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**Measuring immigrant integration policy:  
notes for a mixed-methodological approach**

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# Measuring immigrant integration policy: notes for a mixed-methodological approach

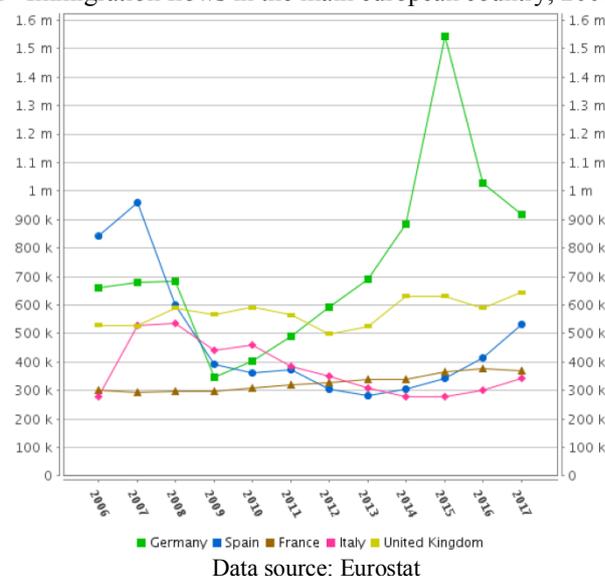
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*Although the issue of immigrant integration has long been present in the sociological debate, it has undergone further development in recent decades. Especially, in the European context, unlike that of North America there has been a lack of interest in the long-term effects of migration policies. Also in countries that have historically been nations of emigration, the increase in migratory flows from third world countries has forced national and EU institutions to adopt policies aimed at fostering integration of new arrivals in host societies. However, the differences between the various European countries and the initial marginality of the action of the European institutions has led to the development of different models of integration. Thus, it is very difficult to compare the different European realities. Since there is no univocal definition of the concept of integration, the consequent formulation of multiple proposals for measuring integration levels prevails. In this paper, after a review on the main theoretical contributions on the topic, the most relevant proposals aimed at measuring integration will be reported.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, immigration is probably the most debated issue, not only in Italy and Europe, but across the western world. It is now constantly present on political agendas and it is one of the main topics of which election campaigns are conducted. This fact often causes distortions in the understanding of the phenomenon, creating fears and uncertainties in the population, which can lead to acts of discrimination, often violent. For instance, the perception linked to an "invasion" of immigrants has increased in Italy, although the number of arrivals has decreased in recent years (figure 1).

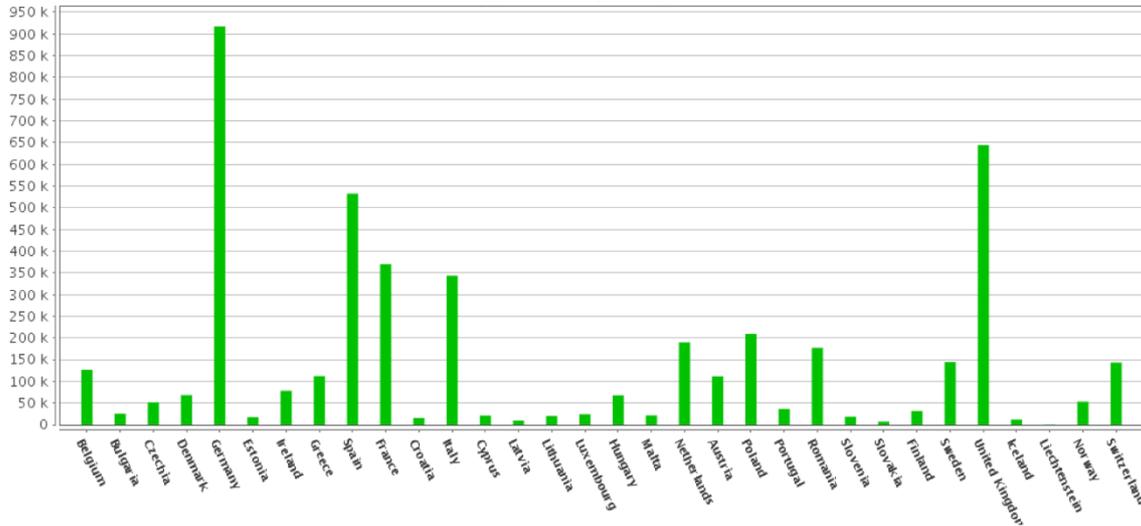
**Fig.1** Immigration flows in the main european country, 2006-2017.



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If we consider the foreign presence in relation to the total population, the perception appears even more distorted: in fact, although Italy appears to be one of the countries with the greatest absolute foreign presence in Europe (Fig.2), the incidence of immigrants on the whole population is among the lowest (Fig.3).

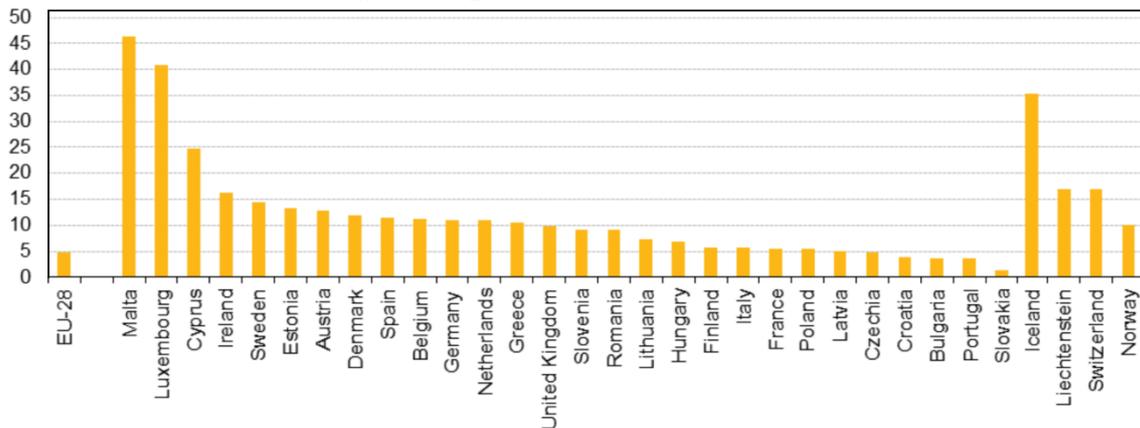
**Fig.2** Immigrants, 2017.



Data source: Eurostat.

These conditions have rekindled attention on the issue of integration in Italy and in Europe, both politically and academically, especially concerning which policies to be implemented. This opened a debate around the possibility to build tools capable of monitoring the levels of integration in the various countries and of evaluating the policies implemented by the European governments.

**Fig.3** Immigrants per 1000 inhabitants, 2017.



Data source: Eurostat.

## ON THE CONCEPT OF “INTEGRATION”: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PHENOMENON

Today, the concept of integration is used almost exclusively when referring to the migration phenomenon. Before the 1970s, it was used in other fields of study, such as social systems and group sociology. Among other concepts used in its place, *assimilation* is undoubtedly the one that has known greater diffusion. A first definition was provided by Park and Burgess in 1921: «a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons or groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and, by sharing their experience and history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life» (Park and Burgess 1921: 735). Park theorized that this process occurs through the four phases of contact, competition, accommodation and, finally, assimilation. While building his theoretical framework on that of the founder of the Chicago school, Gordon identified seven phases. The most important of these are the “behavioral assimilation” and the “structural assimilation”<sup>2</sup>, with which it indicates, respectively, «the absorption of the cultural behavior patterns of the host society [and] the entrance of the immigrants and their descendants into the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society» (Gordon 1961: 279).

However, the concept of assimilation was stigmatized in the 1960s, both as an analytical element and as a political objective. The original assumption that the assimilative process follows a single path, in which every immigrant would have abandoned all distinctive cultural characteristics and entered into an indistinct *melting pot*, became incompatible with the persistence of diversity, inequalities and conflicts in the North American society. In fact, the unrealistic homogeneity within the group of immigrants and natives would have been the precondition for this kind of process. This condition became even more evident with the start of migration from non-European countries, which gave ethnicity greater importance on the influence of the assimilative process.

From these considerations exponents formed a "new assimilation" theory, which deals with the theme aware of the criticalities and ambiguities that the phenomenon can take. In particular, they recognized that there is not a single process, but a multiplicity of assimilation processes (economic, cultural, linguistic, matrimonial, etc.) that follow distinct trajectories and times, independently of each other. This is not only due to the characteristics of immigrants, but especially to the socio-economic contexts in which they operate. Furthermore, a good level of assimilation does not necessarily mean that immigrants should eliminate all the differences with the indigenous population, but rather that they internalize fundamental elements that allow them a full participation in the various sectors of public life (such as knowledge of the language). An example of this new perspective is given by the theory of "segmented assimilation", elaborated by Portes, Zhou and Rumbaut (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

While in the United States debate around integration has been present since the early 1900s, in Europe it began to develop only in the 1970s. This is mainly due to a misreading of the phenomenon by politicians and scholars. In fact, initially there was the conviction that extra-European migratory flows had a temporary character, and therefore there was no need for integration policies.

The academic debate in this regard initially developed during the 1980s and focused mainly on identifying models of integration in European countries. Among the theories developed in this direction, two are of special interest. Based on the principle of citizenship, the first was developed by Brubaker (Brubaker 1992), who distinguished two types of models: on the one hand, the assimilationist ones (such as France, where the *jus soli* regime is in force), where a quick legal recognition is accompanied by a cancellation of the community identities; on the other hand, countries centered mainly on ethnic origin (such as Germany, guided by the principle of *jus sanguinis*), where,

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<sup>2</sup> The other phases are: the occurrence of mixed marriages, identification with the host society, lack of prejudice, the end of discrimination and the end of conflicts. These steps are not considered in a causal or consequential manner by Gordon, but like a dimensions of the same phenomenon, even if «once structural assimilation has occurred...all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow» (Gordon 1964: 80-81).

on the contrary, cultural differences are more legitimate, but at the cost of a more difficult legal framework. The second was developed by Castels (Castels, Booth and Miller 1984; Castles and Miller 2003), who instead identified three different models in the European context, describing their characteristics: countries based on the differential exclusion (in which there is a subordinated inclusion of immigrants compared to natives), assimilationist countries and pluralist (or multicultural) countries. However, in recent years, some scholars (Favell 1998; Goodman 2011) have observed a progressive convergence of the models present in different countries towards a common model, defined as "civic integration": according to this concept, knowledge of host countries language, history and civic norms is necessary to obtain a successful integration of immigrants. This model focuses on aspects not previously considered in the debate on integration, although some criticisms tend to identify constricting assimilation in it.

Due to the large amount of literature on the phenomenon, there are numerous definitions of the concept of integration, which cannot be fully reported in this paper. This depends not only on the differences in migration histories and structural characteristics of the institutional contexts of each European country, but also on the objectives and cultural framework that scholars consider in the various research conducted. In fact, as Castles states, « there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated» (Castles *et al* 2001: 12).

Precisely because of the difficulty in finding a univocal definition of the concept of integration, scholars have chosen to subdivide the phenomenon into observable dimensions, although various methods have been developed over the years. For example, Golini (Golini, Strozza and Amato 2001; Golini 2004) identifies four dimensions of the phenomenon: a) demographic, social and territorial characteristics; b) relations with the communities of origin and with the host community; c) the effective inclusions in the work and school system; d) living conditions and active participation in the public life of the host country. Another example was provided by Eurostat (Eurostat 2011) which, following the indications elaborated during the Conference of European Ministers on the Integration of Zaragoza in 2010, carried out its pilot project using indicators attributable to four different dimensions, namely: a) employment, b) education, c) social inclusion and d) active citizenship. Finally, Entzinger and Biezeveld (Entzinger and Biexeveld 2003) have instead preferred to carry out a more general subdivision of the concept of integration: a) socio-economic; b) socio-cultural; c) legal and political; d) the attitude of recipient societies towards migrants.

## MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

For the reasons just mentioned, it was only in the 1980s that European politicians and academics started to think about the need to build a coherent and complete system of integrators capable of measuring the level of integration of immigrants. The critical issues to be addressed were mainly the unreliability of the available administrative data, the shortage of empirical investigation and the use of different sample sources for immigrants and natives, which made any kind of comparison difficult (Sciortino 2007).

During the Nineties, the overcoming of this problem has allowed a marked improvement and an increase of knowledge in the phenomenon in the various countries. Despite these results, a real and reliable comparison between the different European realities is still difficult because of multiple complications that have been highlighted in a 2012 report by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research<sup>3</sup>. According to Sciortino (2007), who takes up the results found by the Dutch institute, the reasons for these complications are to be found in the following factors: a) the different demographic

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<sup>3</sup> Bijl, Rob and Arjen Verwei. 2012, *Measuring and Monitoring Immigrant Integration in Europe*, Nederlands Institute for Social Research, SCP, The Hague.

compositions of the immigrant population in the European countries, also due to the different migration histories that occurred in them; b) the concerns that drive the political debate on integration, which vary significantly between countries (for example, the cultural issue is considered a problem especially in central Europe, while it is less present in the Mediterranean countries); c) due to these factors, there is also a difference between the various definitions adopted regarding the population being studied (such as in some countries emphasis is placed on community barriers, in others on immigrants from non-western countries, in others still tends to include ethnic and linguistic minorities among foreigners, etc.); d) the contents and the research perspectives adopted that lead some scholars to focus more on certain dimensions than on others; e) the purposes for which these indicators are adopted, whether it is a description of the phenomenon to the public opinion or an in-depth analysis of the effects of policies adopted by policy makers; f) the use of sources that provide databases of different types (administrative, sample, etc.); g) the adoption of territorial criteria, which vary from the EU level, to the national one and to the local one.

To address these problems, over the years many attempts have been made to construct methodological apparatuses and to identify a set of indicators capable of measuring the level of integration at European level. As noted in a 1995 conference promoted by the Council of Europe Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs, scholars immediately faced the problem of lack sources and data that could be used to make a comparison between the different European countries. To fill this gap, the COMPSTAT project was launched, subsequently called PROMINSTAT, which elaborated a census of the sources of data available on the socio-economic integration of immigrants in the various countries<sup>4</sup>.

A first attempt to develop a coherent system of indicators came with the Ercomer project<sup>5</sup>, commissioned by the European Commission and developed by the Erasmus University of Rotterdam in 2003 (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003). In this project, attempts were made to measure the level of integration by subdividing the phenomenon into four different dimensions (socio-economic, legal-political, socio-cultural and attitudes of the receiving society) and looking for differences in three ways: between categories of third-country nationals, between different countries and over the course of time. For each dimension, authors presented a set of indicators considered useful for understanding the phenomenon, but without assessing the actual availability of the relative sources in a comparative perspective.

Another attempt was represented by the MITI project (Migrants' Integration Territorial Index) in 2008, in which France, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Spain took part, and whose purpose was to assess the integrative capacities of the territories (regions, metropolitan areas and cities) in which the research was conducted<sup>6</sup>. Researchers identified a set of indicators referred to three aspects, considered fundamental to verify the integrative abilities: the absorption capacity (dimensions and demographic dynamics of the immigrant population), social stability (housing quality, health and incidence of mixed marriages) and the participation in the labor market. The use of administrative sources data for this project provided a rich framework from a descriptive point of view, but at the same time presented some shortcomings from an explanatory point of view, caused by the lack of individual data.

Some of the problems that the reported attempts had to face were partially overcome with a pilot project conducted by Eurostat in 2011, which wanted to provide a system of indicators that can be used by member states to assess the effects of integration policies. A limited number of indicators were selected for each of the four policy areas<sup>7</sup> taken into consideration (labor, education, social inclusion and active citizenship policies) and the large databases based on the surveys carried out at

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<sup>4</sup> Research relating to the project can be consulted on the website <http://www.prominstat.eu/drupal/node/64>.

<sup>5</sup> European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (<https://ercomer.eu/>).

<sup>6</sup> Italian coordinator of this project was the Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS.

<sup>7</sup> The policy areas and indicators identification was carried out by a group of experts during a meeting in Malmö between 14 and 16 December 2009, the results of which were reported in the conclusions of the European Ministerial Conference On Integration of Zaragoza, 15-16 April 2010.

European level were used for the first time: EU-FLS (Labor Force Survey), EU-SILC (Survey on Income and Living Conditions) and PISA (International Survey on Student Learning Assessment). This made it possible to make significant progress in relation to previous attempts, in particular the possibility of using data that can compare the situation of the native and the foreign population and, finally, to elaborate explanatory models, thanks to the use of individual data. Subsequently, the methodological experience of the pilot project was taken up by Eurostat with *Migrant Integration 2017*, which expanded the policy areas analyzed to six (approach market, working conditions, education, housing and living conditions, risk of poverty and social exclusion, active citizenship), focusing mainly on the differences between the first and second generation.

An experience similar to that just mentioned is provided by the OECD with the *Settling In: Indicators of Immigrant Integration* report, which started in 2012 and reached its third edition in 2018. As in the Eurostat report, databases in the EU and other OECD countries were used to monitor the integration of immigrants in the four selected macro areas (socio-demographic characteristics, skills and labor market, living conditions, civic engagement and social indicators) and focusing in particular, in the last edition, on the integration of young people with a migrant background and third-country nationals.

The attempts mentioned so far have focused their attention on the degree of integration achieved by immigrants in some social sectors, trying to identify the one in which the most critical issues are presented and thus providing ideas for possible political action, without providing an evaluation on any specific intervention. Instead, this objective is pursued by the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)<sup>8</sup>, an experience born in 2004 thanks to the British Council and the Migration Policy Group of Brussels, which proposes a system of indicators that aims to evaluate not the integration processes, but the policies adopted by European and non-European countries. For this purpose, each regulatory intervention is initially coded by an expert for each country and then by a second independent expert. Subsequently, a system of 148 indicators is processed, which allow the assessment of the position of each country for all the policy areas considered, assigning to each of them a score on a scale from 1 to 100 (where 100 represents a policy perfectly supplementary). In this way, MIPEX represents an important tool for the study policies in the field of integration, because it collects and analyzes the interventions implemented in the various countries in a comparable perspective, as well as their degree of coherence over time.

A similar project was launched in 2016 with the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM)<sup>9</sup>, a six-year project led by the Polish Institute of Public Affairs and coordinated by the Migration Policy Group. Unlike MIPEX, this project focuses on the evaluation of policies implemented in the EU15 in favor of the integration of international protection holders. Considering the European and international legal frameworks at and using a system of 173 indicators attributable to four areas of integration (general conditions, legal integration, socio-economic integration and socio-cultural integration), the researchers assign a score from 0 to 100 to policy of the different countries for each of the following steps: setting the legal framework; building the policy framework; implementation & collaboration; reliable data & evaluation; providing financial & human resources; achieving integration outcomes.

In recent years, the activities of researchers in the field of migration and the integration of immigrants have seen an intensification in efforts in order to guarantee increasingly efficient measurement and evaluation tools, thanks also to the activism of the European Union. An example is the creation of transnational platforms that collect the research experiences of various scholars and allow them to get in touch, including the Migration Research Hub, coordinated by IMISCOE, and the Ethnic and Immigrant Minorities' Survey Data Network, developed by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The MIPEX data are available on the website <http://mipex.eu/>.

<sup>9</sup> The NIEM data are available on the website <http://www.forintegration.eu>.

<sup>10</sup> Respectively available on the portals <https://migrationresearch.com/> and <https://ethmigsurveydatahub.eu>.

Italy has only recently become a country of immigration and the focus on the phenomenon of migration and consequently on the tools and methods for measuring integration arises with considerable delay compared to other European countries. The first attempts at analysis consisted mainly of a review of the available sources and the indication of some indicators, based mainly on data of an administrative nature. Among the most important works in this regard, we find those carried out by Natale and Strozza in 1997 and that of Golini, starting in 2001, as part of the activities of the Commission for immigrant integration policies.

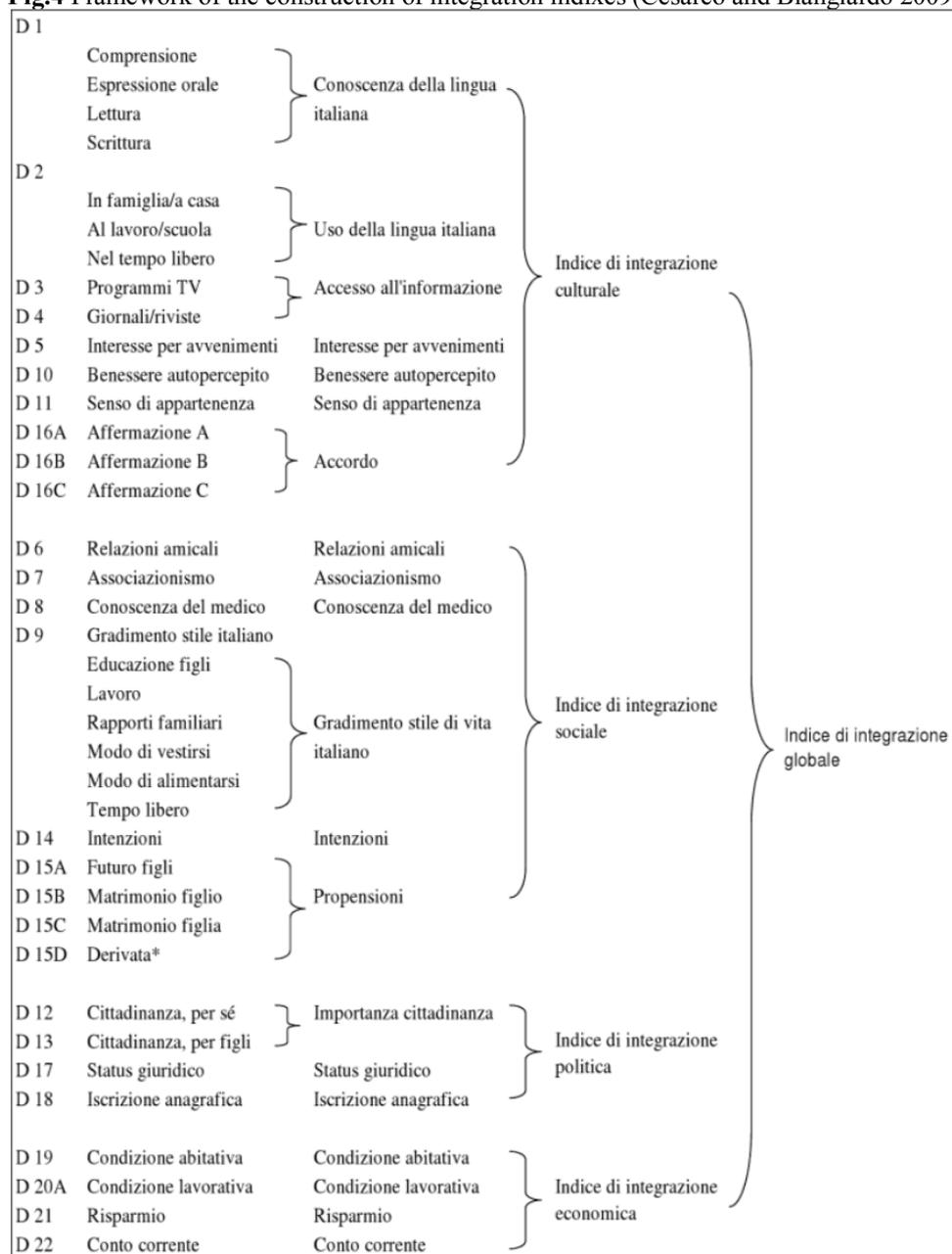
One of the most recent experiences, which addressed this problem, was the *Integrometro*, a project promoted and financed by the ISMU foundation (Italian partner of the above-mentioned MIPEX). The novelty represented by this tool was the adoption of a survey questionnaire, from which the researchers obtained a series of indicators (Fig.4), which have been impossible to achieve otherwise by a simple administrative data. Based on a well-defined conceptual framework (Boccagni and Pollini 2012) and thanks to the use of the “centres of aggregation sampling technique” (Blangiardo 1996), a questionnaire was developed (Cesareo and Blangiardo 2009), making it was possible to identify 21 indicators, which in turn have been summarized in four indexes of integration (cultural, social, political and economic). This system of indicators has allowed for the identification of the individual variables that most influence the process of integration of immigrants (among which, particularly important, it appears to be migratory seniority). A last sociologically relevant contribution that is due to this research experience was the elaboration of the definition of integration carried out by Cesareo and Blangiardo (entirely reported below), which highlights the multidimensional, progressive and bidirectional character of the phenomenon.

Integration consists in that multidimensional process aimed at peaceful coexistence, within a specific historical-social reality, between individuals and groups that are culturally and / or ethnically different, based on mutual respect for ethno-cultural diversity, provided that these do not damage the fundamental human rights and do not endanger the democratic institutions. Integration always consists of a process that takes time; it is a goal that is not acquired once and for all, but that is constantly pursued. It manifests itself at the economic, cultural, social and political level. Precisely because of this multidimensional nature, if it is limited to a single area, it will necessarily be partial. Each of these dimensions creates different degrees of integration. Therefore, for example, a high economic integration can occur in the face of a scarce or non-existent social or political integration (or vice-versa). The different dimensions can position themselves diachronically over time. Finally, integration is bidirectional, because it does not only concern immigrants but also and jointly the citizens of the receiving country.<sup>11</sup> (Cesareo and Blangiardo 2009: 23)

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<sup>11</sup> Translation by the writer.

**Fig.4** Framework of the construction of integration indexes (Cesareo and Blangiardo 2009).



\*Items 15.B and 15.C have been used to generate the 15.D “equal opportunity”.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have seen that integration is a difficult concept to define. This difficulty is caused in part by the change of perspective that the phenomenon has undergone over the years in more in America than in Europe, and in part by the influences that different migration histories and institutional realities have exerted in individual national contexts.

This situation has created many problems in the European context, including the identification of a common system of indicators capable of assessing the level of integration of immigrants with a comparable approach between the various countries. The attempts made so far gave priority to the use of indicators based on aggregated data, although useful from a descriptive point of view one have provided little or no explanatory information.

The increasing use of sample surveys (such as the one funded by the ISMU foundation) has allowed researchers an important step forward: the use of individual data has therefore become a necessary requirement for those who want to go beyond a simple description of the phenomenon of integration.

Despite the important progress made over the last two decades, there are still some gaps that prevent a deep understanding of the dynamics that characterize the phenomenon. In particular, research that intends to study in depth the integration processes should address the following two issues.

Firstly, one of the aspects to consider is that of bidirectionality, as argued by Cesareo and Blangiardo in 2009. In fact, integration is an all-embracing process that pervades the whole society: not only immigrants, but also citizens of the host society must «confront themselves with newcomers and take a position towards them (refusal, acceptance, mistrust, tolerance, openness, etc.), which can put into question the way to life and to conceive their own integration within the belonging society» (Cesareo and Blangiardo 2009: 22)<sup>12</sup>.

Secondly, integration is an extremely complex phenomenon, which involves not only the public sphere and the explicit attitudes of individuals, but also their value and emotional aspects. These are elements that strongly impact on the actions of immigrants and natives and that are difficult to understand through standardized questionnaires. For this reason, it would be desirable for any future sociological research on integration to be oriented towards a mixed-methodology approach. The analysis of aggregate data and the conduct of sample surveys, corroborated by the use of standardized questionnaires, should therefore be accompanied by the administration of in-depth interviews. These would help the researcher from different points of view. On the one hand, they would help confirm or refute the results expressed by the survey, because «the qualitative (...) has the character of being a follow-up in-depth study [and] it has also been used to correct and elaborate on findings from the survey (...)» (Berg 2007: 133)<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, they would facilitate a full understanding of the motivations and dynamics underlying the attitudes of immigrants and natives. Finally, from the information obtained by the interviewees could derive aspects of the phenomenon initially not considered by the researchers and that could be investigated and deepened in future works. In fact, as Ferrarotti writes, «qualitative analysis is irreplaceable (...) for the study of human situations that are crucial and at the same time peripheral, marginal, in appearance insignificant. [It] allows the problems to emerge as they are perceived and experienced by their protagonists. In this way, the research, as well as technically refined, is also humanly significant» (Ferrarotti 2011: 6)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Translation by the writer.

<sup>13</sup> Berg, Bent. 2007. "An action-research approach to the understanding of integration", in Council of Europe, Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs. 1997. *Measurement and indicators of integration. Community Relation*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

<sup>14</sup> Translation by the writer.

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