



CATEGORIZATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN DUTCH POLICYMAKING

Implications for civic integration in the Netherlands



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Colophon

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Abstract

The Netherlands is looking back on the experience of nine years of civic integration policy, with a new policy set to be implemented in early 2022. It aims to change the civic integration process by introducing those obliged to fulfil the civic integration from day one to the Dutch labour market and society. Differentiating people between three different civic integration paths, the goal is to be accommodating for everyone. Deciding who is required to fulfil the civic integration process is done through categorization of people based on characteristics, with main characteristics such as age, nationality and prior education being critical.

In this research, governmental and academic experts on integration and policymaking are consulted. Through literature review, policy review and interviews is explored what role categorization has in policymaking and what impact categorization has on immigrants. Findings show that only a small group of immigrants and refugees stand to benefit from the old policy. The new approach with its three different civic integration paths is expected to help accommodate more immigrants in their civic integration process. However, the remaining issue seems to be in who is categorised as someone requiring integration and who is not. Therefore, recommendations are made to further investigate the rigidity of categories and review what characteristics are critical in this decision.

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Introduction

West-Europe has changed from an emigration base to an immigration hotspot over the course of 70 years. For example, in the Netherlands, immigration numbers in 2010 were more extensive than ever since World War II (Groenendijk, 2011). This transition to immigration hotspot became most prominent in the 1990s when in the Netherlands, the yearly migration surplus averaged at 35.000 immigrants settling in the Netherlands (Groenendijk, 2011). Since then, the migration surplus has fluctuated, with more people leaving the Netherlands in the 2003-2007 period. However, in 2019 the migration surplus has significantly increased to over 100.000 (Hoeveel immigranten komen naar Nederland?, 2021). To migrate to a host society is to throw oneself into an often radically different culture. Therefore, to help integrate the people migrating to Europe and, specifically, the Netherlands, it is paramount that a good integration policy is in place. The problem is how policymakers specify their integration policy to suit the needs of those in need of integration. To determine integration policy for the enormous amount of immigrants coming to the Netherlands each year, policymakers are inadvertently tied to categorising these immigrants and thus differentiating between them, as categorising groups of immigrants eases stress on the system and creates oversight. Specifying which category of immigrant needs integration is determined by characteristics and statuses attributed to these groups (Mügge and van der Haar, 2016). However, according to Mügge and van der Haar (2016), the downside of characterising immigrant groups is that this leaves them vulnerable to discrimination based on those characteristic distinctions.

The fight against discrimination in the Netherlands is more prominent than ever with anti-discrimination marches such as Black Lives Matter and the appointment of the National Coördinator against Discrimination and Racism in October 2021 (Rijksoverheid, 2021). This newly appointed position is a direct effect of a debate in the Dutch House of Representatives. This debate has come about from the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrations and recent increased interest by media. This research paper aims to find out if possible institutional discrimination exists, leading from the categorization of immigrants. Besides this societal relevance for this research, sufficient scientific research on discrimination of immigrants based on categorization is lacking. This gap is shown by research conducted by Mügge and van der Haar (2016), which suggests that categorization in policymaking may lead to negative stereotypes and exclusion. Still, it neither confirms nor deny a proven connection. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to determining whether such relationships exist.

Research problem

Mügge and van der Haar (2016) and Olsen (2017) all argue that the most crucial element in the policymaking process is categorization, on which the entire policymaking process relies. Only through categorization a category-specific policy can be made. Categorization of people is fundamentally important in immigration and integration policy as thousands of immigrants from a plethora of cultures and backgrounds seek access to Dutch society each year, with some cultures differing more than others from that of the host society. Mügge & van der Haar (2016) argue that there is a chance of discrimination, as categorization frames immigrants in these groups to a stereotype that may be harmful and could lead to exclusion rather than integration. Bakker et al. (2016) show that critical integration indicators are the policymakers and politicians involved in immigration. The media and public political figures in host societies affect the perception of immigrants by using characterisation and stereotyping of immigrants to shape the views of the population towards immigrants (Pinyol-Jiménez, 2012). Therefore, it would seem that the basis of integration policy, categorization, is also a primary source of the discrimination and exclusion of immigrants in host societies.

This research aims to investigate to what extent categorization in policymaking affects the discrimination and exclusion of immigrants in the Netherlands. To analyse the broader effect, it is necessary first to explore the crucial elements of the subject.

Therefore, the main research objectives are:

1. To identify in what way categorization is used in Dutch integration policy.
2. To establish a connection between categorization and discrimination of immigrants.
3. To determine whether categorization benefits integration or hampers the process.

Therefore, the main research question follows: “How does categorization in Dutch policymaking affect discrimination of immigrants in the Netherlands?”.

The following three sub-questions aim to answer the main research question:

1. How is categorization used in Dutch integration policy?
2. Does categorization benefit the civic integration process of immigrants, or does it lead to discrimination and exclusion?
3. Is there a specific category that leads to more discrimination and exclusion against immigrants?

Theoretical framework

This research approaches categorization as an irreplaceable and vital mechanism to help better understand the complexity of the social world. Mügge and van der Haar (2016), Crawley and Skleparis (2017) and Olsen (2017) argue that categorization is crucial for formulating policies, as categories are used to describe social phenomena and help us understand the complex social world. The concept of categorization as an irreplaceable tool for policymakers to help define and understand the social world and bring it into legislative terms, is exactly where things go wrong. (Mügge and van der Haar, 2016). One could argue that when policymakers and those acting on the policies categorise immigrants based on their characteristics, the deciding factor is not the characteristic of the immigrant but rather the decision-maker self. It is from that point of view that this research approaches categorization as its guiding theoretical concept.

Categories are the basis for developing policy problems on which legislators can act. The starting point of the EU migration policy chain (Mügge and van der Haar, 2016) distinguishes citizens of EU member states and third-country nationals. This categorization diverges the paths to whether or not the subjects will become part of integration policies or not, with citizens of EU member states not requiring integration at all, as opposed to third-country nationals. Categories are vital in defining similarities and differences between groups. However, categorization also has downsides in society. Crawley and Skleparis (2017) argue that the lives of migrating people are more complex than the sum of categories that are constructed around their lives. Migrants can and often will shift between categories during their lives, therefore making our attempts at categorization, intended to make sense of the complex social world, largely invalid. Categorization has consequences in immigration and integration policy. Through determining which people fall into the category of 'refugee', it is simultaneously entitling and disentitling people to certain rights, resources and protection (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017).

Besides this, categorization often goes hand in hand with stereotypes evolving from categorization (Mügge and van der Haar, 2016., Olsen, 2017.). These stereotypes are created by those that hold power in the categorization of groups. The 'allochtoon' vs 'autochtoon' discourse in the Netherlands, for example, has influenced the perception of non-Dutch negatively, especially in the 'Western' and 'Non-Western' immigrants differentiation (Schinkel, 2008). 'Allochtoon', a Dutch term used to describe a person with a migration background with at least one parent who was born in a different country, as opposed to 'autochtoon', where both parents are born in, in this case, the Netherlands, has gained a negative background. The term 'allochtoon' was used in Dutch immigration reports and in policymaking. However, the term was officially abandoned and changed (CBS.nl, 2016). The negativity surrounding the term 'allochtoon' comes from parts of Dutch society rejecting the characterised group for multiple reasons, such as overrepresentation in crime figures, competition on the labour market and differences in language and culture. As a result, individuals from these stereotyped groups often experience discrimination and exclusion. Categorical structures, therefore, influence not only our societal institutions but also our private lives. The perceived stereotypes have a negative influence on the integration of migrant groups. Therefore, one could argue that the categorization of immigrants leads to discrimination in and exclusion from the host society.

The presented research will focus solely on the situation and policy in the Netherlands. The current integration policy is one where after being granted a visa, the immigrant will either be obligated to take part in the integration process, or be left to their own devices. This decision lies with the Dutch Immigratie- en Naturalisatie Dienst (abbreviated to IND), the governmental institution of integration and naturalisation (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Groenendijk (2011) argues that since the change in immigration and integration policy in 2002, the Dutch government is using the language test implemented in 1998 that was initially used to test the immigrants' Dutch competency not just to help oversee immigrants' progress in the civic integration process but is now effectively using the test to screen and select immigrants for access to the Netherlands and who has a stronger right of residence and of obtaining Dutch citizenship. Unfortunately, the increasing difficulty of the test in recent years has only made it more difficult for immigrants to pass the selection (DUO, 2021).

Besides the rising difficulty level, the formalisation and digitalisation of the test, on their own, are proving a barrier for immigrants. Still, the cost of the language test is funded by the Dutch government through a scheme in which the immigrant can borrow the expenses of the classes and test from DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs), but the immigrant has to pay back this loan if they fail to complete the language tests (Paying for Integration, 2021). This instalment is, however, a significant expense on a small income immigrant family if they fail integration. On the other side of the migration spectrum are the knowledge migrants coming to the Netherlands to study and work, also known as ex-pats. To attract knowledge, capital and skill, the Dutch government instated the 30%-arrangement, a scheme in which migrants that fit the requirements are exempted from paying tax up to 30% of their income. These ex-pats are not required to go through the civic integration process as it is expected that they will leave the Netherlands after a few years (Rijksoverheid.nl, 2021). Therefore, one could argue that the Dutch immigration policy and selection, as set by the Dutch government's Ministry of Social Affairs, discriminates between immigrants based on the categories of competency, education level, digital skills, and wealth. This way of policymaking can only be explained as the predetermined selection, or cherry-picking, of what category of immigrants the Dutch government wants to attract and which to deter. Therefore, one could argue that the Dutch immigration and integration system is discriminatory with categorization as its foundation and is a form of institutionalised discrimination.

Pinyol-Jiménez (2012) argues that international migration causes the confrontation of the 'we' (the receiving population) and the 'they' (the migrating population) as, often, the migrants are seen as rivals on the job market and in access to social services, or are seen as a threat to the public order. Olson (2017) argues that the starting point of social interaction is, therefore, social categorization. How does the 'other' behave? What social cues do we pick up from them and how do we deal with them? How do 'we' interact with 'them'? How does Dutch society interact with immigrants? The Dutch immigration policy, as previously discussed, seems to further this confrontation as described by Pinyol-Jiménez (2012) by wanting to attract highly educated immigrants and complicate immigration for lower-educated immigrants. Moreover, this dichotomy between the local population and the migrant/refugee groups is being reinforced by individuals of migrant/refugee background who commit acts of terrorism or other crimes, which public actors and media quickly magnify in host societies. This, in turn, enforces the 'we' versus 'them' confrontation and spirals the issue of discrimination and exclusion of immigrants.

Conceptual Model

This research will focus on finding a connection between categorization in policymaking leading to discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, the categorization process of immigrants (green) stands central in this conceptual model (figure 1). In the Netherlands, it is the Dutch government that decides on immigration and integration policy. This policy (purple) is enacted by agencies such as the IND (Immigratie en Naturalisatie Dienst), where the decision on who is categorised as a refugee or immigrant that is obliged to integrate and who is categorised as an immigrant that is not obliged to integrate. Therefore, one could argue that those that are obliged to fulfil civic integration are “wanted” immigrants by the Dutch government (blue).

In contrast, those that are not obliged to fulfil civic integration are “unwanted” immigrants (red), with the result being that these “unwanted” immigrants are subject to exclusion from the host society. Therefore, they are also marked red to visually support the negative effect of discrimination and exclusion.

Based on arguments by Mügge and van der Haar (2016) and Olsen (2017), the expectation follows that, through the categorization of immigrants, regardless of ‘wantedness’, immigrants experience discrimination based on characteristics used in the categorization process.

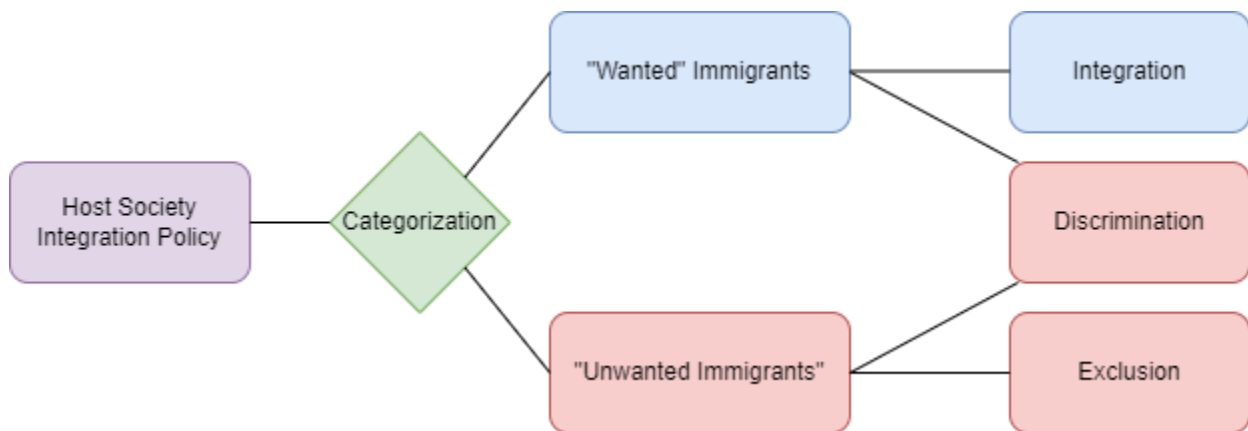


Figure 1 – Conceptual model (Author, 2022)

Methodology

Categorization is essential for policymaking and thus integration policymaking. However, there are suggestions or expectations that categorization leads to discrimination and exclusion of immigrants, as mentioned by Mügge and van der Haar (2016) and Olsen (2017). This research was therefore conducted to discover whether there is evidence that these expectations are correct. Furthermore, due to the social nature of integration and exclusion and the personal nature of discrimination, it was vital to consider the individual perception of both Dutch citizens and immigrants on this topic. Annual reports on Dutch citizen perspective on civic integration show that Dutch 'autochthones' were most concerned with the cultural adaptation of immigrants. However, immigrants and especially second-generation 'allochtones' argued that due to their religion and other physical appearance, they would always be seen as non-Dutch. Therefore, due to this topic's sensitive social and individual perception-bound nature, it was vital to conduct this research from a qualitative approach.

The logical way to investigate this research problem was through policy review, literature review and semi-structured interviews. The approach of semi-structured interviews allows interviewees to build confidence during the interviews and freely talk about the topic with the interviewer. Furthermore, this research was conducted to shed light on both the necessity of categorization and the negative consequences. With that reason in mind, this research aimed to interpret the social realities of the individual stakeholders. To accomplish this, the goal was to conduct interviews with experts on integration policy from government and university positions and immigrants or those that serve the interests of immigrants with regards to civic integration. A semi-structured interview guide was followed during the interviews, covering the essential aspects of the research to answer my research questions.

Unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of this topic and this research being a Bachelors Thesis, government agencies declined the requests for interviews. Besides this, immigrants and those who serve immigrants' interests during civic integration processes did not reply to interview requests. This had various reasons, with the main reason being Covid-19. This severely limited the research in shedding light on all sides of the problem, as only the independent institutional and local municipality perceptions could be investigated.

Data collection

To answer the research question, the aim was to interview policymakers and other shareholders in the Dutch immigration and integration policies and specialists on discrimination, immigration, and integration. The researcher approached the interviewees via email, personally at university or via LinkedIn. The interviewees were chosen purposefully due to their knowledge of the research topic or due to their share in policymaking. The interviews were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed and analysed by the researcher using Amberscript, a tool that helps transcribe and analyse interviews through narrative analysis. All sub-questions in this research were investigated through both literature review and interviews. For example, when studying how categorization fit in Dutch policymaking, one can look to categorization based on different elements, such as nationality, religion, gender, etc., and who decides on the categorization and what factors determine the "wanted" or "unwanted" group as mentioned in figure 1. Due to the current situation around Covid-19, most of these interviews were held online. Naturally, this is a disadvantage for all qualitative research, as the personal connection during interviews can help the interviewer understand the interviewees better and make the interviewees feel more at ease during the interview.

The interview guide (see appendix) contained a consent form and two semi-structured interview guides, one based on exploratory findings, which is focussed more on discrimination and exclusion of (im)migrants and the other on interviews with policymakers/stakeholders, focused on categorization and the policymaking process.

Table 1 shows information about the interviewees, whose names are not used due to privacy considerations. However, the results from the interviews will be discussed and referenced by the respective interviewee number in the manner that is listed in the table below. As interviews 1 and 4 were held in Dutch, the quotes that were selected were translated to English to improve the readability of the paper.

Name in thesis	Organization/ Sector	Occupation	Date	Medium	Duration	In-text reference
Interviewee 1	University of Utrecht	Postdoctoral researcher	29-11-2021	Google Meet	57 minutes	(I-1, 2021)
Interviewee 2	University of Groningen	Professor Social Sciences	30-11-2021	In person	54 minutes	(I-2, 2021)
Interviewee 3	University of Groningen	Professor Social and Political Science	29-11-2021	Google Meet	32 minutes	(I-3, 2021)
Interviewee 4	Municipality of Groningen	Policy advisor integration	2-12-2021	MS Teams	57 minutes	(I-4, 2021)

Table 1 - Overview interviews (Author, 2021)

Ethical considerations

To safeguard participants' privacy and ratify the research conducted for this paper, the goal was to be in line with the main principles in research ethics and adhere to good research practices of honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility as described by ALLEA (2017) and the Dutch equivalent VSNU (2018). These practices entailed that the researcher remained honest about any findings found during this research, taking the best possible care using the most scholarly and scientific research approaches. Besides this, the researcher was transparent about the research's data and was independent and impartial. Furthermore, the researcher is responsible for conducting scientifically and societally relevant research (VSNU, 2018). During the interviewing process, the researcher remained transparent and honest with the interviewees. To ensure that participants were well informed, they were required to fill in a consent form (see appendix) before participating in any form of data gathering. Participants were informed on the primary goal of the research through this consent form, which also stated how the information they provided would be used and that the data collected would solely be used towards the main research goal. All information gathered in this research was examined and used without bias.

Furthermore, the participants had the ability to withdraw themselves from the study at any stage of the report before publishing. The data gathered from these interviews was confidential and was stored securely. If interviews with immigrants were secured, it would have been essential to consider them part of a sensitive group (Baker et al., 2016). Therefore, the researcher would try to create a trustful and secure atmosphere, and the researcher would conduct his research without prejudice towards any of the study participants. Unfortunately, no interviews with immigrants were held.

Results

This chapter discusses the results of the conducted research. The results are based on a literature review, policy review and the information collected via semi-structured interviews.

Categorization in Dutch Integration Policy

Categorization is both pervasive and inevitable (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017). “Human survival depends on group living – on the sharing of resources and protection within a group and the ability to manage coalitions and conflicts with other groups.” (Olson, 2017, p.5). To help us understand and manage the complex social world around us, we as humans place other peoples and cultural elements in ‘boxes’ or groups. These ‘boxes’ help create, for us, logical patterns in extremely complex situations. The creation of these ‘boxes’ or groups is done through categorization based on topic-relevant characteristics. Interviewee 3 expresses his own perception on categorization from a societal point of view: “*So I have always stressed this idea that we [as a society] make general, impartial rules [laws] that identify people not as individuals, but by certain features they have and as such will always create categories.*”. Olson (2017) argues that the starting point of social interaction is, therefore, social categorization. Another key reason why categorization is a necessity in policymaking is described by Interviewee 3, who describes what society expects from their elected governments in regards to decision-making, where categorization is a necessity to generalise abstract groups.

“[...] it is true that it is to some extent unavoidable. Most policymaking that we’re probably concerned with is large-scale policymaking. So not in extremely small groups, where it can, you know, approach every individual in particular, but in large groups where decisions have to be made that are by their very nature, in some sense, abstract. And so, for those decisions to be made, I think it’s necessary to group phenomenal people and so on in various respects. [...] what people legitimately expect from them [government] is that they make decisions and implement decision fairly effectively” – Interviewee 3

The current Dutch integration policy categorises immigrants into distinct groups based on the characteristics of peoples. It differentiates between immigrants on which groups are obliged to follow the civic integration process and which groups do not have to. This differentiation is based on age, nationality, diplomas or certificates of studies taught in Dutch, or whether immigrants are temporarily here for work or studies, such as ex-pats (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Ex-pats are not required to fulfil the civic integration process as they are expected to return to their country of origin after a few years of working in the Netherlands. One could argue that ex-pats also fall in the category of ‘wanted’ immigrants, as the Dutch government tries to make it as welcoming as possible for ex-pats to come to the Netherlands by granting several major benefits during their stay in the Netherlands. These ex-pats enjoy benefits such as the 30% tax reimbursement on their income, as is mentioned by Interviewee 2, an ex-pat himself.

“That [the 30% tax rule] is only applicable to high income, highly educated, but mostly high income. And there is a reason behind it. [...] We want to attract [these] people to come here and they will then have a salary bump for these years because we want them.” - Interviewee 2

Similarly, immigrants from European Union member-states, for example, are not obliged to fulfil the civic integration process. This is due to the expectation that those from other European Union member-states adapt easier into other European societies and therefore integrate themselves. Refugees, on the other hand, are always obliged to integrate (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Therefore, Dutch integration policy creates two groups through categorization, those obliged to fulfil the civic integration process and those that are not. Those that are obliged to fulfil the civic integration process are left to their own to pick the integration plans best suited to them, and are only given the requirement to fulfil the process within three years (Rijksoverheid, 2021).

Those that are not obliged to fulfil the civic integration process are expected to have little issue with settling and integrating themselves into the Dutch society. This differentiation is already one of enormous impact, as those required to integrate are forced to pay for their own civic integration process. There is, however, a way to lend money for the integration process from DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs) and on successful completion of the civic integration process, the loan will be waived by DUO. Failing to complete it, however, results in fines or, ultimately, revokal of the visa (Rijksoverheid, 2021).

*“Not completing your civic integration process can have consequences for your visa.”
– Interviewee 4*

Local governments used to be obliged to offer civic integration courses, but since 2004 the reigns have been handed over to the free market (van Houdt et al., 2011). Since then, it has become the immigrants’ responsibility to find what civic integration courses suit them best.

Dutch Integration Policy reviewed

“Policies are generally evaluated after the first five years and at that first evaluation, which would have been in 2018, [...] it became apparent that the amount of people that successfully completed their civic integration exams was dwindling. And the role of the municipality was missed, as putting the responsibility of finding and completing the civic integration process on the individual appeared too much for a lot of people.” - Interviewee 4

The essence of Dutch integration policy comes down to ‘citizenship’ through civic integration contracts and social contracts. ‘Citizenship’ in this sense means that one has earned their part in society, and contributes to society, by being active and striving for the common good (van Houdt et al., 2011). “[...], for Aristotle, the good citizen is someone actively participating in social affairs.” (Schinkel, 2008, p.17). There is, however, a difference between formal citizenship and moral citizenship, where formal citizenship entails juridically codified rights and being part of a juridical-political nation-state, and moral citizenship entailing the strive to better the common good and contribute to society (Schinkel, 2008). Therefore, one could argue that the Dutch integration policy steers towards assimilation or inclusion rather than integration. In reality, however, this appears not to be the case. Once immigrants have completed their civic integration process, the government shifts all responsibility to society and the immigrants themselves. There is no help from the Dutch government with starting up life after the obligatory civic integration process. Immigrants either have to do it alone or with help from volunteer services.

This will change with the new, upcoming integration law in 2022 (Rijksoverheid, 2021). This law sees to it that the current integration policy will be overhauled and a new policy is expected to help immigrants better after their civic integration process. The new law, like the old, will still differentiate between immigrants that will be obligated to fulfil the civil integration process and those that are not. Refugees will be obliged to fulfil the integration process regardless. The main change that this new law and resulting policy will bring is that those obliged to fulfil the civic integration process will be helped from day one with the leaping board into society after they complete the process. Main changes entail local government assistance from day one, three different skill and language levels to better accommodate all immigrants and a combination of in-class learning about, and cooperation in Dutch society, through volunteer work, internships, etc. (Rijksoverheid, 2021., I-4, 2021)

Categorization and immigrants in the Netherlands

The main issue in the current integration policy lies within making the distinction between ‘refugee’ and ‘immigrant’, a decision that determines and changes an asylum seekers future all together. In the Netherlands, the decision on who is a refugee or an immigrant rests on the IND (Integratie en Naturalisatie Dienst). This government institution judges asylum requests and visa requests. The refugee status has an enormous social weight to it, as refugees are often regarded by the host society as people who need the protection of the host society as they can not stay in their country of origin (I-3, 2021). The distinction between refugee and immigrant, however, is one that has seen controversy in both media and academics and is of great importance to the people in question. The status of refugees brings with it certain rights and protection but also limits people in what they can do or achieve in the host country.

“The emphasis [of the refugee status] lays on ‘we need to help these people’, that they are dependent and on victimhood, again, with all good intentions. But this creates a weird polarity between the people [of the host society] and the refugees.” – Interviewee 1

Besides this, the refugee status seems extremely rigid; once someone is labelled as a refugee, it is challenging for the person to grow from the situation, the public perception of the refugee status seems to stay with the refugee and Interviewee 2 argues that the same goes for immigrants (I-1, 2021). On the other side of the distinction, there are immigrants who desire the refugee status for all its benefits but are excluded from this group based on categorization by the IND. These people will not gain the same rights and protection as refugees might, but might see themselves more free in growing in their life after the integration process, as they are not held back by the category (I-1, 2021). Therefore, it seems that the result of categorization in integration policy is a rigid category, where the people categorised in it are defined for the remainder of their stay in the Netherlands. As discussed previously, those that are categorised as a refugee are obligated to fulfil the integration process. One could thus argue that being categorised as a refugee benefits the integration, as one has to complete the process successfully. Being categorised as an immigrant does not immediately entail that one has to fulfil the integration process. This mostly results in the formation of communities of immigrants based on characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, language and religion. The formation of these communities is a direct effect of integration policy in the Netherlands and results in an increased distance from these communities to the host society (Schinkel, 2018).

The effect on immigrants

Those that really benefit from the current civic integration process are those that are categorised as refugee and have no issues with the rigidity of the category or those that are categorised as immigrants but obliged to integrate. We can define those who are not categorised as refugees but as immigrants and are intrinsically motivated to integrate themselves under this category as well, as it is a significantly smaller group (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2021). Interviewee argues from a refugee's point of view, that the refugee status is experienced as confining once the individual starts developing themselves in Dutch society and see themselves as more than a refugee but are still regarded by society and by law as a refugee.

“At one point that realisation sets in when they [refugees] learn to find their ways in society, that they start defining themselves as something else than a refugee. But due to the label of refugee and still being labeled as refugee by law, and being treated [by society] in such fashion. Then they start to question their own identity.” – Interviewee 1

Those categorised as refugees but that have ambitions to grow from the status and become self-made individuals, those that are not categorised as refugee but had desires to be and those that are categorised as immigrant do not benefit from categorization in Dutch policymaking. It is in these three categories that we find the people that are impacted most negatively by categorization in integration policy.

As mentioned previously in the quote by Interviewee 4, it is under the 2013 integration policy where the individual responsibility is highest, the refugee or immigrant obliged to integrate has to choose their own individual civic integration package that suits them best and is not aided in this process by governmental institutions or the local municipality. “[...] integration has become a matter of ‘individual responsibility’. But at the same time it is explained by means of a de-individualising maneuver, which clusters people in various states of integration in ‘ethnic groups’, [...] (Schinkel, 2018, p.3). Like Schinkel (2018), one can argue that the 2013 integration policy, through means of individual civic integration processes, has an opposite effect than is intended. Similarly, one can argue that socio-cultural integration into a host society can be achieved through social interaction between the integrating party and a “autochthone” Dutch, of which there are only so many that are themselves open for social interaction with those integrating (Schinkel, 2018). Likewise, the host society needs to be reasonable in what they expect of immigrants, as Interviewee 2 argues:

“[...] The more cultural signs [from their own culture] that they display, the less integrated they are perceived to be, the more they are perceived to be not making an effort to become Dutch. [...] and that is the paradox of it, they are always going to be [perceived as] immigrants.” – Interviewee 2

Discussion

When one interprets the information that they have gathered over the course of the research, one always has to take their own positionality into account. Doing this is vital for any qualitative research, especially one that investigates social phenomena, as the individual perspective of the researcher influences the way that results are translated into a definitive conclusion of the research process (Bourke, 2014). As my position as a white Dutch student, my perception of the researched social and governing problem is inherently different than that of someone else. Due to the fact that this research was unable to conduct interviews with refugees or immigrants that fulfilled the Dutch civic integration process, one has to be open about the limitation of singular perception. However, as long as one takes their own positionality into account during the entire research process, one could argue that, like Bourke (2014), their positionality doesn't influence the research process but rather shapes the researcher themselves.

The findings from the literature review, policy review and semi-structured interviews provide the necessary information for the researcher to reflect on their own conceptual model. The results show that through categorization, a decision is made with regards to who has to fulfil civic integration and who does not. However, both groups report that they still experienced discrimination from the Dutch society, stating that no matter their background, they are still regarded as immigrants and not full fledged members of Dutch society. Therefore, when we look back on the 2013 civic integration policy, we realise that the ones that stand to benefit from the policy are, in essence, very few. One could even go as far as to argue that only a select few groups of immigrants and refugees are desired by the Dutch government and that the Dutch civic integration process makes those that are less desirable and makes them more desirable by making them adapt to Dutch society.

Regardless, it has become more evident that categorization in Dutch policymaking is both inevitable and a necessity. It helps policymakers distinguish interpretable groups from the abstract masses, but in doing so completely disregards individual desires and thus eliminates the immigrants as individuals.

Conclusion

The situation in the Netherlands seems to originate from the change in government attitude to immigration and the integration of immigrants. With a new integration policy on its way in 2022, it is vital that one takes a critical look at the old 2013 integration policy.

Categorization is crucial in policymaking. It is essential for us to create a better understanding of the complexity of the social world. Through categorization, we create 'boxes' or 'groups' that are defined by characteristics (Crawly and Skleparis, 2017., Mügge and Van der Haar, 2016., Olson, 2017.). Categorization is used in Dutch integration policy by means of defining those that require civic integration and those that do not. This distinction is made on several characteristics of the individuals in question, most notably are 'type of stay', prior education in Dutch and nationality (Rijksoverheid, 2021., I-4, 2021). With the design of the Dutch civic integration policy, it becomes clear that the Dutch government attains a view of 'citizenship through contribution', although the 2013 civic integration policy does not achieve this (Schinkel, 2018., I-1, 2021., I-4, 2021). The main issue with the 2013 civic integration policy on this front was found to be the lack of government support directly after the civic integration process. Making the 'integrated' the sole responsible for the rest of their lives in the host society, on the one hand, gives them freedom, but on the other hand, it provides the 'integrated' no support or solid foundation to start their lives on, bar the lessons in the Dutch language and lessons on what Dutch society is like. This is one of the critical issues that the new civic integration policy of 2022 aims to tackle (I-4, 2021).

It can be concluded that those that really stand to benefit from the Dutch integration policy of 2013 were, in essence, few. The current policy is too rigid to help everyone and depends too much on the personal responsibility of those obliged to fulfil the civic integration process (I-1, 2021). Those that benefit most from the policy are those that, in essence, are content with their categorization as a refugee and are not aspiring to grow from that category.

As this research focussed on the institutional approach by investigating the civic integration policy, it can be concluded that there is evidence of institutionalised discrimination in Dutch integration policy. This research found evidence of institutionalised discrimination towards immigrants based on the categories of age, nationality, and level of education. Unfortunately, this issue is likely to continue as the new 2022 civic integration policy will continue to categorise immigrants based on these characteristics. Nevertheless, it will provide better support and a better foundation for those that are required to fulfil the civic integration process, as it will be more tailored to the immigrants' needs and capabilities. However, the remaining topic of concern is the categorization of people into who is required to fulfil the civic integration process and who is not.

Reflection and Limitations

This research contributes to the existing research on the Dutch integration policy and its effects on immigrants. The findings are in line with pre-existing literature and therefore demonstrate that there are negative implications for immigrants. As this research was concluded in early 2022 and investigates the Dutch civic integration policy of 2013 and its effects, further research could aim to investigate whether the new civic integration policy has brought significant improvements for immigrants. Other interesting, and perhaps more directly effective in the experience of immigrants, research related to this study could investigate the immigrants perspective or the rigidity of categories that determine who is required to fulfil civic integration.

This research was peer-reviewed by a fellow Bachelor Thesis writer, who provided feedback on the study during the research process. The feedback, in general, was positive, and the issues that were pointed out have been improved.

The main limitations of this research are due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it has been challenging to find willing participants for interviews. For that reason, this research was unable to get a clearer view from the immigrant's perspective on the research matter. In addition, it has been difficult to find cooperation for interviews from government agencies on integration as the subject could be regarded as compromising for the agencies. Other limiting factors are that this research was done for a Bachelors Thesis, where government agencies pointed out only working with Master's theses or dissertations. Therefore, the author has opted to shift the research to a combination of literature review and interviews with independent specialists on the research topic.

Further limitations were that most of the interviews had to be held through online mediums. Conducting interviews online hampers the ability to create a personal connection with the interviewee, which one could generally build up over the course of the interview. Regardless of limitations, all efforts have been made to fulfil this research in an academic manner.

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Appendix

Consent form

Research title: Categorization of (im)migrants in Dutch Policymaking: Implications for immigration in the Netherlands

The goal of this research is to find out what effect categorization in Dutch policymaking has on the discrimination of (im)migrants in the Netherlands. This interview will last approximately 35 to 40 minutes. At the start of the interview, the researcher will explain where the information given in the interviews will be used. The results from the interviews will be treated confidentially and anonymity, if so desired, will be ensured. The interviewee can choose to step out of this research at any point, even after the interview has been conducted, all data or knowledge gathered during the interview will be deleted and will not be used in this or further research. All data and knowledge gathered in this interview will be stored securely by the researcher and will be deleted after the research has been completed. If the interviewee has any remaining questions, even after the interview has been completed, the interviewer is able to answer any questions left regarding the subject/research, now or later in the course of the study.

Consent form for the research project ‘Categorization of (im)migrants in Dutch Policymaking: Implications for immigration in the Netherlands’.

I have read the information about the research project. I was able to ask questions and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I had enough time to decide to participate in the research.

My participation is completely voluntary. I can withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give a reason. I give my permission for using the interview data for the following purposes (*e.g. educational purposes*).

I agree to participate in this interview.

Name and signature of research participant. Date.

I declare that I have informed the research participant about the research. I will notify the participant about matters that could influence his/her participation in the research.

Name and signature of researcher. Date.

Interview guides

Interviews with practitioners/specialists

Introduction (5 min)

0. *Thanking for their time / ask about recording / explaining structure of the interview / introducing myself and my research / sign consent form*
1. Can you tell a little about yourself and your organisation/field of study?
 - a. What is your function within your organisation?
2. Can you tell me a bit about the projects you work on?

Dutch integration/immigration policymaking (15 min)

3. In what way are you involved in the development or implementation of integration/immigration policies in the Netherlands?
4. What are the goals of these policies that are important for your function?
5. What strategies are used to reach those goals or to come to a finalised policy?
6. What is your role in this process?

Categorization (10 min)

7. How is categorization used in policymaking?
8. How are the categories determined?
9. How does categorization benefit the (im)migrants?
10. Is there a connection between the categories made in policymaking and discrimination based on these categories?

Conclusion (5 min)

11. So, if I understood you correctly, ... (summarise the most important points)
12. Do you want to add anything else with regards to the interview?
13. Do you have any contacts that I should speak with for my research?
14. Is there something else you would like to mention?
15. *Thanks for the interview / Inform the interviewee about the rest of the process / ask if they would like to receive a final version of the thesis*

Exploratory interviews

Introduction (10 min)

1. *Thanking for their time / ask about recording / explaining structure of the interview / introducing myself and my research / sign consent form*
2. Can you tell a little about yourself and your organisation/field of study?
 - a. What is your function within your organisation?
3. Can you tell me a bit about the projects you work on?

Dutch immigration/integration policy

4. What are in your mind the most important aspects of immigration/integration policy?
5. How is determined which (im)migrants are 'wanted' or 'unwanted' in policymaking?
6. How are the categories in policymaking determined?
7. How does categorization benefit the (im)migrants?

Discrimination and exclusion

8. How can discrimination be measured?
9. Is there a specific group or category of (im)migrants that are discriminated against more than others?
10. Is there a connection between the categories made in policymaking (such as nationality, religion, gender, first language, etc.) and discrimination based on these categories?

Conclusion

11. So, if I understood you correctly, ... (summarise the most important points)
12. Do you want to add anything else with regards to the interview?
13. Do you have any contacts that I should speak with for my research?
14. Is there something else you would like to mention?
15. *Thanks for the interview / Inform the interviewee about the rest of the process / ask if they would like to receive a final version of the thesis*