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DIIS Brief

Tradeoffs Between Equality and Difference: The Crisis of Dutch Multiculturalism in Cross- National Perspective

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I compare the outcomes of Dutch integration policies in a cross-national European perspective. The Dutch approach is of wider theoretical and practical interest because it stands out for its far-reaching state support for multicultural group rights, which were intended to combat the socio-economic marginalization of immigrants. Contrary to these intentions, I show that the Netherlands performs worse than most other European immigration countries in various domains of socio-economic integration, including the labour market, education, residential segregation, and crime levels. I identify three mechanisms that can link multicultural integration policies to these outcomes: insufficient language and other cultural skills among immigrants; discrimination and white flight; and a lack of intercultural contacts. I also discuss why multiculturalism seems to be especially counterproductive in the context of highly developed welfare states. The dilemma of multiculturalism that I identify is that it aims to achieve socio-economic equality by way of maximizing immigrants' opportunities to develop and maintain their cultural difference. The analysis suggests that it is not always possible to have it both ways.

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COMPARING NORTHWEST European immigration countries can be regarded as a natural experiment on the integration of immigrant newcomers and the management of cultural diversity. All these countries were relatively ethnically homogenous and turned into immigration countries roughly at the same time in the 1950s or 1960s. With the exception of Britain – where post-colonial immigrants from the Caribbean and South Asia predominated – all of them recruited a large part of their immigrant populations from Mediterranean countries, including the Muslim countries of the Maghreb and Turkey. The policies that countries developed to incorporate these immigrants were in the initial guest-worker days quite similar, but started to diverge strongly once it became clear that immigration had become a permanent phenomenon (see the trajectories in Figure 1 below). Some countries with a more ethnic tradition of citizenship, such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, chose to retain high barriers for migrants to become full citizens and made residence rights dependent on performance on the labor market and absence of a criminal record. Moreover, these countries made few concessions to immigrants' cultural specificity. Other countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden chose the opposite direction and argued that integration could be achieved by granting immigrants easy access to full citizenship rights, security of residence even in the case of welfare dependence or conviction for crimes, and state support and protection for their languages, cultures, and own organizations and institutions. France, as so often, went its own way and followed the combination of individual equality and refusal to recognize and promote cultural group differences that had already guided its incorporation of Jews after the French revolution: "To the immigrant as an individual, we must grant everything. To the immigrant as a group we should grant nothing."¹

Now, some 20-25 years after these policies were put into place, we can see how these different treatments have affected the outcomes of integration in a variety of domains such as the labor market, education, segregation, and crime. The Netherlands play a crucial role in this natural experiment, because they implemented the prescripts of multiculturalism as a philosophy of integration (Favell 1998) to an extent that no other European country – and probably none of the classical immigration countries, either – has. If the results of Dutch integration policies can indeed be taken as a test case for whether state-sponsored multiculturalism is a successful recipe for the integration of immigrants, then an inspection of cross-national data on labour market participation, educational achievements, residential segregation, and involvement in crime of ethnic minorities in various European countries leads to a quite sobering conclusion (see tables 1-6 below). On the basis of the intentions of its multicultural philosophy, the Netherlands should have been the country that has been

¹ The original statement that is paraphrased here was made by Count Clermont-Tonnerre in 1789: "To the Jew as an individual, we must grant everything. To the Jew as a group, we should grant nothing" (*Ne rien accorder aux juifs en tant que nation; tout leur accorder en tant qu'individus*).

most successful in solving problems of integration and combating marginalization, segregation, and discrimination. But quite to the contrary, the Netherlands turn out to do worse on central indicators of integration than most other European countries. The size and composition of the Dutch immigrant population cannot explain these disappointing results. Three mechanisms plausibly link multicultural integration policies to these outcomes: a lack of language and other cultural skills on the side of immigrants, discrimination and white flight on the side of the native population, and a lack of intercultural contacts between the two groups. The thesis of a causal linkage between policies and outcomes receives further support from the fact that Sweden, the country that has after the Netherlands invested most in multicultural policies, shows integration results that are on many counts as disappointing as those of the Netherlands.

It should be emphasized that multicultural integration policies are especially counterproductive if combined with a strong welfare state. In countries with a weak welfare state such as most of the classical immigration countries, immigrants are forced to make it on their own. Although a few may survive in ethnic niches, most immigrants will have to acquire the linguistic and cultural skills that are necessary to earn a living, to be able to afford an education for their children, and so on. In the Netherlands, however, immigrants were able to survive – and from the perspective of people coming from poor countries, relatively comfortably so – without making such cultural adjustments. The less tolerant reactions to immigrants in European welfare states must also be seen in this context. In the absence of a strong welfare state, immigration tends to be economically advantageous to most people, because it makes services and products available at a lower cost. But given the welfare state dependency that multicultural policies have brought about in the Netherlands, immigrants are less easily seen as an economic enrichment.

Why did other European countries do better? The United Kingdom is among the top performers on most of the indicators that I consider, although it shows high levels of segregation. The United Kingdom also has embraced multicultural policies, even though of a more limited nature than in the Netherlands. The British results may tell us that multiculturalism need not have the negative impacts it has had in the Netherlands and Sweden, if it is implemented in the context of a somewhat weaker welfare state with more emphasis on self-reliance and more opportunities for low-wage employment. The alternative explanation for the British results is that the British immigrant population is simply not comparable to the Continental European countries—because it is so strongly dominated by post-colonial groups who had pre-existing linguistic and cultural ties to the immigration country. Indeed, in the Netherlands, too, Caribbean post-colonial immigrants perform much better on most indica-

tors (with the exception, as in the UK, of crime) than the former guest workers from Morocco and Turkey.

The German-speaking countries have achieved their relatively good performance (except in education) due to other reasons. Although these countries, or at least Germany and Austria, are like the Netherlands and Sweden strong welfare states, their restrictive aliens' legislation has made naturalization and residence rights dependent on performance. Immigrants who become long-term dependent on social welfare risk expulsion if such dependence is deemed 'reproachable', and at the very least welfare dependence is a barrier to gaining a more secure residence status. Similarly, in these countries an immigrant risks losing his residence status or will fail to get a more secure one in the case of conviction for crimes, even relatively minor ones. In extreme cases, expulsion may result. Expulsion for welfare dependence and for criminal convictions is very rare even in these countries, but the threat and the bureaucratic harassment involved in failing to obtain a secure residence status seem to have had the effect of stimulating immigrants to do what was necessary to obtain a secure status: make sure you have a job and stay out of touch with the law. In a way, these welfare states have replaced the discipline that the market exerts on immigrants in countries such as the USA with the discipline of the state. Both may serve as an incentive structure for immigrants that supports the natural urge of immigrants to earn a better living for themselves and for their children, and by which immigrants have ultimately been better off. The Dutch and Swedish approaches, which offered immigrants encompassing rights including unrestricted access to the full panoply of welfare state benefits without demanding anything in return, may have been well-intended, but instead of building on immigrants' strength and energy, has turned them into passive welfare state clients.

What can other countries learn from this unsuccessful experiment in social engineering? First, that strong, state-sponsored multiculturalism is not an effective way to promote equality, but on the contrary tends to strengthen segregation and marginalization. The alternative need not be a full turn to assimilationism *à la française*, although the recent emphasis on mandatory language acquisition programs across Europe (which initiated not coincidentally in the Netherlands) seems useful. There is nothing wrong with multiculturalism if it means the acceptance, positive evaluation, and public celebration (e.g. in the form of ethnic parades and festivals) of the fact that European immigration countries have become racially, ethnically, and culturally more diverse. What is meant here by strong multiculturalism is a set of integration policies that sees it as the active duty of the state to promote and protect minority cultures, and sanctifies individuals' undeniable right to have social institutions accommodate their special cultural requirements.

The second part of a solution concerns access to welfare state benefits. The experience of countries like Sweden and the Netherlands shows that it is difficult to combine an all-inclusive welfare state with being a country of immigration. Offering newcomers from poor parts of the world unconditional access to welfare benefits whose level constitutes a small fortune where these people come from, has led to dependency rather than to emancipation or equality. To prevent such outcomes, European countries may choose to restrict access to, and reduce levels of welfare and social security for everyone, and to become thus more like the United Kingdom or even like the United States. Or they can move in the direction of the German-speaking countries by making not all welfare rights available at once, and letting newcomers earn their way towards full citizenship rights.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the sobering conclusions that I draw about strong, state-sponsored multiculturalism only pertain to its effects on socio-economic participation and equality. Legitimate normative reasons can be and have been advanced (e.g., among many others: Carens 2000; Parekh 2002) why state support for, and recognition of cultural differences is valuable for its own sake, regardless of how this affects socio-economic inequalities. However, the analysis presented in this paper indicates that in considering such policies one should take into account that there may be tradeoffs between promoting cultural group rights and special institutions, on the one hand, and the goals of socio-economic participation and equality, on the other. If there is one thing the Dutch case teaches us, it is that in dealing with the complex issues of difference and equality in immigration societies we cannot simply assume that what is normatively justifiable will also be practically efficient.

Further reading

Joseph Carens (2000) *Culture, Citizenship and Community*. Oxford University Press.

Adrian Favell (2001) *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. London: Palgrave.

Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, Marco Giugny and Florence Passy (2005) *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. Univ of Minnesota.

Bhikhu Parekh (2002) *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. Harvard University Press.

Figure 1: Configurations of Citizenship in 1980, 1990, and 2002

Source: Ruud Koopmans et al. 2005. *Contested Citizenship. Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

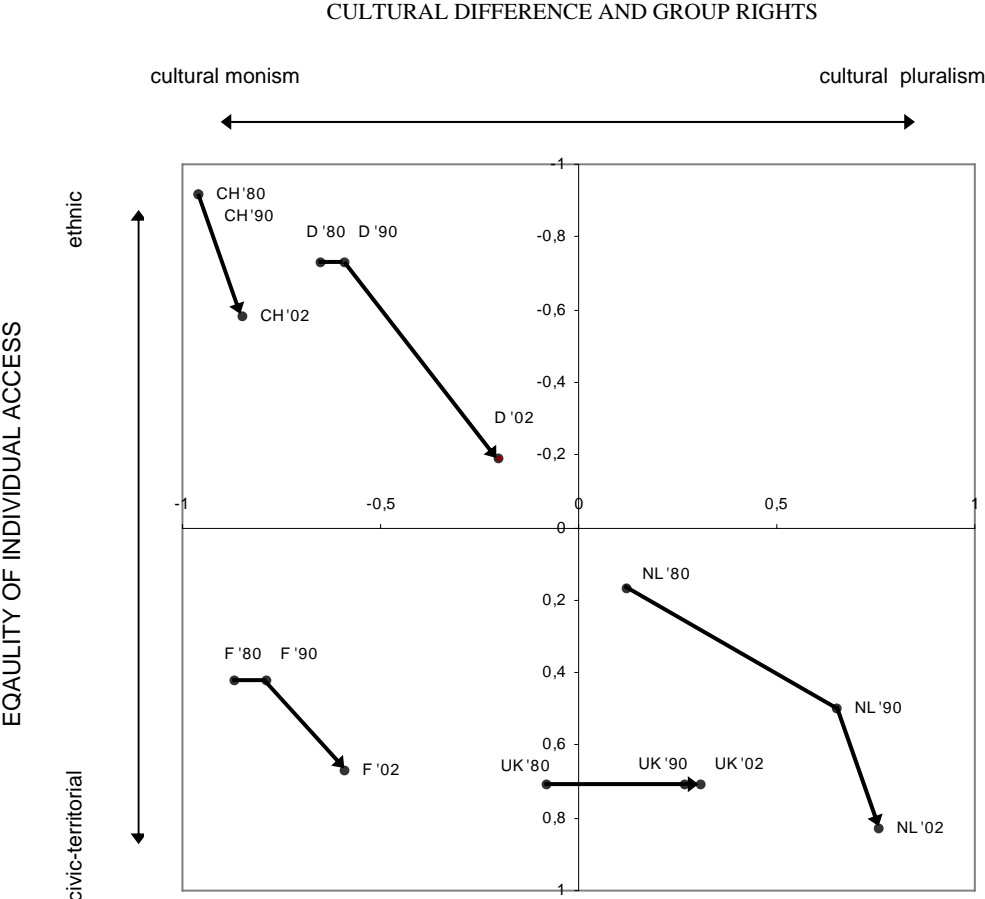


Table 1: Absolute and relative unemployment levels among citizens and non-EU foreigners in eight main European immigration countries, 2000

| | Unemployment citizens | Unemployment non-EU foreigners | Relative unemployment level of non-EU foreigners |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Belgium | 5,8% | 30,7% | 5,5 |
| Netherlands 1999 | 3,4% | 18,5% | 5,4 |
| Switzerland | 1,9% | 9,6% | 5,2 |
| Sweden | 5,1% | 22,0% | 4,3 |
| Netherlands 2000 | 2,6% | 10,1% | 3,9 |
| Netherlands 2000 „autochtonen“ versus non-western „allochtonen“ | 3% | 11% | 3,7 |
| France | 9,6% | 27,9% | 2,9 |
| Austria | 4,3% | 9,9% | 2,3 |
| Great Britain (whites versus ethnic minorities, 1998) | 6,4% | 15,0% | 2,3 |
| Germany | 7,5% | 15,5% | 2,2 |
| Great Britain | 5,4% | 12,0% | 2,2 |

Sources: Eurostat 1999, 2000; CBS 2002; EU employment observatory: Nationale Arbeitsmarktpolitiken, Vereinigtes Königreich: http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net/ersep/trd32_d/00300235.asp.

Table 2: Share of gainfully employed persons (12 weekly hours or more) of the population of 15-64 years among citizens and non-EU foreigners in eight main European immigration countries, 2000

| | Labor market participation citizens | Labor market participation non-EU foreigners | Relative labor market participation of non-EU immigrants |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Netherlands 1999 | 72,1% | 33,7% | 0,47 |
| Belgium | 62,1% | 33,7% | 0,54 |
| Sweden | 72,3% | 42,7% | 0,59 |
| Netherlands 2000 | 73,8% | 44,8% | 0,61 |
| France | 62,6% | 41,9% | 0,67 |
| Great Britain | 71,9% | 54,5% | 0,76 |
| Great Britain (whites versus ethnic minorities, 1998) | 74,4% | 57,0% | 0,77 |
| Germany | 66,3% | 51,2% | 0,77 |
| Switzerland | 79,6% | 65,5% | 0,82 |
| Austria | 67,9% | 67,7% | 1,00 |

Sources: Eurostat 1999, 2000; EU employment observatory: Nationale Arbeitsmarktpolitiken, Vereinigtes Königreich: http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net/ersep/trd32_d/00300235.asp.

Table 3: Differences between immigrant children (two foreign-born parents) and other children in reading, maths, and science knowledge scores in the cross-national PISA study (15 year olds, 2000)

| | PISA reading | PISA maths | PISA science | Average across 3 subjects |
|----------------|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Netherlands | -77.5 | -89.7 | -99.9 | -92.4 |
| Germany | -82.3 | -80.0 | -91.3 | -84.5 |
| Switzerland | -83.6 | -83.8 | -83.2 | -84.2 |
| Sweden | -57.8 | -62.9 | -58.1 | -59.6 |
| France | -46.9 | -43.8 | -65.4 | -52.0 |
| United Kingdom | -33.6 | -36.7 | -35.0 | -38.3 |

Source: Schnepf 2004

Table 4: School segregation index (0-100)

| | Dissimilarity index |
|----------------|---------------------|
| United Kingdom | 62 |
| Netherlands | 55 |
| Sweden | 50 |
| Germany | 49 |
| France | 49 |
| Switzerland | 40 |

Source: Schnepf 2004, calculated on the basis of data on the ethnic composition of schools from the PISA study.

Table 5: Segregation-indices (0-100) of Turkish and Maghrebian immigrants in selected European cities

| | Turks | Maghrebians |
|-------------------|-------|-------------|
| Stockholm (1995) | 60 | - |
| Brussels (1991) | - | 59 |
| Rotterdam (1993) | 54 | 50 |
| The Hague (1998) | 53 | 49 |
| Amsterdam (1998) | 42 | 41 |
| Vienna (1990) | 42 | - |
| Cologne (1994) | 33 | - |
| Düsseldorf (1993) | 30 | - |
| Frankfurt (1997) | 20 | 24 |
| Paris (1990-95) | - | 23 |

Sources: van Kempen 1998, 2003; Henning 1999; Murdie and Borgegard 1998; Musterd and De Winter 1998. Figures for Maghrebian immigrants refer to Algerians for Paris and to Moroccans for all other cities.

Table 6: Share of foreign persons in the prison population, 2002-2004 (for the Netherlands also foreign-born prison population, for the UK racial minorities)

| | % of the prison population | Degree of overrepresentation |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Netherlands | 33.2% | 7.9 |
| Netherlands (foreign born, 2002) | 53% | 5.6 |
| Sweden | 27.2% | 5.0 |
| Belgium | 40.9% | 4.9 |
| France | 21.4% | 3.8 |
| Switzerland | 70.5% | 3.7 |
| Austria | 33.0% | 3.5 |
| Germany | 29.9% | 3.4 |
| United Kingdom | 12.2% | 3.1 |
| United Kingdom (racial minorities, 2000) | 18% | 2.4 |

Sources: International Centre for Prison Studies; Home Office; Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen ; OECD figures on foreign population.

(see <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/rel/icps/worldbrief/europe.html>)