



EMN Norway Occasional Papers

Sustainable Migration in Europe – the Significance of Culture

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Oslo, 2019



Norwegian Ministry
of Justice and Public Security

UDI

Utlendingsdirektoratet
Norwegian Directorate
of Immigration

EMN Norway Occasional Papers is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Directorate of Immigration. The objective is to generate insight and contribute to the discussions on future policies and good practices in the field of migration. The format of the series is envisaged to be instrumental for quick publications and dissemination of papers with a succinct, bold, innovative and policy relevant content. The EMN Norway Occasional Papers are addressed to a wide audience, including policy-makers, academics, the media and the interested public. The views and conclusions are those of the respective authors.

Sammendrag

- Europeiske land er dypt splittet over migrasjon. Den europeiske flyktningkrisen i 2015 var ikke bare en politisk krise, det var også en kulturell krise. Krisen førte til politisk polarisering som vedvarer selv om tallet på migranter har falt.
- Migrasjon til Europa fra utviklingsland på 2000-tallet har hatt tre viktige fellestrekk: Den er drevet av forhold i opprinnelseslandene og består i stor grad av lavskolerte migranter som i liten grad er etterspurt på arbeidsmarkedet i mottakerlandene; europeiske samfunn har gjennomgående undervurdert omfanget av tilstrømningen og; den kulturelle avstanden mellom migranter og nasjonal kultur er ikke tatt på tilstrekkelig alvor.
- Tilbakeslaget for multikulturalisme og liberal innvandringspolitikk skyldes hovedsakelig en historisk unik kombinasjon av stor innvandring av ikke etterspurt arbeidskraft fra fjerne kulturer i fattige utviklingsland - ofte migranter som har fått flyktning/asylstatus med betydelige velferdsrettigheter i europeiske velferdsstater de ikke har vært med å bygge opp.
- Status nå er et presserende behov for en felles visjon og et samlende språk som vil finne gjenklang blant velgerne, som forener en bærekraftig migrasjonspolitik med det overordnede målet om å fremme samhold. Det sentrale stedet å starte for mottakerlandene er med nasjonal kultur og inkluderende nasjonsbygning.
- Nasjonal kultur har ikke fått den anerkjennelse den fortjener som samfunnets 'lim' – bl.a. som følge av en skjevhet som har vokst seg gjeldende på vestlige universiteter - en tiltakende ideologisk ubalanse blant forskerne ledsaget av en delvis ikke erkjent politisert forskning. Dette er et problem.
- Nasjonsbygging er det åpenbare svaret på de kulturelle utfordringene som stammer fra den store tilstrømningen av innvandrere. Staten bør ta ledelsen for å kunne styre utviklingen og hindre at dette skjer på en uforutsigbar måte.
- For at en fornyet nasjonal kultur skal bli omfavnet av flertallet, må den først og fremst strømme fra den eksisterende nasjonale kulturen. Ethvert forsøk på nasjonsbygging basert på generelle "verdier", vil sannsynligvis være for intetsigende til å inspirere til identitet i gamle og nye befolkninger.
- Volum på innvandringen og innvandrenes kulturelle bagasje samt hastigheten på innsiget og assimileringsgrad er nært knyttet til destinasjonslandets økonomiske, sosiale og kulturelle 'absorpsjonskapasitet'. Kultur er vesentlig i dette bildet. Jo mer forpliktende samfunns-

kontrakt, jo større er behovet for assimilering eller lave innvandringstvolum. Et samfunn er mer enn mennesker som tolererer hverandre. Felleskap er påkrevd.

- Denne studien antyder derfor et nedstrippet enkeltmål for kulturell bærekraft, nemlig meningsmålinger om spørsmål noe a la dette: "Etter din mening bør vi la flere (fra kulturelt fjerntliggende land/lav kompetanse) innvandrere fra land utenfor Schengen flytte til vårt land, færre innvandrere, eller omtrent det samme som nå." Hvis opinionen er negativ, kan dette tas som et tegn på at dagens politikk ikke er bærekraftig.

- Beslutningstakere bør også se etter langsiktige løsninger langs to akser: Antall og sammensetning av innvandrere samt multikulturalisme og nasjonalitet. Migrasjon drevet av migrantens behov må balanseres av en åpen diskusjon om etterspørselsiden av ligningen. For dette kreves det en åpen diskurs om hva migranter skal tillates, hvor mange og hvilken grad av assimilering som bør forventes.

Executive Summary

- European countries remain deeply divided on migration. The European refugee crisis of 2015 was not a crisis of numbers so much as a crisis of politics and, also, a crisis of national culture. The crisis led to political polarization that has endured even as refugee numbers have fallen.
- Migration to Europe from developing countries in the 2000s had three key traits in common: It is largely supply-driven and largely consisting of low skilled migrants. European societies persistently underestimated the scale of the influx and; the cultural distance between the groups of emigrants and migrant nations has not been taken seriously into account.
- The backlash against multiculturalism and liberal immigration policies is mainly due to a historically unique combination of large scale, low-skilled immigration from distant cultures into universal welfare states.
- Mainstream European politicians urgently need a common vision, and a unifying language that will resonate with electorates, as they propose sound migration policies with the overall aim of fostering cohesion. The key place to start is national culture, defined as a set of symbols and material things and “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”
- Majority culture has been discredited due, in part, to a bias that has grown prevalent in Western universities – a bias that, at least to some extent, has been caused by an ideological shift within the faculty – and has shaped the broader discourse thereby helping to bring about a curious state of affairs where a topic of great importance to public policy has developed into a narrow, path-dependent discourse, replete with biased terminology.
- European states should conduct studies into the ideological leanings of the university faculty, as has been done in the USA. Should undue bias be found, this will likely even itself out in the medium to long term. In the short term, policy makers are wise to keep in mind that expert analysis may be biased. A final suggestion might be to fund alternative research communities with the explicit aim of challenging received wisdom in the hermeneutic sense.
- Nation building is the obvious answer to the cultural challenges stemming from the large influx of immigrants. As in the past, the state should take the lead. In order for a revamped national culture to be embraced by the majority it must flow primarily from the existing

national culture. Any attempt at nation-building based on something inclusive and not overly burdened with specific meaning, say, 'European values' will likely be too bland to inspire genuine devotion in old and new populations alike.

- The challenge of numbers and composition of migrants, speed of immigration and the 'absorption capacity' of the destination country is intimately linked to culture. A national community is more than a mass of people who tolerate each other. It is not enough that immigrants adhere to vaguely defined values. They must also adopt many of the distinct characteristics of national culture in the country they have chosen to settle.
- This study therefore suggests a stripped-down single gauge of cultural sustainability: polls on the question "In your opinion, should we allow more (culturally distant/low skilled) immigrants from countries outside Schengen to move to our country, fewer immigrants, or about the same as now." If public opinion is negative, this can be taken as a sign that current policies are unsustainable.
- Policy makers should also look to longer term solutions along two paths, also highlighted in this study, those of numbers & composition as well as multiculturalism and nationhood. Supply-driven migration determined by the needs of the migrant need to be balanced by a more open discussion about the demand side of the equation. For this an open discourse is required about what migrants should be allowed in, how many and what degree of integration / assimilation is to be expected.

Sustainable Migration in Europe – the Significance of Culture

Asle Toje.¹

Building on the discussion paper "Sustainable Migration: A Framework for Responding to Movement from Poor to Rich Countries" by Alexander Betts and Paul Collier this paper focus on one aspect in their analysis, that of cultural sustainability.² By 2019, it was clear that the liberal consensus on migration in European countries had been ruptured. The underlying political consensus has shifted and any return to *status quo ante* seems unlikely. Indeed, the order was destined to fail from the start, as it largely failed to take the significance of national culture into account. The decline of what might be dubbed the 'liberal multiculturalist order' creates consternation among the social, economic and policy elites who embraced it from the 1990s onwards.

In Western Europe, an unprecedented openness to immigration was premised on a consensus that immigrant cultures would enrich European societies and that potential downsides to multiculturalism was not of sufficient significance to warrant stringent integration policies. The assumption was that large-scale migration was a force for promoting economic growth, fostering tolerance, offsetting demographic decline, and adding cultural vibrancy to West European societies.³ Migration to Europe from developing countries in the 2000s had three key traits in common: It was largely supply-driven, largely consisting of low skilled migrants; European societies persistently underestimated the scale of the influx; and the cultural distance between the groups of immigrants and the nations to which they migrated was discounted in academic and public discourse alike.

Many blame 'right-wing populists' for the decline of the liberal consensus on migration. After all, a host of new political parties in Europe share an opposition to immigration. It would be a mistake, however, to think that liberal multiculturalism falling into disrepute is solely caused by 'populist' rhetoric or policies. The British political advisor Alistair Campbell put it succinctly "In democracies politicians cannot make their own political weather."⁴ Politicians cannot create widely held views, only benefit from them. Opposition to liberal immigration policies has for some time been wide-spread and scored high on 'strength of sentiment' in much of Europe.⁵ The success of anti-immigration parties at the polls help explain why an order that enjoyed almost universal support among policy elites disintegrated so quickly.

The objective of this paper is to determine why cultural concerns have not been taken into account in efforts to ensure sustainable migration in Europe and to offer thoughts on the significance of culture when it comes to a society's capacity to absorb migrants. To that end the paper offers three distinct, yet interrelated, sets of arguments. *One*, the post-Cold War consensus on migration was in no small measure an intertwining of normative scholarship and elite consensus, more than any principled discussion of what degree of cohesion a nation state requires and how this is to be maintained. *Two*, the backlash towards liberal immigration policies is mainly due to a historically unique combination of large scale, low-skilled immigration from distant cultures into universal welfare states under the conditions of multiculturalism. *Three*, failing to take majority culture into account when managing large scale culturally dissimilar migration can create tensions that may help explain the political, social and economic turbulence witnessed throughout Western Europe. Finally, we return to the overall question of how to assess the significance of culture for sustainable immigration, where a fresh gauge of cultural sustainability is suggested.

Defining the terms

The current effort has a specific backdrop. As one of the eleven-member Norwegian government commission on 'The long-term consequences of high immigration' I penned a dissent where I underlined that the white paper had failed to adequately address one of the questions the government instigators of the report had specifically requested: the significance of culture.⁶ In the dissent, I underlined that "the cultural variable has not been sufficiently problematized [...]. In doing so the commission fails to address the mandate, which specifically mentions culture on three separate occasions."⁷

There were several reasons for the omission, one of them being that culture is a 'sticky' variable – hard to delineate and hard to unbundle from other socio-economic drivers, not least in the context of the rapid cultural transformation brought about in European societies by the forces of globalisation, integration, and modernity more broadly. Another is that both native openness to migration, and the willingness among the immigrants to assimilate to the native culture, are malleable variables. They are subject to change, for instance, through public policy and other circumstances such as the scale, make-up and concentration of immigrant communities.

In order to embark in an orderly fashion this section will lay out some of the core concepts and assumptions of this paper. Studies on the sustainability of migration in relation to national - or majority- culture are few and far between.⁸ For this reason I have chosen a qualitative and exploratory approach to the question articulated in the title. The present effort makes the argument that following the historically unprecedented levels of immigration to Western Europe since the end of the Cold War a broad backlash ensued, driven – at least in part – by concerns over cultural sustainability.

The importance of perceived threats to culture and identity is borne out by a simple fact: the economic crisis of 2008 did little to boost support for the new right in Europe, while the migration crisis of 2015 did. Hardly a revolutionary observation, yet one that is surprisingly often overlooked. Culture does not readily lend itself to quantification, and the study of culture is, as political scientist Kenneth Booth note, “an art rather than a science.”⁹ Booth also offers a timely reminder that cultural explanations do not exclude other explanations. Time-tested models can be improved by taking on a cultural dimension.

Academic research has in past decades focused on culture, but primarily counter-cultures, sub-cultures and minority-cultures and not what these cultures define themselves in opposition to – that is, what Samuel Huntington calls ‘core culture’, which in this study will be referred to as ‘national culture’.¹⁰ Edvard Burnett Taylor defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.¹¹ This definition is useful in that it refers to the learned attributes of society, without being prescriptive or holding any normative bias as to what this culture should consist of.

Culture fosters identity. Admittedly, identity makes most sense in reference to individuals. But humans do not live in solitude: we form into groups and communities, and these ties in turn shape the identity of individuals. Sources of identity vary, they can be *ascriptive* (ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, race etc); *social* (status, network, leisure clubs, team etc.); *economic* (trade, occupation, class, employer etc.), *territorial* (neighbourhood, city, region, country, continent etc), *religious* (deity, sect, congregation etc) and *political* (ideology, party, constitutional, interest group etc). Not all identities are equal. Many are willing to die for their nation states; few are willing to die for their football club, their political party, or Europe.

National culture has traditionally been promoted by nation states with the twin aims of strengthening allegiance and cohesion.¹² This sets national identity apart from the plethora of

other identities an individual possesses. In his essay on ‘Authority and the Individual’, the philosopher Bertrand Russell traced the emergence of the nation state as the largest entity with a proven capacity to bind together individuals, who do not know one another, with strong bonds of solidarity: “Social cohesion, which started with loyalty to a group reinforced by the fear of enemies, grew by processes partly natural and partly deliberate until it reached the vast conglomerations that we now know as nations.” Social cohesion, he argued, is imbued with collective meaning through symbols.¹³

Sociologist Anne-Marie Thiesse defines national identity as “a history establishing continuity through the ages, a set of heroes embodying its national values, a language, cultural monuments, folklore, historic sites, distinctive geographical features, a specific mentality, and a number of picturesque labels such as costume, national dishes or an animal emblem”.¹⁴ When combining the definitions of Taylor and Thiesse we arrive at a sound understanding of ‘national culture’, with one dynamic element – that culture is learnt (not innate) – and one less dynamic element, that national cultures come with an aggregate of symbols and practices, albeit the ‘density’ or aggregate sum of national culture varies from country to country.

Anti-majority bias in academia

Before discussing the various aspects that impact cultural sustainability a few words are needed to explain why majority culture has come to be seen as something ‘slightly disgraceful’ among the educated, as George Orwell once observed.¹⁵ It will be argued that this has much to do with a bias that has grown prevalent in Western universities – a bias that, at least to some extent, has been caused by an ideological shift within the faculty. This has shaped the broader discourse, thereby helping to bring about a curious state of affairs where a topic of great importance to public policy has developed into a narrow, path-dependent discourse, replete with biased terminology.

In the book *Whiteshift* Eric Kaufmann traces the delegitimization of majority culture in academic discourse. Kaufmann traces the Western tradition of opposing one’s own culture from the ‘lyrical left’ in the late nineteenth century, via the ‘cultural left’ and the counter cultures of the 1968 generation. National culture went from being seen as potentially dangerous, to something inherently bad, synonymous with the oppression of minorities. The general opposition to the demands of the nation state helped underpin a theory of white ethno-cultural oppression which, in turn, morphed into today’s “image of the retrograde white

other.” The natural conclusion of this ‘negative dialectics’ of downgrading national culture was, according to Kaufmann, “the mission of replacing ‘whiteness’ with diversity”.¹⁶ This argument dovetails with other explanations on the divide on immigration from David Goodhart’s ‘anywheres’ to Francis Fukuyama’s ‘globalists’ and Paul Collier’s ‘Rawlesians’.¹⁷

This is not a problem *per se*. Criticising one’s own group, what Daniel Bell calls ‘adversary culture’ has, arguably, been a key strength of Western societies.¹⁸ Critique can help cultures cope with societal change. What is unusual, perhaps, is the degree to which the antithesis became established wisdom, in a hermeneutic sense. Contemporary scholarship in Western Europe see little merit in majority culture, other than as ‘the other’, an entity synonymous with perceived transgressions visited upon more worthy minorities. This would be of limited academic interest had not the ‘expert discourse’ shaped the public discourse. To the extent that it did, this has arguably created an urgent need to make the case for the nation and the nation state, if its biproducts such as the redistributive welfare state, representative democracy, and the rule of law are to be preserved. The alternative is, of course, to put forth a different political order that could uphold the same norms and deliver the same goods. No such legitimate alternative has hitherto been found.

We have thus arrived at a point where anti-nation state sentiments appear to dominate social sciences in Europe. There may be several reasons for this. Quantitative research carried out by Jonathan Haidt et. al. has shown a trend where universities in general, but social sciences in particular, have rapidly become less pluralistic over the past two decades. American social scientists are overwhelmingly left-liberal, Haidt and Lukianoff arrives at an overall ratio of 60:1 in disfavour of conservatives. It should be noted that this aggregate figure includes all faculties from engineering to humanities, with the unbalance being more prevalent in social sciences. The trend has accelerated from a ratio of 17:1 in the early 1990s.¹⁹ Recent Pew Research Center survey results highlight a chasm in American views on higher education, with a divergence that runs along partisan lines.²⁰ While we do not have similar data from Western Europe, there is little to indicate that the intellectual landscape is very different.

Left-liberals have in common, according to Haidt et. al., that they place little importance on ‘tribal’ values such as the sense of unity in their moral judgements. Does this matter? Yes and no. While there is little evidence to indicate that ideological inclination makes scholars dishonest, it is abundantly clear that it shapes what questions are deemed worthy of research and what conclusions are deemed career-advancing.²¹ Karen Stenner has

illustrated how individual value differences are important in determining whether a person adopts the “closed” communitarian or “open” cosmopolitan viewpoint.²² The field is riddled with biased terminology which *a priori* discredits certain perspectives while lending legitimacy to others. (Stenner’s own open-minded’ vs. ‘closed minded’ dichotomy is one example.) The tendency of scholars to attribute pseudo-psychiatric diagnoses to opposing views is particularly egregious *inter alia* ‘xenophobia’, ‘fear of immigration’, ‘cultural anxiety’ etc.²³ The fact that serious scholars rely on such hopelessly biased terminology serves to highlight that European migration studies does not have any mechanism to separate scholarship from activism.

This process is highlighted in the ongoing attempts at expanding the definition of racism to include culture. This development has everything to do with ‘racist’ being one of the most damning accusations that can be levelled, and one educated people will go to great lengths to avoid. Interestingly, it would seem that while the levels of racism (loathing on the basis of race) is in decline in West European societies, the accusations of racism seem to be heading in the opposite direction.²⁴ Yuval Noah Hariri rightly argues that most of what today is branded racism is, in fact, culturalism.²⁵ The EU European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia appear to confirm this in their annual report in 2000: “This means that expressions of crude and racist stereotypes are becoming more rare, but at the same time platforms other than ‘race’ are used, such as economic imperatives, cultural differences, security and medical threats defined against a putative culturally and homogenous ‘host’ population.”²⁶

The welcome devaluation of race as an analytical concept shifted the discourse on majority culture onto ethnicity. While ethnicity from the outset was defined in opposition to race as “belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition”, the term has lost much of its original meaning.²⁷ Fredrik Barth, eager to challenge received wisdom, argued that ethnicity is perpetually negotiated and renegotiated by both external ascription and internal self-identification.²⁸ This problem is that the new ‘fluid’ definition of ethnicity understates the permanence of cultures. While certainly there are examples of individuals who switch ethnicity, the vast majority do not. Barth’s fluid definition of ethnicity has contributed to ethnicity becoming the domain of minorities in western countries while the majority population seemingly has no ethnicity worthy of respect or protection. This matter because culture does not cease to exist just because it is not acknowledged. The historian H  l  ne d'Encausse, writing in 1995, describes a similar experiment in the Soviet Union where

Russian culture was introduced as a «lowest common denominator» for all Soviet peoples, costing the Russian nation «its very existence». She predicted that this would spur a nationalist reaction in Russia after the disintegration of the USSR.²⁹ It would seem that identity politics cannot privilege minorities without running the danger of a majority backlash, as Eric Kaufmann argues happened in the United States with the election of Donald Trump and in the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union.³⁰ Nationalism is, after all, a form of identity politics.

Similar to race and ethnicity, the nation also has become a largely negatively charged concept, inseparable from nationalism.³¹ This has coincided with the “constructivist turn” in European academia. Social constructivism in its pure form suggests that “the natural world has a small or non-existent role in the construction of scientific knowledge.”³² Behind the assertion that something is ‘socially constructed’ often lurks a tacit assumption that a practice or perception is ‘ideological’, i.e. an instrumental tool for promoting a particular group’s interests. Thus, deconstruction is required to ‘expose’ the ideological basis of a statement or theoretical position. And the issues singled out for ‘deconstruction’ did very often seem to be phenomena the political left disapproves of. Thus scholarship degenerates into ‘politics by other means.’ The problematic effects only became acknowledged as the pulverizing quality of (de)constructivism was directed at in-groups, such as the Palestinians. Yara El-Ghadban asked: “How to deconstruct a notion without destroying the meaning that it has for people”?³³

How indeed? Even hardened social constructivists balk at the prospect of depriving the much-tested Palestinian people of their sense of community. Enter the intervening variables of power and privilege. In certain parts of academia, white majorities are seen as inherently privileged, and therefore more deserving of negative scrutiny, for example by asserting that “only white people can be racist.”³⁴ This is – of course – a racist trope, attributing negative stereotypes on the basis of skin colour. This way of problematizing aspects of majority culture has – at least in part – helped give rise to contemporary ‘identity politics’, where groups are defined in reference to latent characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, gender et cetera. This seems to have activated anxieties in majority cultures in many western countries manifesting themselves, *inter alia*, in opposition to immigration from cultures deemed to be ‘alien’, and seemingly reinforcing voting along racial lines.³⁵

While academia has been able to enshrine their definitions as received wisdom within their own community and to shape the vocabulary of the public discourse, public opinion has stubbornly failed to conform to the scholarly consensus. Perhaps one might say that Antonio

Gramsci's theory of 'cultural hegemony' holds true. The university discourse clearly dominates that overall discourse, but that discourse is more superficial than the philosopher assumed. Shaping the vocabulary by which a topic is discussed does not necessarily change the underlying perceptions.³⁶ Jonathan Haidt uses a metaphor, 'the moral elephant' which describes the process of human cognition, in terms of intuition and strategic reasoning. In this process, "moral intuitions (i.e., judgments) arise automatically and almost instantaneously, long before moral reasoning has a chance to get started, and those first intuitions tend to drive our later reasoning." Initial intuitions driving later reasoning is the definition of ideologically motivated reasoning.³⁷ The role of academia has, on this level, been a part of the dynamic where views held by ever larger segments of the population was driven outside the bounds of intellectual respectability and creating a consuming discourse replete with vicarious terminology.

One must hasten to add that there is likely no conspiracy at play, only bias. In a seminal study of housing segregation Thomas Schelling provided a blueprint for how this might have come about. He found that if people can pick and choose their neighbour, they might not mind having a black person as one of their neighbours, but they certainly do not want two black neighbours. They want most neighbours to be like themselves. The effect of such 'weak preference' was that blacks were more frequently de-selected resulting, over time, in complete segregation.³⁸ The result seems to be that an overrepresentation of certain political inclinations in academia is an important factor as to why scholars today lack the basic terminology to discuss the legitimate concerns of majority culture without running the risk of being branded a racist by colleagues. How this could happen in the West which prides itself on its adversarial culture and enlightenment values? One place to start might be Norbert Elias' seminal work, *The Civilizing Process*, where he analyses the European brand of 'intolerant tolerance'. Elias notes that Western culture has developed particularly sophisticated, concise, comprehensive, and rigid institutions, social regulations, or self-restraining psychological agents.³⁹

This is, admittedly, the tip of an intellectual iceberg that goes far back, according to Elias, at least to the grand debate between the German emphasis on *Kultur* and the French, and later Anglo-American focus on *Civilisation*. The debate is between the organic and particular – as opposed to the generic and universal – aspects of collective identities. There are many nuances to this discourse, but it might be fair to say that 'kultur vs. civilisation' mirrors a dichotomy found in many, perhaps most, studies of human societies, what Charles

Darwin dubbed ‘lumpers’ and ‘splitters.’ Lumpers like to group things into broad categories, while splitters divide things into smaller categories. Social scientists tend to be lumpers when discussing majority cultures, emphasising common traits across national boundaries, while at the same time being splitters when it comes to minority cultures, emphasising the distinctive elements of each such culture. The dominant ideology in any society will lend credence (and research funding) to certain perspectives, while discrediting and discouraging others. This helps us understand why majority culture has few proponents and many detractors in contemporary academia.

This challenge is not easily resolved. The academy will strongly resist any diversity requirements that would favour conservatives. A better course of action is for European states to conduct studies into the ideological leanings of the university faculty, as has been done in the USA. Should bias be found this will likely even itself out in the medium to long term. In the short-term, policy makers are wise to keep in mind that expert analysis may be biased. A final suggestion might be to fund alternative research communities with the explicit aim of challenging received wisdom in the hermeneutic sense.

Sources of the cultural backlash

Treating the majority culture as an inherently problematic entity has made debates on immigration in Europe prone to coded language, that appears to mean one thing but has an additional, different, or more specific resonance to many. As Jens-Martin Eriksen and Frederik Stjernfelt have pointed out, when Europeans express concerns over the impact of migration on language, the economy, the rule of law or social services, we also talk about culture, though indirectly.⁴⁰ This broad observation can be subdivided into two (separable, but not separate) broad debates about immigration in Europe: that of numbers & composition, and that of multiculturalism & nationhood.

Debate 1: Is a given country obligated to let migrants in; and, if so, how many; and, is it legitimate to favour culturally similar migrants?

Debate 2: What privileges should be afforded to the national culture and what degree of cultural autonomy can minorities reasonably demand?

1. Migration: *Numbers & composition*

The challenge of numbers and composition of migrants, speed of immigration and the ‘absorption capacity’ of the destination country is intimately linked to culture. Yuval Noah Hariri writes: “(...) a national community is far more than a collection of people who tolerate each other. Therefore, it is not enough that immigrants adhere to European standards of tolerance. They must also adopt many of the unique characteristics of British, German or Swedish culture, whatever these may be. By allowing them in, the local culture is taking upon itself a big risk and a huge expense”.⁴¹

For this reason, a number of countries – Australia, New Zealand, the USA and the UK among them – have moved to a ‘points-based immigration system’. Under such a system, any non-citizen's eligibility to immigrate can be decided by whether that non-citizen scores above a threshold of points, in a system where points are awarded based on what are deemed relevant factors such as skills, connection with the country, education, language fluency, existing job offer, or cultural proximity. A number of countries, Norway among them, have introduced ‘integrationability,’ that is the assumed capacity to integrate, as a criterion when taking in refugees or asylum seekers. These expanding categories are overlapping in Europe, since there is scant scope for economic migration, driving aspiring migrants to make their case in humanitarian terms.

In the centuries prior to 1945, immigration to Europe was a limited phenomenon. Most countries had legislation that made immigration difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. This changed in the 1950s. The bloodletting of World War II had created shortfalls in the workforce that were seen to hamper economic growth. During *Les Trente Glorieuses*, the ‘Thirty Golden’ post-war years, guest worker schemes were launched in many West-European countries, with France and Germany at the forefront. Young men from countries with population surpluses were offered short-term contracts to work in the factories. This helped keep wage costs down and stave off automation. The influx was sizeable. In the period 1960–1973, Germany alone accepted some 14 million guest workers. Since the recruitment and training of guest workers was cumbersome, countries took to expanding contracts and facilitating family reunification. This led to local protests, but the objections were swept aside, as economic growth took precedence over other concerns.⁴²

The planners misjudged the needs of the industry, which turned out to be temporary, while many of the immigrants settled for good – the opposite of what was intended. When

European industry suffered a lasting setback during the economic crisis of the 1970s, country after country introduced immigration stops that – albeit with added loopholes allowing for chain migration – remain in place to this date. Since 1968 the European Communities (EEC, later EU) asserted that the free movement of labour was a fundamental right which, over time, generated substantial migration among countries in Europe.⁴³ Perhaps as a testimony to the importance of culture and cultural proximity, such immigration has, for the most part, generated surprisingly little discord.

This changed with the economic downturn and gradual de-industrialisation in Europe starting in the 1970s. With the demand for low-skilled immigration ebbing, a supply-driven new form of immigration from developing countries to Europe grew in importance. The number of asylum seekers increased sharply from the 1980s. In 1984, about one hundred thousand asylum seekers came to the whole of Western Europe. This figure increased to almost seven hundred thousand in 1992. Asylum immigration then dropped somewhat, to rise to over one million migrants in 2015. In a few short decades, immigration has permanently changed the population composition of most West European countries. Norway can serve as an example. In 1970, 1.3 per cent of the Norwegian population were of foreign origin. In 2018, the same figure was 18 per cent. The EU average for the foreign-born proportion of the population is around 10 per cent, of which about six per cent – 32 million – is persons from outside Europe. The scale of recent immigration to Europe has no modern precedent.

Numbers matter. Native population in North-West European countries in particular will find themselves as the largest minorities on local, regional, and – in the longer term – even on national levels. If one takes numbers of migrants relative to the native population for any given country over the past two decades and projects them into the future, one would arrive at what year exactly this shift will take place, assuming that the liberal immigration policies of the early 2000s are continued. To give one example: In London white British today make up only 45 per cent of the population. It should here be noted that statisticians tend to assume assimilation after two generations, which is a flawed assumption under the conditions of segregation and multiculturalism. Inter-marriage is an important indicator of the social integration of immigrants and minority peoples in majority cultures. Especially for Europe's roughly 44 million strong Muslim population, marriage across ethnic lines remains extremely low.⁴⁴

The latter is a relevant point since we now have fifty years of experience with large-scale immigration, and the assumption that integration, and thereby composition, will take care of

itself over generations, would seem flawed. Helmut Schmidt, the former German chancellor, concluded in an interview that the guest worker policy over which he had presided, had been a mistake, "that at the beginning of the sixties we brought guest workers from foreign cultures into the country," Schmidt stated. "The resulting problems have been neglected in Germany, but also throughout Europe." A primary cause for these problems is, according to the Chancellor that "many foreigners do not want to integrate." Schmidt has expected assimilation to take place of its own accord, which turned out to be a flawed premise. Large migrant numbers make sustaining immigrant cultures viable; multiculturalism makes it acceptable.⁴⁵ As Betts and Collier put it: "Culture is a further important barrier: people seldom wish to abandon their own culture. As with language, the barrier is diminished as the diaspora grows and people can cluster into culture-preserving groups."⁴⁶ This is the backdrop to the wide-spread concerns over immigration seen among the native populations in many European countries.

Mass immigration is often presented as inevitable.⁴⁷ This is clearly not the case. Europe has some seven percent of the world's population, it has roughly a quarter of the world economy, it shoulders some fifty per cent of the global welfare expenditure and it received some eighty per cent of all the asylum applications in the world.⁴⁸ Asylum is, in other words, a distinctly European way of migration. As a result of stricter controls, fewer economic migrants from developing countries come to Europe today than during the years of the guest worker schemes. Some countries accept many asylum seekers, while other countries welcome few. In the first quarter of 2019, Portugal granted a total of 75 'first instance' asylums to applicants. France granted 7495 and Denmark 335. The corresponding figures for Norway and Sweden were 330 and 1655, respectively.⁴⁹

There have been a great many studies on the economic impact of third world migration to universal welfare states. The findings point to a simple fact: this sort of migration strongly benefits the migrant but represents a net economic burden on the public finances of the countries that welcome them.⁵⁰ The move towards stricter immigration policies remain contested. While those with high education and high incomes tend to be more positive towards more immigration, an increasing proportion of the European population remains sceptical. In *The Road to Somewhere*, David Goodhart puts forth the argument that the benefits of loose migration policies mostly accrue to the urban, educated middle class, while the costs have disproportionately been shouldered by the less educated and rural populations.

This could help explain the resentment against ‘elites’ found in many West European countries, Goodhart argues.⁵¹

A desire for lower levels of migrations was, for a long time, ignored. This helps explain why the migration crisis of 2015 became such a watershed. A large study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2014 showed that 55 per cent of the respondents in seven of the largest European countries wanted fewer immigrants to their countries.⁵² Then, in 2015, the already historically high migrant numbers were doubled, and a political backlash ensued. Paul Collier writes: “[...] anti-immigrant parties now attract a remarkably high share of the vote. Far from forcing sane debate on immigration policy by the mainstream parties, the emergence of extremists has further frightened them away from the issue. Either you regard this outcome as a shocking condemnation of ordinary people, or as a shocking condemnation of the mainstream political parties: I view it as the latter.”⁵³

What was previously considered a humanitarian and administrative question has become a political fault line. For some, immigration is a fountain of youth for greying populations, a source of economic growth and the rescue of the welfare state. For others, immigrants are the cause of wage stagnation, overburdened social security nets and cultural fragmentation. One of the major problems when discussing immigration is that there is little trust between the two camps; even numbers are contested. Where one side sees immigration as a moral test, the other sees a wrongheaded social experiment carried out by elites who live in neighbourhoods where they enjoy many of the benefits of open borders and few of the downsides.

The onus of the debate has shifted in recent years. Most states today underline “[...] a sovereign right to regulate its national immigration and refugee policy,” to cite a recent Norwegian government White Paper.⁵⁴ In connection with the refugee and migration crisis in 2015, the Norwegian parliament requested the Government to initiate a review of international conventions on refugees and migration. The study concluded that, in general, states have significant room for manoeuvre under international conventions as regards the levels, composition and speed of immigration. If a country such as Poland chooses to only let in Middle Eastern refugees on the condition that they are Christians, this may be disagreeable to some, but well within the bounds of international conventions.

What is interesting is that the obvious debate, that of an agreed upper ceiling for annual migration, remains elusive in most West European countries. This may, in part be

because of the British experience where the Cameron government in 2010 set a migration target of 100,000 per year, which it failed to meet. A recent global study by YouGov-Cambridge Globalism found that half of the Italian population view immigration as negative for the country, followed by Sweden, France and Germany.⁵⁵ While some forms of asylum migration have dropped significantly since the peak in 2015, overall migration numbers – including from outside Europe – remain high. Eurostat, the EU statistics agency, reports that 2.4 million immigrants entered the EU from non-EU countries in 2017, the most recent year for which figures are available.⁵⁶

It would thus seem that public opinion continues to fail to translate into public policy, which would indicate that the question will retain its destabilizing potential in a political sense.⁵⁷ Many West European countries have put themselves in a position where the centrist parties have shown themselves unwilling or unable to lower levels of migration, as desired by a large part of the electorate. Should the 2015 scenario repeat itself – or in the event of a sharp economic downturn – it is not self-evident that the political systems in West European countries will retain their stability. The most notable casualties of the migration crisis of 2015 have been the large centre-right and centre-left parties, making coalition politics in many European countries chaotic and cumbersome. In this sense, 2015 may well have been a harbinger, because the systems and practices that allowed millions to apply for asylum have not been altered, only the measures to keep applicants out. Fences again line Europe's outer borders. Should one country along the Mediterranean open the gates, as Turkey did in 2015, the political outfall will be unforeseeable, potentially destabilizing.

A willingness on behalf of immigrants to adhere to European standards of tolerance is part of the answer to ease concerns over migration but this leaves open the question of European countries' unique national identities. What are the cultural norms that immigrants should be expected to be integrated or assimilated into? As long as Europeans remain bitterly divided on this topic and discussions about overall migration targets and point-based migration remain, migration to Europe is likely remain intensely polarizing. As long as this remains the case, it is unlikely that any compromise can be found on the question 'how many are too many'?

2. Cohesion: multiculturalism & nationhood

For countries in western Europe, in particular, the surge in immigration from beyond Europe in the 2000s coincided with a tentative embrace of ‘multiculturalism’ as a social contract. Terje Tvedt describes this, in a Norwegian context, as ‘paternalistic multiculturalism’: “It did not envisage a future society with Hindu temples and mosques on every street corner, or with parallel communities practicing their own laws, but advocated rather equal treatment of all cultures under a neutral state, and at the same time focused on the individual – all based on the dogmas specific to the period of human rights universalism and developmental universalism. Multiculturalism in its Norwegian incarnation rested on the idea that History itself would resolve the conflict or the differences between cultures, because everyone would become like ‘us’, given time.”⁵⁸

This is a fair description of what many in Europe thought that multiculturalism meant. In fact, the term refers to something much broader, an alternative social contract. Will Kymlicka, the political theorist behind ‘liberal multiculturalism,’ argues something rather more permanent, namely that immigrants should “maintain their collective identity” in their private lives and in voluntary associations while participating “in the dominant culture’s public institutions”. He advocates a ‘thin’ culture where citizens should adhere to liberal democratic principles and considered any unifying national culture as superfluous in “diverse societies”.⁵⁹ This is incompatible with national culture both in theory and practice.

The fierce opposition that this has drawn, particularly after the policy fell into disrepute in the early 2000s, runs the danger of overstating the impact of the multicultural shift. The policies enacted in most European countries, resembled the policies in place before the term came into use, and the policies after.⁶⁰ Perhaps it is most precise to say that multiculturalism came into vogue at a time when national identity was seen as less relevant in an age of globalisation, especially among the internationally mobile elites, and in part as a simple solution to the challenge of migration exceeding many societies ‘absorption capacity’ in terms of informal assimilation. The main effect of multiculturalism was, arguably, what it prevented, namely the sort of assimilatory policies that might have been expected in order to cope with large scale culturally alien migration. President Woodrow Wilson’s opposition to “hyphenated Americans” lacks parallels in European mainstream political discourse.⁶¹

Multiculturalism seemed to resolve the liberal concern where an individual's freedoms are perceived as so paramount that any culturally-motivated expectations on behalf of the collective would be tantamount to abuse of their human rights. And herein lies a paradox of 'liberal multiculturalism': its referent point is not individuals, but groups. It is not entirely clear how 'liberal' liberal multiculturalism ever was. Rather than intellectual rigour, the real selling point for multiculturalism was that it was far cheaper than integrating or assimilating immigrants.

In his 2007 book *Multicultural Odysseys*, Kymlicka writes that the multicultural "experiment is facing an uncertain future".⁶² This was an understatement. The assumption that cultural diversity would be confined to the private sphere soon proved naive. The brief experiment with multiculturalism exposed the weakened state of national identities in Europe. This weakening of patriotism made Western Europe more tolerant and more welcoming to newcomers. But diversity has its price. In a speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2011 the then British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that the multicultural experiment was "dead". He claimed that state-sponsored multiculturalism has not been able to deliver a vision for the society that people want to belong to. "Under the doctrine of multiculturalism as a social contract, we have [...] tolerated these segregated societies acting in ways that conflict with our values," Cameron said.⁶³ Paul Collier, among others, notes that the combination of multiculturalism, high levels of immigration and generous welfare states are unsustainable, based on the strong empirical evidence that diversity decreases solidarity.⁶⁴

The more culturally heterogeneous the population is, the more trust and solidarity appears to erode. Philosopher Gunnar Skirbekk argues in the book *Norwegian and Modern* that cultural cohesion is a precondition for the modern Norwegian welfare state.⁶⁵ It can be argued that the side-lining of cultural concerns in the name of tolerance seems to have expanded the discourse on migration to concerns over integration. But rather than any principled discussion about national culture, the debates have often sought to address the symbols of lacking integration rather than speak to the underlying concern, namely the desire for community.

These debates, in turn, have often been taken as evidence of the supposedly intolerant nature of those who favour national culture over multiculturalism. Majority culture is more benign than is sometimes presumed. Duke University political scientist Ashley Jardina's *White Identity Politics*, which uses surveys to explore the meaning of white identity today, has

shown that whites who identify with their group are no more hostile to minorities than those who do not.⁶⁶

Europe is the home of the nation state. This European model has been globalized into a world made up of nation states. Timothy Snyder has in a recent book argued that nations are a recent phenomenon, little more than a century old.⁶⁷ He arrives at this conclusion because the word ‘nation’ only came into common use in the mid-nineteenth century, which seems to imply a curious reasoning where a social phenomenon did not exist before the current academic jargon came into use. The amount of historical evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. One example can stand for many. No-one who has read the Norse sagas, written during the high middle ages, can be in any doubt that Norwegians saw themselves as Norwegians, distinct from their neighbours, the Danes and the Swedes.

This is not to say that nations are constant; clearly, they are not. States have, in part as a result of both top-down and bottom-up nation-building, developed national cultures with a varying degree of ‘density’, in terms of what a member of the community is expected to know and adhere to. The rise of the nation state after the Peace of Westphalia took on various guises, contingent on factors such as whether nation and territory coincided, whether the state included more than one nation, when the nation state came into being, and the social and political contract underpinning the nation state. What remains certain is that all nation states until relatively recently actively encouraged nation-building in most collective arenas.

In the post-Cold War era, most West European states have departed from fostering Thiesse’s definition of national identity. Instead, the national community was to be based on support for certain common values and beliefs. The difference is between being a “people” and being a “population”. This was considered necessary to handle large-scale immigration and to try to foster a ‘European identity’ to complement the European Union. The EU dispenses ever more of the research funding in Europe, and an interesting study would be to see what extent EU research funding favours the anti-nation state bias in contemporary academia.

The European Union has defined “European values” as being “respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.”⁶⁸ The values that would bind old and new population groups remained vague slogans. The underlying assumption is that national identity is exclusive, while a value identity is inclusive. The solution has been to simply assume that European nation states have thin, value-based identities. In reality, most European states have ‘dense’ cultures, that it takes dedicated

efforts on from the migrant to internalize. National identities are formal and informal, they are positively and negatively defined, they are ancient and recent, they are historical, and they are invented. The quality of any given national culture can, perhaps, best be judged by the extent to which it is able to foster a common identity, shared across all that divides the members of a given nation state.

The surge in nation-building at the turn of the 20th century and after WW2 was a means to an end, and that end was to bind the individual to the collective. This cohesion was seen as integral in bringing about the fruits of the nation state; democracy, the rule of law, the welfare state, and human rights. Nation-building is the time-tested method in Europe to ease concerns over fragmentation and division. It is often forgotten that nation-building was the response to challenges not dissimilar to those seen today. The cohesion it provides was always more important than the content of national identity, the ‘set of symbols and material things’ in Thiesse’s definition.

Renewed efforts at nation-building might seem to serve national cohesion, but the burdens of integration would admittedly disproportionately fall on migrant communities, as would the social stigmas of those who fail to adhere to the demands of a resurgent national “we”. For national identity to be embraced by the majority it must flow primarily from the established national culture. Any attempt at nation-building based on something inclusive and not overly burdened with specific meaning, say, ‘European values’ will likely be too bland to inspire genuine devotion in old and new populations alike.

This means what the scholar Bassam Tibi calls ‘Leitkultur’ (leading culture) model for support for shared values.⁶⁹ This is based on a realisation that not all religious and cultural practices are compatible nor equally permissible in European societies. Cultural tolerance cannot be given primacy over the responsibilities of citizenship, which is uniquely and exclusively tied to a nation state. We must acknowledge, that culture matters in directing an individual’s identity, solidarity and loyalty. We should be aware of creating what Anne Julie Semb calls a “citizenship plus” category where new migrants get access to the rights of the nation state but are allowed to shirk the obligations.⁷⁰ That only works in small numbers. This strategy emphasizes that national law, culture and values apply in the nation state. The nation state, in turn should promote national culture in education, in the arts and in entertainment. If persons cannot or will not be assimilated, they must accept that the leading national culture should have preferential rights, and if collisions occur, the national culture should have the “right of way.”

The danger is that such efforts would cause some groups to retreat into themselves. Vicky Fouka argues that coercive policies and demands can have the opposite effect intended. In a study of German-American communities in the 1800s, she found that those affected by a ban to speak German in schools were more likely to marry another Germans and give their children German names, and less likely to enlist to fight for the US in World War 2. We are told that “Forced assimilation backfired at every level, from the personal to the political.”⁷¹

“There are two ways of constructing an international order,” Henry Kissinger once wrote, “by will or by renunciation; by conquest or by legitimacy.”⁷² The same goes for domestic orders. The current path of outlawing certain cultural symbols and practices points in the authoritarian direction. Nation-building was a way to encourage legitimacy by will, given that the alternative was coercion. Not all citizens of a nation state need to join, but it would seem a critical mass is required. What this critical mass is, is bound to vary in accordance with circumstances and the demands the social contract places on the individual.

Future scholars will wonder that a whole generation of academicians failed to see the degree to which the universalist welded states of north western Europe were fruits of a specific culture and the hopeless naiveté that lead the same scholars to believe that this model could be preserved without cultural cohesion.⁷³ In countries like Denmark, the UK and France we today see a movement towards clearer expectations about adherence to a ‘dense’ national culture than a ‘thin’ value-surrogate. European leaders, for the first time in a generation, are now showing interest in nation-building, the most high-profile example being France’s new policy of a two week ‘national service’ for all 16-year-olds explicitly aimed at fostering patriotism and cohesion in the population. In Europe the great trends, those that matter, tend move ahead under a barrage of disparagement before silently emerging as the status quo. Nation building will likely an example of this. Quite simply because no country can afford to import an underclass of culturally different people who are sustained by the taxes paid by a native middle class that has little in common with them bar their shared humanity. Any society has fault lines, economic, regional, cultural, religious and race. If there is one thing political science has taught us it is that when fault lines coincide- for example when a group that has a different skin colour, a different culture and live in clusters also are at the bottom of the economic pile, you have the recipe for conflict in any society. That is as true for blacks in the US as for Koreans in japan or Arab Muslims in France.

Nation building would as a first rule mean that the state promotes the national culture. Of course, other cultures can be promoted and flourish, but this is not the obligation of the

state. The state should set voluntary assimilation as the goal. The number one priority here is language, language. The national language(s) should be given primacy in all the state's dealings with its citizens. Second, a national curriculum should be reinstated in all school with the aim of making all citizens familiar with the great works in literature, art and film of the national culture. The point is not what the people learn, but that they learn the same cultural reference points. National history must back on the curriculum et cetera et cetera. President Macron's re-vamped national service is an obvious way to ensure that young people from different walks of life meet and develop loyalty and solidarity with each other and at an impressionable age. In the Norwegian context the obvious, and urgent, task is to assimilate newcomers into an understanding that the welfare state is at its core a collective insurance scheme, it is not 'free money'. This is an urgent challenge given that migrants are notably over-represented as net beneficiaries of welfare spending. If this is to continue it may come to undermine middle-class support for the universalist model.

Re-establishing cultural identity can be achieved while keeping up with the tide of globalisation. Francis Fukuyama sums up the predicament of cultural sustainability in the face of large-scale migration: "In both Europe and the United States, that debate is currently polarized between a right that seeks to cut off immigration altogether and would like to send current immigrants back to their countries of origin, and a left that asserts a virtually unlimited obligation on the part of liberal democracies to accept migrants. The real focus should instead be on strategies for better assimilating immigrants to a country's creedal identity." This is a quick fix attempt to introduce the 'thin' American national culture to Europe, where national culture is 'dense'. It is not enough to say that you love Norway and its constitution to be regarded as a Norwegian by other Norwegians. A degree of cultural assimilation is required. Such a path in Europe would divide nation states into 'us' and 'them' with national culture as the great divider, as opposed to unifier. That said, Fukuyama is no doubt correct when he asserts that "Europeans pay lip service to the need for better assimilation but fail to follow through with an effective set of policies."⁷⁴

How to gauge cultural limits to sustainable immigration?

At the height of the 2015 migrant crisis, when over a million migrants arrived in Europe, one of the few pan-European newspapers, *The Economist*, argued: "There are surely limits to how

many migrants any society will accept. But the numbers Europe proposes to receive do not begin to breach them.”⁷⁵ In its leader article the Economist went on to suggest sustainability in terms of economy, labour market, available housing *et cetera*. Few would argue that the migrant crisis came close to bankrupting European states, nor overwhelming their public sectors.⁷⁶

And yet, since then European politics have been transformed to a point where no government openly espouse liberal immigration policies, even if many still practice them. Most European countries today actively discourage supply-driven migration from beyond Europe and attempts to redistribute the migrants that arrived in Southern Europe in 2015 and had already been processed have foundered. Similarly, multiculturalism as a social contract has been discredited. Most countries have implemented policies making integration an explicit duty of the migrant.⁷⁷ Language requirements, oaths of allegiance, and obligatory cultural courses for migrants have proliferated throughout Europe, but in a haphazard manner without any overall plan of what nation they intend to build.

Arguably, the most important unforeseen consequences of the decline of the liberal multicultural consensus on migration have been political. In many countries, the centre-right and centre-left parties that took turns at governing in the latter half of the 1900s have been weakened by a rapid growth of right-wing parties. The centre-left have been particularly hard hit, losing vote shares and government posts.⁷⁸ Francis Fukuyama concludes: “Social democracy, one of the dominant forces shaping Western European politics in the two generations following World War II, has been in retreat.”⁷⁹ Fukuyama argues that there are, surely, a number of reasons for this, some of them particular to national circumstances, but immigration remains the indispensable factor in any analysis. Most scholars now seem to agree that there are aspects constraining a society’s ‘absorption capacity’ other than the economy.⁸⁰

This ‘other’, it would seem, is in no small extent the cultural concerns of the majority. Culture is learned, it is a matter of nurture, not nature. But it is also hard to delineate, since it comprises everything from breakfast habits to social conventions and observed political norms. Perhaps for this reason, many scholars introduce values as a surrogate for culture in their research. Values are, according to the Oxford dictionary, “principles or standards of behaviour; one’s judgement of what is important in life.”⁸¹ This is to substitute a ‘fat’ variable with a ‘skinny’ one. Although the two certainly overlap, they are hardly interchangeable. The

subsequent loss of substance is compounded when values then are compressed further into a single, measurable, variable: trust.

Trust is the current variable *de rigeur* in integration studies. In Norway, Grete Brochmann has been a leading proponent of treating this as a key gauge to sustainable immigration.⁸² The notion is that if the levels of trust expressed in opinion polls do not plummet, immigration is implicitly deemed sustainable. The levels of trust among members of a society varies greatly in different cultural spheres, invariably exemplified in the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map of the world.⁸³ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel assert that there are two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation in the world: Traditional values versus Secular-rational values, and Survival values versus Self-expression values. Migration into Europe was an experiment, not only due to the scale and speed, but also because people from one end of the value map migrated to societies at the opposite end. One result has been a huge drain on social safety nets, which Christopher Caldwell argues has everything to do with a culture that sees the safety nets not as ‘safety nets’ *per se*, but rather as a windfall.⁸⁴ Most European countries are very far from admitting that the low workforce participation among culturally distant immigrant groups has something to do with culture, more specifically the intransigence of the cultural-moral logic captured by Inglehart and Welzel.

Cultural differences can lead to falling trust, but there are some obvious challenges when it comes to over-reliance on such surveys. One potential problem with treating ‘trust’ as a surrogate for culture is that in many European countries it is ‘bad’ to admit to being distrustful. A further challenge with using trust as indicator is the question of proximity. The segregation of immigrant and native communities in many European countries can mean that generalized trust reflects the people the respondent actually comes into contact with.⁸⁵ One example: Swedish scholars have found that Swedes combine a very high level of trust and tolerance with a surprisingly low threshold for moving to a different neighbourhood when immigrants who are culturally dissimilar settle in their communities. The figure is as low as 3 to 4 per cent, which would indicate the opposite of tolerance and trust.⁸⁶ In sum, in a context of segregation, ‘generalized trust’ is a problematic measure of a society’s absorption capacity’ when it comes to immigration. This rhymes with the Robert Putnam’s findings that a greater degree of heterogeneity has a negative impact on social cohesion, limited to the local neighborhood, but does not necessarily affect generalized trust.”⁸⁷

The endless debates on immigration in Europe that focus on cultural symbols, in terms of dress, behaviour, and religio-cultural practices seen as undesirable by many among the

majority population, indicate widely shared concerns that have failed to translate into corresponding shifts in the trust variable, which has largely failed to reflect the overall shift in attitudes towards migration and integration: “The inflow must not exceed a rate and a volume that the nation-state system can manage to include in ways that do not drain public budgets disproportionately and which do not generate substantially increased inequality. Besides, the composition of migrants must be balanced in ways that are perceived as politically legitimate within the democratic constituency.”⁸⁸ While there is little to disagree with in this formulation, Brochmann and Grødem fail to explain how these conditions or balance might be usefully operationalised.

Approaching the same question from a different angle: Sustainability is the ability to sustain or continue. Cultural sustainability in the present context refers to the national culture. Gauging cultural sustainability would, ideally, include all the elements mentioned in the definitions mentioned above. Unfortunately, this is not realistic, in the sense that any attempt at operationalisation would either be uneconomical or, worse, be prone to introduce a conclusion among the premises for the argument. One measurement that has tried to overcome this challenge, is ‘social capital,’ defined by Robert Putnam as factors of well-functioning communities, including interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity.⁸⁹

Putnam found that the more ethnically diverse communities become, the more likely people are to «seal themselves off». They trust their neighbours less and are less predisposed to spend their money on common goods or social spending.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, this yardstick makes it hard to unbundle the effects of migration from the myriad of social shifts associated with modernity, globalisation, past grievances *et cetera*. How to get around the challenge of a discourse that makes it difficult to articulate cultural concerns and the shortcomings of surrogates such as trust or social capital to get at the question of cultural concerns?

Culture is taken to mean different things to different people, especially in the context of migration where unease is primarily triggered by migration from developing countries, and Muslim migration in particular. This challenge is complicated by the discourse itself being devoid of any agreed terminology and an ever-present danger of being coming across as racist. This makes it difficult to find a way to frame a direct question in a manner that would illicit a response that reflects the opinions of those polled. The obvious way is to bypass the ‘black box’ and simply focus on output, that is, to use attitudes to immigration as the indicator of cultural sustainability.

The assumption is that cultural concerns shape attitudes to immigration directly, that this is a key output variable from the ‘black box’ of cultural sustainability, which is hard to articulate, for reasons outlined above. Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, writing in the same series, offer a “working definition” of sustainable migration: “migration that has the democratic support of the receiving society, meets the long-term interests of the receiving state, sending society, and migrants themselves, and fulfils basic ethical obligations.”⁹¹ The section highlights two key aspects. The term ‘working’ is an implicit critique of intellectually satisfying definitions that are unrealistic in terms of research economy.

The second aspect is that of democratic support. The assumption is that for migration to be sustainable, it needs to enjoy the support of the polity. The question is how to gauge this? We know that this democratic support varies over time, so a dynamic measurement is required. Also, more than an ‘ideal solution’, we need a measurement that can actually be used. Democratic elections, carried out every four years in most democracies, cannot fill that purpose since immigration is just one of a plethora of issues on the agenda, making election results an imperfect gauge. The obvious solution is to use polls of “do you want the current level of immigration to decline, rise, or stay at the current level?” as an indicator of cultural sustainability.

When it comes to attitudes to migration, not all surveys are equal. The wording of the questions posed can elicit very different responses. Questions used by agencies such as Eurobarometer and Pew on attitudes to migration tend to be carefully monitored for bias, *inter alia* by the use of focus groups prior to surveys, and could be used as a best practice baseline. One widely used question, is: "In your opinion, should we allow more immigrants move to our country, fewer immigrants, or about the same as now." This question is by no means a perfect indicator of cultural sustainability, but it does capture the differences in various nation states in terms of embracing the cultural change associated with immigration, and it reflects popular perceptions of the present state of affairs as to whether immigration is ‘working out’ for the native population.

Greater realism would be achieved if polling were to include questions regarding numbers in terms of refugees / other migrants, temporal / permanent migrants, as well as cultural and religious backgrounds under the alternate premise of multiculturalism, integration, or assimilation – but this would be both controversial and expensive. The strength of using a single indicator is that it readily understandable, that is, it does not need to be interpreted by academicians in order to make sense. This is potentially crucial due to the

biases discussed above, which although not confirmed certainly cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, a direct gauge lends agency to the subject. The large differences among European countries as well as shifts over time in this measure would seem to align more closely with the rise of cultural concerns than other attempts to gauge the cultural sustainability of migration. Put simply, a workable definition of culturally sustainable migration might be ‘migration that has the democratic support of the receiving society, as illustrated in polls taken up at regular intervals.’

Concluding remarks

In their final remarks in their contribution to the EMD Discussion paper series, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier remark: “Migration is part of the current globalised world, and it can offer significant benefits to receiving and sending societies, as well as migrants themselves. However, in order to avoid the politics of panic seen in Europe and beyond since 2015, there is an urgent need for clear-sighted and ethically grounded framework for sustainable migration.⁹²” This study concurs. The problem is that the role of academia has been problematic, as illustrated above, making it unlikely that any complex measurement will be safe from manipulation and able to garner trust from the relevant sections of society. This study therefore suggests a stripped-down single gauge of cultural sustainability: polls on the question: "In your opinion, should we allow more (culturally distant/low skilled) immigrants from countries outside Schengen to move to our country, fewer immigrants, or about the same as now."

If public opinion is negative this can be taken as a sign that current policies are unsustainable. If so, policy makers should look to solutions along two paths, also highlighted in this study, those of numbers & composition as well as of multiculturalism and nationhood. One possible solution can be to agree on absolute numbers of migrants allowed to settle in the country from various categories, such as refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, family reunion et cetera. States can prioritize migrants that in the past have proven to be easy to integrate and deprioritize migrants from cultures that provide a significant impediment to integration. At the same time states can likely increase support for immigration by actively encourage voluntary assimilation into the national culture through nation-building along the lines seen in many European countries, emphasising the individual’s obligations to the state they have chosen to become citizens of. As a final remark, it is worth emphasising that

ethnicity is not ‘race’, it is not inherent – it is learnt. A national culture for the 21st century is bound to be different in shape and content from national cultures of the twentieth and nineteenth century. The path a nation takes to dignity and self-understanding is one of the most intimate processes imaginable, and one that cannot be determined top-down, or indeed bottom-up – both will be needed.

Endnotes

¹ Asle Toje is a Norwegian social scientist. The author thanks EMN Norway for commissioning this paper and is particularly thankful for the plentiful feedback on earlier drafts made by Øyvind Jaer, Magne Holter, and Stina Holth. The current working paper represents work in progress, and it should be read as part of the author’s evolving reflections on the relatively new concept of culturally sustainable migration. Needless to say, I welcome feedback positive and negative in order to help improve on the ideas for a culturally sustainable approach to migration.

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