



HAL
open science

The Dynamics of Integration. Non-Profit Organizations Supporting Migrants and Societies in French, Spanish and Danish Social Spaces

Morgan Lans

► **To cite this version:**

Morgan Lans. The Dynamics of Integration. Non-Profit Organizations Supporting Migrants and Societies in French, Spanish and Danish Social Spaces. *The European Sociologist*, 2023, The social fabric under stress, 49. hal-04587185

HAL Id: hal-04587185

<https://hal.science/hal-04587185>

Submitted on 24 May 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

The European Sociologist – Spotlight

The Dynamics of Integration

Non-Profit Organizations Supporting Migrants and Societies in French, Spanish and Danish Social Spaces

Morgan LANS

Temporary research and teaching assistant. Bordeaux University.
Centre Émile Durkheim

The social sciences have long defined the modalities of integration on the basis of national and historical conceptions of citizenship as well as policies aimed at foreigners. In this thesis, we show, based on the French, Spanish and Danish cases, how the study of migrant aid associations informs us about the relationship of European societies to foreign populations. Indeed, these historical reception organisations have rarely been the subject of intensive comparative studies, whereas they are essential to integration processes and shed light on the social logics that unfold within territories, particularly at the local level. Based on the data from a survey conducted in a dozen migrant aid associations operating in three European cities with similar characteristics (Bordeaux (France), Bilbao (Spain) and Aarhus (Denmark) – several months of observation and nearly 130 semi-structured interviews – this thesis seeks to fill this gap. What are the positions and stances of the associations regarding the reception and integration of foreigners? To what extent do their normative systems and practices reflect those of their respective states? How can we explain their intervention logics? What does this tell us about the logics of foreigners' integration? Divided into six chapters, this doctoral work is structured in two main parts.

In the first part (chapters 1, 2 and 3), we return to the macro-sociological and historical dynamics of the French, Spanish and Danish spaces with regard to integration. These three chapters situate our fieldwork and make our understanding of the socio-historical fabric of integration modalities in each of the areas studied more intelligible, while justifying an entry through the associations.

We first update our knowledge of the historical relationship between the French, Spanish and Danish states and foreign populations, by reviewing the articulation between their colonial/migratory histories, their imaginations of the Nation and citizenship, as well as the transformations of their policies towards foreigners (chap. 1). The colonial and migratory past still marks the French migratory structure, which can be described as old postcolonial, and in this country contemporary integration policies still mobilise a civic-territorial imaginary centred on the State, which symbolically valorises republican values, norms, practices and conventions. For its part, Spain – a former country of emigration and a former colonial power – has a migratory structure characterised by a late postcolonial character. And its conception of citizenship is torn between centralist, federalist and localist visions of the nation. In this context, the State sees integration in terms of rejecting assimilationism and going beyond multiculturalism in favour of civic-pluralist approaches, which are seen as

necessarily intercultural and egalitarian. Lastly, Denmark has had to deal with labour immigration since the beginning of the 20th century, and from the 1980s onwards, the country also welcomed asylum seekers from outside the EU. Today, its migratory structure can be described as humanitarian and diversified. However, the legacy of an ethnocultural conception of citizenship and the strong influence of the far right have led to restrictive migration policies and ethno-assimilationist, even differentialist, integration policies.

In the second chapter, we presented the limits of such approaches and, more generally, of the tendency to assimilate legitimate integration modalities to 'state thinking' (chap. 2). We then explain how comparing the work and positioning of different types of associations (militant, religious, associative enterprises) – operating in similar local contexts, but contained in very different national spaces – could be analytically advantageous. Finally, the genesis and trajectory of the field of migrant aid associations have been studied in detail for each of the spaces, based on a review of the different historical-political sequences that structure them (chapter 3). In the end, this chapter clarifies the dynamics of national contexts, beyond studies that are limited to state analyses, and offers an initial analysis of the types of legitimate relations that are developed between associations and their respective states, depending on the country.

In France, the voluntary sector has developed over a long period of time, particularly when compared with the Danish and Spanish fields. Its cosmos is characterised by its diversity in terms of the ways in which it intervenes – social action, support for day-to-day integration problems, legal services, awareness-raising work, the fight against discrimination, etc. – and by its marginalisation of purely ethnocultural issues. As a result, the work of recognising cultural minorities has encountered resistance linked to political and financial fluctuations, but which correspond to the framing of the republican imaginary. Over time, the French voluntary sector has also become polarised between associations that work in partnership with the State – those that present themselves as mediators or are solely concerned with social action – and more militant associations that openly fight for the application or even the extension of rights. In Spain, generalist associations – often Catholic social action organisations – were for a long time the only ones involved in receiving foreign nationals. They adapted to the needs of newly arrived populations, without abandoning their work with the most disadvantaged nationals. However, in the early 1980s, associations specialising in migration issues began to emerge. From the 1990s onwards, they even obtained substantial public funding and multiplied exponentially. Faced with their incompetence, the public authorities were forced to rely on their expertise and local presence to develop their integration policy. At the same time, civil society organisations continue to denounce State practices and defend the rights of foreigners. In Denmark, the main activities carried out by historical associations have focused on individual integration, offering integration and language courses and organising recreational activities. It is possible to identify a few advocacy activities in the history, but generally speaking, the associations preferred to work in partnership with the public authorities to meet the individual needs and well-being of foreign nationals, and encouraged their integration into the community, in the name of humanist values and an ethic of responsibility towards the poorest members of society. Struggles on behalf of foreigners did not, therefore, give structure to the voluntary sector: it has been built more on the basis of benevolence, hospitality and humanitarianism, and not against a supposedly established order.

In the second part (chapters 4, 5 and 6), we continue the study of our integration contexts by focusing more specifically on the contemporary period and on the work of associations.

First, the aim is to grasp 'from below' the legitimate integration modalities that are deployed within societal spaces, based on the analysis of the pratico-axiological orientations of the migrant aid associations selected in Bordeaux, Bilbao and Aarhus (chapter 4). In Bordeaux, migrant aid associations share a legal orientation that emphasises access to rights and the fight against discrimination. The aim is above all to help people find their way around the French 'administrative machine', to build their legal narratives and, more broadly, to ensure that the law is applied. This approach is combined with others, such as French courses, intercultural events, training and more social activities. But for the historical associations selected at local level, they remain secondary. In Bilbao, the approaches are eminently more global than in France. They oscillate between references to the social assistance sector and popular education. The support they provide to people is aimed at improving their ability to act and their living conditions, according to a multidimensional grid of integration – economic, cultural, social and legal. At the same time, and despite some specific organisational features, all the Spanish associations we met were involved in struggles to lift the symbolic and structural constraints on new arrivals. In Aarhus, by contrast, this aspect is absent. The associations focus on improving the integration experience and individual skills. In this sense, they introduce newcomers to Danish society in a benevolent way from a cultural point of view, focusing on language learning, and stimulate economic integration as well as encounters with nationals. The associations' activities thus echo situated symbolic registers and are part of the continuity of historical organisational trajectories, as well as in relation to specific configurations of actors. They mobilise institutional logics that are socially situated and specific to the areas under study, while offering nuances, adaptations and improvements that remain, moreover, often linked to shared socio-historical references. Sometimes their activities are inspired by logics that go beyond these areas, but the translation of these logics takes shape in contact with their own logics.

The fifth chapter focuses on the relationship between these organisations and the state authorities. It shows, in particular, how the sociohistorical and institutional embedding of the associations structures these relationships and how these legacies play, by extension, on the contemporary dynamics of integration. Here, our survey reveals differentiated relationships between migrant aid associations and the State, which depend on logics specific to each area. Within the same city, relations tend to be homogeneous, although there are organisational strategies relating to different types of association. It is in Bordeaux that the types of association have the greatest influence on socio-political positions, insofar as there are associations that work systematically with the public authorities and present themselves as politically neutral – or apolitical –, while others prefer to challenge them openly and keep their 'hands free'. In Bilbao, most associations are involved with the local authorities, but at the same time they do not hesitate to criticise them. Relations between sectors are therefore characterised by forms of conflictual partnership. In Aarhus, the associations act according to an eminently partnership-based approach and only very rarely do they challenge the state. These differences can be explained in terms of three structural and historical-institutional factors: the degree of decentralisation/centralisation of State structures – places of negotiation, regularity of exchanges and development of relationships of trust –; the form of systems for organising social protection – associative functions and positioning of players, dissemination of principles, values, standards and specific practices, in addition to a certain vision of the individual; civic-political cultures – the way in which relations between civil society and the State have been established over time. We have also identified a final factor that helps us to understand the diversity of relationships, in a more agency approaches: the form of inter-associative cooperation. In Bordeaux, this depends essentially on the organisational positioning of the associations in relation to the State. In

Bilbao, the associations participate in platforms that enable them to engage in more long-term cooperation. Finally, in Aarhus, they are virtually absent, apart from a few local partnerships between volunteers. These forms of solidarity are important to understand the relation with authorities. More generally, they have an impact on the dynamics of change by forming advocacy coalitions that are more or less critical.

In the last chapter, we explore the perceptions of association members, before assessing the extent to which their visions reflect the organisational approaches observed in chapter 4. The discourses show that there are cross-cutting logics, invariants in the ways of thinking about integration. This result contrasts with what we have seen so far. Irrespective of where they take place, integration processes are seen as paths leading to autonomy, equality and participation. In the imaginary of French, Spanish and Danish associations, their combination represents what is meant by 'integration'. Behind these invariants, however, lie interpretations that depend on the space in which they are produced. The ways in which the statements are presented, the justification for the order of priority given to the different dimensions (autonomy, equality and participation), and the social expectations of foreigners all vary from city to city. In addition, some elements are addressed in some contexts, but not in others. Subjective modes of integration cannot therefore be understood solely in terms of 'universal' logics. They are also part of the framework of meanings conveyed by particular socio-historical configurations. In Bordeaux, the associations primarily defend the principles of autonomy and equality by referring to the rule of law and the republican individualist ideal. They believe they are defending international citizens. In Bilbao, the associations' members seek first and foremost to 'produce social change' and guarantee equality, as well as the participation of people in their own right. They take a global view of integration needs and recognise the obstacles to integration, while being aware of the macro-sociological and geopolitical determinants of migration: an awareness linked to a memory of emigration. In Aarhus, the associations feel they have a duty to chaperone foreigners, while emphasising their individual responsibility. They dwell on the importance of the cultural dimension of integration and defend the image of Danes becoming Danes, while at the same time being critical of national factors that hinder the integration of foreigners.

In summary, it can be said that the associations in Bordeaux are part of the continuity of a civic logic of integration, conveyed within the state authorities, insofar as they emphasise the question of rights and defend the figure of the individual citizen as well as the principles of autonomy and equality. An examination of their activities shows that they are in some ways one of the last bastions of the original republican ideal. For these associations, the state is no longer really in line with the values it advocates and the multicultural realities to which it responds. In this sense, they reject assimilationist approaches and demand the emergence of a republican interculturalism. In Bilbao, the associations are the main guarantors of support for foreigners and defend first and foremost the principles of equality and participation. They intervene – just as they do with the most excluded members of Basque society – according to an integral logic, recognising the wholeness, as well as the particularity, of each person and each of their problems. In general, their activities are conceived within a local framework and in a pragmatic way. In a logic of cooperation-conflict with the local public authorities, they also defend the ideal of an intercultural Basque society, affirming its pluralism and its specific identity. In Aarhus, the associations act in the continuity of an ethnic imaginary of state citizenship, while defending universalist postures. They believe that it is important to maintain the foundations of a Danish national specificity, while focusing on the principles of autonomy and participation. They seek to disseminate the values of the nation to newcomers in a spirit of cooperation with the public authorities. However, they resist the logic of exclusion promoted by the State by implementing a benevolent reception, considering, in the final analysis, foreigners as Danes in the making.

To conclude, our survey underlines the existence of an important discontinuity between the studied spaces and a strong continuity within the studied spaces, which leads us to say that the modalities of integration result from the way of acting, thinking, feeling, as well as organising, of actors intervening in coherent sociohistorical configurations. These modalities are therefore neither limited to 'state thinking' in relation to the question of citizenship or migration, nor to purely local phenomena: they are more precisely the result of material and symbolic configurations made up of supranational, national and local logics, articulated in specific spaces, animated by spatial stratifications, social protection regimes as well as particular civic and political cultures, producing certain forms of sectoral interdependencies. In this sense, comparisons concerning the construction of integration modalities can no longer ignore the determining force of societal coherences, because they produce regularities in the material and symbolic relationship with the 'others', nor can they conceal the work of the actors who position themselves within them, insofar as they ultimately act on the logic and diffusion of these coherences.