

Integration in Sweden

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This chapter discusses the evidence around integration and explores some further considerations, especially related to Sweden. It also considers some of the consequences of how policies and society in Sweden and beyond frame and attempt to integrate migrants and refugees and manage discrimination. It concludes by discussing the ways in which schools and teachers can act as important platforms to build a society that promotes equality as a social practice and fights discrimination.

Sweden has been often represented as Europe's preeminent example of a country with an official multicultural policy (Borevi 2013, Castles et al. 2014). In 1996, a Swedish Minister for Integration was appointed with responsibility for issues related to integration, discrimination and human rights at the national level. In 2014, the office was abolished and integration policy became part of the policy on jobs, education and welfare (European Website on Integration 2014). Notwithstanding, Sweden has struggled and continues to struggle with issues concerning housing segregation, discrimination and integration of immigrants and refugees into the labour market and in society at large (Andersson 1998, Andersson 2006, Andersson et al. 2010, Borevi 2013, Åslund and Nordström Skans 2010, Nordin 2013, Bråmås 2008, Eastmond 2011, Bevelander 2004, Bevelander 1999, Lundborg 2013, Lindbom 2010, Malmberg et al. 2013 among other). Moreover, with the recent arrival of a significant figure of refugees in 2015, the debate on integration continues to evolve.

Integration, multiculturalism and assimilation

Integration is broadly defined as: “the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups” (Migration Policy Institute 2003). The specifics of this definition vary from country to country. In the Swedish case, the concept of integration was introduced into politics and policies during the 1970s as part of the multiculturalism debate (Borevi 2013, Andersson 1998, Castles et al. 2014). By the 1990s, Sweden was celebrated, alongside Canada and Australia, as a successful example of immigrant integration (Castles and Miller 1993). More recently Wiesbrock (2011) has argued that integration policies in Sweden have been effective.

In the aftermath of 9/11, security became a priority and some European countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands, began a retreat from the policy aims of multiculturalism. Sweden, however, continued to be presented as a country unaffected by this evolving “multiculturalism crisis” and as a clear example of “positive” immigrant multiculturalism in Europe (Borevi 2013: 140). Yet within Sweden itself the debate has been more critical and the definition of integration continues to be contested. We therefore will consider a more comprehensive understanding of integration that also includes the role of the dominant group in the inclusion of migrants and refugees and that makes reference to a dialogue between both parts.

What is social integration?

Social integration is broadly seen as the possibility for all members of a community to have an open dialogue so that peaceful social relations can be achieved. Social integration can also be defined as a characteristic of social networks, daily face-to-face social interaction, and freedom of choice (Andersson 2007). In short, for social integration to occur, people need to meet with the possibility to have open dialogue. Additionally, meeting on equal terms is desirable to achieve peaceful social relations and the role of freedom of choice must be considered among all groups.

As noted above, Swedish integration policy has been defined along the lines of policies of multiculturalism.

What is multiculturalism?

In the Swedish context multiculturalism has been broadly understood to refer to (i) the ethnic make-up of the population and (ii) political ideologies and strategies (Borevi 2013). Let us bear in mind that this is not a very clear explanation of what multiculturalism means but how it has been broadly understood in Sweden.

Critiques of multiculturalism in Sweden include:

- 1- The first critique concerns the ethnic make-up of the population as something problematic and
- 2- The second has to do with political ideologies and strategies which have been used to manage ethnic diversity (Ibid.)

Notes for consideration: policies of multiculturalism have mainly targeted immigrants, not the host society. In other words there is a one-way dialogue concerning integration, from the top down, established by the state. What are the ways in which host communities can or should contribute to multiculturalism?

What are policies of multiculturalism? Castles et al. (2014: 19) define these as the granting of cultural and political rights to immigrants and refugees. Generally, multicultural policies have two aspects:

- 1- State support for special ethnic institutions, schools, preschools, homes for the elderly and the like.
- 2- Allowing exemptions from common law and regulations for members of religious and/or cultural minorities.

These two types of policies are linked to two notions of multiculturalism that delineate rights into *positive* and *negative* rights.

What are positive rights? This means that minorities of society get support from the state through funding.

What are negative rights? This means that minority members of society are granted exemptions in the law from state intervention.

For example: Minorities are granted positive rights when they get state funding for minority schools and are granted negative rights when exemptions in the law and regulations are made, for example for ritual slaughter (halal and kosher).

How has Sweden followed a multicultural model across time?

Sweden has historically pursued a multiculturalism defined by positive rights and been resistant to allowing exemptions to the law for cultural and religious reasons.

Even though Sweden has been used as one of the most prominent examples of positive immigrant integration since the 1990s, research studies on multicultural policy contest

assumptions that the country has followed a multicultural model across time. The scores provided in the Multicultural Policy Index for the 1980s showed that Sweden was only applying three of eight recommended policies. In 2000 this rose to five, and by 2010 it was applying seven out of the eight. According to this index, it is only in 2010 that it may be appropriate to characterise the country as having a multicultural approach towards migrants and refugees (see Borevi 2013 and MPI 2017).

As we will discuss below, however, multiculturalism policy has had many critics, especially because of the strategies and ideologies used to manage cultural and ethnic minorities. Moreover, successful (social) integration is a goal that is still not accomplished.

Key types of multicultural policies across time

Sweden has implemented two types of multicultural policies over time:

- 1- Group-specific policies that target ethnic groups to compensate for their minority status. These have to do with positive and negative rights (see above)
- 2- General policies that seek to make public institutions more inclusive of ethnic diversity.

Notes for consideration:

- In Sweden there has been historically no support for negative rights.
- There was no aim to support immigrants in *social integration* until 1997 and efforts in this regard are still not yet showing any success two decades later.
- Segregation and low levels of labour integration contribute to creating only limited spaces for social integration. However this is not the only reason why integration strategies fail.

Assimilation

What has been missing in the debate thus far? We can gather from the above that multiculturalism policies have mainly targeted immigrants and refugees, but little has been done to address the role of settled Swedes. Policies of multiculturalism have aimed more at system integration i.e. granting rights to immigrants to have equal conditions, access to the labour market and to exercise political influence, rather than social integration (Andersson 2007). Moreover from the get-go multiculturalism policies have been designed taking for granted *assimilation* (Ibid.).

Assimilation means a situation in which immigrants or their offspring become similar to their host society. Scholars argue this concept has mostly been dominant in US debates and originated from the need to create cultural similarities in the 19th and 20th centuries. In Europe instead the debate has circled around the concept of integration rather than assimilation (Scheider and Crul 2010:1144). Yet, from the above we can gather that the debate on integration in Sweden is, at its heart, a debate concerning assimilation.

As recently as 2017 the *Economist* (2017) wrote an article titled “Sweden is trying to turn people Swedish”. This indirectly reminds us in a sweet-sour way the reasons why immigrants and refugees are segregated and cannot find jobs: precisely, says the article, because they are not native Swedes. Multicultural policies have aimed at granting the same rights to immigrants as

Swedes but have not addressed the role of the host society, nor their interaction with immigrants and refugees as an intrinsic requirement for integration. Moreover, there is still a negative stance towards granting negative rights (see above).

Challenges to integration

Below we will provide an overview of the two key challenges presented on an ongoing basis concerning immigrant and refugee integration: segregation and labour market integration. Later below we will provide an overview of other key challenges less but equally important to consider: racism and discrimination.

Segregation

Ongoing segregation has been identified as a key culprit of failed integration. Outside Sweden the country is seen as having progressive housing policies, good quality housing, well planned cities and a not very contested welfare state (Andersson 2007). Within Sweden there has been an ongoing debate about segregation and ethnic segregation especially has become a highly politicised issue (Andersson 1998, Andersson 2007, Malmberg et al. 2013, Åslund and Norström Skams 2010 among others).

Some important points to consider historically:

- 1- The Million Homes Programme was initially seen as a success but very fast it became an example of failure of ethnic integration to segregation.
- 2- State led planning recreated segregation
- 3- Initially segregation issues focused on the class dimension, but in the 1980s social class segregation became demarcated by an ethnic component. It then became a political issue and more pressing (Andersson 2007)
- 4- In 1995, 1 in 8 first-generation immigrants lived in residential areas mostly populated by people with a foreign background. Yet only 1 in 70 Sweden-born individuals lived in these same neighbourhoods (Andersson 1998).
- 5- “All of Sweden strategy for refugee reception” dispersed refugees across the country, but refugees concentrated in the urban periphery of Malmö, Stockholm and Gothenburg, with some neighbourhoods having 90–100% residents with an immigrant background.
- 6- Immigrants have also encountered housing discrimination (Andersson 2007: 416).

Ethnic segregation remains a key issue to be addressed (Åslund and Nordström 2010, Andersson et al. 2010, Bråmås 2008, Malmberg et al. 2013 among other). But why is spatial integration important in the first place?

Socialisation and locality

Among the most important potential impacts of segregation is the process of socialisation and, in this case, of social integration. The first contact with the socialisation process is family and the second is our local setting. During our everyday life, our social experiences in the local setting shapes our worldviews, attitudes and career expectations. In this secondary socialisation, the institutions we are in contact with can be of great influence. Among these is school.

When they enter a new local setting, immigrants will frequently need to re-learn their assumptions, as will the host society and locality themselves, in order for social integration to take place. Vergunst (2008) points out that social integration in the locality is impacted by a social struggle as immigrants attempt to exert their power of agency (their will) and the host society/ locality has the power to accept and even exclude. We must bear in mind it is these power struggles which might inhibit social integration and the role of locals is just as important as that of immigrants.

Perceptions of the locality

The socialisation process of migrants not only has to do with the social networks made available in the locality but how the locality itself is perceived by society at large and how it is represented in the media. Neighbourhoods with a high density of ethnic minorities are often referred to as ghettos, *banlieues* and, in Swedish, *förorter*. These are spaces that not only may suffer from poverty, unemployment and the like but are usually depicted in the media as violent and problematic (for example Rosengård and Rinkeby), which in turn leads to stigmatization. Other impacts on social integration are increased policing, which in turn becomes racialised/ ethnicised, and increases hostility from those targeted.

Integration into the labour market

The second important challenge is economic integration. Below is a brief chronology of the integration of immigrants, refugees and foreign-born citizens into the labour market:

Post-war period: Immigrants did very well in the labour market. During this period economists calculated that foreign citizens participated 20% more than native Swedes in the labour market (Ekberg and Gustavsson 1995)

1950s and 1960s: Decade by decade immigrants began to be less integrated into the labour market. This became an important concern, especially as the immigrant population began to increase significantly. Still, unemployment at this point was low. One reason provided is that most immigrants were from Nordic countries (Bevelander 2004).

1970s and 1980s: During this time unemployment was low in Sweden compared to other OECD countries. From 1977 unemployment rates began to be reported separately by nationality. At this time it was reported that unemployment rates were double for foreign-born citizens and residents compared to Swedish citizens. The 1980s was also characterised by refugee immigration from diverse countries and cultures, such as from Asia, Africa and South-East Europe (Bevelander 2004).

From 1990s: During the first half of the 1990s unemployment was plaguing both groups yet from 1993-1995 it was recorded that unemployment was three times higher for foreign born citizens than for Swedes (Bevelander 2004). During the mid-1990s an economic boom brought unemployment rates down to 1–2%, but remained high among refugees and immigrants. In: Malmö, Herrgården 75–95% of those born abroad experienced unemployment (Andersson 2007).

2017: At 16%, Sweden has one of the highest unemployment rates among OECD countries among foreign-born men and women (OECD 2017).

Notes for consideration

- From the 1970s up to the 1990s statistics recorded a gradual decline in immigrant employment rates of foreign-born men and women (Bevelander 2004).
- There is no agreement over why there has been a dramatic long-term reduction in labour market participation for migrants.
- Research has increasingly emphasised the role of demand and discrimination in the recruitment process.

The last point leads us to consider again that for integration to succeed in daily life, we need to take more seriously the role of the host society, and bear in mind the challenges racism and discrimination pose to integration in Sweden. Given that racism and discrimination have usually not been given importance in the Swedish debate, but have started to gather attention as an important issue for integration, it is important we consider what is meant by both and how they interact with each other.

Racism and discrimination

During the 1990s the “immigrant issue” was one of the most debated in Sweden. The debate circled around urban poverty, social marginalisation and exclusion (Andersson 2007). Yet even with striking evidence of a growing ethnic/racial hierarchy in the labour market and housing, discussion of discrimination and racism has been taboo. The Equality Ombudsman was only founded in 2009 and even today racism especially is seen as non-existent by wider society.

What is racism? Our most common understanding of racism historically is interlocked with the creation of racial hierarchies. Such hierarchies are used to justify discrimination, prejudice and bigotry towards someone from another race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior. Yet racism is not easy to define or identify and the use of rigid definitions such as this to distinguish racists from non-racists is one of the main reasons progress in understanding racism is slow (Rattansi 2007:2)

We present here three arguments to consider when discussing racism:

- 1- Race is a social construction used historically as a powerful tool for colonial administrative measures and domination, to legitimise violence and even used to justify the killing of other human beings. For example:
 - a- Racial categorisations were designed by colonisers for administrative and domination purposes. They were used to de-humanise indigenous people and justify their torture, exploitation, death and Christianisation. These categories could never be appropriately implemented in Central and South America (Quijano 2000)
 - b- Rwandans shared a common culture and government but Belgian and German colonisers took it upon themselves to construct racial classifications and divide Rwandans to control them. They divided Rwandan people into Hutus, Tutsis and Twa. A grotesque chapter in history resulted from this with the genocide of over 2 million people.
 - c- In the 19th century “superior” whites were of “Saxon” stock, which did not include, for example, the Irish, Italian and Eastern European Jews. Through time

some of these groups have gained access to “whiteness” whilst others have not (see for example Brodtkin 1998).

- 2- Racism today also concerns culture and ethnicity. Culture and/or ethnicity have been also used recurrently to demarcate one group as better than the other or to justify unfair treatment.
- 3- There is still no law that adequately penalises racism. And there is still no society free from racism.

Even if racism is represented as overcome in Sweden, debates on racism continue to emerge with scarce but direct voices. In 2014, for example, Mohtadi and Tadi edited an anthology that brings together important texts within this field, helping us understand, deepen our knowledge and reflect on racism in Sweden today: from the Sverigedemokraternas party increasing support to racial stereotypes in Swedish society to *antiziganismen*. The book ends with a text by Diakit  who clarifies that *fientligheten* based on the colour of his skin will never be *fr mlingsfientlighet*, it is and becomes racism (2014, 292):

“S  fientligheten mot mig p  grund av min hudf rg kan egentligen aldrig bli fr mlingsfientlighet, det  r och f rblir rasism”. (Diakit  2014:292)

The number of reported hate crimes concerning xenophobia and anti-Semitism increased considerably from 1997–2003 (Bunar 2007). Beyond structural changes i.e. legislation, new orders for police, and social programmes in impoverished immigrant communities, not much has been done to understand and create awareness that especially targets the groups and communities from which the perpetrators of these crimes come.

Given the denial over the existence of racism in Swedish society and our lack of understanding over what racism actually implies it seems useful to provide an overview of how racism operates.

How does racism operate?

Racism operates through culture and is an expression of structural conflict. Structural conflict is normally knitted in our social fabric by power structures. Individuals form part of a power structure. But power cannot only be used to reproduce racism it can also be used to combat it! It is therefore more useful to consider practices and not individuals psyche (Essed 1991).

Notes for consideration: Dominant group members are inclined to deny racism. It is therefore important to consider how situations are defined, but even more *who* defines situations.

Consider for example:

- What happens when a person with a foreign name applies for a job versus a person with a Swedish-sounding name.
- What happens when a person with foreign-like appearance is stopped by the police versus a more stereotypical looking Swede.

- What happens when a person with a foreign-like appearance/name versus a more stereotypical looking/name Swede is attempting to rent or buy a house or an apartment.
- What happens when immigrants are convicted versus native-settled Swedes.
- What happens when native Swedes define immigrants' problems.

Everyday racism consists of practices that can be generalised. Everyday racism is infused in familiar practices and therefore is socialised into our attitudes and behaviours. Finally, it is cumulative. Considering "everyday racism" i.e. considering everyday practices helps us go beyond focusing on racism as an individual question of whether I am a racist or not! (Essed 1991:3). We must be aware that even if we claim not to be racist we might be furthering racism in our everyday practices and perceptions.

Discrimination

Legally, discrimination refers to treating someone differently based on certain characteristics. The Equality Ombudsman is the government entity in charge of fighting discrimination in Sweden and is especially concerned with discrimination in the workplace, higher education and schools. Yet discrimination operates in ways that are sometimes not graspable nor illegal. Therefore, civil society organisations also works assisting those that might be targets of discrimination.

Schools are key spaces to fight discrimination in society!
Get engaged!

What has been the role of the education system in integration in Sweden?

In Sweden, generally the education system is seen as:

- 1- A right for all citizens
- 2- A channel for achieving a modern anti-totalitarian society

What has been done to increase integration through the education system?

At a structural level:

Sweden has attempted to implement multicultural policies that have focused on positive rights i.e. supporting minority schools and, later, supporting mother-tongue instruction. State support to minority schools began in 1963 with a parliamentary motion demanded a Jewish school be granted state funding

In 1975 mother-tongue instruction was introduced to prevent semi-lingualism. This policy has also been considered as *paternalistic*, i.e. it came from above. The authorities were responsible for providing information and motivating mother-tongue instruction (Bunar 2010).

At the heart of the integration debate concerning the education system:

Has been freedom of choice. More specifically key issues, debates and questions are linked to (Bunar 2010):

- School choice and segregation
- School choice and efficiency

If we take into account these two issues concerning school choice recent research has

provided evidence that in Sweden there is a significant skill difference between natives and second-generation immigrants (Nordin 2013). Nordin has shown that the origin of schoolmates with immigrant backgrounds or who are second generation immigrants has had a negative impact on their Swedish grades, this problem has been linked to segregation. Despite the complexity of accepting these assumptions it is important to value the significance of peer influence on Swedish grades. Moreover, when we consider school choice and segregation there are also tentative results over the significant impact independent schools have had on residential segregation (Lindbom 2010).

Notes for consideration: Initially education was part of the political debate regarding social origin (class) and gender and how these have affected educational choices (Lindblad and Lundahl). Today immigrants, refugees and foreign-born citizens are suffering from similar concerns as those once related to social class segregation.

The school choice debate is a long and detailed debate that is out of scope for this chapter. Please inform yourselves further on the role and impact of multicultural policy in your school and community.

What is the role of teachers in integration?

You are key actors in setting integration into motion. You have the power to nurture dialogues under equal terms. The classroom is an ideal space for all students to learn from each other, with your mediation, in a safe environment.

As we have noted throughout this chapter social integration is lagging behind in Sweden. The classroom is a key space for setting in motion the socialisation process between and for immigrants, refugees, foreign-born, second-generation and native citizens. As noted earlier, school is a very important aspect of the socialisation of children. This is where children learn which norms and behaviours are perceived as acceptable in society. What is taught and how teachers engage with students and socialise students among them is therefore crucial. Moreover, it is actually in the classroom where both integration and exclusion can be experienced, practiced and learned for the first time by all children.

It is of paramount importance that laws and regulations exist along with rules and practices to promote equality and fight discrimination in the classroom. But more importantly teachers are needed to put them in practice. Beyond policies and the law we must consider and discuss how schools and interactions in the classroom can strengthen access to social networks, socialise migrants and Swedes as equals in society and fight discrimination. You have the power to build a more equal and just society!

Concluding remarks and recommendations

As we have learned in this chapter, integration in Sweden is far from succeeding despite important steps taken through multiculturalism policy. Why? Multiculturalism policy has been a topic of hot debate and has had many critics across the years for good reason. For example, we must consider the promotion of equality goes beyond granting rights if the host society creates obstacles to their materialisation. It is very challenging to access the right to work if no jobs are granted to immigrants. It is challenging to counter residential segregation if tenants block immigrants, etc. The one-way “dialogue” of multiculturalism policies, in defining and addressing the needs of immigrants and refugees from the top down, has generally excluded

the role of Swedish society at large.

Ultimately, multiculturalism policy is problematic at its core because there is lack of understanding and consensual definition of what is meant by multiculturalism itself. It is therefore important to continue to ponder on this point and demand clarification when we see this term in policy and when it appears in our daily life. Begin by attempting to clarify what you mean when you use the term, question its meaning when you see it in policy implemented in your school and engage your students in the debate.

Given that so much attention has been given to immigrants and refugees, it is important you consider from the outset the role of Swedish society at large within the process of integration.

Where can you start?

- **Context:** There is no single right formula. From the outset you may consider the *context* of your school, the community where your school is located, the general debate in the news and the like. This will bring forward different avenues for each teacher to contribute to integration. What works for one teacher might not work for another. So being aware of our context is always a good place to ground our feet.
- **Privilege:** Consider *privilege*. Consider your background and your privileges. Consider the privileges of native-Swedish students. Consider “white” privilege. Taking privilege into account will help you even out the ground for everyone. It especially will help you prevent everyday racism.
- Be aware and inform your students about key facts and myths on the migration debate. For example:
 - 1- Myth: migration is growing and accelerating. There has been continuity in different periods of time. There have been other “ages” of mass migration as for example in the 19th to mid-20th century.
 - 2- Fact: Most of the world does not migrate.
 - 3- Myth: Immigrants are a cost to society.
 - 4- Myth: Immigrants are a threat to our culture. Culture is never static. Cultural diversity provides new music, literature, food, new ways of socializing. Most importantly, respecting other cultures and religions promotes peace and halts violence!
 - 5- Myth: Development will stop migration. If anything, scholarly evidence shows that more development brings about more migration.
 - 6- Myth: Migrants are a security threat. There is no evidence to support the assertion that migration produces a state of emergency.
 - 7- Fact: There is a northern bias from receiving states that has framed migration as a problem to be solved. But migration does not necessarily need to be managed as a problem as history has evidenced.
 - 8- Continue to inform yourself and students on myths about migration!

- Provide support to students facing racism and discrimination and those discriminating against others.
 - 1- If structural racism is taking place in your school, get in touch with the Equality Ombudsman or civil society in your community and inform yourselves of the measures that should be taken to halt the problem.
 - 2- When a student experiences racism and/or discrimination from other students, teachers may benefit from applying the advice they are given about addressing bullying to help students stay safe. For that to happen you can inform students that they should tell someone:
 - a- who will listen
 - b- make time
 - c- who can help
 - d- help the student feel safe (Davies, Leeds University)
- Provide support to students who bully others based on their skin colour and understand where they come from. Awareness and an open dialogue are necessary to break hateful practices.
- Continue to consider your role, especially the role of the host society to counterbalance the debate. You have a role in addressing the perceptions, practices and treatment of migrants and refugees in Swedish society in your everyday practices and in the classroom.
- Consider that you might be furthering racism by concentrating your focus on the role of immigrants. Try also to focus on the perceptions and everyday practices of the host society.
- Continue to provide space and time to discuss racism and discrimination in the classroom and at your school on an ongoing basis. Problems never go away when we sweep them under the carpet.

Keep an open mind and give space for self-criticism and reflection!

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