The Politics of Migration and Integration in Europe’s Systems of Multi-Level Governance: Regions as Policy Pioneers

Introduction

The politics of migration in Europe has taken a critical turn in recent years. While attempts to install modern immigration policies that regulate the recruitment of newcomers - similar to those in place in Australia, Canada and the USA - have widely stalled in reaction to pervasive political opposition, political attention has since shifted to issues of immigrant integration. These developments are in sharp contrast to the 1990s when the shared assumption was that Europe would gradually, albeit persistently, move toward multicultural policies (Luedtke 2005). Instead, during the 2000s, numerous European countries witnessed growing public concern regarding the cultural and religious diversity that had accompanied immigration. These concerns were articulated by both the mainstream political establishment, and by populist radical right parties who successfully exploited anti-immigrant sentiment for their own electoral advantage (Triadafilopoulos 2011; Mudde 2007).

In the post-9/11 climate the perception of migrants as a security threat and a socio-economic burden that need to be contained gradually gained resonance in competitive party politics. What can be observed in policy terms across Europe is how – to use a rather dramatic image – a recent backlash against multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009) has decisively changed the political opportunity structure for launching initiatives aimed at accommodating cultural diversity and promoting integration. In this political environment, integration policies have moved away from public endorsement of cultural diversity and migrants’ entitlements (as prominently represented by the Canadian multicultural model) toward a stronger emphasis on state-monitored processes of integration. Analyzing recent trends in Europe’s emerging policy

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1 Integration is a politically highly controversial term whose meaning depends on a particular framing of what constitutes successful and desirable inclusion of migrants. In this paper we rely on a distinction between coercive, disciplining integration policies on the one hand and liberal integration policies that are based on the multiculturalist idea of publicly endorsing cultural diversity (Brubaker 2006). Banting and Kymlicka (2010) show how these
responses to immigrant integration, Joppke observes with respect to newly instituted so-called ‘integration courses’ that “the obligatory and coercive thrust of civic integration is moving to the fore almost everywhere.” (Joppke 2007a; also Brubaker 2001)

In this article we address the dynamics behind the making of integration policy in Europe. What are the critical developments and factors driving integration policies across the continent? One prominent way of answering this question is to focus on the politicization of immigration. This research does not deal per se with integration policies; yet, given the focus on migration and diversity demonstrated by many of the actors, especially within the populist radical right, this line of research sheds important light on the political context in which integration policies are debated and implemented. While politicization is often linked with the populist radical right (Zaslove 2004), other researchers have also focused on the role of center-right parties and even in some cases left-wing parties (Bale 2008; Bale 2009, Schmidtke 2004). Unquestionably there is evidence that since the 1980s and the 1990s immigration has become politicized, but nonetheless the tangible influence of the populist radical right on policy formation may be overstated (Mudde 2007; Ivaldi 2011).

A second dominant interpretative framework explaining the scope and nature of integration policies in Europe is to focus on the link between nationalism and integration. Semin Suvarierol (2011), for one, speaks of a nationalist resurgence. Her research is analogous to a tradition in migration research centred on competing national models.² It assumes that the nation state, its underlying sense of cultural belonging and the constitutive traits of a national community, still provide the decisive modes of perceiving migrants and of designing integration policies. From this interpretative angle the ‘backlash against multiculturalism’ is depicted primarily as a continuation of nationally specific modes of inclusion and exclusion (Entzinger 2000).

Yet, social reality is more nuanced and complex than suggested in the dichotomy between multiculturalist creed and a renewed (nationalist) drive toward an assimilationist logic. As Banting and Kymlicka (2006: 281) succinctly state, the “exaggerated claims about the triumph of different interpretations of integration are also shaped by different national lenses through which the challenges of successfully including newcomers are diagnosed and framed in terms of policy priorities.

² However, Suvarierol argues that the recent surge of nationalism is based upon a new form of nationalism, one that differs from traditional nationalism’s attempted to construct ‘new national identities’ from ‘local, elite, and folk cultures’ (2011:3).
new models of post-national multiculturalism alternate with equally exaggerated claims about the resurgence of nativist populism and the death of multiculturalism.” Indeed, the situation in Europe is puzzling: in spite of the adverse political climate – more pronounced during the recent economic crisis – certain European countries have experienced remarkable progress in promoting the integration of newcomers from non-EU member states. Similarly, defying the idea of national models, countries in Europe have regularly adopted immigration policies that seem to be at odds with their long term national trajectories. For instance, the Netherlands, formerly known for its multicultural approach to immigration has in recent years instituted some of the most assimilationist integration policies in the EU.

Rejecting the basic assumption about an alleged rebirth of nationalism, Christian Joppke (2007) offers a competing interpretation. For him, the tension between integration policies strengthening the rights of migrants and those enforcing the normative expectations of the host society can be related to the tension inherent in contemporary liberalism’s approach to migration and diversity. He detects a peculiar coexistence of civic integration policies with their disciplining, ‘repressive’ thrust and a constitutionally backed empowerment of migrants in terms of their legal status (most prominently citizenship and antidiscrimination policies). On this basis, Joppke develops the hypothesis about a gradual convergence of European integration policies that is driven by the ethical logic of rights-based liberalism and its expectations about newcomers’ adoption of civic virtues rather than the logic of competing national models.

As compelling as his argument is regarding the overall political climate in which integration policies are formulated, we contend that it is not a sufficient explanation to come to terms with the de facto heterogeneity of approaches in this field across Europe. The idea of a convergence at the European level does not capture this diversity of approaches developed at various levels of governance. What we find empirically is growing evidence of an increasing divergence in integration policy formation, not only across but within nation-states. This observation provides the background for the paper’s main research questions: what is driving these initiatives in the field of integration policy? Where does the political impetus for more ‘liberal’ integration policies come from? Under what conditions and through what processes do these initiatives

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3 For Germany: Baraulina (2007), Bommes (2007), and Gesemann and Roth (2009).
succeed in an environment in which competitive party politics and public opinion tend to oppose
them?

In order to explain the dynamics behind integration policy formation in Europe, we consider it
necessary to move beyond a conceptualization that is restricted to national politics and its
institutional arrangements and actors. It is conceptually misleading and empirically erroneous to
speak of a single – national – model responsible for forming, deliberating, and implementing
immigration and integration policies. According to our key hypothesis, the sub-national level of
governance has developed into a meaningful arena of political debate and policy formation in the
field of integration policy; regions and cities have become important laboratories for
deliberating, developing and implementing integration policies. As such they have become
significant sites of policy innovation often in open contrast to the lack of coherent policy
formation at the national level. In this respect it is our central hypothesis that municipalities and
regions have become significant policy entrepreneurs in managing migration and integration. We
link this observation to the structural changes in Europe’s emerging system of multi-level
governance, which has empowered the subnational level of governance in its efforts to design
and implement integration policies.

Our argument is based on a comparative case study of Emilia-Romagna in Italy and North-Rhine
Westphalia in Germany. These two cases were selected due to their similar traditions of acting as
integration policy innovators within their respective national contexts. At the same time, both
regions are situated in different state structures: Germany is a federal state, while Italy is a
unitary state, though federalizing. Both countries are characterized by a comparable diffusion of
policy competence at the sub- and supra- levels of governance with related, historically-rooted,
forms of urban-regional political cultures; they have also experienced similar controversial
debates over recent reforms to immigration and integration policies (Bigot and Fella 2008,
politicized in Italy in part through populist sentiment, while populist politicization of
immigration has been less so in Germany. As a result in this paper we investigate whether
immigration is undergoing similar processes of politicization, and whether similar political
initiatives have emerged at the municipal and regional political levels in both national contexts.
We examine policy documents, legislative debates at the regional level, and have conducted interviews with civil servants and civil society organizations in both regions.

The article begins with a theoretical discussion, combining immigration and integration policies with the literature on multi-level governance. We then focus on the evolution of immigration and integration policies in Germany and Italy, highlighting two important developments: the politicization of immigration at the national level and the growing space for integration policies at the local and regional level. The paper then turns to our cases of North-Rhine Westphalia and Emilia-Romagna, addressing the emerging opportunity structures for multi-level integration policies in the two regions. In particular the paper examines the political process that led to the development of regional integration policies and contrasts it with the often highly charged national debate over integration policy matters. We pay special attention to the important advocacy role of civil society organizations. In the conclusion, we identify some structural similarities in both regions in terms of taking advantage of emerging political opportunities in this policy field and in advancing innovative approaches to integrating newcomers.

Managing migration and integration in Europe’s system of multilevel governance

The concept of multi-level governance has been developed as part of wider research on European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Its central task is to better understand fundamental changes in the locus of political authority provoked by the deepening of European integration, changes that pose increasingly effective constraints on the sovereign power of individual nation-states and their policy-making capacity. Challenging a state-centric perspective, the model assumes that decision-making competencies are increasingly shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by actors in the national domain. With insights from multi-level governance, it is possible to conclude that the new political reality in Europe is shaped by the interplay between different levels of political authority, each of which cannot act unilaterally (Scharpf 2001, Risse 2001).

The idea that governance in Europe is multi-layered, generating binding collective decisions beyond the exclusive authority of the nation-state, offers a valuable interpretative framework for the research question under investigation. Immigration might not be the most pertinent example
of how authority in a particular policy field has shifted towards the European Union but there are clear signs that, in spite of the vigorous defense by member states over sovereign authority in this field, the EU has taken on a more pronounced role in setting the agenda for legislation in the fields of immigration and asylum (Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011; Schmidtke 2006). While the ambitious plan to move immigration and asylum into the first pillar under community competence has not materialized to the degree laid out in the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU has taken important legislative initiatives in these policy areas (including, issuing directives on family reunification, returning illegal migrants, and instituting policy initiatives such as the Blue Card designed to attract highly skilled migrants to Europe), as well as instituted important benchmarks for national integration policy making.\(^4\)

For the purpose of our research question these developments are significant in two respects. In terms of providing new political opportunities for the sub-national levels of governance there is the direct support that is being offered to them in terms of financial and organizational resources made available to sub-national authorities as well as more indirect modes of support or incentives. First, the increasingly significant European level of governance has challenged the idea that attracting and integrating migrants is an exclusive domain of national authorities. The emerging EU citizenship status, the Blue Card initiative, and the guidelines (and funding) concerning integration policy, all illustrate this subtle challenge to exclusive national models of regulating migration: civic rights have become gradually decoupled from the nation-state and patterns of integration are partly re-defined by a broader supra-national community. The way in which issues of immigration and integration are perceived and addressed at different levels of governance widens the options for developing legislative initiatives in the field. New opportunities for policy formation appear whose origins and feasibility are closely linked to the respective territorial unit of governance.

These opportunities are also (indirectly) linked to normative expectations that the EU has established regarding the appropriate treatment of third-country nationals (be it via the emerging European citizenship status – see Maas 2008 – or the EU’s recent initiatives in the field of integration). For instance, at Tampere the EU committed to the principle of bringing third

country nationals to ‘near equality’ with Union citizens (Halleskov 2005). These standards can have an empowering effect on sub-national actors (also vis-à-vis national authorities) when it comes to launching their own programs. The process of coordinating policies in a system of multilevel governance also means that there are greater degrees of flexibility in shaping the concrete measures on the ground while also implementing policies formulated at a higher level of governance. This again contributes to a process of widening the options for initiating and developing policies in the field of immigration and integration.

These developments coincide with the growing importance of the regions within nation-states. In the case of federal states, such as Germany, regions (i.e. Länder) have long played an important role in formulating and implementing public policy. This trend towards regionalization, however, has also dramatically restructured unitary states such as Italy. Since the 1990s, Italy has undergone a significant decentralization of political power; in 1993 mayors became directly elected, while in 2001 the centre-left national government passed a new law that sought to redistribute and enhance the powers of regional governments; most notably when disputes arise over which level of government has jurisdiction the central state can no longer use its commissioners to force the regions to comply with national demands, it is now up to the constitutional court to interpret and rule on the matter (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007, 190-94).

More recently, the center-right government has passed legislation that would decentralize fiscal policies, what is referred to as fiscal federalism (Cento Bull 2009; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010). Regional actors across Europe, therefore, currently possess more resources, greater legitimacy, and the political desire to enact public policy at the local and regional level, to influence national policy, and to interact directly with the European Union.

Second, the growing competence of the EU has empowered actors at the regional and municipal levels of governance. Following its principle of subsidiarity, the EU has promoted strategic partnerships between the European Commission in Brussels and sub-national governments

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5 In Europe regions and cities have become important laboratories for deliberating, developing and implementing integration policies; for the cities see the EU-funded project: Multicultural Democracy and Immigrants Social Capital in Europe: Participation, Organisational Networks, and Public Policies at the Local Level; http://www.um.es/localmultidem/index.php or the Cities for Local Integration Policies (CLIP) project).

6 This is an important development towards a federal state given that a core and defining feature of a federal state is the entrenchment of regional and/or provincial powers within the country’s constitution. In other words, in a federal state the national level government cannot overrule the regions or the provinces as occurs in a unitary state.
across Europe (both in terms of policy implementation and research). In addition, the EU has committed itself in the Commission’s White Paper on European Governance (EU Commission 2001) to the principle of participation by means of an open consultation process with its citizens—a promise that NGOs can employ as political capital in trying to make their voices heard in the policy process. The EU’s partnership with cities across its member states is an intriguing example of how the supranational level can facilitate integration policy processes in the urban context as well as set benchmarks for their successful implementation at lower levels of governance. This initiative is backed by considerable funding (the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country Nationals has a budget of 850 million Euros over a six year period, 2007-2013); many of these initiatives emanating from the European Union and in particular the Justice and Home Affairs’ office are implemented in close collaboration with civil society actors on the ground.

**Party politics and the emerging policy context: between divisive politicization and regional opportunity structures**

Germany and Italy have followed very different trajectories in terms of managing migration and integration within their borders. Until recently, Italy was a country of emigration whose key policy challenge in this field was to properly address the concerns of Italian expatriates abroad. Given its low number of newcomers, immigration was simply not a political concern in Italy. In a peculiar way Italy’s experience mirrors the political context in Germany: while having turned into one of the most attractive destinations for migrants in Europe during last 50 years, Germany has only recently acknowledged that it has become a country of immigration. Rather, the issues of citizenship, immigration, and nationhood did not play a prominent role in political discourse or policy-making until the 1980s. This can be widely attributed to the fact that in the immediate post-war era there was a consensus among all major parties that immigration was not an issue that was critical to German society; rather, it was dealt with in terms of accommodating “foreigners” and, as it was euphemistically referred to, in terms of welcoming “guests” who were expected to leave after the end of their professional assignments (Schönwälder 2001).
This started to change, however, in the late 1980s and 1990s. On the one hand, immigration was politicized; the Christian Democratic parties (CDU/CSU) discovered anti-immigrant rhetoric to be a winning formula for electoral politics. This was part and parcel of growing political pressure from the regions. The rise of the extreme right-wing, anti-immigrant party, Republikaner, in the late 1980s (with particular success at the Länder level) can be directly linked to the efforts of the established German conservative parties in promoting an agenda highly critical, if not outright hostile, to immigrants and foreigners (Karapin 1999).

The change in federal government, after 16 years of conservative rule, to the Red-Green coalition government under Gerhard Schröder provided new opportunities for dealing with the challenges related to migration. One of the first pieces of legislation that the new government introduced was a revision to the country’s century-old citizenship law in 2000 (Green 2000). Their second major reform was a new immigration law. The debate over the new law, which after a long political and legal battle came into effect in a much-watered down version in 2005, is indicative of how immigration can be politicized in party politics at the national level (Bauder 2008). At the same time the issue of immigration and national identity has recently been employed by parties as a polarizing and mobilizing tool. In stark contrast to the CDU/CSU’s earlier support in modernizing Germany’s Citizenship Law, the party later engaged in a campaign designed to discredit government plans to allow for dual citizenship. During this debate, national borders were portrayed by CDU/CSU as demarcating the fundamental allegiance of individuals to their collectivity.

This direction of framing issues related to immigration and integration in national political discourse became dominant irrespective of the immediate strategic considerations of major parties. After September 2001, with a view to the influx of migrants from Eastern Europe, migration is widely portrayed as a matter of security concern (from illegal migration and organized crime to religious fundamentalism). As a result, immigration has been influenced by two dominant developments: 1) at the national level, the politicization of immigration has led to a convergence between the left and the right regarding law and order, and security on one hand, and the need for immigrants for economic and demographic purposes on the other; while 2) at the regional level, new approaches towards immigration policy have begun to materialize showing a different logic of politicizing the issue. The second point will later be illustrated with the example of Germany’s most populous province (Land) North-Rhine Westphalia.
Once the fierce debate about the main objectives and scope of the new immigration law was settled, public and political attention shifted to the issue of integration. The first key question was how to promote the successful social, civic and political inclusion of Germany’s migrant population. With a view to the policy process it is noteworthy that in 2002, the Enquete-Kommission of the Red-Green government underlined that the collective representation of migrants’ interests is essential to their successful integration into German society. In this respect, one of the key initiatives of later governments led by Angela Merkel has been to call for ‘integration summits’ in 2006 and 2008 to provide a forum for debating the issue among representatives from different levels of government and civil society groups. Yet, these integration summits unfolded as a highly staged event that left little room for grassroots initiatives or the input of non-governmental agencies.

What the summits did produce was a ‘national integration plan’ designed to promote initiatives fostering integration in a variety of arenas. Critical for our argument is that the plan provided for a measured empowerment of actors at the regional and municipal levels. For instance, under the plan’s auspices both sub-national levels of government can apply for model projects in the field of integration in the multi-million euro range. Equally important is that municipal and regional authorities were invited to join in a partnership with the federal level to address this policy issue. With this act, the federal government acknowledged a trend developed over the last ten to fifteen years wherein local and regional governments have been more and more active in fostering initiatives targeted at migrants. Indeed, regions (Länder) such as North-Rhine Westphalia have developed a distinct profile in terms of legislation and programs in the field of accommodating newcomers. The tendency to give more power to these regions in addressing migration-related issues also results from the nature of German federalism. In particular, integration policy improvements have been directly linked to wider concerns with the German educational system and labour market, policy areas that shared between the central and state governments. Accordingly, with integration posing challenges for policy domains with a shared regional-
federal competence, the sub-national level has gained considerable flexibility in defining what integration means on the ground and in developing their own policy approaches.

In contrast to Germany, Italy’s transition to an immigrant-receiving state is a more recent development. In the early 1980s, when Italy was in early stages of becoming a country of immigration, it did not possess an immigration law per se; instead, issues regarding immigration and immigrants were treated as questions of law and order (Veugelers 1994). In the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, however, Italy gradually passed a series of laws addressing its recent transition into an immigrant-receiving country. In 1986 it passed an immigration law that sought to regularize and legalize immigration by granting to immigrants legal status and rights to state provisions regarding work, health, and other social services (Einaudi 2007, 129). In 1990, this law was supplemented with the Martelli immigration law, which sought to better protect the legal status of immigrant workers, in particular self-employed workers, family members, and those requesting asylum while also attempting to improve the visa system and setting quotas for immigrants (Einaudi 2007, 155). At this early stage of immigration policy development it was not possible to speak of integration policies or of a level of multi-level governance, even though pressures to create more suitable immigration laws did emanate from the lower levels, such as social and political organizations within civil society, particularly unions and religious organizations (Einaudi 2007, 112).

Italy’s transition during the 1990s into a country of immigration was rather dramatic. The presence of immigrants increased substantially, growing from just over 600,000 in 1991 to 1,334,889 in 2001 (Einaudi 2007). In addition, fears and apprehension regarding immigration among Italians also increased, while new political forces such as the Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale sought to politicize immigration. This created new tensions between and within the political left and right (Zaslove 2011; Zaslove 2006).

In 1998, the then newly elected center-left government introduced the Turco-Napolitanto law. The law improved flexibility for immigrants seeking work permits or entrance visas for family members; it also introduced a permanent residence permit for immigrants (Einaudi 2007: 215-6). The law also placed more emphasis on immigrant migration. Even though it did not reform the citizenship law or give immigrants voting privileges at the local level, as some in the center-left had hoped, it did create a National Fund for integration which was to be allocated at the regional
level, thus allowing for the development of regional integration policies (Andall 2007) (Campomori and Caponio 2011).

In 2001, the center-right coalition was returned to government, this time with the support of the Lega Nord. Immigration had become a growing concern of the LN as it moved from being simply a regionalist populist party into a radical right party, and the influence of the LN was therefore reflected in a new immigration law passed in 2002. This law made it more difficult for immigrants to receive a work permit (linking immigration with employment), restricted family reunification, and made it easier for the state to expel illegal immigrants (Colombo and Sciortino 2003). In 2008, when the center-right was returned to government, additional changes were made to Italy’s immigration laws. In 2009, a highly controversial security package was passed. This new law criminalized illegal immigration, raised entrance barriers for immigrants, made marriage and family reunification for immigrants more difficult, and sought to create civilian patrols to enhance local security (Cento Bull 2010, 419-22). In addition, in 2010, language requirements were implemented for immigrants seeking a permanent residence permit.9

Immigration and integration policies in Germany and Italy can be therefore summarized as follows: at the national level immigration and integration have become politicized; more so in Italy than in Germany which is in part due to the presence of the LN, and to a lesser extent the AN - two parties that, to different degrees, have openly employed anti-immigrant rhetoric. In addition, the move towards integration in Germany and Italy has produced mixed results. In Germany, despite the early intentions at the federal level to facilitate immigrant integration, federal efforts have recently stalled and have not resulted in a coherent policy approach. In Italy, there has been a notable emphasis on making integration more difficult by focusing on the need for migrants to better integrate by increasing, for example, language requirements. In the latter case, despite earlier attempts to slowly move towards what might be categorized as the beginning of multicultural policies (i.e. Turco-Napolitano law), since 2001 the center-right governments have passed legislation that makes it more difficult for immigrants to remain in Italy. It is now more difficult for immigrants to obtain and retain a residence permit, provisions for family reunification have been restricted, a clear link between migration and work has been established,

9 See Italian Interior Ministry for the legislation:
http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/servizi/legislazione/immigrazione/0954_2010_06_16_DM_04062010.html
funding for immigrant integration has been reduced, and new language requirements have been introduced. These developments in Italy have consequently shifted the emphasis in the immigration policy field towards monitoring and controlling.

Integration as an emerging policy field at the regional level

North-Rhine Westphalia and Emilia-Romagna are both regions that have experienced considerable immigration in recent years. North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) is Germany’s most populous state and its traditional industrial heartland, and has attracted migrants for much of the 20th century. During the years of the post-war ‘economic miracle’, NRW with its extensive manufacturing sector was one of main destination points for ‘guest worker’ immigration. In spite of the cessation of the guest worker recruitment policy in 1974, newcomers continue to come to NRW, where presently almost one quarter of the population is of migrant background (first or second generation). Of its almost 18 million inhabitants, 2.5 million are born outside of Germany; about one third of Germany’s Turkish-born population also lives in NRW. In NRW’s major cities the foreign born population reaches around 20% (about 10% live in NRW as foreigners; see second part of the table below).

Emilia-Romagna is one of Italy’s most dynamic economic regions. It boasts highly competitive small and medium businesses located in a dense network of industrial districts, a high standard of living, and a low level of unemployment. These socio-economic features have contributed to the growth of the number of immigrants within the region. The presence of immigrants in the region has consistently increased since the 1990s; in 2007 immigrants composed 8.55% of Emilia-Romagna’s population (compared to 5% nationally), second only to Lombardy (Campomori and Caponio 2011). In addition, the diversity of origins and the multigenerational aspect of the immigrant population have dramatically transformed Emilia-Romagna; the region is now a well-established immigration destination and it boasts a diverse immigrant population (www.demoistat.it).

### Immigrant Resident Population in Emilia-Romagna and Italy (measured as total and percentage of total population, regional and national) and Foreign Population in NREW and Germany (2003-2010)

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<td>NRW Germany</td>
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<td>180,6201</td>
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Data collected from: demo.istat.it (Italy) and Statistisches Landesamt and Bundesamt

North-Rhine Westphalia as a trendsetter in Germany’s integration policy

NRW has been a pioneer in promoting its own integration policy. A proactive approach in this field was developed under social-democratic rule before 2005 and continued under the Christian-Democratic Prime Minister Jürgen Rüttgers.\(^\text{10}\) In this respect, NRW has actively taken advantage of the gradual empowerment of the regional and local levels of governance within the German federal state structure in regards to integration policy (the 2004 Immigration Law - Zuwanderungsgesetz - allows for a new form of collaboration between the federal and the regional level on integration matters, as well as provided a framework for new funding opportunities for regional and local authorities in this policy area). It is somewhat surprising to realize that it was a member of the CDU who became the first minister for integration at the state level in 2005; namely, Armin Laschet, North-Rhine Westphalia's Minister for Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration\(^\text{11}\) (otherwise known as the “Integrationsminister”). In this respect, North-Rhine Westphalia has been a trendsetter for the introduction of similar ministries in other, often CDU governed, states (Lower Saxony, Hesse, Schleswig Holstein and Berlin). NRW has also spearheaded the idea of a conference for ‘integration ministers’ at the

\(^{10}\) Korte (2009) speaks of a “pronounced integration culture” and a tradition of “openness” characteristic of NRW.

\(^{11}\) “Minister für Generationen, Familie, Frauen und Integration des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen”
state level – even against considerable resistance from other Länder to this proposal\textsuperscript{12}. Reflecting on the process of launching and implementing such policies it is remarkable how – in contrast to the highly controversial and emotional debate in the national political arena – the CDU-led government and its ‘integration minister’, Laschet, were able to address the challenge of incorporating migrants into regional society through a pragmatic policy approach.\textsuperscript{13}

Under his leadership, and continued by the current Red-Green government, North-Rhine Westphalia has developed innovative approaches to promoting integration designed to attract and retain newcomers (one prominent example is a comprehensive language training program for pre-school children). The major thrust of the legislative initiatives in this field is directed toward (equitable) access to the labour market and educational opportunities. It is indicative of the overall orientation of NRW’s integration policies that the state secretary for integration has traditionally been incorporated into the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs. In legislative terms, the 2001 "Integrationsoffensive Nordrhein-Westfalen" (Integration Offensive NRW\textsuperscript{14}) set the agenda for a comprehensive strategy for promoting the integration of newcomers, an initiative that in its design and scope was unique in Germany. At the time supported by all political parties in the regional parliament, the plan outlines how successful integration needs to involve all sectors of society (from the labour market and educational sector, to urban planning, civil society organizations and the business community) and needs to be primarily driven by a concern for equal opportunities (‘Chancengleichheit’).

Most recently (2011) the new Red-Green government in Düsseldorf, and its current integration minister Guntram Schneider, have begun the process of launching a new “Teilhabe- und Integrationsgesetz” (Participation and Integration Law) whose goal is create binding legal entitlements for immigrants. The region of NRW is the first to embark on such an ambitious legislative initiative that might well set the agenda for governments at various levels in Germany’s federal system.

\textsuperscript{12} With its regular integration conferences at the regional level NRW has created considerable pressure for other Länder to follow suit. These conferences have by now developed into an important forum for policy coordination among Germany’s Länder and with the federal government.

\textsuperscript{13} It should be mentioned though that Laschet’s political course has been controversial within the CDU itself.

\textsuperscript{14} The document is available at http://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/dokumentenarchiv/Dokument/MMD13-1345.pdf
Towards a multi-level integration policy: the case of Emilia-Romagna

In contrast with Germany, and not surprising given the evolution of Italian immigration policy, until recently Emilia-Romagna’s ability to control its own immigration and integration policy has been limited. The region did include provisions for immigrant services in a 1985 regional law regarding social assistance, while a 1990 law provided housing initiatives for immigrants, and another law in 1991 included immigrants in the category of socially disadvantaged individuals (Calavita 2005, 83-4). Nevertheless, the legal powers of the region in terms of immigration matters remained limited, especially regarding integration. It was not until after the 1998 Turco-Napolitano law that the region began to formulate its own integration policies. Since 1998, more funds were transferred to the region to address integration matters and as a result Emilia-Romagna began to create its own annual programs addressing the needs of immigrants (Interview at the Regione Emilia-Romagna; Campomori and Caponio 2011).

The regional center left government took advantage of these new opportunity structures to introduce the region’s first integration legislation in 2004 (the Norme per l’integrazione delgili immigrati extracomunitari)\(^{15}\). Subsequent legislation has also been introduced by the regional legislature: in 2006 and 2008 amendments to the law were passed to ensure the effectiveness of its policies in integrating immigrants. As the first region to create its own integration policy, Emilia-Romagna have since acted as a model for other Italian regional governments. Despite continued opposition to this new integration policy regime by the regional center-right parties, since 2003, Emilia-Romagna has ranked in the top five regions in Italy in terms of integration capacity, while in 2009 it was ranked number one (Campomori and Caponio 2011).

This legislation at the regional level must be contrasted with national legislation. If at the national level laws (such as the Bossi-Fini law) have introduced more restrictive immigration policies (especially focusing on security and linking work with immigration), the emphasis at the regional level has been on providing tools for integrating immigrants into the fabric of civil society, especially focusing on language, cultural mediation and the legal rights of migrants.

\(^{15}\) Available at: http://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/monitor.php?vi=nor&dl=leggiV/2004/lr-er-2004-5&dl_t=text/xml&dl_a=y&dl_id=leggiV&pr=idx,0;artic,1;articparziale,0
Similar to the national level, center right parties such as Forza Italia, the LN, and AN have opposed these measures, however, the center left government, in collaboration with civil society organizations, has nonetheless managed to ensure that Emilia-Romagna is a policy leader regarding immigrant integration.

The dynamic of promoting liberal integration policy at the sub-national level

In this section we focus on the process of forging integration policies at the sub-national level. Three important and mutually reinforcing factors are identified: 1) a disjuncture between the regional and national levels in terms of how the issue of managing migration is framed and politicized in the public sphere; 2) the growing opportunities for empowering actors at the sub-national level and making the governance process more polycentric; and 3) the dynamic of policy formation and coordination in this field in which sub-national actors have often taken the lead in formulating initiatives in the field of integration and have established expectations for the wider policy community.

1. Politicizing the management of migration at the regional level: the pragmatic turn in NRW

Compared to the national level, issues of immigration and integration in NRW follow a distinctly different logic of politicization and addressing them in the policy process. It is noteworthy that it is under the CDU government of Jürgen Rüttgers that a proactive integration policy has been developed and implemented based on a broad multi-partisan consensus. At the regional level there is hardly any populist attempt to exploit the issue, but instead rather a thorough commitment to developing pragmatic, problem-oriented approaches to the challenge of integration. Parliamentary debates in Düsseldorf on this issue follow a different discursive script than national ones; general debates on the allegedly threatening effects of foreign cultures (as articulated in the *Leitkultur*-debate or, more recently, the discussion sparked by Thilo Sarrazin’s book) are largely absent from the regional political arena. Such identity and culture-oriented issues and the exclusionary rhetoric often accompanying them were also widely missing from the
last electoral campaign in NRW. In short, the discourse on immigrants is de-dramatized and rarely exploited as an emotional mobilizing device in competitive party politics.

Instead, the political rhetoric used by state authorities from the centre right as well as the centre left is strongly shaped by pragmatic concerns resulting primarily from day-to-day issues emanating from local communities, as well as a long term strategy of regarding newcomers as an asset for the state’s economic future. While immigration and integration have proven highly contested at the national level, at the state level in NRW they are predominantly framed in terms of the state’s socio-economic needs; similarly, the discourse surrounding these issues are strictly interest-driven and generally refrain from employing identity frames.

The following figure summarizes the frame analysis of parliamentary debates and policy documents in the national and regional (NRW) arenas. Three distinct framing strategies were identified and were used as a coding device: identity frames relating to conflicts and concerns emanating from cultural and religious diversity (for instance, illegitimate cultural or religious practices); security frames relating to an alleged threat both in terms of crime and religious-political extremism; and interest frames that are guided by socio-economic concerns mainly related to the labour market and the educational sector (for instance, issues of equitable inclusion of minorities, etc.). While identity frames shape debates and policy initiatives only to a minor degree (indeed, they are almost absent in the regional context), security frames are particularly prominent in the national arena. The difference between the regional and the national level is striking with respect to interest frames; unmistakably this mode of addressing issues of cultural diversity and integration, namely to describe them in terms of equitable inclusion and participation, dominates the thematic orientation and interpretative lens of the debate at the regional level.

Figure: Distribution of frames (in %) in parliamentary debates and policy documents at the national and regional level in NRW (2005-2010)

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16 In total 79 documents (parliamentary debates and policy documents addressing issues of integration and the management of diversity) were coded at the regional and 56 at the national level. These documents were coded on the basis of competing framing strategies in the above described diagnostic frameworks. Each text/document could contain various frames and was not coded as one unit.
The emergence of innovative approaches to governing migration and integration can also be linked to a functionalist logic driving the agenda at the regional and local level. Integration of newcomers is widely perceived to be an issue that is particularly needed in its culturally diverse urban centres (in light of immigrants’ underachievement in the educational and professional arenas, failing schools, crime, etc.). In addition NRW is a relatively economically deprived part of Germany that regards (skilled) migrants as a critical resource in its programs for economic recovery and re-structuring. Issues of attracting and retaining newcomers are an immediate and pressing concern for the region. It is these prevailing demographic and socio-economic needs that propel policy innovation and openness for new approaches that is generally absent at the national level. The policy priorities are formulated accordingly: the core initiatives promoted in the so-called ‘integration initiatives’ from 2001 (at the time supported by all parties in parliament) are guided primarily by principles of equality of opportunity and are designed to ensure equitable access to the educational system and the labour market. The main purposes of the regional government’s regular reports on the situation of migrants in NRW is on improving their opportunities in the school system, promoting immigrant language courses, and facilitating immigrant labour market access through training and additional education programs.
It is against this background that one can understand NRW’s decisions to assign ministerial responsibility for integration, as well as incorporate immigration and integration matters into the state’s long-term economic renewal plans. The issue of integration has gradually been ‘mainstreamed’ in terms of extending into other policy fields (issues of migration and integration are now an integral part of public policies in the domain of other ministries, for instance, in the field of the economy, labour relations or social affairs, indeed, the name of the ministry in Düsseldorf – Ministry for Employment, Integration and Social Affairs – is indicative of how the task of managing migration has moved closer to the core responsibilities of public policy) and thus addressed based on this administrative logic. In the ministerial policy documents integration policy is explicitly characterized as a so-called *Querschnittsaufgabe* (cross-sectional task) that needs to be considered across various policy areas at the regional level. This has already set into a motion a process making these issues ‘compatible’ with the public administration’s regular mode of operation.

*Emilia-Romagna: de-politicizing the task of accommodating migrants*

In the case of Emilia-Romagna, the introduction of the 2004 integration law became possible because of an ‘accommodating’ political environment. While immigration is more contentious in Emilia Romagna than in the German context, since the region has traditionally been governed by the left there has nonetheless been a greater process of accommodation on integration issues. In the immediate post WWII era the Italian Communist Party was the dominant party; however, beginning in the early 1990s the Italian Communist Party was transformed into a center-left social democratic party, replacing the Communist party as the hegemonic party in the region. In this new context the reformed left continues to dominated the region, holding the regional presidency since the 1990s.

The parties on the left generally frame the debate in terms of universality, in which immigration is regarded as a structural phenomenon, as well as frame the issue in terms of cultural reciprocity, legality, and the need to foster political participation among immigrants. First, the

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17 The social democratic party is gone through three stages: the party was first called the Party of the Democratic (PDS) Left, then it was the Democratic Left (DS), and currently it is the Democratic Party (DP). To avoid confusion we refer to the left as the social democratic left, unless more detail is required.
left-wing political parties such as the social democrats (PDS/DS/DP), the communists (RC), and the Greens emphasize the importance of equal access for immigrants and non-immigrants to social services, housing, and education, as a way of avoiding the creation of a two-tiered society in Italy.\textsuperscript{18} In this respect, the goal of the integration project as stipulated in the 2004 law resonates with a classical leftist agenda. From this it is possible to identify its overriding philosophy. Integration is framed in terms of universalism. The documents states that “the social integration of immigrant foreign citizens, integration that is considered, by all who have undersigned the Agreement, is an essential element for guaranteeing foreign citizens the same rights and obligations as those of the citizens of the Emilia-Romagna region, and facilitating access to the existing services within the framework of a universalist policy capable of addressing and adapting to the needs of individuals from different cultures” (Norme per l’integrazione sociale 2004: 73). In order to accomplish this the region has set out six goals: 1) increase immigrant participation in public life; 2) prevent discrimination; 3) create an institute to monitor the developments of migration in the region; 4) provide provisions (monetary) for the provinces and municipalities; 5) ensure housing, health, and social services (i.e. equal access); and; 6) support cultural integration especially in the schools (Norme per l’integrazione sociale 2004: 74).

Second, immigration is framed in terms of structural transformations, in which the focus is on push factors that encourage migrants to come to Europe and Italy, as well as on the regional demand for immigrants. One of the more pronounced differences among the parties on the left is evident in this context: the social democrats and the Greens focus more on the functional necessity of immigrants while the RC focuses on the larger global structures of capitalist exploitation.

Third, all of the left wing parties emphasize the need to integrate immigrants by way of increasing cultural mediation between immigrants and the host society. Multiculturalism is shunned in favor of inter-culturalism; here the focus is on providing immigrants and Italians the

\textsuperscript{18} This section is based upon an analysis of the debate in the regional legislature regarding the passage of the 2004 Norme per l’integrazione sociale. The debates analyzed consist of debates from: Februray 24, 2004 (morning and afternoon session); February 25, (morning and afternoon session) 2004; March 17, 2004.
knowledge, resources, and the ability to communicate with one another. Finally, the left wing parties recognize the need to provide financial and cultural resources, more open citizenship laws, and considerable emphasis is placed on the need to facilitate political participation. Although the priority of the center-left is to provide voting rights at the municipal level and to amend the existing citizenship laws, since they are not able to accomplish this, they have focused on non-binding forms of political representation such as setting up elected advisory councils composed of immigrants (See below).

The policies of the center-left government have also been challenged by the center-right opposition. The center-right in Emilia Romagna is composed of several parties. In the post WWII era, the Christian Democratic Party was the dominant party in the region, earning 25% of the vote. After 1992, however, with the emergence of the Second Republic, the center-right has been represented by Forza Italia and its smaller allies, including Alleanza Nazionale which garners around 10% of the vote, and the Lega Nord whose support remained low (around 3%) until the recent 2010 elections when it rose to almost 14%. In addition, the Christian democrats persist as a small party gaining between 3 and 4% of the vote. In total, the center right coalition receives around 30% of the vote in Emilia Romagna.

The center-right is highly critical of Emilia-Romagna’s new integration policies. Its framing of the issue emphasizes security, law and order, and integration as adaptation. Security, however, is the overarching theme that characterizes the center-right approach to this issue. Here there is a tendency to link immigration with law and order, in which the focus is on controlling illegal immigration. A common refrain is for the center-right parties to argue that the provisions provided by the Bossi-Fini law (i.e. the 2002 national legislation), in terms of controlling illegal immigration, as well as linking work and immigration, are better policy tools to address the social ills of immigration. The question of law and order and security is most evident in comments by the FI and the LN. In the case of the latter, the party emphasizes the dangers that immigration poses to a liberal democratic polity, particularly Muslim immigrants and the perceived threat of Islamic terrorism. The AN and the UDC, meanwhile, focus on the need for immigrants to acquire linguistic skills and cultural knowledge in order to successfully adapt to Italian society.
Despite what are highly diverse positions and often highly charged and volatile legislative debates over the regional integration law and related legislation, the law eventually passed because of the center-left’s legislative majority. None of the interventions of the center-right parties in the regional legislative debates, however, indicate any possible support for the legislation.

2. Policy advocacy and migrants’ engagement: toward a polycentric governance process

At the regional level, especially in Germany, we detect a less politicized environment allowing for policies that are more conducive for immigrant integration. In addition, we also detect a more inclusive political process, one that empowers migrants at the local and the regional level. One key factor that is likely to account for the different logic of politicizing issues of integration and developing policy responses might be the more articulate forms of political inclusion and advocacy at this level of governance. The relative strength of civil society actors and their – partial – inclusion into the political/policy process is likely to produce a less politicized and more pragmatic approach.

While conducting a policy process oriented toward pragmatic socio-economic priorities, state agencies have also been actively involved in nurturing the political engagement and participation of migrants themselves and their organizational bodies. At this level of government, commitment to political participation is more substantive and geared toward grassroots involvement than the highly staged, top-down ‘integration summits’ organized at the federal level. Similarly, the inclusion of migrants into the political life and institutions of NRW have recently become more robust (Schönwälder and Kofri 2010). State agencies in North-Rhine Westphalia have been involved in nurturing an infrastructure – partly through the use of material incentives – to support the self-organization of migrants in their communities. For instance, throughout the state so-called ‘integration agencies’ (126 in total) have been created to provide basic services to newcomers. These agencies play a dual role, as service providers as well as offer an institutional context for collective decision-making and political advocacy. Similarly, a project called
MigrantInmenselbsthilfe (migrant self-support groups) assists migrant organizations in terms of conceptual, legal, economic or financial issues or with respect to public relations. 

Comparing the regional to the national context it is striking to realize that in NRW the commitment to the political inclusion and participation of migrants has become part of political practice in a substantive way. A host of migrant organizations and migrant representatives have been included in the policy process (at least in a consultative capacity). Local governance in particular is entrusted with promoting community partnerships, soliciting input from various civil society actors, and overseeing the implementation of new policies. This contrasts with the highly symbolic yet procedurally limited and contested experience of the integration summit organized by the federal government. Various institutional supports have also been created to further encourage political participation among migrants.: In municipalities with more than 5,000 officially registered foreigners it is mandatory to establish so-called integration councils (for instance, in February 2010 almost 100 of these integration councils were elected throughout NRW). While these councils only have a limited, consultative role, they are still an important institutional vehicle for including migrants in the policy formation process. In addition, NRW has a rich history of civil society organizations that articulate the interests and concerns of migrants (Emrah Ilgün and Sabine Jungk (2001) produced a list of 2,400 of such migrant organizations in NRW). Support programs run by both the regional government and the European Union help to sustain these migrant organizations. Their inclusion in processes of community outreach and policy deliberation is an explicit goal of NRW’s integration plans.

In the case of Emilia-Romagna there has also been a move towards a well-established policy regime with the mandate of incorporating and integrating civil society organizations into the political process. This is particularly relevant regarding the role of cultural mediators, attempts to encourage greater political integration of immigrants, and the role of civil society organizations.

Although the origins of cultural mediators emerged at the national level with the Turco-Napolitano law in 1998, as the center-right government formed the government. in 2001-6 and

19 In line with the commitment to support more political participation by migrants NRW has also permitted local voting rights for migrants from non-EU countries. NRW is one of the most articulate supporters of this voting rights provision and uses its influence in the German upper house to advance this political agenda more broadly.
since 2008 the central government has decreased funding and financial support for resources dedicated to integrating immigrants, i.e. provisions such as cultural mediators. In the absence of such policies at the national level, regions such as Emilia-Romagna have acted increasingly in a unilateral manner, focusing their attention on cultural mediators as a means of integrating immigrants both culturally and institutionally into the fabric of civil society. The purpose of the mediators is to remove economic, social, and cultural obstacles from immigrants in order to ensure their universal access to work, social services, housing, and education. In order to achieve this goal, the region uses trained individuals who attempt to act as a conduit between the immigrants and the native Italian culture. These cultural mediators have been employed in schools and other public institutions, as well as in immigrant public service and information agencies, the primary purpose of which is to facilitate intercultural dialogue and integration. As the regional representative for immigration notes in a policy document, the key goal of the cultural mediators is to bring out the cultural richness of the new immigrants, and to move away from the notion of immigrants as being only an economic resource or a security threat (La mediazione intercultural 2010). The purpose of the cultural mediator is to create an intercultural dialogue between immigrants and Italians within neighborhoods, regarding schooling, and the deliverance of social services.. As the report notes: “this perspective moves beyond assimilation and multicultural tolerance, privileging the relation between cultures, inter-culturalism in order to share their common values and objectives” (La mediazione intercultural 2010, v).

Political Integration and Civil Society Organizations

The first priority of the Emilia Romagna regional government, as stated in the 2004 Integration Law, would be to permit immigrants to vote in municipal elections and to change the existing Italian citizenship law, thereby making it easier for migrants to naturalize. However, in the absence of legislation that would allow immigrants to vote, the 2004 regional law calls for representative and consultative bodies (i.e. consisting of non-binding consultation) consisting of both immigrants and Italians at the regional and provincial levels (Norme per l’integrazione sociale 2004). There are several elected immigrant bodies within the region. In Bologna there

20 http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/immigrati-e-stranieri/progetti/la-mediazione-interculturale
21 Available at: http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/immigrati-e-stranieri/progetti/la-mediazione-interculturale
exists a provincial immigrant assembly that was first elected in December 2007. The election involved 32 party lists with 275 candidates, and experienced a 21 percent turnout (where 9,200 voters out of 43,000 residents participated). The vote was based upon a proportional system to assure fair minority representation. In the end 30 advisory “councilors” were elected. The immigrant assembly is a consultative body, but it can also propose specific legislation. The assembly does not have an official vote in council proceedings, however, it can comment on all pieces of provincial legislation. Furthermore, its participation is required for legislation regarding spending programs relating to integration. The president of the immigrant assembly also participates in the provincial council, the commission council, and the conference for the metropolitan area in Bologna (see: http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/). The regional body also has an elected assembly for immigrants, which is led by the regional councilor for immigration and is composed of 34 representatives (two from each province), eighteen of which are immigrants, and half of which are women. The assembly’s main function is to consult and to propose legislation regarding immigration and integration (see: http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/).

Civil society groups, such as union and church organizations, have been very important in the historical development of immigration policy in Italy. These organizations were often the first to address the needs of immigrants, as well as lobby for legislation on behalf of immigrants at the national level. They continue to play an important role in helping immigrants at the local level, especially regarding integration. Union, church and other civil society organizations have played a prominent role in Emilia-Romagna, especially in cities such as Bologna, where the government has actively supported their involvement and has used these organizations to facilitate immigrant political and cultural participation (Interview at the Comune di Bologna).

Interviews with individuals from several civil society organizations highlighted their important role in the integration process. For example, a representative from the Christian democratic trade union (CISL) in Bologna pointed to her organization’s role in providing legal services to immigrants, ensuring they know their rights vis-à-vis the Italian state and protecting them against abuse. In addition, she noted their role in providing educational services, as well as information regarding language courses (Interview with union representative in Bologna). In a similar
manner a representative from Caritas noted their role in providing social assistance to the poor and those in need (Interview at church-based immigrant centre).

In addition to these more traditional civil society organizations, the regional government has sought to coordinate the substantial number of independent cultural organizations present in the region. These organizations act as a meeting place for diverse cultures, promote cultural diversity, and encourage dialogue between cultural minorities and Italian society at large\(^{22}\) (Interview at the Comune di Bologna).\(^{23}\)

These developments lead us back to one of the key assumptions of the multi-level governance literature. In a nutshell, the expectation is that the relationship between state and non-state actors becomes more polycentric and non-hierarchical compared to those structures of governance dominant in a state-centric model. A system of multi-level governance is therefore likely to be qualitatively different from the model established at the national level that has dominated the framework for politics and state-society relations in the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century (Neyer 2003). New forms of governance are expected to allow for greater mobilization of citizens, private groups, and office holders in order to secure policy outputs closer to their interests and preferences. Community groups and stakeholders in civil society are expected to face more concrete opportunities to engage in bottom-up political mobilization and exert a greater degree of political pressure on those in positions of power. In the case of managing migration we have clearly found that the local and regional levels of governance have created new opportunities for political mobilization, as well as institutional openings for the participation of migrants in the integration policy process.

**Conclusions**

\(^{22}\) See: [http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/immigrati-e-stranieri/dove-rivolgersi/centri](http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/immigrati-e-stranieri/dove-rivolgersi/centri)

\(^{23}\) As others have noted, it is necessary to be somewhat cautious when addressing the role of the left vis a vis immigration. For example, Davide Pero’ notes that exclusion and apprehension regarding immigrants (and refugees in particular) is also present among the political lefts (Però 2007). At the same time, and in contrast to this scepticism, our research also points to the important role played by those forces within civil society that have sought to forge integration policies that seek to accommodate the challenges posed by the growing numbers of migrants.
Our key hypothesis has been that the emerging system of multi-level governance in Europe has created political opportunities for the subnational level to play a distinct role in shaping the conceptual design, practice, and effects of integration policies in Europe. The fact that managing migration has become entrenched at various levels of government is indicative of more than simply the increasing complexity of policy making and the plurality of actors involved in the process. Similarly we doubt that it is primarily our selection of case studies that has led us to confirm our basic hypothesis. While we deliberately chose two regional contexts with a distinct track record of developing innovative integration policies, we contend that the ‘enabling’ leftist political culture in both regions does not fully account for why the sub-national level has taken on a new meaning in this field of public policy.

We identified three key factors that point to a structural change in the political environment whereby regions and cities have established themselves as key actors in shaping policies and societal practices of integrating newcomers. First, we detected a distinct logic of deliberating and framing the issue of migration management at the regional level. In this respect, North-Rhine Westphalia and Emilia Romagna constitute cases where the politicization of migration issues is less likely to arise in competitive party politics, and where instead the issue is prone to more pragmatic discursive negotiation across party lines. This allowed for the mainstreaming of migration-related issues into key areas of (local and regional) policy making. In stark contrast to the highly divisive national debate about the alleged threats associated with cultural and religious diversity, in both regions the task of integration is strongly framed in terms of the region’s interests and the need to provide migrants with equitable opportunities in the educational sector or the labour market.

Second, we found a greater degree of formal and informal methods of including migrants and their organizations into the political process. Even though it is difficult to stipulate what kind of impact migrant organizations have on this field of public policy we argue that the local and regional level has generated some marked opportunities for community input and initiatives. Indeed, in our case studies we have found a link between the pragmatic orientation and breadth of integration initiatives on the one hand, and the way in which community organizations have become more firmly embedded in institutional practices and accepted by the wider policy community on the other. Third, we identified a particular dynamic in this policy field that – at least partly – can be attributed to the increasingly significant role of the sub-national level of
governance. With the European Union creating incentives (in terms of resources and policy benchmarking) and the nation-states handing down responsibility in this policy area, the sub-national level of governance has taken on an increasingly important role in initiating horizontal and vertical forms of integration policy coordination.

While it is – to some degree - recognized that the urban context provides a critical arena for integrating newcomers and providing them with educational and professional opportunities, the role of this level of governance is under-theorized in academic research and conceptually underdeveloped in current public debates surrounding immigration and integration policies (Brenner 2004). This article has made an attempt to identify some of the structural features responsible for empowering the sub-national level in developing and implementing new integration policy. The driving forces behind this development – most prominently, the pragmatic, multi-partisan approach to diversity management, and the openness of the sub-national level to migrant participation and advocacy regarding integration policy – are likely to generate new dynamics in Europe’s evolving system of multi-level governance. From a theoretical perspective, our comparative case study suggests the need to conceptualize developments in integration policies beyond the national models that so far have dominated earlier scholarship in this field.
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