



# **Civic activation of immigrants - An introduction to conceptual and theoretical issues**

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POLITIS

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## **POLITIS – a European research project**

### **Project information**

Populations of immigrant origin are growing and changing in Europe. POLITIS explores the potential of immigrants for the development of a civically active European society, starting with foreign students' perceptions of Europe and focusing on sustained social and political activities of immigrants. POLITIS is the short title for the research project "Building Europe with New Citizens? An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries".

The study is divided into 3 parts:

- Part I: A comparative literature review on immigrant civic participation in 25 member states
- Part II: A comparative analysis of foreign students' perceptions of Europe, exploring the potential of their ideas about Europe with the help of essays and focus group discussions
- Part III: A comparative analysis of more than 150 qualitative interviews with civic activists of immigrant origin in the EU to identify favourable and unfavourable biographical and national conditions for active participation

### **The POLITIS Working Paper Series**

POLITIS working paper series may include project-related contributions by all project partners. The main project researchers in the consortium constitute the editorial committee of the working paper series. It is editorial policy to secure quality standards while encouraging the discussion of results that are preliminary or limited in scope.

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**Abstract**

Civic participation is of major importance for the democratic development of Europe. As European societies are highly affected by immigration, it is interesting to examine why immigrants are usually less active than natives. We explain our concentration on first generation immigrants and at the same time raise awareness of the different meanings and research implications of terms such as ‘immigrant’, ‘migrant’ and ‘foreigner’ both in statistics and in the public discourse of European societies. Active civic participation is defined as continuously investing time and energy to organise solidarity or give a voice to societal concerns in the receiving society. Although this definition is relatively broad and comprises both political and civil society activities, it does not include low-key types of participation such as voting or visiting events. Building predominantly on American literature on individual determinants of civic participation and on European literature to examine the influence of the societal opportunity structure on the participation of immigrants, we conceptualise our own model for researching the topic. We identify the activation process as the main research gap.

## **1. Introduction: Why participation of immigrants is of major importance for contemporary European societies**

Not only have the traditional forms of civic participation through trade union activism, party membership or church and cultural association attendance declined in today's society, but participation in the New Social Movements of the 1980s (environmental movement, feminism, peace movement) has also diminished. Sennet (1998) argues that it is the very nature of work organisation in contemporary capitalist societies that may lead to declining levels of social participation and active citizenship. Indeed, the USA has experienced a collapse of civic activities in the past twenty years (Putnam 2000). This trend is also present in Europe and has been deplored for the sake of democracies: abilities and dispositions like attentiveness and trust that are learned and confirmed in associations can contribute substantially to a democratic political culture (Offe and Fuchs 2001).

Within this general trend towards civic apathy and societal fragmentation, migration poses an additional challenge (Ireland 1994), bringing in further cultural and religious diversity. Citizens experience feelings of apprehension and often perceive immigrants as a major threat to the already dubious cohesion of their society. The newcomers and their alien customs, traditions and beliefs are blamed for the collapse of community feelings and practices.

International migration will most likely continue at a high pace throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as European populations are aging and shrinking while economies and labour markets are becoming increasingly interconnected. Thus, the issue of civic activism both among natives and among immigrants is an important challenge for European society/ies today and tomorrow. Even today, immigrants make up large percentages of the generation of young adults in many European countries. The activation of this generation is crucial to Europe's future civic life. If they are active today, they are more likely to stay active in the future and they are the parents and potential role models for their children.

In view of the overall decline in civic participation and the anticipated rise in international migration, a better understanding of the civic participation potential of immigrants is an important issue for Europe. Contrary to usual perceptions, we hypothesize that immigrants have an important potential for the revival of civic participation. Low levels of organisational involvement of immigrants in ethnic or mainstream associations are not necessarily contradictory to this hypothesis, as the potential may not translate into actual activities if political and social conditions are not favourable. If it does indeed translate into activities, the latter may be confined to the immigrant group and its ethnic networks rather than the broader society of the receiving country (Putnam 2000:22). Our emphasis is on the 'catalysts'; those factors that transform a potentially engaged individual into a civic activist in a migration situation. Such catalysts, as we shall explain in the sections that follow, may vary among countries as well as among different immigrant communities. We may however also identify catalysts that apply to different countries and settings.

European societies differ in migration history and policies, their overall level of civic activism and, more specifically, in regards to the political and social conditions that enable or impede migrants from participating in public life. Chapter 2 of this book will give an overview of the most important conditions in all 25 member states, while chapter 3 will discuss similarities and differences between the countries.

In this paper, we will give an overview of conceptual and theoretical issues, starting with the notion of the ‘immigrant’ (section 2) and the concept of ‘active civic participation’ (section 3). We will specify our own theoretical approach concerning the activation process, while reviewing scholarly literature on the factors influencing civic participation in general and the participation of immigrants in particular (section 4).

## **2. Who is an immigrant?**

In the following sections, we shall briefly discuss how migrants are defined in various contexts such as official statistics, political discussions and scholarly literature. As we are taking a European perspective, we have to be aware of the fact that the notion of ‘immigrant’ differs considerably from country to country, reflecting different political and historical conditions. We explain our emphasis on a particular definition of immigrants in our effort to understand civic activation in migration situations.

### **2.1. Foreign born and natives**

The differentiation between ‘foreign born’ and ‘natives’ is the most widely used differentiation with regard to immigration. It defines immigrants as persons who have changed residence across borders. Personal migration experience is the decisive criterion.

In many sociological studies, foreign born individuals are called ‘first generation immigrants’, while their offspring – born in the receiving country or having immigrated with their parents at an early age – are called ‘second generation immigrants’. Instead of foreign born and natives, the terms *allochthones* and *autochthones* are used by the Dutch state to more precisely define the ethnic/national origin of citizens or residents. This pair of concepts is a refinement of the country-of-birth criterion. It differentiates between *allochthones* - foreign born individuals and their immediate offspring, taking the country of birth of the parents into account, and *autochthones* – native born with two native-born parents. This criterion has been used in the Netherlands since the 1980s for official statistical purposes, allowing social scientists and migration experts to have a more inclusive approach to the Dutch population of immigrant origin by including the second generation (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2002).

Because we are interested in the civic participation under the influence of migration experiences, we are exclusively interested in first generation immigrants, specifically in those persons who immigrated as adults or youth and possess a personal migration experience in the sense that the (cultural and social) frame of reference changed due to

geographical relocation. Therefore the 'foreign born' criterion is a necessary although not sufficient criterion to define the group whose activities we would like to understand more deeply.

Although 'foreign born' seems to be an easy and straightforward concept, there are still some complications in the contemporary European situation. While more often than not people move over borders, in some areas of Europe borders have moved over people repeatedly during the last century. This has been the case in the aftermath of World War II and also during the state formation phase after 1989 in Central Eastern Europe.

Two examples are worth citing here to illustrate this complexity. After World War II, Germany received some 12 million co-ethnic refugees of German origin, most of whom had been expelled from regions that formerly belonged to Germany and became part of the independent Central and Eastern European countries. These people were born inside Germany's former borders but outside its current borders. Germany still does not use the country-of-birth criterion in official statistics until today, making this mass influx statistically invisible. This is also true for contemporary ethnic German immigration coming from states that never had any affiliation with Germany.

Before 1989, the Baltic States were part of the Soviet Union. During this time, many Russians and/or people from other Republics of the Soviet Union (mainly Ukraine and Belorussia) settled there (by their own will or by force) as part of the dominant occupying majority. They were thus born inside the borders of the former state (Soviet Union), but outside the borders of the current state (Latvia, Estonia or Lithuania). A differentiation by reason of admission (labour, family, refuge) does not make sense for these population movements as there was no 'admission' at that time. However, after Latvia and Estonia won independence in 1991, the Russian-speaking populations that chose to remain in these countries were assigned the peculiar status of stateless permanent residents of Latvia or Estonia. Although they did not experience a complete change of reference as international migrants from other countries at that time, their current situation is comparable to that of current international migrants.

## **2.2. Aliens and citizens under the influence of naturalisation policies**

People acquire citizenship according to their country of birth (*jus soli*) or as a result of their genealogical origin (*jus sanguinis*). Models of ethnic citizenship give preference to ancestry and hence to the nationality of parents and grandparents. Models of civic citizenship favour the place of birth criterion, conferring citizenship to children born in their territory regardless of the nationality of their parents. In general, most citizenship regimes involve a combination of the two elements. Thus, in some cases the *jus soli* principle is applied only if the parents of the child have lived for a certain period of time in the country or if the child her/himself continues to live in that country. In other cases, a pure *jus sanguinis* regime is mitigated by a territorial element: children of foreign parents or foreigners born in a different country who are long term legal residents are allowed to naturalise if they wish.

These different norms and practices are reflected in migration statistics (Grieco 2002). Some countries like France provide data that make a distinction between foreign-born foreigners, foreign-born citizens and native-born citizens. Others like Germany only reflect the principle distinction between citizens and aliens.

Generally speaking, the distinction between citizens and non-citizens (foreigners, whether temporary or long-term legal residents) is the main dividing line in official statistics and public discourse in most countries. Data on population by citizenship status is often used to frame migration related issues.

Let us, however, explore some concrete empirical examples.

Most immigrants are foreign nationals at the time of migration. Exceptions are people of the same ethnic background who are granted citizenship upon arrival in the destination country, through preferential channels. This is the case, for instance, of the ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern European countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Muenz and Ulrich 1998) or of the Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Russia 'returning' to Greece (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002).

Similar, albeit not identical, is the case of residents from former colonies in a transition period, such as the Surinamese in the Netherlands, the Commonwealth citizens in the U.K. or the Algerians in France. Such cases are usually linked to unique historical circumstances. Other exceptions are made for the children or even grandchildren of former emigrants who may have inherited or re-acquired the citizenship of the country. The case of Argentine citizens of Italian ancestry who are able to recover Italian citizenship if they prove that at least one of their grandparents had been an Italian citizen is a good example here (Pastore 2001). A similar case is that of the 'retornados' in Portugal; former emigrants from Portugal who settled in the Portuguese colonies in Africa, returning to Portugal after these countries gained independence in the second half of the twentieth century.

More often than not, immigrants have the right to naturalise after a given period of time (usually between five and ten years of residence in the country they wish to naturalise) under specific conditions (in some countries these conditions refer mainly to the socio-economic realm, e.g. having a job and stable residence and not having been convicted of certain crimes, in others they also include cultural requisites such as language competence, familiarity with the customs and traditions of the country of settlement and/or a feeling of belonging to that country). Applicants may or may not keep the citizenship of their country of origin. The conditions and procedures involved in the naturalisation process influence the naturalisation rate and thus the percentage of immigrants that are citizens.

Naturalisation policies and practices further blur the sociological distinction between immigrants and foreigners. While first generation immigrants may naturalise (thus not all immigrants are foreigners), sometimes non-citizens may not have experienced migration themselves as they may have been born in the country of settlement of their parents and are still not entitled to the citizenship of their country of birth. The obvious

example of one such case has been German citizenship and migration policy until the year 2000. Today, more than one million of its seven million foreign residents are native born, the offspring of immigrant parents or grandparents (second or third generation migrants), and have not yet been naturalised.

In such situations, the popular distinction between foreign nationals and citizens is not a good indicator for our interest, particularly from a European perspective. In some countries, a considerable percentage of all first generation immigrants are naturalised citizens, whilst in other countries this percentage is negligible; and in some countries virtually all foreign nationals are foreign born, whilst in others there is a considerable percentage of second and third generation among foreign nationals.

We consider citizenship acquisition as a potentially important factor that influences active civic participation since the exercise of some rights is only possible for citizens and because naturalisation may be a conscious step towards becoming part of and taking part in the receiving society.

### **2.3. Status and staying perspectives**

When European states consider immigration policies, they often orient themselves towards the classical immigration countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia with their sharp distinction between immigrants (with a permanent residence right) and non-immigrants with a temporary residence right). The differentiation suggests that non-immigrants leave after a specified period of time, while immigrants come for permanent residence and stay forever. Nonetheless, even in classical immigration countries, this categorisation leads to problems as it is built on rather simplistic assumptions about the immigration process. In the USA, there have been periods when a large percentage of people arrived with an immigrant status and left after some time and today many people who have a (permanent) immigrant status in the USA have previously been there as temporary migrants or illegal entrants (e.g. Santel 1998).

In most European states, there are few migrants who came with a permanent residence status from the outset. Also, national policies vary not only in terms of citizenship acquisition rules but also in reference to migration statuses. Some countries, like Ireland or Greece for instance (Ruhs 2004; Kassimis and Kassimi 2004), have developed only very recently a long term immigrant category given that the need for such a category and for related policy provisions has only emerged over the course of the last decade.

Many people migrated with a temporary and/or uncertain staying perspective. They later decided to stay or were granted long term residence status after several years of life and work in the receiving country. Here again the distinction between the different categories of seasonal, temporary and long term migrants reflects the socio-cultural norms and historical experiences of the receiving societies. Thus, the main 'hosts' in post war Europe – Germany, France and the UK – had different expectations regarding the time perspective of their foreign workers. Germany saw immigration as a rotating guest worker scheme at the end of which migrants would return to their country of origin. This did not happen. On the contrary, a substantial part of the migrants settled



and brought their families in, considering Germany their new home. In France and the UK, expectations were more relaxed, not least because migrants came from former colonies and were thus perceived as sharing important cultural and historical links with the receiving society. However, indefinite stay permits were gradually restricted to those with French or British ancestry and citizenship regimes became more restrictive. These changes emphasized the temporary perspective of international migration. Most receiving societies have difficulties coming to terms with the idea that newcomers are there to stay, permanently.

In reality, the distinction between temporary migrants and long term or permanent immigrants is a criterion that differentiates migrants according to the host society's self-perception and policy objectives and has little to do with actual migration processes. Migration policies often change, adapting to the migration trends and realities as well as to the perceived interests of the host society. In this way, people who came under rotation agreements were given indefinite stay rights and undocumented migrants received legal status. Thus, when we distinguish migrants according to their status, we do not imply a hypothesis about their future migration behaviour, but relate to the legal ascription of the receiving state. When we want to analyse civic participation behaviour of immigrants, we should not restrict our analysis to certain types of immigrants – namely to those who came with a permanent residence status. From a historical and internationally comparative perspective, entry status is only a very weak predictor of later settlement.

While the migration status of a person should not influence whether s/he is included in a study about immigrant participation, it may have important implications for her/his participation behaviour. Illegal immigrants may refrain from active participation of any kind if they fear detection and expulsion. Seasonal or short term migrants may be oriented completely towards their country of origin with no interest in participating in the receiving society. In fact, migration status defines the social, economic and political rights of the immigrant and hence may play an important role in creating favourable or unfavourable conditions for civic participation.

#### **2.4 National majorities and ethnic minorities/diasporas**

Immigrants and their offspring from a certain country are often seen as an ethnic minority in the receiving country. Ethnicity is not an objective criterion like 'foreign born' or 'foreign national', but depends on self-perception and perception by others (Heckmann 1992). It may be linked to a specific culture, language or religion that signals a perceived belonging to a certain minority. This implies that boundaries of minority – majority perception may evolve and dissolve during migration processes. As ethnic minority building is based on perception, a certain size of immigration is usually necessary so that immigrants from a certain country can be perceived as a group.

Visibility may be higher if the minority is of a different racial phenotype (skin colour, facial characteristics, overall complexion) making the group easily distinguishable from the majority. Visibility may also depend on cultural factors such as dress codes and

overall appearance of immigrant individuals that make them stand out from the majority 'crowd' (e.g. headscarf). Some groups are stigmatised by the political and public discourse defining them as 'problematic', 'backward', 'dangerous' or 'undesirable' aliens. Such negative stereotyping is often directed towards Albanians in Greece or Algerians in France, Turks in Germany, and Pakistanis in Britain.

Because our main interest is to create a better understanding of activation processes in future migration situations, we are not concerned with historical minorities but rather with immigrant minorities. Historical minorities are native populations of a different ethnicity or nationality that were part of the country from its very moment of state formation or pre-modern migration movements. Well known cases of national minorities are the Basques in Spain and France and the Irish in the UK. However, most – if not all – European countries have one or several historical ethnic/national minorities living in their territory.

Although these populations are not part of our target group, it is worth considering whether countries with important historical minorities have a different way of dealing with immigration related ethnic minorities. In addition, new migration may blend with traditional ethnic minorities. In Poland for instance, recent Ukrainian economic migrants have settled in historical minority Ukrainian communities. They thus both challenge and revitalise the minority institutions and may provide for a test case to examine whether institutional channels aimed at catering for the civic and political needs of historical minorities can be used by and for immigrant minorities.

Ethnicity perceptions in immigrant minorities do not necessarily overlap with country boundaries. Kurds for example come from Turkey or Irak and organise in Kurdish associations in the receiving countries. People from South America may see themselves and be perceived as Latinos in the receiving countries, while they would not have been aware of such a categorisation before leaving their country of origin. In some countries, people from sub-saharan Africa are categorised generally as Africans because they are black while they may internally differentiate not only in relation to their country of origin but also in relation to their ethnic or clan affiliation. In general, self-organisations of immigrants are often organised along ethnic lines, not differentiating between immigrants and non-immigrants by nationality or status but by ethnicity, as indicated by country of origin, culture or language.

As with the treatment of immigrant status, we propose that civic participation of immigrants should not be analysed along ethnic lines, but that ethnicity and the receiving countries' way of dealing with ethnicity should be considered as a potentially influential factor.

Having concluded our brief discussion on the concept of migrants, the following section will examine the notion of active civic participation in light of recent literature on active citizenship and social capital, with particular reference to immigrant populations.

### 3. What is active civic participation?

Active citizenship has been the focus of much political and policy debate at the EU level in recent years. Chanan (1997:1) defines active citizenship as ‘the people’s capacity to take an active role in public affairs, whether through formal democratic structures, through the press, through public debate, through associations, political parties, trade unions, local clubs and societies or simply through informal networks and mutual aid among neighbours, friends and family’. This is a rather extensive definition of active citizenship which, in line with feminist thinking, transcends the boundary between public and private life and defines active citizenship as a set of practices that link public life (associationism, politics, voluntarism) with the private domain (family and friends).

Other authors use ‘civic activity’ as a virtual synonym to political participation and differentiate, as Kastoryano has done (1998), between civic activities (political participation) and civil activities (including wider forms of community engagement), with the latter being more likely for immigrants who do not have access to all forms of political participation. As we are not sure that this differentiation will be useful for understanding the process of immigrant activation, we will use a broader definition of civic activities and include both political and civil activities.

As we speak of ‘active’ civic participation, active implies a level of activity that goes substantially beyond voting. In our study, we are not interested in active citizenship as such, but in the persons who participate. Starting from the broad definition of active citizenship, we define actively participating immigrants (immigrant activists) for the purpose of our comparative study as people that *give a voice to societal concerns*, e.g. by engaging in political parties, local committees, parent associations or migrant lobby organisations; and/or organise solidarity and self-help, e.g. by *taking leadership functions* in religious associations, ethnic associations or informal self-help networks.

This implies that this research overlaps not only with research on voluntary associations and political activism but also on elites and leadership. We are aware that only a minority of immigrant and native populations will be able and prepared to devote their time to demanding forms of civic activism. Nonetheless, these are very important persons, as they may influence or even shape the integration process of whole communities (e.g. Diehl 2002:26). Celis and others (2001:8) name them ‘*agents of change*’ – actors who have a societal commitment and explicitly pursue objectives aiming at the organisation of society, community and economics in a democratic way.

This focus on ‘agents of change’ implies that the distinction between paid and unpaid work is not crucial to the interests of this research. Active citizens with leadership functions may be professionally employed in their fields of commitment, receive smaller amounts of money or privileges to cover activity-related costs or devote their time and energy on a purely voluntary basis without any payment or in-kind compensation. The line separating paid and unpaid activities may differ between countries and between types of activities (e.g. trade union activists or members of local councils may sometimes receive remuneration). This may differ during the life-course

of a person, as someone may have started as a volunteer and managed to turn his concern into a paid profession at a later stage, exercising it far beyond the required working hours and work intensity; or someone may have found a job in a social profession (e.g. cultural mediator, social workers, health worker) and may have become civically engaged at a later stage (e.g. lobbying for her/his clients).

We are aware that a substantial part of the literature on the political participation of immigrants and minorities deals with their voting behaviour, political party and associational membership (see for instance Jacobs and Tillie 2004). Voting behaviour and organisational membership may be an important background and precondition for engaging in more demanding and stable forms of civic participation.

One should note here that in different societies, we find different codes of practice and related categorisations. Thus, civic participation may take place in more or less formal/informal settings and in a more or less organised manner. In some countries, networks of civic involvement are more developed than in others and civic activism as such is a well-known concept, understood by most citizens and residents. In other countries – and here not only recent democracies of Central Eastern Europe may be a case in point but also countries with weak civil societies (e.g. Greece or Italy, see Almond and Verba 1980; Demertzis 1994; Diamandouros 1993) – where networks of civic activism are weaker, less organised forms of involvement may be more visible and qualify as civic engagement. It is particularly important here to consider what is understood in the national context as civic activism. We will seek to achieve a more refined conceptual definition of active civic participation in Europe with the help of interviewing immigrant activists at a later stage.

The starting point for our interest in the subject has been outlined as Europe's future democratic development and the potential contribution of immigrants to European civil societies. Therefore, we are interested in immigrants' participation in the receiving societies. At the same time, we are aware that contemporary migration is characterised by transnational ties of immigrants and immigrant communities made possible by new transport and communication technologies. Thus, long term immigrants may be politically and economically active in both their country of origin and their country of settlement. They may send remittances and/or make investments in their country of origin, start ethnic businesses in their country of settlement, and engage in commercial activities between the two. They may also engage in political activities in their country of origin, maintaining links with local politics while at the same time engaging in ethnic or mainstream networks of civic activism in their receiving countries. It is an interesting question whether transnational ties shape, encourage or discourage participation in the receiving societies. Supra- or multinational organisations may encourage individuals to become active. For example, if an immigrant was active in the Rotary club or the Catholic church, s/he will find similar structures in the receiving country to which s/he can turn. Kastoryano (2002) denies this influence of European organisations, as national engagement is a precondition for political activity at the European level. The practical goals of immigrants' European activities lie on the national level, as the nation state guarantees rights or responds to interests.

This leads us to further specify what is meant by civic activism in the receiving societies. Is it useful to include activities in all sorts of ethnic and migrant associations, or should the definition be limited to activities in majority institutions in the receiving societies? If we were to confine our analysis to majority institutions, we would run the risk of not taking into account a large part of immigrant activism and thus, underestimate its potential for a civic revival of the European societies. Therefore, a mainly geographical definition of activism should be applied; we qualify immigrant commitment and leadership in ethnic or immigrant associations of the receiving societies clearly as civic participation in the receiving societies, as long as it fulfils the general criteria (giving a voice to societal concerns, organising solidarity and self-help). This implies that these associations are seen as part of the receiving societies – notwithstanding that they are discussed as ‘parallel societies’ in some countries. This view is supported by associational research. In his reconstruction of the formation of Turkish self-organisations, Schiffauer (1999, 2004) emphasizes that these organisations are not simply institutions transplanted from Turkey to Germany but rather institutions that have developed in reaction to the German environment. Ethnic associations including those with fundamentalist orientations are a “response” to the environment of the host country.

We are aware that there is a value judgement in our research interest; we are looking for civic activism of immigrants because we assume that active citizens are good for Europe. However, it is a highly debatable issue in some countries as to whether activities in ethnic associations are positive for the receiving societies. In Germany, for example, the debate goes back to the 1980s when Elwert argued that even segregative immigrant associations stabilise the individual and promote integration in the long run (Elwert 1982), while Esser stated that participation in such associations will hamper and prevent individual integration and lead to the formation of parallel societies (Esser 1986; Esser 1988). These arguments have been picked up in a number of studies and recently featured prominently in public debates (Cyrus 2005). Whatever arguments one may find to be convincing in these debates, they provide no significant reason to exclude activities in certain types of associations from an internationally comparative study of the activation process. However, there is a certain value judgement in the description of what we see as civic activism (giving a voice to societal concerns, organising solidarity and self-help) as it excludes destructive and undemocratic activities. Whether an immigrant lobbies for lower taxes in a liberal party, negotiates a location for mosque-building in a local community, acts as a representative for an immigrant nationality in a council or founds a women’s help organisation for a certain nationality – all activities would qualify as active civic participation, independent of any immediate or long-term effects.

To summarise: we are interested in immigrant activists – first generation immigrants who are continuously investing time and energy to organise solidarity or give a voice to societal concerns in the receiving society.

#### **4. Which factors influence active civic participation of immigrants?**

In the previous sections, we have demonstrated how we will transform a societal challenge into a research topic by explaining our research interest and by touching on a few factors that may influence the civic participation of immigrants. We will now review some scholarly literature in order to conceptualise factors that influence active civic participation of immigrants.

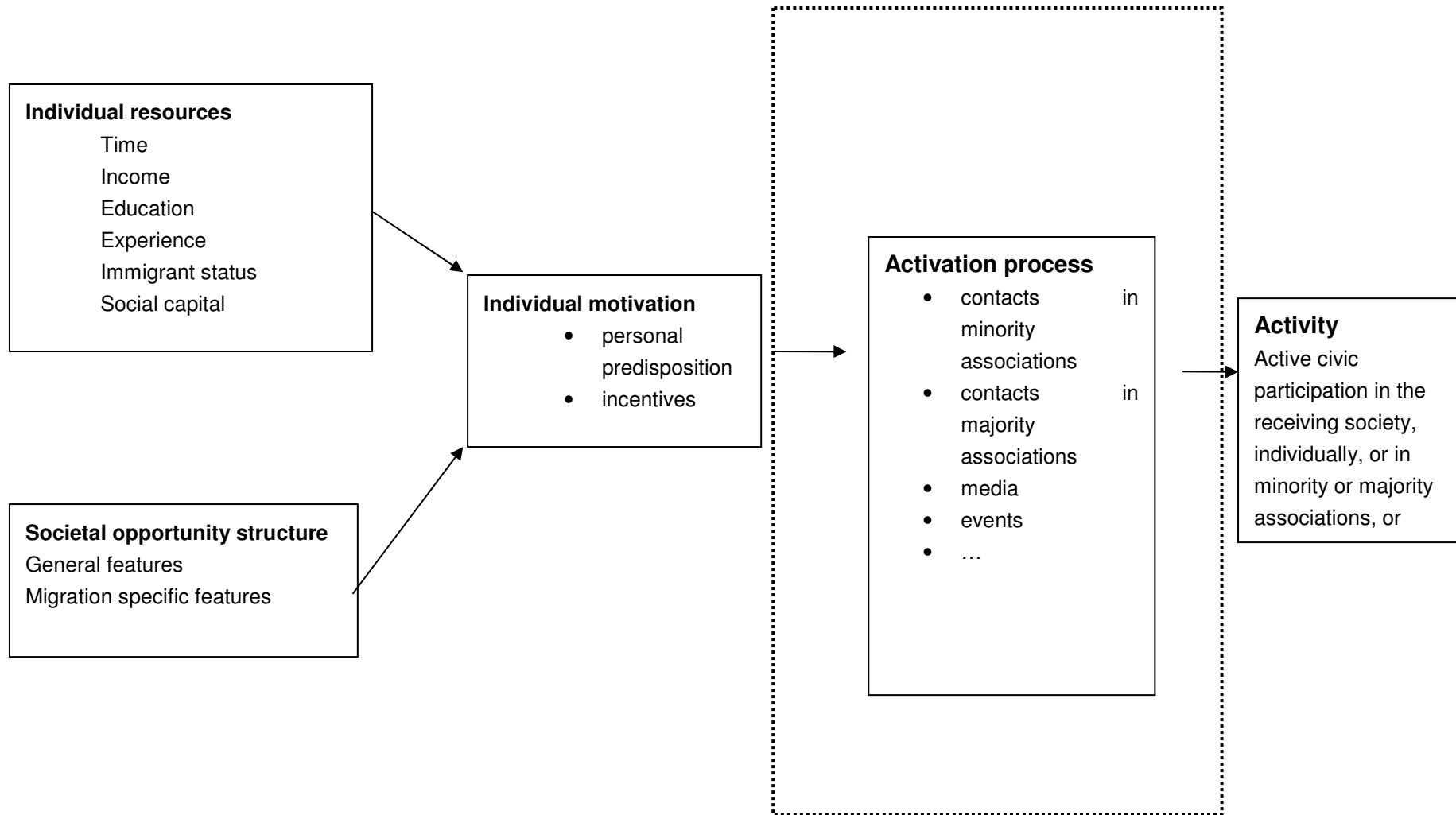
We mainly draw on three sets of literature to build our own theoretical model of the interaction of factors:

- We develop our approach from the civic voluntarism model of Verba and colleagues (Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995, 269). This approach focuses on the interaction of resources, a variety of psychological predispositions called political engagement and the recruitment process.
- In addition, we take the societal opportunity structure into account, as exemplified in studies which aim to compare differences between national groups in one location (Diehl 2002, Fennema and Tilly 1999) and between immigrants in different locations and nation states (Koopmans 2004).
- As we are fundamentally interested in the recruitment process, we make use of several concepts from the social capital theory (Putnam 2000) which looks at how social networks are embedded through associational life and can also be applied to immigrant minorities (Jacobs and Tillie 2004), specifically to the role of ethnic or immigrant associations in the activation process.

In our model, we assume that an individual has a command of individual resources. The individual is faced with a societal opportunity structure with more or less obvious and accessible options for participating. In this situation, the individual may or may not develop a motivation to become active, depending on the individual resources, psychological predispositions and the incentives that the opportunities imply for this person. However, the question remains as to how this motivation leads to activity. Instead of using the term “recruitment process” we will define it as the “activation process” because although active recruitment via third persons may indeed turn motivation into action, it is not the only factor that contributes to this change.

To sum it up in simplified questions: What is he or she able to do (resources)? What could she do (opportunities)? What does she want to do, considering her personality, ability and opportunities (motivation)? How does she become active? (activation process)? What does she do (activity)?

**Figure 1: Active civic participation of immigrants- graphical model**



The link between the basic elements in the model are summarised in figure 1. In the following sections, we will review research and considerations concerning the factors included in the model.

#### **4.1 Individual resources**

Because there are hardly any studies on active civic participation as such, we mainly rely on studies that are principally concerned with demanding forms of political participation. While there are numerous studies of single aspects of political participation like voting behaviour, the most comprehensive study was conducted by Verba and colleagues, and their results are largely consistent with other results of smaller studies.<sup>1</sup>

Verba et al. analysed a sample of 2,500 political activists in the United States, derived from interviews in 1990 (Verba, Schlozman et al. 1993). In their study, political activity is broadly defined and includes not only voting, but also contacting politicians, joining protests, volunteering in a local community, serving as a board member, working in an electoral campaign and donating to campaigns. They stress resources such as time, money and skills over motivations and recruitment as contributing factors to active civic participation. In their analysis, they find large differences in both the probability of participating and the level of activities. Generally, well-educated and well-off persons are much more likely to be active. Disadvantaged persons are much less likely to be active than persons with a high socio-economic status and more likely to become active for personal reasons. Generally, resources can explain the differences in socio-demographic characteristics, like age and family status (see also for example Putnam 2000 or Fuchs and Offe 2001). The lower level of participation for women can be largely explained by a lower command of resources (Schlozman, Burns et al. 1994:984). From the analysis of characteristics of political activists, we can formulate expectations of civic participation of immigrants. Insofar as immigrants are predominantly in the low-income, low-status section of the labour market and lack language proficiency, they can be expected to be less active than the native population.

Although Verba and colleagues do not differentiate between foreign-born and natives, they do differentiate between Anglo-Whites, African-Americans and Latinos. As Latinos are predominantly foreign-born, this category can be used as an indicator for the effect of migration experience on participation. Across all categories of political involvement, Latinos are considerably less likely to be active. Among Latinos, citizens are more likely to be active than non-citizens (Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995: 231-234). Among Latino activists, issues of civil rights or minorities figure higher, but are by no means dominant (248).

Generally, past activities are a strong predictor of future activities. They create networks that are important for the activation process and they generate experiences that can be built on. Also, experiences in the country of origin can be considered a resource. Portes

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<sup>1</sup> Most aspects are extensively covered in the book Verba et al. 1995 (2002).



and Rumbaut give the example of Finnish and German labourers who founded unions in the United States, using their experience in unions in their countries of origin to help them in their country of resettlement (Portes and Rumbaut 1990).

However, immigration and forced migration (asylum seeking) in particular can sometimes be a traumatic experience that involves a rupture with one's ties to the homeland and one's past way of life. Social capital in the form of extended networks is usually not transferred to the receiving country, unless whole communities emigrate (like in the case of ethnic Germans from Romania). Initially, networks in the receiving country are small – with sometimes only one person serving as a bridgehead for migration. However, the capacity to build a network does not disappear in a new country, but it may take a while to be revitalised and transferred (consciously or unconsciously) to the new context. We hypothesize here that migrants who were helped by ethnic or other networks and experienced solidarity during the migration process may be more likely to transfer their trust and become active in the society of settlement.

We propose to consider the legal status of an individual as a resource, in as much as it is connected to participation rights and duties, and it therefore has to be analysed in relation to the societal opportunity structure. Uslaner and Conley (Uslaner and Conley 2003:341) point to the central role of citizenship status in shaping civic participation in their study on the Chinese in Los Angeles.

## **4.2 Societal opportunity structures**

According to Koopmans (2004: 451), the political opportunity structure includes both an institutional (political system, distribution of party power) and a discursive element (established notions of who and what is considered reasonable and legitimate). We start from this concept and broaden it for our purpose. The societal opportunity structure includes general features relevant for all residents and specific features relevant only for immigrant or specific groups of immigrants.

General features include the general framework for becoming active in a society, such as the legal framework (e.g. the voting system and the laws regulating the foundation of associations), the current institutional structures (e.g. party system, size and type of volunteer organisations) and the perception of activism in public and private discourse.

Migration specific features include the legal framework for immigrants (e.g. system of residence status and attached rights, specific restrictions for foreign nationals), the current institutional structure of migrant associations (e.g. size and types of ethnic organisations or official advisory councils) and the perception of immigrant activism in public and private discourse (e.g. public promotion of immigrant activism or resentment of specific associations in the public discourse).

General features of societal opportunity structures may explain some international differences. We would expect more immigrant activism in countries where civic activities are generally promoted and wide-spread, while countries with a weak culture of activism would not encourage immigrants to become active.

However, migration specific features are more interesting when exploring why immigrants seem to be generally less active than native populations. Undoubtedly, the legal opportunity structure lays the framework for activities in which migrants can become involved. This is particularly relevant for immigrants that have not naturalised in the country of settlement and hence do not benefit from full citizenship rights.

Legal differences between the national integration regimes are well-documented in European countries (Davy 1999; Davy 2001). Inherently, legal rules predominantly influence the type and level of political activity. If for example, voting and standing for office are not allowed for certain immigrants, these forms of civic engagement are not open to them. Their activities have to occur on a lower level or to take on other forms. If association building is restricted, informal associations may develop or immigrant associations may be registered under a different status (e.g. as cultural or neighbourhood associations or with the formal support of native citizens who may appear as founders of the immigrant association).

Immigrants with citizenship of receiving countries theoretically have full participation rights from the beginning of their migration project. In practice, the situation is somewhat different as they often have to face bureaucratic obstacles with which they are not familiar. They often lack the language competence to sort out the paper work and even after citizenship is granted to them, they are not able to effectively participate in the polity due to their limited communication skills.

Koopmans' analysis (2004) shows that local integration regimes have a high influence on immigrant activities, as measured by the quantity and content of claims in centre-left newspapers. In his comparison of 16 German cities, he finds that structures for engagement and a liberal climate lead to more claims raised by immigrant or ethnic organisations and a higher focus on the receiving country than the country of origin. Nonetheless, differences between Germany, the UK and the Netherlands are much more pronounced than differences between cities in these nation states. The importance of national regulations and discourses is reaffirmed by his study.

Local opportunity structures also depend on the size of immigrant populations and historical association patterns. Living in a city with many immigrants of the same origin provides multiple opportunities to become active in ethnic associations, while immigrants in some rural communities may only have the choice between becoming active in majority associations or not becoming active at all.

Historical circumstances may facilitate activation and association building either by motivating a large number of people to become engaged around an issue created by periods of distress in the country of origin or by encouraging mobilisation around important issues in the receiving country, as is the case of the sans-papiers-movement in France.

### **4.3 Motivation**

Civic commitment always involves costs in terms of time and energy and in some settings it may even involve personal risk due to public exposure on controversial issues. A precondition to becoming active is the presence of some kind of positive individual motivation. Studies show that individuals may be motivated by the prospect of status and acceptance (Diehl 2002:52), by some type of material rewards (direct remuneration or resume-building), or by a sense of moral responsibility or duty (Price 2002). Here, we regroup all aspects that result from a combination of individual resources and societal opportunity structures as incentives.

Diehl (2002) emphasises that non-material rewards may be influenced by country-specific education. Well-educated immigrants, who often cannot use their educational qualifications in the receiving country, tend to be active in ethnic organisations. In this way, they are able to experience acceptance in leading positions that are not accessible to them in majority organisations.

Motivations may be hard to pin down and analyse unless they are explicitly expressed or commented upon by the individual, as they may involve an element of personal psychological predisposition, independent of resources or rewards.

### **4.4 The activation process**

The activation process encompasses the concrete movement from motivation to activity.

Using (non-immigrant) activists' interviews, Celis et al. (2001:15) argue that learning active citizenship is 'neither linear nor one-dimensional. Learning active citizenship can be continuous or "smooth" (e.g. evolving from strong socialisation in the family) or "jagged" (e.g. from critical or frustrating experience). The process may be conscious, but is more often accidental, unexpected and ad hoc.' They describe the activation process as highly individualised and contingent on social and political conditions. However, we will try to identify some recurring patterns of the activation process.

From other studies, we know that many activists are first drawn into community commitment by networks. A representative survey of civic activists in Germany has shown that 58 per cent of all activists were actively recruited or asked to become involved, mostly by leading activists or friends in organisations (Abt and Braun 2001:187). The same survey shows a relatively high fluctuation of activities, while most active citizens had already somehow been active in their youth or young adulthood. In their analysis of the recruitment process, Verba and others (2000:256) highlight the important role of recruiters. Recruiters tend to approach both individuals who were politically engaged in the past and individuals to whom they are somehow close.

Thus, we can deduct two explanations as to why immigrants are more likely to be approached for positions in minority than in majority associations. Firstly, they are less likely to be close to political or civic activists from the host country. Secondly their prior political activity is less likely to be known to these individuals. The very migration

process may have interrupted the *activation chains* that draw activists from one type of activity to the next.

This effect is multiplied if the role of voluntary associations is taken into account. In a contribution on different participation rates and patterns of men and women, Schlozman and others reflect on the relation between voluntary organisations and political participation (Schlozman, Burns et al. 1994:967): ‘these non-political institutions can act as the locus of attempts at political mobilization: church and organization members make social contacts and, thus, become part of networks through which requests for participation in politics are mediated.’

Another aspect that may hinder the process of activation is the lack of role models. Where women are visibly situated in political office or positions, there is greater participation among women. The conclusion of Bruns and others may also apply to immigrants: ‘What happens at the elite level politics and the broader political and institutional context matters for the behaviour of women and others [who are] less engaged in political life’ (Burns, Schlozman et al. 2001).

Assuming that immigrants are initially more likely to become active in ethnic or immigrant associations, the question is whether some of these activities lead to separation from associations of the majority society, or whether they are the basis for broadening the field of civic activities. Building on other work, Putnam differentiates between bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) forms of social capital (Putnam 2000:21). As examples he names ethnic fraternal organisations (bonding) and the civil rights movement (bridging), among others. Bridging social capital is more valuable for community building. Many studies result in optimism that the immigrants’ development of bonding social capital may result in later development of bridging social capital.

Portes and Rumbaut, looking back at US immigration history, consider ethnic activism as an important factor of immigrant integration and comment that ‘time and the passing of the first generation inexorably turn immigrant communities toward American concerns’ (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:126). However, their study also points to the influence of the sending country and the length of stay perspective in moulding this process. The engagement for ethnically defined issues is interpreted as a learning process: ‘Defense of their own particular interest - defined along ethnic lines - was the school in which many immigrants and their descendants learned to identify with the interests of the nation as a whole’ (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:142).

Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer also emphasize the positive role of association membership for political participation, but are more reluctant with regard to ethnic associations: ‘Empirical research confirms that rates of voting rise significantly with the membership of groups of immigrant origin in associations of mainstream society such as churches, sports and leisure clubs, trade unions or neighbourhood committees. However, even a tendency of certain groups to “stick to themselves” by forming their own ethnic associations may have positive effects (...). Where such associations communicate across religious and political cleavages or form larger umbrella organizations, they are more

likely to encourage their members to participate in the political life of their society of residence.’ (Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2002).

Inspired by Putnam, a study by Fennema and Tilly (1999, 2001) shows that the level of ethnically based civic associations is favourable to immigrant integration into majority politics. The authors offer two explanations. First, the norm of reciprocity is produced in ethnic associations and is used both in the mainstream and in ethnically mixed settings, Second, the existence of ethnic associations produces an ethnic elite that has the social capital to indulge in mainstream politics. Ethnic associations create social trust which spills over into political trust and higher political participation. A comparison with similar studies in Belgium, Denmark and Germany confirms the positive relationship between ethnic membership and political participation, although there are variations with regard to the relative importance of membership in ethnic associations, cross-ethnic organisations and trade unions, each of which point towards different institutional environments (Jacobs and Tillie 2004:425).

Uslaner and Conley (2003:332) question Putnam’s (1993:90) suggestions that participation in civic organisations generally induces skills of cooperation and a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours. Instead, they argue that building stronger social ties with an ethnic community may lead people to withdraw from civic engagement in the larger society (2003:333). Their empirical basis is a survey of ethnic Chinese in Southern California. Their most important conceptual assumption is the differentiation between generalised trusters and particularized trusters (335). While generalised trusters are willing to trust strangers who may outwardly seem quite different from them and believe that most people share common values, particularized trusters only put their faith in other people from their own group. Their analysis shows that generalised trusters have a higher level of activity, which is more often in majority associations, while particularized trusters if active at all, are only active in ethnic organisations. They suggest that there are ‘two separate worlds of civic engagement’ (489). However, it is not clear whether this holds true for more immigrant groups and other indicators of ‘trust’. Moreover, their data is compatible with the idea that ethnic activism may lead to activities in majority associations, even though they would probably only concede to this for activists with the personality structure of a ‘generalized truster’. The structure of their sample shows a significant overlap of activity patterns. While 20 percent are only active in ethnic organisation and 14 percent only active in American politics, 28 percent are active in both (Uslaner and Conley 2003).

The connection between ethnic and mainstream, minority and majority civic activism is still an unsettled issue. While the majority of studies in different countries suggest that any kind of activism is better than no activism at all, a few scholars argue that ethnic activism may lead to social isolation and self-exclusion from the society of settlement. What also remains unclear is whether there is a transfer of social capital from ethnic networks to mainstream activities as suggested by Putnam (2000). Most importantly, it is worth examining whether civic involvement follows a linear path from ethnic activism to mainstream involvement or whether the reverse may also be true;

immigrants may first become involved in mainstream organisations such as trade unions or local councils and then use the social capital accumulated there to create an ethnic association.

## **5. Concluding remarks: Research context**

This chapter has presented conceptual and theoretical issues concerning the study of active civic participation of immigrants in European receiving societies. We suggest that this is a politically important issue for the future of European democracies, as European societies are likely to face high levels of migration in the face of demographic decline and aging (section 1). In section two, we have explained that first generation immigrants are particularly interesting for the study of the activation process for civic participation, as their personal participation history is influenced by their migration experience. We have outlined the difficulties of coming to a common understanding of ‘immigrants’ in a European setting. In the third section of this chapter, we have discussed the notion of active civic participation as it exists in both general literature and in literature which specifically refers to immigrant civic and political participation. We have provided our own working definition of the civically active immigrant: an individual who engages in civil or political activity in a relatively sustained and durable form. We have provided a definition of civic activism that includes political, civil or societal activities that refer to public issues, centred around ethnic and migrant-specific issues as well as concerns of the society as a whole. Last but not least, we have reviewed various factors that influence the civic participation of immigrants (section 4). Our main interest lies in the process of transformation from a potentially active individual to an immigrant activist.

In this chapter, we have developed the main theoretical framework for the European research project ‘Building Europe with New Citizens? An inquiry into civic participation of foreign residents and naturalised citizens in 25 countries’ (POLITIS). The POLITIS project aims to better understand the activation process, and takes into account not only the social networks of involvement but also the individual predispositions, resources, and structural factors that shape immigrant civic engagement in the receiving society. We assume that both individual and societal factors influence the motivation of an individual to become an active citizen. But motivations are not activities. We are particularly interested in the process that leads from motivation to activity and in the role that actors from majority or minority associations play in this process. Our key interest is the initiation and development of the activation process in a migration situation. We will explore this process by collecting individual activation stories and examining how immigrants describe and interpret their personal activation history. We will also look at if and how immigrants relate their activation to their migration experience, personal preconditions and societal circumstances.

With the help of country reports, we shall seek to relate the individual ‘activation’ biographies and experiences to the structural and institutional factors of the different countries studied. We shall seek to identify the key elements in the opportunity

structures that act as catalysts of individual motivations and interests, transforming the activism potential to concrete engagement and actions.

In the following chapter, we will present summaries of country reports in all 25 EU countries. As they are short and concise, they cannot serve as a description of opportunity structures in these countries, but rather as a guide to the more extended reports in the 25 reports that are available on the POLITIS website ([www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe](http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe)).

The last chapter highlights comparative aspects that are of interest for the study of civic participation of immigrants as outlined in this chapter.

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