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The Elusiveness of Governing Migrant Integration: Why putting complexity in boxes does not work

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Conclusions

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Understanding the Elusiveness of Governing Migrant Integration

Immigrant integration is a complex social problem, which has attained much attention in public and political discussions (Entzinger, 2006; Koopmans, 2013; Goodman, 2010). In the Netherlands, we have witnessed a policy change towards a stricter and more aggressive approach to influence behavior of migrants (Joppke, 2007). As in many other European countries, this policy change is accompanied with a harshened tone regarding migrants, and a strong rhetoric by both right-wing parties and mainstream parties - that connect integration policies to the broader concern regarding the preservation of national identity and social cohesion in Dutch society (ibid). In order to encounter integration of immigrants, governments – both on a national and local level – attempt to intervene in the behavior of migrants, using a simplified narrative that exudes the belief in government steering by command and control. New migrants are, for example, obligated to pass civic integration courses, in which the content is focused on explaining Dutch history and prevailing norms and values in society that one needs to respect and adopt. Moreover, many politicians have attempted to impose policy interventions that are also intended for 'old' migrants and their children – as a way of forcing acceptance of the Dutch culture and loyalty to the new society.

This thesis has shown how local governing actors – working on different levels - are struggling with the complex nature of immigrant integration. Furthermore it has revealed how and why this struggle is in contrast with the narrative that integration can be linearly influenced by harsher policies.

The research question addressed in this thesis is:

How do local governing actors make sense of and respond to migration-related diversity and how can these responses be explained?

The research question breaks down in the following four sub-questions, that will be answered in this section. The cumulative answers to these four sub-questions form the answer to the main research question:

- What effect do series of bureaucratic contact have on the integration of immigrants in the Netherlands? (RQ1)
- Under what conditions are street-level bureaucrats working with immigrants likely to transcend the boundaries of their discretionary space in order to deal with the dilemmas in their work? (RQ2)
- How can we understand the varying uses of social media for interethnic contact by second-generation migrant youth's motivations of social media use? (RQ3)

- How and why do cities manage their identity through place branding – in the face of migration-related diversity? (RQ4)

6.1.1 What effect do series of bureaucratic contact have on migrant integration? (RQ1)

Chapter 2 has shown how bureaucratic contacts between migrants and governments take place – on a macro level - in a chain of reinforcing or dampening feedback loops that eventually influence the attitude and willingness of migrants to comply and adapt to Dutch society. The major variation in pathways of migrants is the result of the cumulative effects of all these feedback loops, which are shaped in a specific context within specific local conditions. The successful integration of migrants is hence not merely a result of one single and isolated interaction with the government or a certain policy intervention that migrants “undergo”; rather it is strongly connected to a full range of interactions distributed over a long period of time in which different governments – from the local health agency to the municipality and the Refugee Centre or Education Centre for integration - all *can* play a distinctive role. By reconstructing the mental models of migrants, we got a better understanding of how these different bureaucratic encounters work and how they impact on immigrant integration. Moreover, I found that these different encounters come together differently in almost every story, because each pathway may exist of a combination of encounters, with different consequences and different specific local conditions. As a result, integration policies are followed by both expected and surprising, favorable and unfavorable outcomes.

Nevertheless, there were some pathways that were perhaps more typical and illustrate how governmental responses do follow a certain “policy line” that is typical for its period. We saw for example that “older” migrants – who migrated in the ‘70s and ‘80s – experienced far less bureaucratic contact during their arrival and in the first years of settlement. When the municipality contacted them in recent years about obligated integration courses to learn the Dutch language, many of these migrants felt resentment and were not willing to comply by content. Furthermore, we also saw several stories of migrants who were eager to learn the Dutch language, but were pressured by governmental officers – working at the Refugee Centre or at the municipality – to prioritize finding a job instead. (Integration) policies relevant at that time, focused merely on participation on the labor market. While these incidents are not isolated from a broader context of more bureaucratic encounters, this tendency to focus on ‘jobs’ first instead of ‘learning the language’ - did as well brought about a lot resistance from migrants later on in their lives. On the other hand, we saw how individual attention and notice of migrants by street-level bureaucrats who were willing to go the extra mile for particular migrants, was always a major impact on the motivation and hence the willingness of migrants to participate in society. In particular, the first years in which migrants arrive and settle in the country of destination – what we previously called

“reset-phase” - was an important moment for the further steps that people took on their pathway, as this time was often used as a measure to evaluate obligations that follow from more recent integration policies.

6.1.2 Under what conditions are SLB likely to transcend their discretionary power to deal with the dilemmas of their work? (RQ2)

On a micro-level, it were the street-level bureaucrats – who are actually responding to migrants in their day-to-day confrontations. In doing so they can have a distinctive impact on the lives of their clients – especially in terms of their motivation and willingness to comply to integration rulings and adaptation to Dutch society. Sub-question 2 hence focused on decision-making by street-level workers who frequently work with migrants, as presented in chapter 3. The chapter showed the complexity of such decision-making by street-level workers, who on the one hand are deemed to obey the uniform rulings from integration policies, but on the other hand see the diversity of migrant’ stories. These workers are hence constantly confronted with all kinds of dilemmas: should I strictly follow the rules or is there any discretionary room to take in account the personal distress of migrants which is blocking their compliance? Where does the responsibility of me as a government-worker begins and stops? And what if the policies that I am implementing are evidently having undesirable effects or do not fit the reality of immigrant’s lives and become unfair or unrealistic? Do I still implement the rules? The competing demands press heavily on the shoulders of street-level workers, who are in general reluctant to deviate from existing policy rulings, but are actually willing to do so under specific conditions. Despite organizational restrictions, workers would increase their discretionary power or reject policy rules in the case of motivated clients, who were going through difficult circumstances in their personal lives. However, this was only the case when the perceived policy rulings would be judged by the street-level workers as unfair and unpractical. This combination of conditions were important in explaining how street-level workers *respond*, while at the same time these patterns were further complicated by the fact that workers are constantly rethinking and revising their role, tasks and responsibilities – as their experiences and the dynamic political context are no given fact. What do we hence learn from this in terms of government steering of migration-related diversity?

Firstly, it downplays again the idea of a ‘one-size-fits-all’-approach to control how migrants adapt to Dutch society. Policies are eventually implemented by street-level workers, who have some extent of discretionary power – which in practice means that many different choices are being made by these workers, for each individual case that is presented to them. These street-level workers represent the “face” of the Dutch government – and interact with migrants directly, sometimes strictly implementing policies, sometimes expanding their formal job descriptions by going the extra mile for a client, and sometimes

deliberately breaking the policy rules. In addition, the study reveals that in a context of a complex, politically laden and changeable approach to migration integration, the application of these policies to individual cases can be chaotic, improvised and sometimes arbitrary, again contrasting the straightforward stories of cause and effect which are nowadays evident in the political discourse surrounding immigrant integration. This obviously leads to a simplification of reality, which result in unrealistic expectations about the government's capacity to steer and also in "clumsy policy interventions failing to capture the complexity of the objects they are seeking to influence" (Boswell, 2011: 12). Secondly, our work has not only captured feelings of resistance of migrants, but also feelings of discomfort of street-level workers who more than ever before feel uncomfortable in implementing policies towards the vulnerable group of migrants that they encounter on a more structural basis than the politicians and policy-makers that actually develop these policies. The 'boxes' that policies offer to deal with different types of migrants are often not doing justice to the real-life cases that these street-level workers are confronted with. Independent of the question if workers hold on to 'these boxes', the data showed a growing feeling of resistance, discomfort, and frustration amongst street-level workers, which will be further discussed in section 6.2.

6.1.3 How can we understand the varying uses of social media for interethnic contact by second-generation migrant youth? (RQ3)

In this dissertation, I have not only studied the offline-reality but also the *online*-reality of migrant's behavior, which again exemplifies the elusive character of steering towards 'migrant integration'. This proves Favell's (2001) point on how different societal developments (in this case: the increased use of the internet, and social media in particular) confront governments with less foreseeable and manageable problems. Furthermore, as I discussed in the introduction of this thesis, a main issue in responding to migrant-related diversity revolves around the question of identity and feelings of belonging of both natives as migrants. The *socio-cultural* dimension of the issue is at the heart of the public and political debate. Until now governmental responses consist mainly of attempts "to reinforce their view of national identity through such measures as the teaching of national history and promoting national citizenship" (Cantle, 2012), which is mainly a way of combatting the increased sentiment of anxiety, threat and insecurity regarding migrants in society. Studies have shown though that the negative discourse on a national level have negatively influenced feelings of belongings from migrants, who feel less at home in the Netherlands (see e.g. Ghorashi, 2006; Dukes & Musterd, 2012 and Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). Identification and belonging go beyond the offline world of migrants. My work as presented in chapter 4 has shown that ethnicity is only one of the many topics that migrant youth discuss on social media. However, engagement in intra-ethnic online communities is partly motivated by *struggles with identity and lifestyle*, which is in line with

other studies that have shown that youth use social media to negotiate their identities (Valkenburg et al, 2005; De Leeuw and Rydin 2007; Elias and Lemish 2009). My work also showed that bonding with migrant communities by second-generation youth via social media is less orientated at the come-country than the home *culture*. This fits the more known findings of studies that show how migrants try to find ways of combining multiple identities, feeling both strongly connected to their own ethnic group as for example with the city of residence, hence identifying to different and more cultural characteristics (Berry et al 1997, Bourhis et al 1997, and Navas et al 2007). Again this indicates that the tendency in public debate - to reduce identification process to only the 'box' of ethnicity - is invalid: the experienced identification of migrants is multi-dimensional and transcends boundaries of home-country or ethnicity. These findings give us direction in the discussions on how to deal with migration-related diversity – namely as a question on how to create a shared sense of belonging that connects both natives and migrants to Dutch society. Unfortunately, current measures are instead challenging “the commitment of migrants and the coherence of the national community into which they are require to integrate” (Goodman, 2010: 22).

6.1.4 How and why do cities manage their identity through place branding – in the face of migration-related diversity? (RQ4)

Not only discourses but also policies are becoming more negative and are leading to exclusion of migrants in many aspects of society (Ghorashi 2006; Entzinger 2009; Ersanilli and Saharso 2011). In chapter 5, I have focused on branding policies, as an alternative 'tool' of responding to migration-related diversity, as more and more local governments are using branding tools to create images for both external as internal audiences. Branding policies are a way of influencing perceptions of the city, based on persuasion and storytelling instead of coercion. In essence branding is about selecting elements of your identity and putting these on display, confirming the narrative of the city that you are and want to be. When taking in account that migrants often strongly identify with the city that they are living in, this shows the great potential of branding policies as a way of responding to issues regarding migration-related diversity. This thesis – see chapter 5 shows – how two Dutch cities acknowledge migration-related diversity as a key characteristic of the city's DNA. However, due to the political and discursive setting around migration-related diversity – cities are reluctant in using diversity in actual brand communications. Diversity is treated as a 'given fact' or 'a logical result of city's trade history', and is mainly used in the background or is depolitized away from the broader public and political debates on migration-related diversity, by using mainly an economic perspective to diversity. Branding professionals feel they need to avoid interference of politicians and policy makers by not getting involved too much in “politics”. Even in Amsterdam, where the pro-diversity discourse is historically imbedded in the administration, marketers were hesitant to in-

clude diversity prominently in their branding strategy. Eventually we saw that these markets could not ignore the administrative pressure to do so. Our study – chapter 5 – hence shows how the new reality of increased migration-related diversity is not *one-on-one* translated in branding policies, because of the resistance of political and discursive filters through which this diversification is perceived and portrayed. These findings again stress that the simplifying narrative regarding immigrants and migrant integration of politicians and policy makers does not only lock public debates in a negative cycle, but also impact on other policies apart from integration policies itself. Branding professionals are aware of the highly contested and politicized nature of the issue and try to stay away from it. City branding policies hence do not only seek to reduce urban complexity, but also try to *avoid* urban political contestation.

At the same time though, chapter 5 also shows that local governments are really struggling with this issue. In Rotterdam, I found the sentiment that the potential of migration-related diversity is not yet fully used in branding policies and that promoting diversity more prominently would be a future-direction that is interesting, both from an economic and social perspective. Currently, the city is exchanging information with the city of Antwerp, which is a forerunner in including diversity into the brand strategy. In Amsterdam, the discomfort and struggle with the current brand was more existing *within* the municipal administration, where one believes that migration-related diversity can no longer be ignored as the new reality, hence urging the city to use it in building a collective city identity for all ‘Amsterdammers’. The remaining question hence is: does including diversity in the city brand actually impact on how migrants identify and relate to the city of residents? Can migration-related-diversity in city brands really compensate for the negative impact of the negative discourse on migrants? In the last section of this chapter, I will reflect more on these questions.

6.2. The argument against simplification

6.2.1 *Dealing with or avoiding the local complexities of migration-related diversity?*

The narrative of a coherent policy development that could directly counter the failure of immigrant integration, pushes us to lose sense of the historical processes out of which the current integration of migrants has arose. My research disputes the idea that integration is fully dependent on state’s intervention (Favell, 2001). On the contrary, it supports the idea that “migrant integration depends on a wide and changing range of factors and can take place, in spite of, just as much as because of integration policies and initiatives” (see also Gray, 2006: p. 1). This brings me to the following two main conclusions:

Firstly, the highly oversimplified narrative that politicians use to “short-cut” the complexity of integration processes clearly does not fit reality. In this narrative, migrants are often blamed for their “failed” state of being, while one assigns great capacity to governments to steer and influence migrant’s behavior. Stone (1989) refers to this as a ‘causal story’, that construct causality in a way that is simple and convincing, for example by clearly attributing blame to certain (f)actors for examples: ‘migrants’ or ‘governments’. In addition, such causal stories often also point to certain policy interventions, which are believed to tackle the problem (Fischer & Forster 1993). For example the obligated ‘democracy’ classes for newcomers or the double crime penalties for city citizens with a migrant background, as mentioned in the introduction. Another part of the narrative which we find in public debate, is one that ascribes ‘failed’ integration, to existing integration policies, blaming governments (instead of migrants) for ‘too soft’ policies, that lead to little effects on migrants integration processes (see also van Reekum and Duyvendak, 2012). Moreover, the latter authors argue that in public debates the central cause of failure is being attributed to “inhibited relations with newcomers, vagueness about what is expected from them, and not least: a hesitation to speak publically about the issue” (p.462). According to these authors the narrative here is that a more successful policy approach – one that is more uninhibited and more explicitly - is needed to overcome the problems of failed migrant integration (ibid).

My research shows differently. Immigrant integration policies are not failing, because migrants are necessarily *unwilling* or *incapable* to adapt to the new society. Immigrant policies are not necessarily failing, because policies are *too soft*, *too inhibited* or *too implicit*. Integration policies are ‘failing’ (or: are not always effective), because the governing of migrant integration in essence is an **elusive phenome**, which means it cannot be ‘steered’ effectively by isolated policy measures that do not do justice to the fact that integration concerns a dynamic system that responds to many incentives, while the outcomes are sensitive to various (mutual) relationships that are changeable over time (Gerrits, 2012). Policies or policy decisions always assume a certain causal relationship “between the steering incentive and its possible consequences”, while in reality it is not always clear which conditions or factors are leading to specific situations (ibid, p. 25). In the case of immigrant integration, we saw how interactions between local governmental actors and migrants are *cumulative* in their effects, and cannot be interpreted in an *isolated* manner. The decision-making of street-level workers working with migrants could not be explained in terms of one or two factors, but it was rather *a combination of conditions* that led implementers to transcend their discretionary power in favor of certain migrants. Similarly, the decision-making of branding professionals was not a merely an objective reflection of the social transformations in the city, such as the rise of increased migration-related diversity. It was highly intertwined with other elements – such as the broader discourse

on migration-related diversity. Lastly, identification processes of migrant youth were not necessarily focused on ethnicity, but on multiple dimensions of their identity – were home *culture* was more prominently occupying migrant youth than solely their home country. The behavior of migrants, implementers and policy makers can't be *linearly* traced back to a simple a-leads-to-b-reasoning. This linear thinking and reasoning is not congruent with (local) reality. This complexity “requires patience, reflection and incremental piecemeal adaptations, [whereas] migration and diversity policies and governance are often under pressure to come with quick, simple and clear solutions” (Scholten 2018: 3). Obviously, this pressure leads governments to simplify and reduce rather than grasp complexity. This does not mean that integration policies are necessarily bound to fail, however it shows the importance of an *awareness* that developing policies requires a deep understanding of the intricate workings of integration as a system, and that policy makers and implementers are part of a system of causes and consequences that shape change (Gerrits, 2012). This is especially important in policy fields such as migrant integration, which is characterized by a highly politicized context where the urge to simplify local reality is even more intensively experienced by politicians.

Secondly, the overall observation that I would like to stress here is *the struggle* that local governing actors - in all their different shapes - are experiencing. In all the interviews that I conducted with migrants and with local governing actors that are confronted with migrants or migration-related diversity there was a sense of discomfort, frustration or even resistance with how one (is forced) to respond to migration-related diversity.

On the one hand of the struggle we have local governing actors: both street level workers such as integration coaches, integration teachers and client managers as branding professionals in and together with municipalities, experienced the dealings with migrant-related diversity as a heavy dilemma. In many cases, they did see the complexity of the situation, but were unable to find solutions that really fitted the complex nature of the situation. A clear example here, are the many street-level bureaucrats that implemented the policy instructions (such as passing on information to social services on absence of migrants during classes) – but felt very uncomfortable that their clients would suffer negative consequences (be cut on social benefits). A coping strategy that often followed was that implementers would avoid too much confrontation with migrants, *holding on* to the policy instructions, which structure and simplify the complexity of the situations that they encounter into “boxes”. Nevertheless, this feeling of discomfort would not leave them. Similarly, branding professionals that explicitly chose to treat migration-related diversity as a recognized brand value, but were reluctant in involving it in actual brand communications – were struggling with this decision, as they knew that avoiding the sensitized and political discussion on diversity was probably not congruent with the social transforma-

tions that the city has experienced in the last decades. Again, one *avoided* the discussion by not incorporating the migration-related diversity characteristics too prominently – but the feeling of discomfort, frustration and an unsatisfied feeling of failure would remain. This tension and coping was hence the *same* for the street level implementers as for branding professionals that operate on the interface of policy design and policy implementation.

On the other side of this struggle, are migrants themselves who are acting and reacting to those working on behalf of local government and who hence represent the Dutch government in their mind. My research has shown that many stories of migrants eventually show the same feeling of discomfort, frustration and alienation, as bureaucratic interactions often led to a vicious circle of disappointment and unfavorable consequences, which on its turns led to giving up attempts to integrate in Dutch society. Migrants in many cases feel that their reality is not being understood properly: it is *their understanding* of the workings of bureaucracy that eventually influences their decisions and actions. In particular negative interactions or the *lack* of interactions that take place during the first years of settlement (what we previously called “reset phase”) – can impact heavily on their behavior years later, when the government confronts them with new requirements regarding their integration trajects. Hence, the evaluation of such behavior should not only be based on the ‘isolated’ piece of reality which shows an unwilling or skeptical migrant, but one needs to understand how these pathways arose – producing intended and unintended results, that – on its turn - can explain why the governing of migrant integration is such an elusive phenome. In addition, these feelings of discomfort and frustration clearly effects on feelings of belonging, as my research also showed how migrant youth is constantly negotiating their identity and position in the multi-ethnic society, both offline and online – and in which intra-ethnic contact often was motivated by a struggle with identity and lifestyle.

6.2.2 The problem of ignoring complexity thinking in research and policies

My research has shown that attempts to govern migration-related diversity – and migrant integration in particular - have failed to deliver the proverbial ‘control switch that was expected to control society’ (see e.g. Klijn & Snellen 2009, for an extended discussion). I concur. The main reason for this failure is the *elusiveness* of governing migrant integration, such as many other social phenomena or ‘problems’ that society encounters. The data shows such a wild variety of issues and such a complex entanglement of interactions between migrants and governments that it would be naive to expect there to be one set of ‘instruments’ that can govern society. If anything, immigrants and bureaucrats act local in place and temporal in time (Belabas & Gerrits, 2018).

Many scholars have written on this quest for governmental control, and in particular on how governments respond to the complex nature of many social problems. Dror (2001), for example, argues that governments need to “upgrade their capacity to steer, guide, and ‘weave’ the future” (as paraphrased in Parsons, 2004: p.65). He stresses that governing is about “the capacity to map the complex shifting realities confronted by policy-makers and impose an ‘architecture’ on a reality which is perceived to be essentially messy and chaotic [...] and is thus in need of being steered in the right direction and designed” (as paraphrased by Parsons, 2004: *ibid*). Many other scholars find the solution for structuring the messy reality in rationality and knowledge, arguing that governments need and *can* achieve ‘greater control over a runaway world’, by a better use of policy knowledge as matter to combat the complexities of social problems (see e.g. Giddens 1999; Mulgan, 2003, and Sanderson, 2002). Others (see e.g. Schon 1973 and 1983; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003) are more critical about this instrumental approach and turn to approaches in which knowledge is treated as more “tacit, emergent and embedded in specific contexts, practices and local experiences” (Parsons, 2004: p. 49). Such an approach has its basis in facilitating a process of public learning, which allows for a wider process of innovation, adaptation and creativity, which on its turn leads to messy and incoherent but more effective outcomes (Schon, 1973 and 1983). Core of the discussion here is whether complexity – in the words of Parsons (2004) - calls for increased or decreased capacity to map steer and weave. According to Scott (1998, and others) –in reality governments have embraced the instrumental rationality approach or still relies heavily on central steering, “ignoring practical and local knowledge, informal processes and the role of improvisation in an uncertain, complex and unpredictable world” (as paraphrased by Parsons, 2004: 54). Scott speaks about “metis’ referring to localized and embedded experience, which institutions are not aware of, and which according to Rooney et al (2003) does not allow “micro diversity to flourish” (p.136).

My work has shown how the understanding and experiences of local actors – such as policy implementers, policy makers and migrants themselves – are central to the comprehension of migrant integration. However, this localized and embedded experience is not known (n)or used or considered in policymaking. Traditionally national integration policies in the Netherlands have been characterized by a belief in strong central policy coordination, which has led to a strongly national and state-centrist mode of problem framing (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008). In addition, this highly centralized policy structure led to a prominent role of national politicians and central administration in how immigrant integration was framed (*ibid*). The policy narrative and the policy measures that follow, hence ignore the local complexities of crucial local actors and disregards the relationships between them and migrants. In addition, *studies* on how local governments are dealing with migrant integration rarely use a systematic view that zooms in on interrelated inter-

actions patterns. A few studies have focused on the simplified narratives that politicians and policy makers use (e.g. Boswell 2011, more recently Scholten, 2018) - however the literature on migration and integration in general seems to miss a complexity perspective that attempts to actually unravel the black boxes of causality. Insights in complexity are also very little used in public administration and hence in governance-related issues (Klijn & Snellen, 2009). The perspective used in this dissertation proofs the importance of using complexity and system thinking in studying social problems. In addition, based on my findings I argue that as long as politicians and policy makers are not aware or ignore the systematic whole of interrelated situations and actions, it will keep producing failing integration policies, that don't do justice to social reality.

This obviously corresponds with the large body of knowledge on system thinking and complexity (see great scholars such as e.g. Parsons, von Bertalanffy, Luhman and Forrester), but more specifically also with those who connect complexity thinking with public administration (Van Gunsteren, 1976; Kickert, 1991, Teisman 2005; Teisman, van Buuren and Gerrits, 2009; Gerrits, 2012). In particular, the acknowledgement that "coordination is not a designed and stable mechanism but much more an evolving process because of the dynamic interactions between self-organizing participants in governance processes, management interventions and unmanageable internal and external dynamics" (Teisman, van Buuren & Gerrits, 2009: p. 232) fits the conclusion of my work: (failed) migrant integration is not necessarily the result of ineffective policies or non-complying migrants. The process of governing migrant integration is elusive in its nature, because of the dynamic interactions between many different actors.

6.3 Break open persistent narratives: branding & belonging as alternatives

Even though that my work has shown the boundaries of governance "steering" by unraveling the complexities of the systematic whole of migrant integration, I do not argue that all governmental efforts to respond to migration-related diversity are deemed to fail. In contrary, I argue that governments should first become aware of the systematic reality in which migrant integration develops: there is no such thing as an ultimate cause and the causes that are indicated as constraining or facilitating migrant integration are many times resistant by attempts to control it (Teisman, van Buuren & Gerrits: 2009). Governments will never have full control, but are able to be effective, firstly by letting go of both policy *discourse* and policy *measures* that are merely based in a command-and-control-way of acting. Following complexity governance literature, an alternative direction would start in policy measures or policies that "not necessarily fit within pre-existing institutional categories or levels", because policy problems often involve various institutional government levels as well as various institutionalized policy fields or subsystems (Scholten 2018). Because processes of integration follow different paces, forms and outcomes, governments

need to enquire an approach to migrant integration that allows to respond with a much broader range of *ideas* and *instruments*, which are not necessarily situated in the domain of integration policies – but can develop even beyond.

Based on my research, I think that current governing attempts should be more informed by what is happening “on the ground”: the practical and localized knowledge and experience which is imbedded on many different places and levels within the government. Embracing this localized knowledge and experience is necessary to avoid ‘the “struggle” or alienation – as described in the last section - that both local governing actors and migrants are experiencing. Here, I do not suggest that ‘more knowledge’ will eliminate the elusive nature of migrant integration, but I do think that using localized knowledge *and* experience, will help to understand the local reality of those working most closely with migrants. More research is needed to understand how this knowledge is helpful in developing effective policies. Moreover, by using this localized knowledge and experience one could also *break open* the simplified narrative on migrant integration and offer alternative modes of responding to the local complexity that local actors are encountering. Research has shown that “in areas of policy that have become highly politicized and are the object of intensive media scrutiny, governments are likely to resort to rhetoric and symbolic decisions in order to meet public approval” (Boswell, 2011, p.21, paraphrasing Edelman, 1999 and Brunsson, 2002). In addition, my research shows that the highly-politicized character of migrant integration which further reinforces the simplified narrative, *even* impacts on other policy fields, such as branding policies. I would argue that breaking open this narrative, is the first step in developing policies that really grasp the complexities of migrant integration instead avoiding those complexities. Opening up the narrative would allow us to explore other instruments, which perhaps could help us in dealing with – instead of avoiding – the complexities of migration-related diversity.

Building on the findings of this thesis, I would argue that branding policies are an example of ‘soft’ instruments – an alternative to harsher in command-and-control based instruments - which possibly can help to develop an alternative narrative, which offers a language that speaks both to natives as migrants. As van Gunsteren (1976) stressed, planning by governments only makes sense “if it provides, or improves, a language, a communication structure, within which citizens can discuss the present, the future, their relation to each other, and thereby arrive at common and rational decisions. (p.X)”. This requires a *holistic* approach to migrant integration, which will lead to more appropriate interventions. Branding policies have the potential of playing a role in such a holistic approach, as more and more cities are developing policies that go beyond promotional campaigns, but revolve around repositioning the city as a whole, as a way of reconciling both leisure, business and community demands and inspirations, in a narrative that speaks both to

natives as migrants (Garcia, 2004). In addition, branding in essence is about identity, community building and belonging, a central aspect of the political and social debates on migrant integration. Research – including my thesis – shows that migrants are actually struggling with identity related questions, and that the negative national discourse on migrants negatively impacts on the identification with the Dutch nation but does *not* automatically extend to the local level. Breaking the simplified narrative regarding migrant integration would *allow* to explore such softer and more holistic policy instruments that potentially can improve feelings of belongings of migrants. More research on the impact of how branding policies impact on community building and identification processes of migrants is needed to see if such an alternative approach makes sense. In the following selection I will reflect more on directions for future research.

6.4 Reflection and for Future Research Agenda

In the previous sections, I have reflected on my research findings and on how these findings relate to existing bodies of knowledge. The conducted research also has some limitations, which I will briefly address in the section below. As a reflection on findings and limitations of this study will point to avenues for future research, I will subsequently present three directions for future research on migrant integration.

6.4.1 Reflection and Limitations

First of all, my main research question has focused on how local governing actors make sense of, and (re)act to migration-related diversity, and how these responses can be explained. My research has addressed mainly governing actors on the implementation level, focusing on migrant integration policies and branding policies. It is important to note that my research does not cover all governing actors on the local level nor all policy fields that are related to migration-related diversity. I have focused on two types of local governing actors. On the one hand, the classical street-level workers, who work with migrants on a frequent basis. On the other hand, branding professionals, that work on the interface of policy design and policy implementation. More research is needed to reaffirm my findings in other frontline-contexts, as the generalizability of these findings is only limited to similar governing actors around migration-related diversity and identity related policies.

Secondly, I believe that the main strength of my work lies in the richness of my empirical work, which has offered a deeper understanding of the world of both migrants and governing actors “on the ground”. In doing so, I have used different theoretical lenses in each of the presented studies, which has resulted in the combination of different theoretical ideas that contributed to answering my main research question. Nevertheless, the difficulty of using such a wide range of theoretical bodies lies in how to bring together the different pieces of findings to a meaningful coherent contribution to the understand-

ing of the governance of migration-related diversity. Given the breadth of the disciplines in which the studies are based, this dissertation does not necessarily offer a coherent theory of causation, but rather the separate studies together add to the empirical study of governing migration related diversity. More importantly, the contribution lies in the fact that each of the studies separately allowed to give voice to the perspectives of groups in society that usually are portrayed as passive actors that only inherit and adapt to existing ideas (see section 2.4 of introduction chapter).

Lastly, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that the qualitative research databases that were collected compose of mainly interviews with migrants and local governing actors. For the studies that focused on the migrant's perspective, I have gathered over 100 in-depth interviews with both first and second generation migrants, originating from more than 20 countries (see chapter 1 and 3). The studies that have focused on governing actors count a total number of over 40 in-depth interviews with both 'regular' street-level workers as key stakeholders in diversity and branding related policy fields. While the strong reliance on qualitative interviews suited the aim of this dissertation, I would recommend other (qualitative and quantitative) methods in reconstructing the governance of migrant integration. In the last section of my dissertation, I will reflect on this when I speak about the future agenda for the governance of migrant integration.

6.4.2 Future Research Agenda

Throughout this chapter, I have presented my research findings and conclusions. In doing so, I have also mentioned different points of attention for future research regarding the governance of migrant integration. I will end this dissertation by discussing some of these directions for future research more elaborately. The following ideas should therefore not be viewed entirely different from all paragraphs as presented in this chapter, but are merely a straightforward summary of ideas that were already hinted at in all the above:

First of all, future research on the governance of immigrant integration should focus more on what is happening on the frontline of implementation of integration policies. The call to give voice to social actors in this level playing field is not new. This dissertation was a first attempt to offer these "on-the-ground"-perspectives. Nevertheless, I argue that more research is needed to get a broader view on other governing actors or non-governing actors that are crucial in integration trajectories of migrants. Migrants have many encounters with governments during their arrival and settlement in the receiving societies, in order to develop an holistic and effective approach to migrant integration. We need to know more to know more about how these encounters and interactions effect of migrant's lives. My call would be to broaden the focus of governing actors that we are taking in account, as many migrants view all governmental contacts, even those that appear outside the realm

of migration and integration, as part of their process. Following Kim & Andersen (2012), I believe that we should try to make the mental models of these (social and governing) actors more explicit, because they are highly necessary in explaining and understanding behavior and thus in improving policy making. In doing so, I would support the use of a mixed method approach, as my work has heavily leaned on interviews.

A second point of attention for future research on the governance of migrant integration is the potential of more holistic policy approaches. Identity building in the context of super-diversity is core to the discussion on migrant integration. Both migrants and local governments are struggling with this issue. Based on my conclusions, I strongly believe that city branding has the potential of playing a crucial role in creating collective identities in super diverse societies. This is especially important given the simplistic political narrative on migrants that has achieved the opposite. There is very limited research on the effects of city brands on community building. My call is to develop research that focuses on how second and third generation migrants experience communication from local governments and if inclusive brands can play a role in positive city- and country identification of migrants.

Finally, my last point on future research regarding migrant integration focuses on valorization of current research on migrant integration. The public and political debate on migrant integration in Europe is heated and remains very focused on the question of how to deal more strict with migrants to assimilate them in society. How can research in this context become relevant for policy makers and the broader public? How can research that sheds light on the nuances and complexities of migrant integration have an impact on a more generalized audience? In my view, there is a task for researchers in the field of migration and integration to get a better understanding of why current narratives on the governance of migrant integration remain persistent in the idea that the failure of migrant integration lies in unwillingness of migrants or too soft policies, and in finding ways to get more attention and comprehension of the complexities of dealing with migrant integration.

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