Socio-Cultural Integration of First Generation Immigrants in Greece

Konstantinos Terzakis[1] and Irene Daskalopoulou[2]

Abstract

We analyze the socio-cultural integration (SCI) of first generation immigrants as the outcome of economic integration and regularization. We focus on Greece for which similar evidence do not exist and report SCI levels and the factors that are conducive to them. We construct a simple socio-cultural integration index and analyze its variation against pre and post migration factors, using a sample of 200 first generation immigrants in Greece. Robust empirical estimation techniques are applied. Results reveal interesting findings with regard to immigrants' types of adaptation to the host community. On a zero to ten scale, average SCI levels are estimated at 5.7 (± 2.5) which is high in absolute terms but low in terms of the degree (type) of integration. After controlling for the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, naturalization and their time living in Greece, we find that education and employment status are the most important determinants of socio-cultural integration.

Keywords: *Cultural participation; immigrants; integration; Greece*

Introduction

Research on the socio-cultural and economic integration of migrants continuously increases denoting the increased academic and policy level interest in the field (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2010; Bauer et al., 2005; Penninx, 2005). The socio-cultural and economic integration of migrants is an issue of particular importance since social cohesion and socio-economic sustainability might be threatened by alienated migrants who suffer work – related (job insecurity, economic deprivation, inequality) and / or social life – related (family organization, individual welfare, community relations) 'precarity' (Standing, 2011; Kasimis et al., 2015; Fratsea and Papadopoulos, 2021).

Available knowledge suggests that both pre-migration and post-migration factors are important determinants of integration (Fokkema and De Haas, 2015; Hemming et al., 2018). Hemming et al. (2018) analyze youth mobility in Europe as the outcome of a correspondence between macro conditions, which compose different opportunity structures, and micro level motivations. They identify different country-types as an example of the heterogeneous social and territorial mobility frames that Europe experiences (Hemming et al., 2018). Analyzing the socio-economic integration of first-generation immigrants in Spain and Italy, Fokkema and De Haas (2015) report that education, pre-migration information, age at migration, gender and post-migration occupational status are the key determinants of the degree of socio-cultural integration. As they conclude, pre-migration factors seem to dominate as predictors

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[1] Regional Decentralized Administration of Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionion, Directorate of Foreigners and Immigration, Department of Residence Permissions of Argolida, and Department of Economics, University of the Peloponnese, Tripoli, Greece. Email: k.terzakis@uop.gr.

[2] Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of the Peloponnese, Tripoli, Greece. Email: daskal@go.uop.gr.

of integration but policies that allow for skill exploitation and development in the host countries might be a critical economic lever for the enhancement of migrants' socio-cultural integration (Fokkema and De Haas, 2015).

Appropriate admission policies and an effective scheme of identifying foreign qualifications are also important in supporting the upward employment trajectories of immigrants (Andriescu, 2018; Tuzi, 2019). Bevelander and Veenman (2006) report the positive effect that higher education levels and job chances exert on immigrants' naturalization. Naturalization through nationality is another important factor. Ersanilli and Koopmans (2010) compare the levels of socio-cultural integration of naturalized and non-naturalized immigrants in three main migration receiver countries in Europe, namely France, Germany and the Netherlands. They find country level specific patterns of integration and integration mechanisms. As they report naturalization is positively associated with sociocultural integration (measured by host-country identification, proficiency and use of the host-country language, and interethnic social contacts) in the case of France and Germany who are countries that traditionally require a certain degree of cultural assimilation from their new citizens (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2010). In addition, they suggest that limited cultural assimilation conditions tied to citizenship may be helpful in promoting socio-cultural integration, while dual nationality might not be a priori negative (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2010). Analyzing cross-national variation in cultural participation among 24 EU countries Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016) find that the number of visits to museums, art galleries, historical monuments, and archaeological sites depends mainly on education and income (they report remarkably similar positive effects on cultural participation across European countries) while the effects of age and gender are weak and not consistent across countries. Cheong et al. (2007) suggest that country level structures shape the migrants' social and economic interactions with the local community and thus social capital encompasses culturally embedded understandings of immigrant processes and migration contexts. More recently, Fischer (2020) and Scheibelhofer (2020) analyze the way in which borders and boundaries are understood, experienced and interpreted by individuals and suggest that they are important not only for the formation of integration policies but also for sketching the social position of migrants.

The socio-cultural integration of migrants in Greece is an issue that has received no direct attention. The bulk of research for Greece focuses on two key issues, namely, a) the labor market effects of migrants and b) regularization and the control of illegal migrants as a social security and political agenda issue (see indicatively Fakiolas, 2003; Lazaridis and Psimmenos, 2000; Triandafyllidou, 2000; King et al., 2000; Kasimis et al., 2003). The gap in the literature is important. It might be argued that Greece experiences two distinct migration 'waves'. The first one took place mainly in the 1990s and involved economic migrants originating primarily from the neighboring state of Albania. This wave is completely different from the current one were a large number of migrants and refugees are entering Greece as the border hub on their way to other European countries (Tuzi, 2019; Lewkowicz, 2021; Fratsea and Papadopoulos, 2021; Minamide, 2021). We might identify these two waves as illustrative examples of Sirkeci's (2009) refugee crises' continuum, the latter 'evolving' amongst the two opposite ends of cooperation (e.g. bilateral migrant agreements), on the one side, and conflict (e.g. refugee crises), on the other.

It follows that differentiated patterns of migration require distinct policies. The social cohesion and sustainability challenges that surround each migration pattern are different.

Here we focus on the country's integration scores with regard to the first-wave migrants, i.e. people that have Greece as their migration destination. In view of that, we analyze the level and the determinants of socio-cultural integration of migrants in Greece. Our analysis is based on case study data for a sample of 200 immigrants, collected in 2017 in the prefecture of Argolida (Region of Peloponnese). The case study is representative of the type of migration in Greece as migrants of that period are largely dispersed and mainly directed to the rural areas of the country (Kasimis et al., 2003; Rovolis and Tragaki, 2006). Our main hypothesis is that socio-cultural integration is dependent upon the economic integration and naturalization of this type of migrants. Most often than not, this is an implicitly assumed relationship. It has not been explicitly analysed, at least for the case of Greece. Here, we suggest that knowledge on this relationship is critical as it entails information on the country's capacity to integrate different cultures and civilizations in the event of experiencing destination migration flows.

Background knowledge and hypotheses

This part is devoted to a brief review of the knowledge regarding migration in Greece and a discussion of the main empirical hypothesis of the study. As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of migration and its various effects on the socio-economic structure and performance of the country, and of rural areas in particular, has received rather little attention (see indicatively, Lianos et al., 1996; Kasimis et al., 2003; Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2006). Kasimis et al. (2003) provide a thorough discussion of the phenomenon of migration in the rural areas of Greece and point to a significant change in its nature, i.e. the transition of the country from being largely 'a waiting room' to a permanent migration destination. Rovolis and Tragaki (2006) report that the majority of migrants come from the Balkan countries, with Albanians accounting for almost 60 percent of the total immigrant population and being a distinct group in the sense that they tend to follow their own disperse settlement pattern and are not geographically concentrated (in main urban centers, e.g. Athens).

Also, there exist only few studies that provide insights on the degree of migrants' integration and the mechanisms that are conducive to it. Available knowledge focuses on the flexibility of migrants in the labor market, a fact that has caused them to be acknowledged as a valuable labor resource pull able to cover for urging workforce problems in the Greek countryside. Kasimis and Papadopoulos (2005) analyze the multifunctional role of migrants in the Greek countryside and find that it intervenes critically with the operation of the farm and the farm household, supporting the economic and social cohesion of rural societies and shaping the locals' views on the magnitude of migrants' presence and their effect / burden on the local society. Papadopoulos (2009) focuses on the social mobility of immigrants in rural Greece and identifies work flexibility as a parameter that increases the likelihood of integration to the host society. Using evidence from three paradigmatic regions in rural Greece, i.e. a *marginal/ mountainous* rural region, a *dynamic* lowland rural region of intensive agriculture, and a *pluriactive* island region, he concludes that immigrants show increased adaptive capacity with regard to the demands of the local labor markets and this has helped them to better integrate with the host community (Papadopoulos, 2009). In particular, he reports that Albanians show a higher adaptive capacity and thus they are better integrated into the labor markets of the Greek rural areas, followed by other groups of immigrants that also show signs of higher work integration due to socio-cultural advantages and time precedence (e.g. Bulgarians and Romanians) (Papadopoulos, 2009). Labrianidis and Sykas (2009) use field work data and also

report that the influx of immigrants in the early 1990s had a threefold contribution in the socioeconomic development of Greece and of Greek rural areas in particular. As they argue migrants have helped pluriactive farms to sustain agricultural production and allowed for a more flexible combination and specialization of capital and labor in the production process (Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009). Even more important is the fact that, contrary to what has been observed in many developed countries, immigrants in the Greek countryside experience upward economic mobility over time, a trend supported by their occupational and spatial mobility (Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009).

In view of the above we focus here on analyzing the determinants of socio-cultural integration of migrants in Greece. We assume that socio-cultural integration is a higher level of integration, an ultimate social outcome that ensures social sustainability for the local communities. We propose that this outcome is the result of a) a number of rather typical adjustments (e.g. employment, regularization) and b) personal characteristics of the individual (e.g. motivation to migrate, education level, age of migration etc.). In line with the available knowledge in the field we summarize these determinants as pre and post migration factors and naturalization and we test for their effect via the estimation of a regression equation. In particular, we test for the predictive power of the following relationship (1):

$$SCI_i = f(SES, NAT, SD, Z), \text{ i=1...m} \quad (1)$$

Where *SCI* accounts for the level of socio-cultural integration of person i in the sample of M migrants, analysed as a function of four sets of parameters. So, we propose that variation in the level of socio-cultural integration is a function of: (1) socio-economic status variables (*SES*) (i.e. education, employment and income variables), (2) naturalization (*NAT*) (i.e. regularization, legal entry) variables, (3) the socio-demographic characteristics (*SD*) (i.e. age, gender, etc.) of individuals, and (4) other control variables (*Z*) such as years in Greece, country of origin, ties to country of origin etc., that most likely affect migrants' degree of integration.

Study area and data

Our empirical analysis refers to immigrants residing in the prefecture of Argolida (NUTS III level), Greece. Argolida is one of the five administrative prefectures of the region of Peloponnese (NUTS II level). With a total population of 97,044 persons it accounts for 17% of Peloponnese's population and 18.5% of Peloponnese's GDP (2015). In 2011 it is classified as 37th in terms of population and 41st in terms of population density out of a total number of 74 regional administration units. It has been chosen as an indicative case study area as it holds a large portion of activities in all areas that migrants are employed namely agriculture, trade, tourism and leisure, and the construction sectors.

Data were collected through a cross-section questionnaire survey conducted within a two-month period in early 2017. Personal interviews with immigrants visiting the local administration offices (nationality and migration office, employment office) were conducted. The personal interviews that were conducted lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and involved a random sample of individuals. The structured questionnaire recorded the socio-demographic and economic profile of respondents, the migration factors, their ties and links with their country of origin, information on objective and subjective integration factors, and the socio-cultural activities that they participate in Greece.

In order to acquire a homogeneous sample for our analysis we have applied two selection criteria to the collected data. The first criterion was that the respondents are first-generation immigrants in the country. The second was representativeness in terms of the country of origin. As in the rest of the country, the larger population is Albanian immigrants and thus our sample has been stratified to account for that. After eliminating cases that do not corroborate with the profile of immigrants that is the target group of the study (e.g. immigrants who were born in the country) we were left with a usable sample of 195 questionnaires that have all the necessary information for our analysis.

The socio-cultural activities that are used in order to denote the degree of migrants' integration are listed in Table 1. Following the available literature in the field these activities have been chosen so as to account for a wide spectrum of out-of-home cultural activities. In particular, following Morrone (2006) we use an operational framework of cultural domains including ten outdoor cultural activities. The activities have been chosen so as to be: a) valid dimensions of our latent (unobserved) cultural integration variable, and b) specific as to the cultural domain they measure. In line with the aim of our study we developed a homogeneous set of questions measuring an attending / receiving type of participation behavior in the above presented cultural activities. So, our dependent variable is the socio-cultural integration (SCI) index which is an aggregate measure of the ten activities presented in Table 1, each weighted equally. While acknowledging that the issue of active or passive participation might be of relevance here we must note that this is an issue that falls outside of the present study's scope. However, to the extent that personality factors have been found to affect people's cultural tastes and practices (Kraaykamp and Eijck, 2005) we do account for interethnic friendliness (social contacts with Greeks) as a potential determinant of socio-cultural integration.

Table 1. Cultural domains and integration of immigrants

Cultural event	Degree of integration	Type of involvement
Local fair, religious ceremony	Low	Enjoy the atmosphere even without sharing same customs or religious beliefs
Museums, art galleries, historical monuments, archaeological sites, book exhibition	Low	Enjoy various pieces of art even without specific knowledge
Music/ dance performance	Low	Enjoy the performance even without sharing the language of the lyrics
Cinema	Medium	Attend with some knowledge of an international language or the host country's language
Theater	High	Attend with at least fair knowledge of the country's language

An individual's score in the above socio-cultural integration (SCI) index can range from 0 to 10. Data inspection revealed that participation to socio-cultural activities follows the chosen low-to-high typology. The average SCI score for our sample is estimated at 5.7 (SD=2.54). So, in terms of the number of activities that the migrants are involved in, a high integration score is observed. But the degree of integration might be considered as average when the intensity of the activities comprising the scores of the SCI variable is taken into account.

For the estimation of our regression equation (1) we have identified four sets of explanatory variables depicting: 1) the education and economic profile of respondents, i.e. income, employment status (self-employed, private employee etc.), education level, country of education etc., 2) naturalization, i.e. regularization, legal entry, friendliness etc., and 3) the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals, i.e. age, gender, marital status, children, etc., and 4) other control variables, e.g. number of years in Greece, country of origin and ties to country of origin. The description, measurement and basic descriptive statistics of all variables included in the analysis[3] are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Definition, measurement and basic descriptive statistics of used variables.

Variable	Description and measurement	Descriptive Statistics			
		Min	**Max**	**Mean**	**SD**
Socio-cultural integration (SCI)	Number of socio-cultural activities he/she attends (dependent variable)	0	10	5.70	2.54
Socio-economic status (SES)					
Income	Ordinal variable in 4 categories (<1,000€, 1,000-5,000€, 5,000-10,000€, >10,000€)	0	3	1.64	.90
Employed	Dummy, 1 = Yes	0	1	.75	.43
Self-employed	Type of employment dummy, 1 = self-employed	0	1	.17	.38
Private employee	Type of employment dummy, 1 = private employee	0	1	.36	.48
Job satisfaction	Ordinal variable, 4 = very satisfied with current job in Greece	0	4	2.01	.83
Education level	Ordinal variable, 7 = post graduate studies	0	7	3.06	1.64
Education origin	Dummy, 1 = Education only in country of origin	0	1	.79	.41
Education to employment	Dummy, 1 = Employment not related to education	0	1	0.93	.25
Naturalisation (NAT)					
Regularisation	Dummy, 1 = have not Greek nationality	0	1	.58	.50
Legal entry	Dummy, 1 = has legal migration licence	0	1	.53	.50
Sociodemographic characteristics (SD)					
Age	Age of respondent in years (ln)	17	66	37.70	10.66
Gender	Dummy, 1 = female respondent	0	1	.38	.49
Children	Number of children living with respondent	0	3	1.82	1.15
Control variables (Z)					
Friendliness	Dummy, 1 = has not Greek friends	0	1	,03	.17
House in Greece	Own house in Greece dummy, 1 = No	0	1	.94	.24
House in origin	Own house in country of origin dummy, 1 = No	0	1	.35	.48
Years in Greece	Number of years living in Greece (ln)	5	27	18.19	4.82
Country of origin	Country of origin dummy, 1 = Albania	0	1	.76	.43
Ties to origin	Ordinal variable, 2 = often visit country of origin	0	2	.78	.54

Empirical estimations and results

A linear regression model was estimated in order to predict variations in the socio-cultural integration of immigrants. Given the small number of observations available we used bootstrapping estimation techniques (i.e. random sampling with replacement) in order to get more accurate estimates of our coefficients *(Efron and Tibshirani, 1993). The bootstrapping procedure is distribution independent and also remedies for possible bias owing to the representativeness of the sample (Adèr et al., 2008).*

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[3] A number of other variables have been examined as relevant to the analysis but have not been included in the final analysis since they do not present significant variation, e.g. the reason to migrate variable (95% reported economic reasons to be the motive to migrate), and the family status variable (the vast majority of respondents are legally married 80.4% and for all cases the husband / wife lives in Greece).

Table 3 presents our estimation results. As mentioned earlier, a linear regression model was estimated in order to predict the socio-cultural integration of respondents based on four sets of independent variables. Our regression equation is significant ($F_{(19, 172)}$ = (7.554, p < .001), with an R^2 of .455. Respondents' predicted socio-cultural integration is equal to 3.577 + 1.385 years when time living in Greece is measured in years. SCI increased by 1.385 for each unit (year) increase in the time that the immigrant lives in Greece (Table 3).

Table 3. Determinants of socio-cultural integration of immigrants in Greece

	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	3.577	2.620	1.365	.174
Age	-.624	.632	-.988	.325
Gender	-.338	.364	-.928	.355
Children	-.076	.135	-.561	.576
Income	.158	.183	.861	.391
Education level	.602	.179	3.352	.001
Education origin	-2.044	.581	-3.520	.001
Employed	-.487	.430	-1.132	.259
Education to employment	1.569	.538	2.918	.004
Job satisfaction	.180	.182	.988	.325
Private employee	.673	.371	1.814	.071
Self-employed	1.282	.425	3.012	.003
Regularisation	-.290	.348	-.833	.406
Legal entry	-.744	.762	-.976	.330
Friendliness	-.508	.842	-.604	.547
House in Greece	-2.115	.685	-3.089	.002
House in origin	.904	.337	2.684	.008
Years in Greece	1.385	.705	1.966	.051
Country of origin	.379	.375	1.011	.313
Ties to origin	.078	.287	.272	.786

Our empirical analysis reveals quite interesting findings. Overall, the main hypothesis of the study is confirmed and thus SCI could be considered to indicate a higher level of integration drawing from economic naturalization within the host country and community. More specifically, our empirical results show that the economic, education and employment factors are the dominant predictors of SCI. As regards education, results show that higher levels of education are positively related to SCI while SCI levels are lower for those migrants that have been educated only in their country of origin. As regards employment, results indicate that it is not employment per se that matters but the immigrants' employment status. Thus, we find SCI levels to be positively affected in the case of self-employed and private employees. An interesting finding relates to the positive effect that the education to employment variable exerts on SCI. SCI scores are higher for immigrants that are employed in jobs not related to their education. This finding is in line with available studies reporting migrants in Greece as a highly flexible workforce (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2009; Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009). Given the rather low levels of the respondents' education (mean = 3.06, SD = 1.64, in a 0-7 ordinal scale) we should point to that flexibility also relates to the migrants' willingness to undertake unskilled jobs. As regards naturalization interesting findings are observed. Contrary to our expectations formal naturalization (i.e. legal regularization) has not been found to exert a statistically significant effect on SCI. It is reasonable to assume that in the case of migrants that have acquired a legal 'stay and work status' the effect of regularization is captured by the work status variables. Finally, important evidence is provided in terms of

the effect that the socio-demographic and other control variables exert upon SCI levels. As regards the socio-demographic profile of respondents we find that neither age nor gender exert a statistically significant effect on the level of socio-cultural integration. However, the effect of other control variables accounting for sociability and ties to host country and country of origin is found to be important. In particular, not owing a house in Greece is found to exert a negative effect on SCI while not owing a house in the country of origin exerts a positive effect in SCI levels. It is interesting thus that 'informal naturalization' in the sense of building more permanent relationships with the host country, is found to be an important determinant of socio-cultural integration.

Conclusions and implications

The current analysis refers to the socio-cultural integration of migrants in Greece. In particular we analyze the degree of socio-cultural integration of first generation immigrants in Greece as dependent upon economic and naturalization variables while controlling for the socio-demographic profile of individuals, their sociability and ties. We construct an aggregate measure of cultural integration based on the level of immigrants' participation in a number of outdoor cultural activities. On a zero to ten scale, average SCI levels are estimated at 5.7 (± 2.54) which is considered high in absolute terms but low in terms of the degree / intensity of integration associated with such SCI levels. Using robust estimation techniques we provide evidence that the economic and employment status variables are the key determinants of the level of migrants' socio-cultural integration. After controlling for time in the host country, the socio-demographic profile of immigrants and legal naturalization strong evidence is provided that socio-cultural integration is determined by employment status and earnings. An equally important finding relates to the effect that the pattern of sociability and the ties related to the local community have upon the socio-cultural integration of migrants. The more they feel their host country as a permanent place to live the more integration occurs in terms of the socio-cultural life of the community. Although this is more or less a general observation, reporting the predisposition of individuals to actually interact with their socio-cultural environment is a critical finding. Such knowledge might be useful in designing policies that enhance the social sustainability and cohesion in areas that accommodate migrants by fostering their participation in socio-cultural events. An interesting line of future research would be to more deeply analyze the personality factors and the preferences of individuals as determinants of participation in certain types of cultural activities. This way a deeper understanding might be provided as regards the mechanisms that underlie the formation of immigrants' cultural tastes and practices in their host country.

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