



university of
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Towards Successful Integration of Migrants in Dutch Society

*A case study of non-EU migrants living in
Groningen*

Colophon

Title: Towards successful integration of migrants in Dutch society: a case study of non-EU migrants living in Groningen

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Date: 28-01-2022

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Word count: 6568

Abstract

Driven by the growing gap between migrants with a non-European background and the mainstream society of the European Union, this research aims to describe the key elements constituting successful integration into the Dutch society for non-EU migrants living in Groningen. The research is of societal relevance since societies promoting social integration are found to be better off than societies that do not in terms of social inequality and poverty. Two models found in existing academic literature were used to create a conceptual model consisting of the most important influencers on integration with facilities, daily life, foundation and the social connection as the main domains. After the conduction of 6 in-depth interviews with participants with a non-EU background residing in Groningen, it can be concluded that language is the most important constitutor for integration and should not be looked at independently, but as an overarching connecting factor. Location dependency was found to be of added value to the existing theories as it can have a stimulating or obstructing effect on the process of integration.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Be it due to the consequences of conflicts, improving socio-economic status, better education opportunities or global warming, all countries have migrants of some form. The concept 'migrant' is difficult in terms of terminology as this concept is often used interchangeably with the concept 'refugee' while there are crucial distinctions between them (Bates, 2002). International Organization for Migration (2019, p. 132) defined the concept 'migrant' as:

A person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

Migration today and in the past, is a continuous phenomenon that occurs all over the world at any time of the day. On the 1st of January 2020, the total number of people who were residing in a European Member State with citizenship of a non-member country was 23 million out of the 447.3 million, which represents 5.1% of the total European population (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2020).

Equally, in The Netherlands the number of migrants has been rising since 2008 with a total of 220.853 people who arrived in the year 2020 (CBS, 2021). In 2019, the municipality of Groningen was established as one of the 10 fastest growing municipalities in the Netherlands in absolute terms (CBS, 2020). As CBS (2020) stated, this growth can largely be explained by migrants moving into the municipality. In 2019, the province of Groningen consisted of 93.000 inhabitants with a migration background implying that 16% of the Groningen residents themselves, or their parents, were born abroad (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2020). In the municipality of Groningen this number was even higher namely 24% of the inhabitants having a migration background (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2020). On top of that, the percentage of non-western migrants, migrants whose origin group is one of the countries in the African, Latin-American and Asian continents (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey, has risen with 22% (Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, 2020). Thereby suspects the CBS (2020) that the population of Groningen will continue to rise until 2050 with 6.8% and with migration as an important factor influencing this.

An important part in the life of a migrant moving to a new country is the integration in the society of the receiving country. Integration enables the migrants to enjoy equal opportunities, rights, and services that the local community also has access to (Amparo Cruz-Saco, 2008). When discussing integration in Europe, a distinction can be made between EU migrants (migrants from within the European Union) and non-EU migrants (migrants from outside of the European Union). The degree of social inclusion differs across these immigrant groups as the integration for a non-EU migrant into the European society is more challenging than for an EU migrant (Wang and Naveed, 2019). For example, Muslim minorities are still not accepted as equal citizens as they are not seen as acquainted to the common identity beyond their religious practices (Mohiuddin, 2017).

Moreover, rather than the role of the state and the receiving societies integration in Europe is more and more seen as the responsibility of the migrant, where migrants face multiple obligations for them to integrate (Barbulescu, 2019). This can be seen in France, Italy, and The Netherlands, where migrants are required to sign an integration contract at their arrival (Barbulescu, 2019). In Groningen, status holders who want to build a new life in the city are obliged to integrate implying learning the Dutch language and culture and participating in society (Gemeente Groningen, 2021). The integration period of the migrants is 3 years after which their knowledge about language, knowledge about society, norms and values is tested with the integration exam. Those who pass the exam are officially integrated. However, can integration be expressed in the ability to pass an exam?

1.3 Societal and academic relevance

One of the most important and pressing challenges policy makers are facing, is the integration of migrants of which adequate data are essential to form the right integration policies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Data that can be found across the European Union indicate that there are still significant, multi-layered, and growing gaps between people with a non-European background and the mainstream society (European Commission, 2018). Simultaneously, failure to effectively realise the potential of people with a migrant background represents a substantial waste of resources, both for the people involved and more broadly for the EU economy and its society (European Commission, 2018).

The integration of migrants has been a hot topic in The Netherlands for a long time, especially over the last decade with the rise in the number of migrants coming into the country. The

discussions about the integration are often divergent in its tone ranging from prejudices to acceptance. These facts stress the importance of studying social integration since a good relationship between natives of the host-country and migrants can be proven to be extremely important (Martinovic, et al., 2009). For example, societies promoting social integration to diminish poverty and social inequality through inclusive policies are better off than societies that do not (Amparo Cruz-Saco, 2008). Moreover, Wang and Naveed (2019) found that social inclusion from non-EU migrants significantly reduces income inequality for the whole society and diminishes the pressure on public budgets. Many of the benefits of the integration of migrants have thus been established which makes researching integration relevant to society and academia.

1.2 Research problem and research aim

The reasons for gaps in the integration of non-EU migrants mostly relate to language barriers, unequal access to decent housing, employment, and social services, delayed education and mismatching jobs or overqualification in the case of highly educated migrants (European Commission, 2021). This together with the challenges policy makers face regarding integration policies formulates the research problem. Because of this and the benefits of successful integration stated above, social integration of non-EU migrants needs further investigation.

The aim for this research is to identify the main influencers of integration for non-EU migrants residing in Groningen and therefore the following research question is proposed: *“What are the key elements constituting successful integration into the Dutch society for non-EU migrants living in Groningen?”*. In this research, the attitudes, and feelings of non-EU migrants towards their integration in Dutch society are examined in relation to the location of the municipality of Groningen.

The study area of Groningen is chosen since it is home to many migrants which makes studying integration here, to strive for effectively using the potential of the people arriving and a more equal society, important. On top of that, prior research about integration of migrants in the Netherlands has mainly been focused in the middle and west of The Netherlands and less in the north and therefore this research adds to the existing literature. The research question is answered with the help of three sub-questions that consider peer-reviewed theories and in-depth interviews.

The sub questions are:

1. What are the most important influencers of integration in general?
2. To what extent do non-EU migrants feel integrated into the Dutch society?
3. To what extent do non-EU migrants feel it is possible to integrate into Dutch society?

1.4 Structure

This thesis is structured in the order of the research process. The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundation and discusses existing literature about integration. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual model that has been created for this research based on prior academic literature forming the base of the research. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology, data collection and analysis process. The collected data and empirical findings are presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses and summarizes the main findings and concludes the case study.

2. Theoretical framework

Prior to examining the integration into Dutch society of non-EU migrants residing in Groningen, it is important to understand this phenomenon and to conceptualize what effects integration in general and in what way. Using various existing academic sources, insight into a variety of theories and perspectives about the influencers of integration is provided and discussed which substantiates the research. After the identification of the key elements that play a role in the integration process, a link with Groningen is made to create an interesting and relevant case study. The research question proposed in the introduction is answered by analysing the results of the qualitative data collection using the literature discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Integration

As the number of migrants has been increasing over the last years, the public discussion on the topic of integration has become increasingly significant too. However, the concept of integration is used widely and has many definitions and interpretations, varying significantly by national context, leading to differences in integration practices and policies (Hübschmann, 2015). Understood in the broadest sense, “migrant integration is a multi-layered, complex process of becoming part of society” (Hübschmann, 2015, p. 4). In this research the concept of

integration is described as a process consisting of multiple elements contributing to it to be successful or not.

2.2 Three dimensions of integration

Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015, p. 14) defined the concept of integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society”. This definition emphasizes, again, integration being a process and does not specify the degree or requirements for acceptance by the receiving society making it highly useful for studying this process in an empirical way. Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) stated that integration encompasses three distinct dimensions, seen in figure 1, in which migrants may (or may not) become an accepted part of the host society; (I) the Legal-Political Dimension, referring to the degree of integration with two extreme poles. On the one side the position of the migrant who has become a national citizen and on the other side the position of the migrant being irregular and not part of the host society (yet). Factors influencing the position of the migrant in this Dimension are, among other things, residence statuses and political rights.

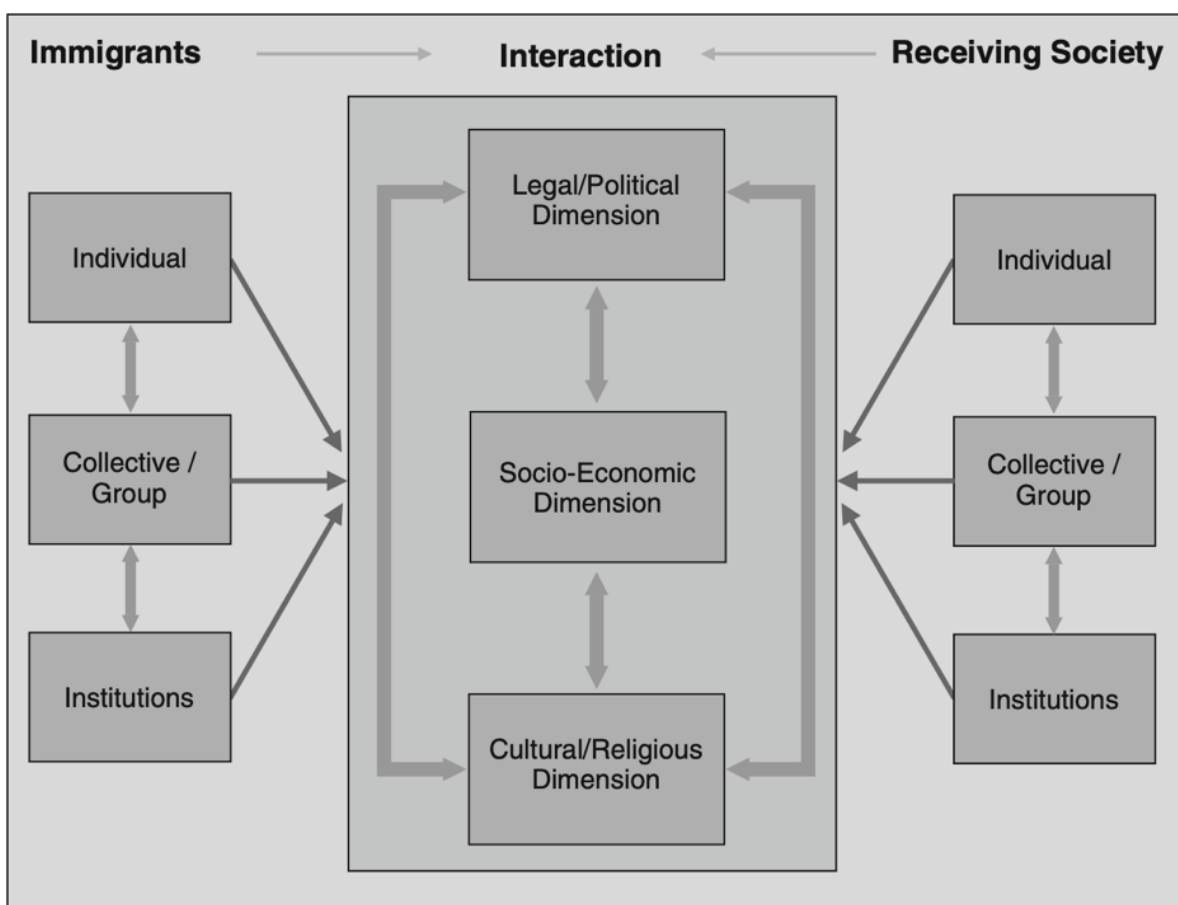


Figure 1: A heuristic model for the empirical study of integration processes (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2015, p. 16)

(II) The Socio-Economic Dimension, referring to the economic and social position of the migrant, irrespective of their national citizenship. This Dimension includes access to facilities such as employment, education, housing and health care compared to that of natives. Finally, (III) the Cultural-Religious Dimension, pertaining the perceptions and practices of the receiving society and migrants including the mutual reaction and acceptance to religious and cultural diversity and differences.

According to Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas there are two main parties involved in the process of integration namely the receiving society and the migrants themselves. This with the receiving society as the far more decisive party in the process due to its power, resources, institutional structure, and reaction to newcomers. The three dimensions and involved parties have been merged in the heuristic model by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas which together give an overview on the process of integration.

2.3 Core domains of integration

Since there are various perspectives on the definition of the concept of integration this research will also look at- and include the theory of Ager and Strang (2008). They too created a conceptual model, seen in figure 2, on the core domains of integration.

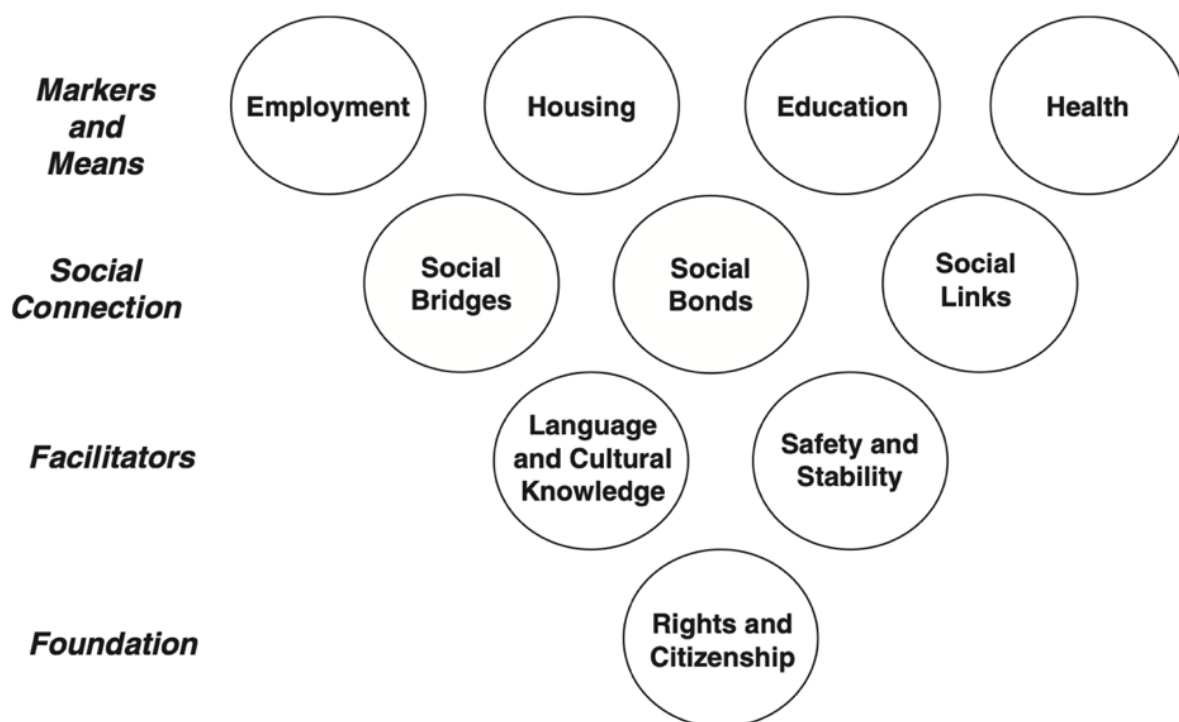


Figure 2: A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager and Strang, 2008, p. 170)

The conceptual model consists of the following domains which according to them define integration: (I) Markers and Means, consisting of Employment, Housing, Education and Health which are important tools in integrating in society. Employment naturally leads to interaction with the native people and helps with learning the language and on top of that is a chance in supporting oneself and building a future as well as gaining confidence and self-esteem (Bloch, 1999). Equally, education is a powerful instrument in the process of integration and adaptation as it is beneficial for the personal development of the immigrant and can offer higher chances to contribute to the host society and consequently participate in the labour market (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2001). Finally, the ability of feeling “at home”, resulting in increased partaking in society, can be established by proper housing as it improves physical and mental health (Ager and Strang, 2008).

(II) Social Connection, which is seen as another fundamental domain in achieving successful integration. Most important at the local level where residents define social connection as the ultimate defining feature of a community being integrated (Ager and Strang, 2008). Integration described by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2001) is a ‘two-way’ process referring to the mutual accommodation of the migrant as well as the host society. Additionally, the sense of ‘belonging’ involving family ties, shared values, committed friendships and the feeling of respect were found to be the fundamental elements in an integrated community (Ager & Strang, 2008).

(III) Facilitators, which contains Language and Cultural Knowledge and Safety and Stability. The absence of the native language of the host country could be seen as a barrier to full participation in society, social interaction, and economic incorporation, as learning the language is seen as the central element in achieving integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). The migrants could experience learning the national language of their new country as an enrichment of their identity however, it could also be felt as losing their existing identity and the fear to losing their “sense of belonging” (Beacco, et al., 2017). Similarly, is the concept of culture, described as a general sense of “the way of life” shared by a certain group of people consisting of music, food, beliefs, traditions, architecture, art and institutions (Lacroix, 2010). Culture can promote the mutual understanding of “common values” which can strengthen the relationship between the migrants and the host country (Lacroix, 2010). Comparably are the national rules and habits, for example shaking hands to introduce yourself, self-evident for someone born in The Netherlands yet perchance unfamiliar for someone else.

And finally (IV) Foundation, consisting of Citizenship and the Rights that come with being an official citizen which are seen as pillars of an 'integrated' community. Human dignity, justice, security, independence, freedom of cultural choice and equality are rights that can be considered essential for migrants to feel part of society due to the feeling of being equal to the host society (Ager and Strang, 2008). For example, according to Favell (1998), full citizenship, with its rights and responsibilities, has been seen as a crucial precondition to integration in France.

3. Conceptual framework

The theories of Ager and Strang (2008) and Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) are relatively comparable when looking at the two models. The Legal-Political Dimension overlapping with the Foundation Domain, the Socio-Economic Dimension with the Markers and Means Domain and the Cultural-Religious Dimension with the Facilitators Domain. To combine both models into one, The Social Connection Domain of Ager and Strang (2008) has been replaced by the Interaction between the Migrants and Receiving Society of the model by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) as they found the interaction between the two involved parties to be the most important influencer on integration in terms of the role of people. This results in the conceptual framework created for this research, seen in figure 3 below, covering all the elements influencing integration in society found in the literature in order to answer the research question.

The model consists of the four domains; Foundation, Social Connection, Facilities, and Daily Life, which have been derived from the existing theories of Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) and Ager and Strang (2008). In this research, these four domains are seen as the main influencers on the process of integration and consist of multiple appurtenant elements. For example, the domain of Facilities can have a negative or positive effect on the process of integration depending on the availability or unavailability to proper Housing, Education, Employment, and Health Care. The 11 elements thus influence the corresponding domain which simultaneously influences the process of integration.

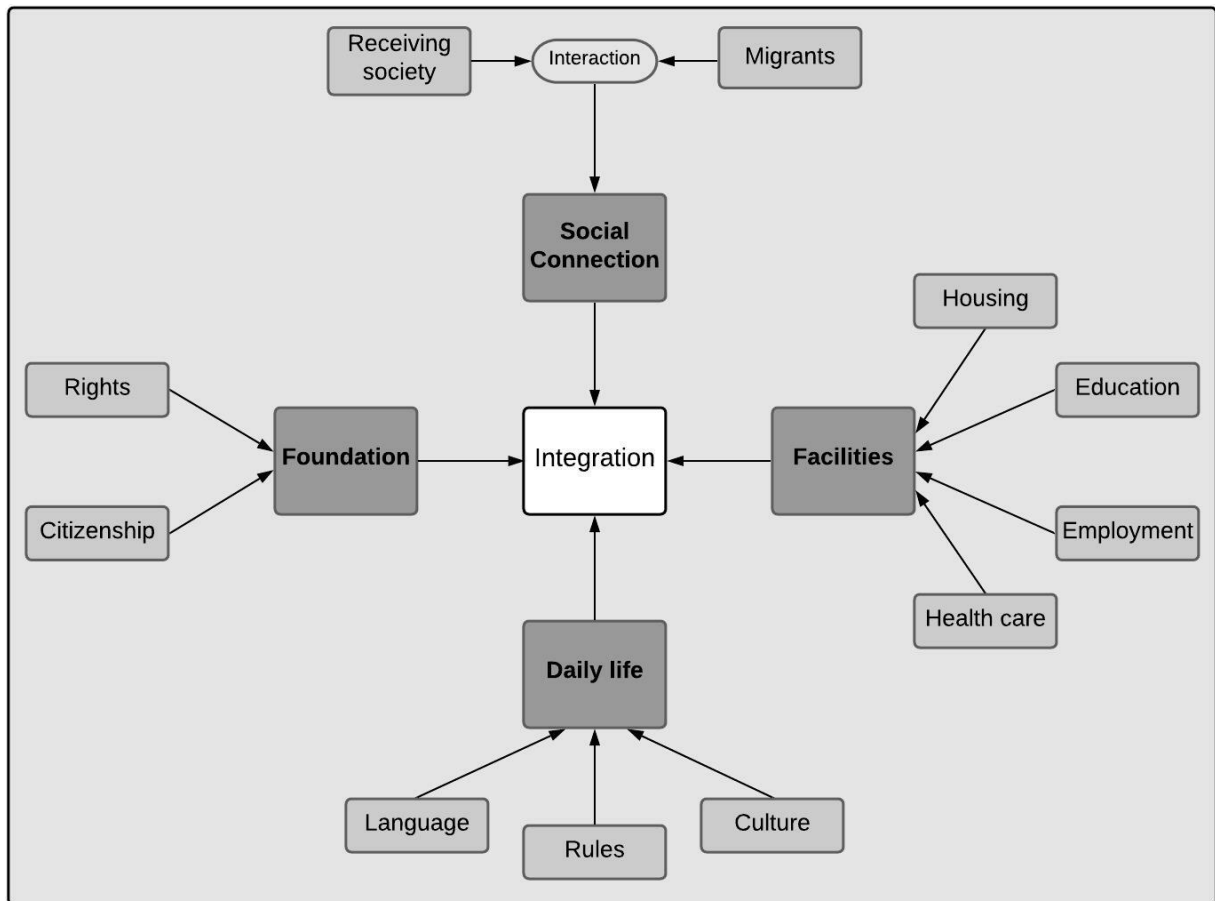


Figure 3: Conceptual Model Key Elements Integration (Source: author)

In this research the focus will be on these four domains to find out how and to what extent they have an influence on the process of integration and to see which of the elements contribute the most according to the migrants living in Groningen. By comparing the answers of the participants in this research with the created conceptual model an answer to the formulated research question can be given.

3.1 Expectations

The expectations for the research questions will be that the migrants experience the elements of the four key domains: Social Connection, Facilities, Foundation, and Daily Life to be the pronounced constitutors to successful integration in the Dutch society since this was concluded in the existing literature.

4. Methodology

Within this chapter an elaboration on the data-gathering will be given together with the ethical considerations that come with it. The right paradigm in answering the central research question was found to be interpretative. Since “integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167) the interpretative paradigm, striving for understanding social phenomena in its context and through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016), is the most suitable. The interpretative paradigm also emphasises the socially constructed multiple realities where individuals interact with other individuals and assign meaning to different social phenomena (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). The interpretative paradigm does not rely upon numerical data but makes use of methods generating qualitative data such as in-depth interviews (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable method to gather data and to answer the research question.

4.1 Data collection

The data of the research was collected by using open ended semi-structured interviews as this way of interviewing seeks to achieve active involvement of the participants in the construction of data about their lives (Punch, 2014). An interview guide, seen in appendix 8.1, was constructed to guarantee that the same fundamental lines of inquiry are pursued with each participant interviewed (Patton, 2002). The evidence gathered from the academic literature provided sufficient background knowledge to set up the interview guide covering the most relevant information needed to answer the research question. By creating an interview guide with open ended questions, the participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions in a detailed way. The guide is essential since it keeps the conversation focused on the relevant topic while it also allows for individual experiences and perspectives to emerge (Patton, 2002).

The participants were recruited using Facebook groups such as “Internationals in Groningen” where a message was posted explaining the research and its purpose and which asked for people, originating from a non-EU country and living in Groningen, who wanted to participate in the interviews. After the first two interviews the snowball sampling approach was used, a method that is applied when subjects with the target characteristics are difficult to find and

therefore the acquaintances of the existing study subjects are recruited (Naderifar, et al., 2017), which eventually led to a total of 6 subjects.

4.2 Data analysis

The in-depth interviews with the focus-group were held online via “Googlemeet”. The recordings were made by using the Dictaphone app on a phone with a personal code to secure the privacy. Subsequently, the recorded interviews were transcribed into text with the help of the transcription software Otter.ai.

For analysing the data, the method of coding was applied. In qualitative research, such as in-depth interviews, coding is central as it discovers regularities between the data (Punch, 2014). Coding is the process of labelling and naming the data to identify patterns and sort the data into themes (Punch, 2014). A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used to analyse the data. First a theory-driven (deductive) code tree, appendix 8.2, was created including the four main themes of the interviews: Facilities, Daily Life, Foundation and Social Connection. During the manual process of coding, the data-driven (inductive) codes were identified and categorized within the right theme. In this way the data of the 6 interviews could be compared in terms of similarities and differences. The statements and quotes mentioned by the participants relevant to the research, were transferred into another document and are described in chapter 5.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Since in this qualitative research personal data of participants is collected it involves ethical issues. Prior to the interviews the participants were sent a consent form, appendix 8.3, to inform them about their rights. Moreover, they were formally asked if they agreed with the interview being recorded. Furthermore, it was stressed that the gathered data would be processed completely confidential, and names are not mentioned so the privacy rights are not violated.

4.3.1 Positionality

As a young, western, Dutch female it is critical to reflect on the positionality of my role as researcher in relation to the participants who all originate from a country outside the European Union. As I do not have experience with any form of integration, I consider myself an outsider.

From this position it is therefore important to be transparent and honest about the research and to make the participants not feeling offended or labelled, as migration can be a sensitive topic. It was aimed to do the interview in an informal environment to make the participants feel comfortable and more willing to share their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, prior to the interview an introduction with some personal information, the purpose of the research and the value of the in-depth interview was given to show the research objectives and aims.

5. Results

Within this chapter the results of the qualitative research are summarized by discussing the findings of the interviews in relation to the existing literature. The results are divided into four different sections reflecting the 4 main components of the conceptual framework. In figure 4 the characteristics of the participants involved of the research are noted:

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Educational level	Nationality	Residence time
Interviewee 1	Female	39	University	Venezuela	3 years
Interviewee 2	Male	30	University	Pakistan	2,5 years
Interviewee 3	Female	49	University	Venezuela	6 years
Interviewee 4	Male	33	University	Pakistan	3 months
Interviewee 5	Male	36	University	Nigeria	5 years
Interviewee 6	Male	29	University	Indonesia	2 years

Table 1: overview interviewees (author)

5.1 Facilities

Firstly, the facilities were analysed by asking the participants about employment, health care, housing, and education since access to- and participation in these domains are crucial for any resident (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2015). Employment was mentioned as the most important facilitator to integrate according to the participants.

“Employment is the most important element to become integrated because you not only integrate in society but also integrate in the space – interviewee 1”

“I believe that when you work, you can actually get into the ‘street knowledge’, which is really important for integration at any place” – interviewee 4

Referring to street knowledge as the knowledge you gain by doing instead of learning. Higher education, recognition of qualifications, social skills and language skills play an important role in the labour market success of migrants (van de Ven and Voitchovsky, 2015). If employers base their recruitment on prejudiced perceptions or stereotypes this could have negative consequences for individual migrants (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2015). This is in line with the statements by the interviewees mentioning the rejection on multiple jobs, despite being higher qualified than some of their competitors, due to the language barrier or their background.

“I feel a little bit of discrimination. When I apply for a job, you know, I can be more overqualified than my competitors. And yeah, they still always say no and I am rejected. So there has to be something going on with cultural background.” – interviewee 3

Interestingly, two of the interviewees will soon move to the bigger cities of Utrecht and Rotterdam respectively as they state the access to the labour market is easier there. The given reasons for this were the higher supply in international companies and the feeling of more equal opportunities as the employers are less conservative and traditional than the people living in Groningen. This stresses the dependence of location on the process of integration.

One of the first necessities of migrants arriving in the new place of residence is the access to shelter. The availability of housing is considered a fundamental aspect of quality of life and serves as an indicator for the status in the integration process of the migrants in the receiving country (Meier, 2013). Remarkably, all the participants mentioned the difficulty to find housing when they arrived as they felt they were treated differently than the natives. A distinction could be made between the participants who already had a social connection, a partner or a friend, with whom they were going to live, and the participants that did not. The individual moves all experienced difficulties and were seen as negatively impeding the integration process.

“The realtors here are not really proactive, and the client has to do the work. Also, the market is really unfriendly, and landlords take advantage of internationals who have to pay more. The houses are not a match with the price you pay.” – interviewee 6

Education provides contact with the local communities and thus plays a significant role in establishing relationships supportive of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). The given answers confirm this as the participants mention the opportunity to get in touch with the Dutch more easily at university than anywhere else.

"The university is the place where I don't feel like an outsider. This also allowed me to mingle with the native people more easily at the beginning" – interviewee 5

However, in contrast to existing literature the health care accessibility was positively experienced, but was not seen as an indicator for integration but rather a necessity in life.

5.2 Daily life

Secondly, the daily life of the migrants was discussed with language, rules and culture as the main elements. Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2015) described the reactions to the cultural diversity as two extremes. With on the one hand the rejection of cultural diversity by the host society forcing migrants into mono-cultural societies and on the other hand the complete acceptance of different identities and cultures by the host society. Interestingly, both extremes were equally experienced by the participants. Where one of the participants said they felt completely recognised the other mentioned the feeling of never being accepted completely.

"That is just like in the back of my head, I will never be accepted and never going to be integrated." - Interviewee 4

Central to the integration process is the ability to speak the native language of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Correspondingly, the interviewees were unanimous about this; learning the native language is the most essential element of integration. However, learning the language was not perceived as very easy as it was declared that the price of the language courses is very high. This not only demotivates people to learn the language but also creates a difference in the level of integration between the higher and lower social class.

"I believe that if I'm living in a culture for a certain time, and I don't learn the language, it's really impolite to that culture." – interviewee 4

In the research of Van Tubergen (2006) it was found that migrants who did not speak the Dutch language well, were not economically and culturally integrated in the Dutch society. Which was confirmed by interviewee 6.

“If I really want to get integrated in the culture, I am forced to learn the basic of Dutch, so I can find my way in society.” – interviewee 6

Nevertheless, here again location dependency was mentioned by the interviewees in relation to the importance of speaking the Dutch language. It was mentioned that in the bigger cities, such as Amsterdam, people who do not speak Dutch are more accepted than in Groningen (or more generally speaking, in the north) as the cities are more internationally oriented. This was another reason for two of the interviewees to move west.

The rules in Dutch society were, in contrast to the literature, not seen as important to the integration process. The rules were seen as way to keep the society organised and in order but not as an influencer.

5.3 Foundation

Thirdly the foundation with the rights and citizenship as the two most important elements was discussed with the participants. The legal-political dimension described by Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2015) consists of two extreme poles of which one is a migrant being not part of the host society in the legal-political sense and the other a migrant who is a national citizen. Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2015) mention that this dimension is independent of the other two dimensions which is similar to the answers given by the participants in this research. It was mentioned by the participants that the official Dutch citizenship for them was not part of the feeling of being integrated which is in contrast with Ager and Strang (2008) who state full citizenship as an essential prerequisite for integration.

“Integration and becoming a citizen are two separate things. I can be in a society and be integrated while I am no citizen there. So I think citizenship may not be necessary for integration at all.” – interviewee 4

“To me it is more a legal formality. It’s only going to be important to have a passport, and to travel freely.” – interviewee 3

One of the interviewees did mention that to him the citizenship is of importance for his own personal process of integration as it provided him with more rights compared to not having the Dutch citizenship. Electoral rights can provide migrants with political representation in decisions that affect their most immediate interest, particularly at the local level (Guild and Groenendijk, 2009).

“If I am talking and I have opinions, but you know, at the end of the day I cannot vote, what is the point then..” – interviewee 2

5.4 Social connection

Finally the social connection of the migrants in relation to the receiving society was discussed. Ager and Strang (2008) mention the feeling of ‘belonging’ as the most important aspect of living in an integrated society which can be achieved through social connections. Although the participants all agreed that social connection with the host society is extremely important in feeling integrated, there was a big difference in the way each participant was socially connected. Half of the participants only had social connections within the same ethnic group and felt the Dutch were not open to connect with. Contrarily, the other half of the participants did have social connections with the native and were positive about the attitudes of the Dutch towards them. This difference was explained by one of the interviewees as the result of the life prior to arriving in the Netherlands in terms of education and the exposure to international environments.

“I’ve been brought up in a family that was educated and exposed to other cultures and environments as we travelled a lot. So, for me, it was not a big shock. But I think for a lot of people who come from more traditional or less educated families, they would find it quite hard get along with people and to integrate.” – interviewee 4

Most of the participants mentioned the fact that the social circles of the Dutch are hard to enter as the people are closed, direct, straightforward, individualistic, and not very trustful. One of the participants even felt mentally affected by the attitudes of the Dutch and therefore felt that integration was impossible. Studies on international migration have shown that migrant integration at the socio-economic, psychological and cultural levels indeed have significant effects on mental health (Yue, et al., 2015).

“I just don't have high expectations that I will definitely, you know, be one of them. There is no hope.” – interviewee 3

5.4.1 Interaction

Interestingly to see were the statements about the interaction between the two main parties involved in integration, the migrants and the receiving society. This interaction was described to be of great importance for the process of integration by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) which was confirmed by all 6 of the participants. The statements expressed the importance of the share of migrants as well as the receiving society in the interaction to achieve social integration.

“Integration really depends on the individual itself. I mean, if I am an introvert by nature, then I am not opening myself to talk to people, so I mean, obviously no one is coming to talk to me. If I am an extrovert and I can talk to people, I can just go and have a communication.” – interviewee 2

“Integration is like a two-way street; it just can't be one way. Both parties have to meet in the middle.” – interviewee 5

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the integration of non-EU migrants living in Groningen and identifying the key elements influencing this. Comparing the results of the interviews with the research of Ager and Strang (2008) and Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2015) it was found that this research can be of added value to the two existing models.

First, the most significant finding in this research was the importance of language which was mentioned as the most vital element of integration by all the interviewees. However, it was found that language is interrelated with many of the other elements in the conceptual model and cannot be seen separately. For example, the importance of learning the language is not only important in communication but is also of great importance in the access to the labour market and even in finding proper housing. Therefore, language can be seen as the overarching, connecting and most influential factor in the process of integration. This suggests an adaptation in the created conceptual model. Namely, instead of language being an element influencing

the daily life it should be one of the main domains simultaneously influencing the other elements. Moreover, due to the importance of this finding, a policy recommendation can be made which suggests the provision of more accessible and cheaper language courses which will stimulate the migrants in learning the Dutch language and thus stimulates the integration process.

Secondly, in line with the existing literature, the elements education, employment, housing, culture and interaction between the migrants and receiving society, were indeed perceived by the participants as important determinants in the process of integration. However, health care was seen as a necessity to life in general, rules were seen as keeping the society safe and citizenship was described as a legal formality and opportunity to travel freely. All three were mentioned as not important to the integration process.

Finally, location dependency, absent in the existing literature, was also mentioned multiple times as something that is of significant value to the process of integration. Big cities with many multinationals and more internationals were seen by the migrants as places where integration was easier to accomplish compared to the smaller more traditional villages located in the north of the Netherlands. This is therefore also the reason that two of the interviewees decided to move out of Groningen to the west of The Netherlands to find more compatible jobs and easier social connections with other people. This is therefore a reason to include location dependency in research about integration.

To conclude, the research question: *What are the key elements constituting successful integration into the Dutch society for non-EU migrants living in Groningen?* cannot be established with one definite answer. Integration must be seen as a complex process with multiple elements influencing it and which is experienced differently by everyone. The in-depth interviews helped gain a wider view of what could be hindering or promoting integration according to 6 non-EU migrants living in Groningen. Besides the additional finding of integration being location dependent, the most pronounced factors influencing integration were identified to be employment, the interaction between the migrants and the host society but most of all the language.

6.1 Reflection

Despite thoughtful consideration about the topic, methodology and data collection strategy, the research consists of a few limitations. First, due to the restricted time for the research and the difficulty of finding suitable participants the total number of interviews is limited which gives a smaller dataset than desired. Moreover, the interviewees participating in the research were all highly educated. This can be seen as sampling bias and is therefore not representative for the population. Additionally, due to COVID-19 the situation of the last 2 years is significantly different than in the past which can lead to different results than if the research was done prior to COVID-19 due to the influence of the restrictions on the process of integration. This also decreases the representativity. Moreover, the analysis of the interviews is in some way intuitive and does not follow strict scientific rules such as in quantitative research. The small dataset of only 6 interviewees, the sampling bias, the pandemic with its restrictions and the way of analysing the data therefore does complicate the ability to draw conclusions.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

After finishing the research, a few recommendations for future research can be established. In future research it is recommended to interview people with different educational backgrounds as this is more representative to the population. Also, the history of the life of the migrant is important to consider. There was a noticeable difference between the level of integration of migrants who travelled the world and went to international schools and migrants who did not have a multi-culture past. This difference might be interesting to further investigate in future research.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Interview guide

Interview guide

Introduction

0. Thanking for participating, ask about the consent form and the agreement of the recording, introducing myself, explain the purpose of the interview
1. Could you tell something about yourself?
 - a. Age, family, education, where are you from?
2. How long have you been in the Netherlands?
3. What prompted your choice to come to the Netherlands?

Questions about the facilities

1. Where do you live?
2. Was it easy for you to find a house?
 - a. Do you feel there are differences between migrants and natives in the access to housing?
3. How do you feel about the Dutch hospitality?
4. Do you currently have a job?
 - a. If yes, what is it?
 - b. if no continue with the questions about education*
5. Was it easy for you to find a job?
6. What do you think about the job opportunities in the Netherlands?
7. Do mostly internationals or native Dutch people work there?
8. Do you currently study in the Netherlands?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. what do you study?
 - ii. What do you think about the opportunities non-Dutch get within the university?
 - iii. How do you feel about the ability to integrate within the university?
 - b. If no continue
9. What about the health care availabilities? Is this easily accessible for you?
10. Looking at the discussed facilities, housing, education, employment, and health care. Which to you is the most important in integrating yourself?
 - a. Why?

Questions about the daily life

1. What do you think about the native Dutch culture?
2. In your opinion, what characterizes Dutch culture?
3. Do you feel you can easily join the Dutch traditions?
4. What, if anything, appreciates and bothers you in the Dutch culture?
 - a. Do you think there are many rules?
5. What do you think about the culture in relation with integration?
6. Do you feel it is essential to learn the Dutch language?
7. Are you currently learning the Dutch language?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. Do you find the Dutch language is complicated to learn?
 - c. Is there enough help to learn the Dutch language?

8. What to you is the most important element in integrating yourself about the daily life?

Questions about the foundation

1. Are you officially a "Dutch citizen?" (Dutch passport)
 - a. If yes continue at *
 - b. If no: are you interested in becoming one?
2. *Since when have you officially been a Dutch citizen?
3. How did you experience the process of becoming a "Dutch citizen?"
4. Do you feel the citizenship is important for the integration process?
5. Do you think there is enough help to get integrated in the Netherlands?
 - a. Government?
 - b. Other people?
6. Do you feel you have equal rights compared to the native Dutch? Why?

Questions about the social connection

1. Could you please describe your social life?
2. What kind of activities do you do in your daily life and with who?
3. Are most of your contacts in the Netherlands native Dutch or people with a different background?
4. How important are social connections for the integration process?
5. How would you describe the attitude of the native Dutch is towards new people?
 - a. How do you experience the attitudes are of the Dutch towards integrating yourself?
6. How do you think the native Dutch perceive your culture?
 - a. Do you feel they are open minded and interested in learning something of another culture?
7. Do you feel integration is more dependent on the migrants or the receiving society? Why?

Closing questions

1. How do you overall feel about the ability to become integrated in the Dutch society?
2. What to you are the most important elements in becoming integrated in the Dutch society?
3. What are things that hold back the process of social integration in the Netherlands?

Conclusion

- Thanking for the interview and their time
- Asking if they want me to share the finished thesis

8.2 Code Tree

Integration													
Facilities						Daily life			Foundation		Social connection		
Housing	Education	Employment	Health care	Language	Culture	Rules	Rights	Citizenship	Migrants	Receiving society	Interaction		
Very hard	Very good	Very difficult to find a job	Easily accessible	Very essential	Open culture	Too many rules	Never felt any difference	More opportunities	Limited contact with Dutch	Very closed	Two-way street		
Competitive	Same opportunities as Dutch	Overqualified	Well arranged	Area dependent	Freedom to move and speak	Need to follow the rules	Same rights	Opens future doors	No Dutch friends	Not open	Meet in the middle		
Expensive	Good to have local degree	Discrimination	Easy access to the covid vaccination	More accepted	Dutch music and television	Safe society		Satisfaction	Waiting	Direct/straight forward	Respect each other		
Unfriendly market	Easier to integrate	For socializing	Very careful	Complicated	Sinterklaas	Keeps society in order		Voting rights/politics	Don't get anything for free	Distant	Area dependent		
Landlord taking advantage of internationals	Internationals and Dutch	More difficult in the North		Scare of talking Dutch	Traditions	Organised		A lot of information	Motivation	Wall around them			
Limited renting time		Location dependent		Expensive	Punctuality	Everybody follows the law		Only a legal formality	Must be acceptive	Driven/disciplined			
		Street knowledge		Polite to learn	Toughness			Travelling	Background	Difference between people			
		Working permit		Crucial to learn				Does not mean the Dutch will accept you	Educational level	Always choose the Dutch			
		Moving away						Integration and becoming a citizen two different things	Need to learn	Hard to approach			
									Make effort	Open for discussion			

8.3 Informed Consent



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 groningen

faculty of spatial sciences

INFORMED CONSENT

“TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IN DUTCH SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF NON-EU MIGRANTS LIVING IN GRONINGEN”

I have read the information about the research. I can e-mail the principal investigator if I have questions about the study (m.m.olland@student.rug.nl).

I understand what the research is about, what is being asked of me, which consequences participation can have, how my data will be handled, and what my rights are.

I understand that participation in the research is voluntary. I myself choose to participate. I am aware of the fact that my data will be handled anonymously. I can stop participating at any moment. If I stop, I do not need to explain why. Stopping will have no negative consequences for me.

Below I indicate what I am consenting to.

Consent to voluntarily participate in the research:

Yes, I consent to voluntarily participate.

No, I do not consent to voluntarily participate.

Consent to processing personal data anonymously:

Yes, I consent to the processing of my personal data, anonymously, as mentioned in the research information. I know that I can ask to have my data withdrawn and erased. I can also ask for this if I decide to stop participating in the research.

No, I do not consent to the processing of my personal data.

Consent to refusing answering questions:

Yes, I consent to refusing answering questions without any consequences in the case that I do not feel comfortable answering the question.

No, I do not consent.

Consent to record the interview:

Yes, I consent to the recording of the interview.

No, I do not consent to the recording of the interview.

Signature of participant

Date

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