evidence-based decision processes inspired by clear and shared objectives.

Starting from the functions and duties assigned to the Observatory, it should be possible for local institutions, in particular at Regional level, to support the cooperation among subjects who, in a specific area, work on the theme of immigration and social integration.

In this perspective, applied social research and activities management become strictly related (Mauri, 2010). An effective Observatory will also be able to act both on a cultural level and on an operational level, with the specific aim of bringing together individuals who express a specific need and services, a relation which is guided and encouraged by relating objectives and results, exploiting potential resources that are present on that territory, by using innovative methods of intervention and available opportunities.

To sum up, we can identify five primary functions and purposes of a local social Observatory, in particular if it works at regional level: knowledge, analysis, strategies, evaluation and dissemination. Regarding the former, it is related to the observation of the behaviors in order to create an updated and systematic knowledge about migration phenomena, integration-related problems and about ordinary and emerging needs of the target population.

The analysis function is related to a systematic and coherent elaboration of information for the definition and implementation of guidelines, for example: analysis of social needs of migrants, the study of specific services, the study of the quality of interventions and the evaluation of the results, studies on

discrimination etcetera. On the basis of the information produced in this first phase and of the outputs obtained in the research phase, the Observatory can support decision making processes to define the strategic goals in the face of the problems that came out. After the intervention model is decided, the policy-oriented phase allows the Observatory to support the creation of the intervention strategies, the definition of the operative objectives, the detail of the activities to be carried out.

Also the evaluation of policies and actions is carried out by the Observatory. In this way we can monitor the efficacy (the interventions must cover known and latent needs), the efficiency (they have to find the equilibrium between costs and benefits) and the adequacy of the services, with respect to the actual demand.

In synthesis, the Observatory in its function of support of local managers in the decision-making process is at the same time:

- Center for the monitoring and analysis of migration dynamics and trends;
- Center for the identification of intervention areas and activities and priority setting;
- Place for the matching of information and requests expressed by local entities, social partners, migrant associations and by all the stakeholders who work in the field of migration and migrant integration;
- Facility that supports decision-making on integration policies and related legislative actions.

On the base of twenty years experience in the planning of local Observatories in different regional and local contexts, it is useful that we point out some of the difficulties that Synergia faced. Although many situations are interconnected, we can identify two categories of problems that could characterize the start-up and the development of a social Observatory. The first set of critical issues regards the political-institutional dimension: the ability of local authorities to clearly express their planning objectives in relation to issues of integration of immigrants and the ability to incarnate, in a consistent and stable way, the functions and activities of the Observatory within the local planning framework.

Closely related to this issue is the question of legitimacy that the political, administrative and technical authorities grant to the Observatory. A *deficit* on these dimensions can determine, on one hand, that information cannot be actually used for decision-making (because it is not in line with the planning goals), on the other hand, a lack of connection between information outputs

and decision-making process. For example, if you follow a logic of immediate political consensus, an effort of a local government on some issues in favor of migrants that could create conflicts with the host population due to the allocation of financial resources, is unlikely to be adopted. In other words, a strong political and institutional commitment is prerequisite to the implementation of an effective social Immigration Observatory.

The second set of problems concerns the structural and organizational aspects of an Observatory. The already mentioned importance of an Observatory that is stable in time, means, above all, the availability of resources and then the possibility to allocate personnel for at least few years. Dependence on annual funding, that in some cases is related only to European funds, can make it difficult for an Observatory to survive, by limiting its ability to plan activities and get public acknowledgement.

The stabilization of the activities and functions depends not only on funding. The Observatory, in order to be useful in the eyes of all local actors and citizens, must avoid the temptation to become too abstract and self-referential.

If it privileges only some specific competencies, it risks to simplify the vision that is necessary for efficient planning on various aspects of migration (health, labour market, housing, school, mobility, training, social services, culture, etc.). This is why it is necessary to have a multi-professional team, with influential representatives of public bodies, Universities, private research and consultancy institutes, third sector organisations, voluntary associations, migrants' associations and so on.

An Observatory must also be a forum for discussion with all relevant actors, also for establishing priorities to be addressed. This type of participatory structure requires that local institutions adopt a cross-departmental organisation as well, so as to support planning.

To avoid a closed "local" approach and enhance the operational capacity of an Observatory on immigration, that more than other Observatories studies a "global" topic, networking with similar experiences at both national and European level is necessary. This condition is strategic for the exchange of working methods, the refinement of methodological approaches, the reporting of new emerging issues, the enrichment of policy design, through the exchange of good practices. This ability to network should be encouraged at European level, much more than what is done today. Finally, an Observatory may risk being self-referential and missing its cultural function if its activities are not adequately mainstreamed and the results it produces are only used by the small group of people directly

involved in the work. The investment in communication activities aimed at specific targets in local contexts must also include the circulation of non-specialist information to support the formation of public opinion that becomes aware, able to base its judgments on matters of fact, without being dominated by the logic of emergency or prejudice. In its dissemination, education and awareness-raising actions, built on the results of investigations and evaluation, an Observatory performs a fundamental role for the present and the future: food for thoughts, so that people become guided by rationality, go beyond fear and look in positive terms to the future of our multicultural society, understood as a "society of coexistence" which should not however be achieved at the expense of fragmentation into a multitude of subcultures that despise each other (Habermas, 1996).

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