

**DEFINING MEMBERSHIP AND BELONGING:
REFUGEE INTEGRATION POLICIES IN AUSTRIA**

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Abstract

This Master's thesis explores the understanding of membership and belonging that lies in Austrian integration policies for refugees who arrived in the country after January 2015. The National Action Plan for Integration, along with Integration Acts, federal laws, and brochures aimed at refugee integration are analyzed with the main goal of identifying the implications of integration to the acquisition of membership in Austria. Interpretative policy analysis is utilized to, first, contextualize integration policies in terms of their genealogy and socio-political context, and second, to deconstruct the content of the policies and brochures to reveal the "rules" for integration and membership. The results show that integration policies condition refugees on their performance and define membership in Austrian society as a "valuable asset" that can be achieved by internalizing Austrian values, acquiring German skills, gaining financial independence, and eventually Austrian citizenship. Among the other findings are the hegemonic power of the state in establishing the terms of integration, imposing new roles and duties for refugees, idealizing the image of Austria, and homogenizing the "Austrian values". The findings of the Thesis complement earlier studies on integration policies by shedding light on the meaning of these policies for humanitarian migrants.

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1 Introduction

In 2015, an unprecedented number of 88 340 migrants applied for asylum in Austria, making it the third main destination country for registered applicants relative to its population (European Commission, 2016). Between 2015 and 2017, the country granted asylum to around 65 000 applicants, and an additional 13 000 for family reunification (Eurostat, 2018). The majority of the asylum seekers were people from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, who fled from wars, persecution, and torture (Kohlenberger, Ennser, 2017). With the subsequent public concerns over security, pressure from the right-wing parties, and strengthened border control (Wodak, Rheindorf, 2018 p. 19-22), from 2016 the numbers of applicants and recognitions fell sharply¹, yet the notion of the “refugee crisis” has dominated much of public and state policy debates in the country. Since the newcomers were perceived as culturally different, their accommodation was treated as a “challenge” that had to be “solved” by facilitating “integration” (50-Points-Plan towards integration of refugees, 2015 p. 4). Consequently, integration policies have been adopted in Austria with the main aim of “quickly integrating” refugees and a clear goal of structuring and managing “where one has to integrate” and how (ibid.).

Since 2015, there have been a number of legislative measures for refugee integration, including the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP, 2015) with 50-Points-Plan towards integration of refugees (2015) and several Integration Acts (2017). These define a mandatory system of German language and “Austrian value” learning, the “integration year”, integration declarations/agreements and exams, orientation courses on “living together”, controls for monitoring integration, and penalties for non-compliance. By targeting primarily the refugees, the integration policies prescribe a certain path to “integration” and structure their social

¹ Recognition rate decreased from 70% to 51% (Eurostat, 2018)

interactions with the “host” society in accordance with the state’s vision on what is needed to become a member of the polity. This presents an interesting case for studying the power of the state in regulating the presence of newcomers (Shore, Wright, 2011) and establishing control over the membership rules (Kostakopolou, 2010).

Similar practices of mandatory language, country-knowledge courses, and integration tests have been imposed on economic migrants in Europe since the end of the 1990s (Joppke, 2010). In the literature on integration, these measures are defined, among others, as new tools for obtaining membership in a nation-state because language proficiency enables participation in a labor market, social life, and culture, while learned skills and commons values ensure commitment to group goals and norms (Goodman, 2010). However, this type of membership represents a type of inclusion that can be regulated by policymakers in accordance with their understandings and goals. So, what kind of membership is attributed to the refugees who were forced to flee their countries and are different from economic migrants? Despite the abundance of studies on refugee integration, there is a significant gap in identifying the meaning of “integration” that is being imposed on humanitarian migrants.

This thesis takes an attempt to fill in this gap and examine what understanding of “integration” lies in Austrian integration policies for recent refugees and what are the expectations and “rules” of membership and belonging to the Austrian society. Integration is a strongly institutionalized subject in Austria (Josipovic I., Reeger U, 2020), therefore my research will be based on the analysis of Austrian legislation and institutional integration of refugees, including laws and the content of the value and integration brochures. The research question that is guiding my study is: how the Austrian government defines and regulates membership in its society in current integration policies for refugees. The aim of my research is to explore what is the ideology behind “integration” and what implications integration policies have on the acquisition of membership in contemporary nation-states.

The methodology to be used in the thesis is the interpretive policy analysis, which states that policies reflect the world they belong to and at the same time they shape “new relations, new spaces, new meanings, and new subjects” (Wright, Shore, 2003 p. 1). Following the concepts outlined by Cris Shore and Susan Wright (2011), I will examine refugee integration policies in Austria by contextualizing them in terms of their genealogy, socio-political context, timing, discourse around it. I will then deconstruct the policies to identify the patterns of labeling people and prescribing them a certain way of (external) behavior. This method helps to understand the world that integration policies establish (e.g., the image of Austria), their construction of the integration path, and required steps for achieving integration and membership in the society. The documents to be examined are Austria: 50-Points-Plan towards integration of refugees, the Integration Act (2017), Integration Year Act, Asylum Act (2005), Federal Office Establishment Act (2012), Basic Welfare Support Act (2005), Aliens Police Act (2005), Recognition and Assessment Act (2016) and Anti-Face-Covering Act (2017). In addition, the brochures for the mandatory value courses “My Life in Austria – Opportunities and Rules” and “Coexistence in Austria – United by Our Values” will be analyzed as they provide information on “Austrian values and principles” and are part of the obligatory “integration package” (Josipovic I., Reeger U, 2020). My sampling for policy analysis is based on the selection of acts, laws, programs implemented or amended after 2015 and aimed at the integration of persons who were granted asylum or subsidiary protection after January 1, 2015. The selection is explained by the desire to examine Austrian refugee integration policies since the beginning of the “refugee crisis”.

The theoretical framework of the research is based on the mentioned above Sara Goodman’s conceptions of membership and belonging, which can be shaped by state policies and achieved by complying with the state’s regulations (Goodman, 2010). In addition, while examining the integration policies and brochures, I will draw on methodological nationalism,

which is defined as “an assumption that state/society/nation is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer, A., Glick Schiller N., 2002). I will critically review the concept of “integration”, challenge the assumption that there is a homogeneous space in terms of Austrian values taught, and that integration occurs between two natural entities each of which carries certain cultures and values that can be acquired. Since the “values” offered in the brochures and laws are not differentiated, Austrian society is portrayed as a “container” that one is expected to integrate to. Similarly, even though refugees represent a heterogeneous group (Kohlenberger, Ennsner, 2017), the policies “label” them as one group and shape the discourse around their “peaceful coexistence” with the “host” society in a homogeneous manner.

Following this introductory part, a short part on terminology will define some of the key concepts that are planned to be used in the thesis. After that, I will provide a literature review on the relations between mandatory integration measures and the concepts of belonging and membership. This will be followed by the methodological part that will explain the interpretative approach to studying policies. To contextualize the integration policies, I will then examine historical roots as well as the immediate context and discourse around the refugee accommodation measures in Austria. Finally, I will perform policy analysis of the mentioned above integration policies and draw conclusions on their meaning for membership and belonging in Austria.

Terminology

Refugee. Following the guidelines of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), the Federal law concerning the granting of asylum in Austria defines a refugee as a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, nationality, race, political opinion or membership of a particular social group is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling

to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country(Asylum Act, 2005). The term “persecution” expresses a threat to freedom, life and physical wellbeing, however, the degree of its “intensity” needed to grant the asylum remains open to interpretation of Austrian authorities who make a decision on asylum (ibid).

Although under the Austrian Asylum Act (2005) the country states that refugees in many respects are equal with Austrian citizens, e.g. access to the welfare benefits, higher education, and labor market, it still introduces a set of mandatory measures, such as country knowledge, language proficiency, exams and “integration year” requirements for refugees to receive allowances.

Integration. The National Action Plan for Integration- (NAPI, 2015) defines Austria’s legislation measures in refugee integration and focuses mostly on the knowledge of the German language, “Austrian values” and labor market integration. The term “integration” is defined by NAPI as a two-way process that is “shaped by mutual appreciation and respect, whereas clear rules secure social cohesion and peace” (50-Points-Plan, 2015). It should be noted that integration is a legal obligation for refugees and non-compliance with its requirements may lead to sanctions and administrative penalties (Integration Act, 2017 §23 p. 11).

Membership and belonging. In the thesis, I will use Sara Goodman’s definition of “belonging” as “feeling a part of the national political community” that is connected to a “sense of acceptance” on the one hand, and “commitment and shared ownership of national norms, rules and resources” on the other (Goodman, 2015 p. 16). As for “membership”, it is defined as “belonging to an arbitrary community” and is closely tied to and recognized through the holding of citizenship or another legal status in society. Its primary purpose is to ensure social cohesion and create group loyalty, common culture, and goals.

2 Literature Review

“Integration is a complex term with positive and negative ascriptions, emotional expectations, demands, strategic approaches and delimitations. This complexity and ambiguity continue in integration policy”
(Rosenberger S., Gruber O., 2020)

As stated in the introductory chapter, this research aims at critically analyzing the policies of integration for refugees in Austria and the type of “integration” pursued by the Austrian authorities. Therefore, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework for studying “integration” and academic debate around its civic turn. The second section of the chapter examines the relations between integration and concepts of belonging and membership, while the final section draws on methodological nationalism as an analytical tool for studying policies and values.

2.1 “Integration” and the “civic turn”

The theoretical framework for migrants’ adaptation in the country of settlement distinguishes several outcomes of the relations between host society and immigrants, including assimilation (Gordon, 1964), segregation (Wagner, et al., 2010), marginalization (Phinney, 1990) and integration (Berry, 1974). The latter is defined as a “two-way process of mutual accommodation” in which migrants preserve their identity and actively participate in the host society (Berry, 1991). It has been regarded as the most desired outcome of the social interaction because it allows to find unity in diversity and ensure social cohesion. Social integration is considered as the initial phase of integration, which can be achieved by enforcing antidiscrimination laws and pressure on employers and public officials (Rosenberger, Gruber, 2020). Civic integration takes forms of language and citizenship tests and results in receiving

citizenships. Finally, cultural integration presumable occurs as a result of long-term residency and inclusion (Miller, 2016). The framework of integration highlights the “two-way process” based on the normative assumption that the choice of non-dominant group in choosing interaction strategy is limited by the structure of the larger society, governmental support, and available information (ibid). Thus, the involvement of both sides is needed for successful integration.

Since 1990s, the concept of integration has shaped the minorities related issues in politics, society and culture and became an established policy area in many states (e.g. Western European democracies) and international organizations (United Nations, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) (Rosenberger, Gruber, 2020).

However, despite the wide usage, some scholars criticize “integration” for the blurred nature of the term, which makes it attractive “empty signifier” with loaded meanings (Schinkel, 2017) and a “narrow concept” that ignores different degrees and temporality of integration (Bommes, 2007). Another criticism towards “integration” comes from academics who disregard the idea that societies are static and “container”-like units in which locals, unlike immigrants, are already fully integrated (ibid., Wimmer, A., Glick Schiller N., 2002). Lastly, integration is criticized for ethnicization and culturalization of inequality. Since integration policies problematize migrants based on their ethnicity and nationality (migration background), they neglect the social, gender, and educational differences, which might be at the core of the inclusion issues (Mecheril, 2003).

Language and value learning, country knowledge and integration agreements are known in the literature on integration as “civic” measures (Goodman, 2014). They have been adopted since the end of 1990s by several Northwestern European countries after a period of

human rights and pluralistic approaches in migrant adaptation policies. As noted by Sara Goodman, it came unexpected that after years of *laissez faire* and then multicultural policies towards minorities, many European countries switched to new legal membership requirements for foreign nationals. These ranged from mandatory country-knowledge and language requirements to integration courses, tests, and contracts for immigration, residency, family reunification, and naturalization (Goodman, 2010). Growing rhetoric on the failure of multiculturalism and concerns over the high unemployment and social disintegration among ethnic minority groups were used to justify the restrictive orientation on the inclusion of newcomers in the Netherlands, France, Austria and other Western European countries (Kostakopolou, 2010).

The change in immigrant incorporation raised many questions of whether civic conditioning represented a new form of inclusion into modern nationhood, or rather new barriers and tools for regulating the presence of newcomers. The proponents of civic integration claimed that the practices were aimed at equipping a newcomer with skills, knowledge of “values” and “norms” for active participation in the economic and social life of the country of settlement (Miller, 2016). The opponents, however, viewed them as new instruments for controlling migration flows selecting the most “adoptable” migrants, who can “earn” to be included (Bauböck, Çinar, 2010). The right-wing party slogans “Integration before immigration”, “Promote and demand integration” (Goodman, 2014) confirmed the claims of the latter and raised serious concerns over the liberal nature of these measures, as well as the disconnect between their genuine intentions and the outcome.

Some scholars considered civic conditioning inherently illiberal and fueled with colonial heritage and racism (Kostakopoulou, 2010). Arguing that liberalism implies equal treatment and non-discrimination, they stated that civic requirements violate human dignity, create “superiority” of “European values” (ibid), and “double standards” for citizens and non-

citizens (Orgad, 2010). It was perceived illiberal that immigrants are required to learn history that the “natives” might not know or that the “values” taught are homogenized and assumed to be shared by all the citizens in the polity (ibid).

Criticism was also raised with regards to the actual intentions. Some authors were skeptical that the measures intend to really include and empower newcomers. On the contrary, it was argued that obligatory integration measures were meant to exclude and enhance the state’s control over migration and membership rules (Carrera, Guild, Kostakopoulou, 2010). The typical markers of national identity used – “othering”, language requirements, civic knowledge, proved allegiance – illustrated that the policies represent a continuation of the nation-building project, with its coercive and assimilationist features (Kostakopoulou, 2010).

On the opposite side of this debate were those who viewed civic measures as a “pursuit of liberal goals with illiberal means” (Joppke, 2010). Using the Rawlsian understanding of “liberalism” as a “political liberalism”, Christian Joppke, for example, defined integration to society as “procedural consensus on what is “right”, not in terms of a substantive consensus on what is “good”” (Joppke, 2010). Therefore, in his opinion, civic integration measures and mandatory tests comply with liberalism if their content does not test “what is good” and the “inner disposition” of the members-to-be (ibid).

It was also argued that, given that the “host” country provides support in learning, language competencies, familiarity with liberal democratic order, history, and even culture are justifiable requirements because they test gained knowledge, and do not demand a change in identity (ibid). Some also added that it is in the interest of migrants to integrate as this way they will have a greater access to social justice, equal opportunities and will take a full advantage of their “new home” (Miller, 2016). The “double standards” critic was opposed by pointing out that school education for citizens is equal to migrants’ civic courses, and thus, migrants are

merely learning things that citizens already know. The obligatory nature of the measures was also justified, as it was regarded as necessary to use “illiberal means” for turning immigrants into autonomous liberal citizens (Joppke, 2010).

The third approach to the civic measures lies in perceiving integration measures as neither liberal nor illiberal, but merely as “abstract tools”, the function of which differs depending on the national context, public discourse (Peucker, 2008), social policies, and labor market (Mouritsen et al., 2019). Therefore, even similar practices of the civic turn may serve different purposes in different political contexts: they may promote loyalty among newcomers or decrease access to the citizenry. Just like the interpretative approach to studying policies, this view highlights the need to consider the national context, paths, and models while making assumptions on what civic integration says about the boundaries of membership. The next part of the thesis will offer a general overview and some concrete examples of the relations between obligatory integration measures and conceptions of belonging and membership of newcomers in modern nations.

2.2 Membership, belonging and integration

In the model of traditional nation-states, belonging and membership were formally expressed in citizenship that attached to this concept legal status, formal political and cultural inclusion, access to rights, and protection (Bauböck, 2009). This made citizenship, as Brubaker noted, “an instrument and object of social closure” (Brubaker, 1990). The “ideal” type of membership was “egalitarian, sacred, national, unique, and socially consequential”, meaning that the members of the nation-state were supposedly equal before the law and belonged to one and only one nation “through birth and upbringing” (Brubaker, 1990, p. 6-10). Over the last decades, the presence of immigrants and other “unincorporated”, marginal cultural/ethnic

minority groups made it evident that membership is not static and can take forms of partial membership, dual membership (e.i citizenship), “desacralized” membership because of profit motives, and even “membership of the state without membership of the cultural nation” (ibid., p. 11).

One could argue that the civic integration measures in European liberal democracies introduced the possibility of decoupling citizenship from membership, re-thinking them as the “processes of becoming”, rather than being (Soysal, 1998) and “becoming” by the means of civic knowledge and language acquisition rather than belonging to one ethnic group (Kymlicka, Bloemraad, 2019).

As it was defined earlier, “belonging” refers to the “feeling as a part of the national political community”, which is connected to a “sense of acceptance” by the “host” society and “newcomers” “commitment and shared ownership of national norms, rules and resources” (Goodman, 2015 p. 16). As for the “membership”, it is a “belonging to an arbitrary community” (ibid., p. 18) and is closely tied to and recognized through the holding of citizenship or another legal status in society. The rationale behind the membership is to ensure social cohesion and create group loyalty, common culture, and goals. So, could it be argued that integration policies in focus broaden social perceptions for membership to include migrants and refugees? If yes, what kind of membership and belonging do these measures (aim to) generate?

On the one hand, integration practices seem to serve as new tools for obtaining membership in a nation-state. Civic integration presupposes that a process of learning a language, acquiring skills and values of the receiving society turns into a process of taking on membership in a nation, because language proficiency enables participation in a labor market,

social life, and culture, while learnt skills and common values ensure individual autonomy and commitment to group goals and norms (Goodman, 2010).

One should note, however, that the type of membership achieved through civic integration differs from the traditional (e.i., inherited) one since it creates what Sara Goodman calls a “state identity”, as opposed to “national identity” (Goodman, 2014). The latter refers to the set of attributes and beliefs shared by those who already belong to the same nation and share territory, ethnicity, legal rights, history, and national ideology (Smith, 1999).

State identity, in contrast, can be achieved by passing integration tests and complying with the state’s regulations. Unlike national identity, in theory it does not imply assimilation and loss of identity, but rather a knowledge and external (behavioral) conformity to one culture, history, and myths. The main requirement, however, is the adherence to values and norms of the host society that allow an individual to participate independently in social and economic spheres, contribute to their development and establish connections with their new place of residency (Goodman, 2014).

The type of belonging and membership obtained through state identity and civic integration represents a new form of inclusion into nationhood (ibid). It does not necessarily contradict the national identity or traditional forms, but it is also not completely autonomous from them because it can be regulated by policymakers in accordance with their national migration goals and understanding of what it means to be Austrian, Dutch, or European. The regulation, one could argue, is still performed based on what Brubaker would call national models and traditions of self-understanding (Brubaker, 1992). Access to the membership for outsiders, as claimed by Rogers Brubaker, is shaped by the understanding of nationhood. For example, France has a political and civic understanding of nation and citizenry, which means that membership in the French nation is defined by political unity and civic belonging to the

political community. In contrast, Germany with its ethnocultural perception of nationhood defines membership through shared culture or ethnicity and, therefore, for a long time, it has been excluding ethnically non-German immigrants born in the country from national membership (ibid).

So, what seems to be an important element of this type of membership is that it gives more power to the state in deciding what to integrate to and shifts obligation of “belonging” (e.i., integration) on newcomers (Goodman, 2014). Moreover, there is an idea of “deserving” membership in the imaginary community and “earning” it through integration courses, language acquisition, and citizenship tests. It is not enough to merely reside, pay taxes and share the “burden of the commonwealth” (Kostakopoulou, 2010), it is equally important to adopt presumable shared “values” of the majority and integrate linguistically, socially, and culturally.

Though seem new, these are traditional paths to nationhood (ibid., 16), so one might conclude that the civic turn may well constitute the continuation of the nation-building projects in Western liberal democracies, which experienced a significant inflow of migrants and are now defining their “values”, “high culture”, civics in relation to the “others”, and also in pursuit of integrating the “others”.

2.3 Methodological nationalism

Although criticized for being fueled with nationalism and racism, most of the countries in Western Europe adopted, institutionalized, and “normalized” civic integration measures in practice and in the public discourse on immigration, naturalization, migrant and refugee’s accommodation (Rosenberger S., Gruber O., 2020). One of the explanations for the dominance of the integration perspective in public policy and social sciences lies in the long tradition of

methodological nationalism, which is defined as “an assumption that state/society/nation is natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer, A., Glick Schiller N., 2002, p. 301). As argued by the scholars of the methodological nationalism concept Nina Glick Shiller and Andrea Wimmer, the nation-state as the sole unit of analysis for social processes has shaped the perception of migrants as an “anomaly, a problematic exception to the rule of people staying where they ‘belong’, that is, to ‘their’ nation-state” (ibid., p. 311). Therefore, migrants and all those who come outside of national boundaries are inevitably seen as “strangers”, potentially dangerous, culturally different, and socially marginal. Migrants and refugees are also seen as exceptions to the “rule of territorial integrity” (ibid) and challenge the congruence of the legal (citizenry), cultural and social boundaries that supposedly hold the society together (Wimmer, 2003). This entails inclusion and exclusion processes and explains the popularity of “integrating” ideas, which aim at “fixing” boundaries and ensuring social cohesion.

Three variants of methodological nationalism include ignoring the national framing of modernity, “naturalizing the boundaries of the nation-state” and limiting the analytical focus to the borders of the nation-state (ibid).

Most refugee integration studies, as well as national and international reports on integration largely overlook the dominance of the nation-state model “as the universal form organization” in their research (ibid). The fact that integration processes are usually based on a national benchmark and focus on national languages, values, and norms illustrates that the nation-states are seen as natural spaces or as a “container” for the integration to occur (ibid). Although the regulations of the states should not be disregarded, the role of the nation space is not necessarily the only defining factor of people’s lifestyle, norms, identity, and integration paths (Rosenberger S., Gruber O., 2020). Transnational ties, structural inequalities, and

discrimination, for example, are equally influential for the participation, life chances, and the outcome of the integration.

The current study attempts to add to the literature that problematizes the national framing in integration research. It tries to distance itself from the dominant “integration perspective” and overcome limitations created by this approach. Looking at the case of refugee integration in Austria, this research addresses the integration policies without assuming the “container” model of the society and the nation-state. It also does not wish to fall into the methodological nationalism trap and assume that “integration” should necessarily exist and work. On the contrary, it intends to critically assess this concept, study the construction of “integration” in policy texts, identify the main forces that mobilize the idea of integration and the world that they establish. In addition, keeping in mind the methodological nationalism modes, the study problematizes the concept of “Austrian values” as “routinely structured nation-state principles” (Wimmer, Glick Schiller, 2002), which assume a homogeneous space in terms of natural entities and a “container” society that one is expected to “integrate” to.

The next chapter will outline interpretative policy analysis methods and tools for studying the Austrian legislation and values and identifying policy concepts that are colored by the nation-state logic, which portrays an idealized world with a self-evident order.

3 Methodology

As the previous chapter has revealed, integration policies carry different meanings depending on the background against which the policy has developed, as well as the actors, measures, and interests. In order to answer the posed research question about the membership rules in the contemporary Austrian refugee integration policy, the current study adopts interpretative policy analysis as a methodological approach. It was initially planned that my methods will also include qualitative interviews with refugees to learn about their experience with and perceptions of the courses and integration measures, raise their voices, and show them as active participants of the integration process. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and continuous Covid-19 restrictions in Vienna from November 2020 until May 2021, it was not possible to arrange meetings with refugees and conduct the interviews. Some of the refugees contacted did not feel comfortable talking via Skype or Zoom. Therefore, my research and analysis are based on the examination of policies and a “top-down” construction of “integration”.

The interpretive policy approach used in this thesis is different from the traditional policy analysis, which assumes that policies are objective, “value-neutral” products of a linear process of “rational” problem solving (Regmi, 2019; Colebatch, 2000). In contrast, the interpretative policy suggests treating policies as “performative, productive and continually contested” instruments that have agencies and can be “expressed in a sequence of events” (Wright, Shore, 2003 p. 1). In this logic, policies reflect the world they belong to, and at the same time, they shape “new relations, new spaces, new meanings, and new subjects” (ibid.). Therefore, policies carry meanings and mirror “the rationality and assumptions” that dominate at the time of their formation. The latter is true not only for the national space but also global,

meaning that even if policies derive from the local cultural and historical space, they may still be influenced by global events and discourses (Clarke et al, 2015).

Policies are also used to justify or change the existing social order, “classify, regulate... and organize people” and produce subjectification (ibid p. 13). By subjectifying or in other words, labeling people in a certain way and prescribing them a certain way of conduct, policies establish power and move actors to operate in terms defined by these policies. This aspect of the interpretative policy approach is influenced by the Foucauldian notion of governmentality and “external construction” of an individual’s identity (ibid., p. 17). Yet, it does not mean that subjects of the policies are always passive in accepting subjectification. Wright and Shore (2003), for example, argue that individuals may reject imposed orders and actively participate in the realization and critique of the established norms.

The concept of Gramscian hegemony is also important, as policies are presented as hegemons, which define the problem and offer solutions, as if “these were the only possible ones” (Wright, Shore, 2003)”. Thus, policies have power over discourses, the language, and agendas and can be defined as “organizing principles of society” (ibid). Search for policy meaning, therefore, includes not only the examination of the written materials and documents, but also the spoken language used in public debates, interviews of officials, narratives, and myths (Yanow, 2000 p. 41).

While studying policies, the interpretative policy approach suggests, first, to contextualize the policy in focus by considering its historical and socio-political context and timing (Hyatt, 2013 p. 838). This analysis includes multiples layers and a need for consideration of the influences that the context and discourse may or may not have on shaping policies and vis-a-versa. Second, after contextualizing the policy, it is essential to deconstruct it to “reveal patterns and processes in the organization of power and governance in society”

(Wright, Shore, 2003 p. 4). This can be done by recognizing policies as agencies and studying them not only as texts or data but as “contested narratives” (ibid.). It is important to keep in mind their transformative power, the role of political actors, symbolic gestures, power and structure dynamics, discourses around policies, and their subjectification practices while drawing conclusions about their meanings.

Using the steps of the interpretative policy outlined above, in the subsequent chapter, this study will focus on the investigation of the genealogy of the “integration” concept in Austria as well as the socio-political context and discourse against which the integration policies for refugees were adopted. After that, integration policies and integration brochures adopted in Austria after 2015 are to be analyzed to reveal what image of Austria and requirements for integration and membership are constructed in the policy documents and discourse around refugee integration. The purpose of using a two-step methodology lies in the expectation that the history of problematization and formulation of “integration” in the public space may help to deconstruct the development and meaning of current integration measures.

The key documents used for the analysis are shown in Table 1 and include laws and measures known as the “integration package” (IOM, 2016). The selection of these documents is based on the defined time frame of the post “refugee crisis”, after 2015. Therefore, all the laws and texts in focus were either adopted or amended after 2015 and aimed at regulating and accommodating the refugees who arrived in the country after January 1, 2015.

The Federal Acts presented in Table 1 establish and regulate asylum and status granting procedure (Asylum Act, 2005; Federal Office Establishment Act), integration monitoring (ibid), an obligatory system of value, and German language learning (Integration Act, 2017; Integration Year, 2017), integration declaration and exams (ibid), welfare support (Basic Welfare Support Act, 2005), labor market integration (Recognition and Assessment Act, 2016;

Integration Year, 2017) as well as control and penalties (Integration Act, 2017; Integration Year, 2017). The Anti-Face-Covering Act (2017) outlaws full-body veils in public areas and aims at integration through open communication.

The 50 points Action Plan for integration developed by the Expert Council for Integration outlines the national measures for integrating refugees, including education, promotion of values and German language, community services and employment.

Table 1 – Documents used in interpretative analysis

Title	Year
Federal Law Concerning the Granting of Asylum (2005 Asylum Act – Asylgesetz 2005)	2005, amendments 2015
Federal Act on the Establishment and Organization of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Federal Office Establishment Act)	2012, amendments 2015
68 th Federal Act enacting an Integration Act (IntG, Integrationsgesetz)	2017
Anti-Face-Covering Act (AGesVG, Anti-Gesichtsverhüllungsgesetz)	2017
Settlement and Residence Act (NAG, Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz)	2005, amendments 2015
Aliens Police Act 2005 (FPG, Fremdenpolizeigesetz 2005)	2005, amendments 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018
Consolidated federal law: Entire legal provision for the Year of Integration Act (Integration Year - (IJG)	2017
Federal Law Regulating Basic Welfare Support of Asylum-Seekers in Admission Procedures and of Certain Other Aliens (Federal Government Basic Welfare Support Act 2005 – GVG-B 2005)	1991, amendments in 2015, 2017, 2018
Brochure My Life in Austria – Opportunities and Rules (Mein Leben in Österreich)	2015
National Integration Plan - 50 Action Points - A Plan for the Integration of Persons entitled to Asylum or Subsidiary Protection in Austria	2015
Brochure “Coexistence in Austria – United by Our Values (“Zusammenleben in Österreich. Werte, die uns verbinden”).	2015

Austrian Recognition and Assessment Act	2016
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The two brochures “My Life in Austria – Opportunities and Rules” and “Coexistence in Austria – United by Our Values” were developed by Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and used by the Austrian Integration Fund as a part of the mandatory value and orientation courses (IOM, 2016). The former is available in languages of refugees – Arabic, Farsi, English, Pashto, Russian and is given to every refugee and persons under subsidiary protection. It provides a detailed description of Austrian values and culture, covers a range of topics about Austria, such as health, environment, employment, gender equality, neighborhood rules, and some practical aspects of living in Austria, such as waste separation and dealing with money. The brochure “Coexistence in Austria” discusses rights and obligations in Austria along with fundamental principles and values of Austrian societies, which include freedom, rule of law, democracy, federalism, republic and so on (My life in Austria. Chances and rules, 2016).

A closer look to the texts of these documents in the subsequent chapter will allow to unveil their meanings, their interpretation of integration and its implications on refugees’ acquisition of membership and belonging in Austrian society.

4 The context that matters

Following the interpretative policy approach outlined above, this chapter examines the origins of “integration” as well as socio-political context and discourse against which the integration policies for refugees were adopted in Austria since 2015. This contextualization aims at placing the policies in a wider context to understand how the policies reflect and depend on the social reality. In addition, a closer investigation of the refugee integration measures is provided for further analysis of their meaning in Chapter 4.

4.1 Genealogy of integration in Austria

Presence of migrants and refugees has a longstanding history in Austria. After the World War II, the so-called “guest-workers” from Yugoslavia and Turkey and asylum seekers from communist Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland², among others, diversified the Austrian population (Kraler, Jandl, 2003). However, the country portrayed itself more as a country of transit than a country of immigration and has not taken serious attempts to accommodate its migrants until 1990s (Perchinig, 2012). The term “integration” appeared in federal laws for the first time in 1992 when the Residence Act (1992) defined “integration support” as a full inclusion of legal migrants, recognized refugees and their family members in economic, societal, and cultural sphere in Austria. The term was associated with equal opportunities in these spheres (Aufenthaltsgesetz, 1992).

In the same year, the City of Vienna established the first organization for immigrants’ inclusion - the “Viennese Integration Fund” (Wiener Integrationsfond) - and promoted the idea of integration as a “policy of equal opportunities for migrants” (Perchinig, 2012 p. 1).

² Many of which did not stay, e.g. around 10% out of 500,000 refugees

Similarly, the civil society and social activists in the city united to set up an umbrella organization “SOS-Mitmensh” and demanded pro-active measures from the government in the area of refugee and migrant integration (ibid).

The Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), which were in government coalition at that time, reacted with introducing the “integration package”, which included, on the one hand, reforms of the Residence Act and Aliens Laws for improving immigrants’ rights and opportunities, and, on the other hand, decreasing the number of migrants in exchange for the better integration conditions (ibid). This strategy was intended to please the civil rights organizations, who were fighting for migrant’s legal inclusion, and at the same time to accommodate the appeals of the established right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) (Perchinig, 2012). Since 1990s, the FPÖ’s strong anti-migrant stance has been on a rise and promoted restrictive orientation towards asylum, migration, residence, family reunification and naturalization (ibid.).

The SPÖ and ÖVP slogan “Integration before immigration”, thus, was intended to please everyone. However, as noted by an Austrian migration policy analyst Bernhard Perchinig, this political move has firmly attached “integration” to the issues and debates on migration and influenced the future development of integration policies (Perchinig, 2003). By 1998, the “integration package”, consequently, included the reformed legislation on migrants’ employment (Auslän-derbeschäftigungsgesetz, 1997) and residence rights (Fremdengesetz 1997, Asylgesetz 1997). New measures for housing and training supports, as well as eased access to residence permits (for “highly integrated” migrants) were introduced as a part of the “integration support”. Last, but not least, the Integration Advisory Council was formed with the task of advising the Ministry of Interior on the matters of integration and its improvement (ibid).

With the FPÖ coming to power in coalition with ÖVP in 1999, “integration” was linked to the familiar rhetoric of reduced migration and new rhetoric of “internal security” (after 9/11 terrorist attacks) (König, 2003). The coalition introduced new legal membership requirements for foreign nationals, including the language proficiency, integration contracts, citizenship tests and high residence duration (10 year) prior citizenship acquisition (Goodman, 2010). The government’s programme “Comprehensive integration” (2000) included German language and training courses, while the Integration Contract established compulsory hundred hours of German language and literacy courses for labor migrants from non-EU/EEA (Goodman, 2014 p. 97). Half of the cost for the course had to be paid by the migrant, and a failure to fulfill the Agreement terms resulted in fines, loss of legal status, and even exclusion. This was followed by further restrictions in the Citizenship Act (2006), which raised the required level of income, language proficiency, residence duration (up to 10 years, with certain exceptions), and introduced a citizenship test that examined the knowledge of Austrian history, democratic order, and a province (ibid., p. 99). For immigrants and their families, it meant that they had to show a certain level of integration, commitment, and economic self-sufficiency to become legal members of the Austrian polity.

As argued by Bauböck and Çinar (2010), the measures introduced by the FPÖ -ÖVP collation represented instruments for controlling migration and limiting immigrants’ access to the welfare and benefits, which were the main concerns of the right wing party.

The FPÖ portrayed these measures as the political success and one of its heads Peter Westenthaler stressed:

“We are making it clear that abuse of the social system will no longer be possible in the future... If they [migrants] cannot integrate, then it is clear what shall happen: they will no longer be allowed to stay here! After all, this is not what the Austrian social system is meant for” (Perchinig, 2010).

Restrictive measures on integration continued even when the FPÖ was no longer in power. The topic became a salient issue, and two separate governmental bodies were established to deal with migrants— a State Secretariat (2011) and a Ministry for Integration (2014)³. Despite Austria’s reluctance to acknowledge itself as an immigrant country, the policy of integration, as it was shown above, is institutionalized in the country.

4.2 Integration policies for refugees

The Federal law concerning the granting of asylum in Austria defines “refugees” as a people who cannot return to their homes because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” (Asylum Act, 2005). Refugees are different from the economic migrants in that, first of all, they are in need of humanitarian protection because they were forced to leave their countries unlike economic migrants who choose to relocate, and second of all, they cannot return to their homes due to violence, persecution and wars. Although under the Austrian Asylum Act (2005) refugees are recognized as a special group whose rights are equal with Austrian citizens (ibid), regulation of their presence in Austria seem to follow a remarkably similar logic of promoting and demanding integration and conditioning their benefits on individual performance and achievements. Similar to conditioning residence permit extensions on language acquisition for economic migrants, refugees’ access to welfare benefits is conditioned on a set of mandatory measures, such as country knowledge, language proficiency, exams and “integration year” requirements. The current subsection is devoted to the analysis of these measures.

The asylum procedure in Austria is based on General Administrative Procedures Act (1991), Federal Act concerning the Granting of Asylum (2005) and the Federal Act on the

³ Austria: Overview of the legal framework // Asylum Information Database <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/overview-legal-framework> Data accessed: April, 5 2019

Exercise of Aliens' Police, the issuing of Documents for Aliens and the Granting of Entry Permits (2005)⁴. After the so-called "refugee crisis" and the highest inflow of asylum seekers in 2015, the country has also adopted the Federal Constitutional Act concerning the Accommodation and Allocation of aliens in need of help and protection (2015) and introduced more restrictive measures for refugee acceptance, protection and integration⁵. Examples of that include quota system, instances of withdrawal of protection, cuts on social benefits and vocational training opportunities, but improved access to the labor market (Rheindorf M., Wodak R, 2010).

Three federal agencies were assigned responsible for refugee integration. The first, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl – BFA) works under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Interior and decides on refugee's residence status. The second, Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds – ÖIF), funded by Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, is responsible for basic language courses and general integration. The third, the Public Employment Service (Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS), regulated by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, deals with integration of refugees in the labor market and their further training/education⁶.

The type of integration that is pursued by these agencies implies that a refugee possesses the knowledge of the German language that allows him or her to enter employment, training, establish contacts with locals and comply with the rules and regulations. To achieve that, in Autumn 2015 the Austrian parliament established language courses, general orientation, information modules on Austrian history, housing, education, healthcare and living

⁴ Austria: Overview of the legal framework // Asylum Information Database <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/overview-legal-framework> Data accessed: December, 29 2019

⁵ Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/statistics> Data accessed: December, 29 2019

⁶ Austria: Overview of the legal framework // Asylum Information Database <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/austria/overview-legal-framework> Data accessed: April, 5 2019

together, and charter talks, which provide information on what Austrians consider important for everyday interactions⁷.

The so-called “Austrian values” became mandatory in 2017, with the introduction of the Integration Act. They include democratic values, such as freedom of speech, equal rights, tolerance, and rule of law can be found in the brochures of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, entitled “Coexistence in Austria – United by Our Values”⁸ and “My Life in Austria – Opportunities and Rules”⁹. They are also taught at value and orientation courses. Upon the completion of these courses, a refugee is referred to the public employment service (AMS) for assistance in finding an employment. The refugees aged 15-25 have a chance to attend a youth college that prepares them for school, or provides vocational training and consequently, a permanent job¹⁰. Similar to the integration of labor migrants, an important element of the refugee integration process is the Integration agreement signed between the Austrian state and a refugee, that underlines an obligation of a refugee to complete the prescribed language, orientation and values courses and states that a failure to do so may result in a social benefits reduction.

Although the contracts have been criticized for being signed between unequal partners and without a possibility of terms negotiation (Meier, 2018), they soon were “normalized” in the discourse and practices of refugee integration in Austria. The Integration Act was followed by the Act on Integration Year¹¹ (2017), which established a “one-year modular labor market

⁷ Werte und Orientierungskurse <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/kurse/werte-und-orientierungskurse/werte-und-orientierungskurse/>

⁸“Zusammenleben in Österreich. Werte, die uns verbinden. https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/Zusammenleben/Zusammenleben_in_Oestereich_Deutsch-Englisch.pdf

⁹ Mein Leben in Österreich – Chancen und Regeln <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/kurse/werte-und-orientierungskurse/werte-und-orientierungskurse/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Full title: Federal law on the labor market integration of employable asylum seekers and persons entitled to subsidiary protection as well as asylum seekers who are likely to be granted international protection within the framework of an integration year (Integration [Year Act](#) - IJG)

measure” aimed at “improvement of the chances of sustainable integration into the labor market, social participation and economic self-preservation” (Integration Year Act § 1, 2017). Carried out by carried out by the Public Employment Service (AMS), the Integration Year targets persons entitled to asylum and subsidiary protection who are no longer in compulsory schooling, speak German at an A1 level (Beginner)¹² and can work, but were unable to find a job. The measures outlined in the Act include competence clearing, support in recognition of certificates and qualifications, German, value, and orientation courses (provided by Austrian Integration Fund), career orientation, job and application training and other employment related activities (Integration Year Act § 5, 2017). In addition, a community work is introduced as a part of training to allow refugees to receive a work experience that can facilitate their employment.

The refugees are firmly guided to the Austrian functional systems of the labor market and their performance throughout the year is recorded on their integration cards. Every participant of the Integration Year is awarded with the card that reflects changes in his/her integration path when passing from one integration stage to another (e.g. from one language course to another, from certificates recognition agencies to competence clearance, etc).

Similar to many integration measures, the assigned measures of the Integration Year are also mandatory. The refugees are “obliged to cooperate and participate [in activities] unless there are worthy reasons for consideration” (ibid. § 3). Violation of the compliance and participation results in the reduction of unemployment and welfare benefits and represents a principle of demanding integration, not merely promoting and supporting.

As it is seen, Austrian policy for refugee integration is controversial as it includes demanding measures for integration, such as obligations and penalties, alongside with

¹² According to the Common European Framework of Reference A1 refers to the basic, beginner knowledge of the language (Council of Europe, 2001)

supportive measures, such as language and trainings provision and assistance in finding a job. Placed in the context of previous measures for legal membership of economic migrants in Austria (such as integration agreements and tests), the measures for refugees seem to be a continuation of the restrictive integration logic: obligation and support. But why the same interpretation applies for refugees who fled from wars and found a humanitarian protection in Austria? Why does the similar interpretation of integration apply for labor migrants and recent refugees mean? In order to answer these questions, the next chapter of the Thesis sheds a light to the Austrian political context in which the integration policies for refugees were adopted.

4.3 The Austrian political context

“What is one’s own is particularly evident in the political dealings with the “Other””
(Rosenberger S., Gruber O., 2020)

The refugee movements in 2015 in Austria were initially met with the welcoming approach from the civil society and government’s efforts to provide accommodation and offer support to refugees (Gruber, 2017). Collaboration with Germany and condemnation of the Hungarian fences marked the first stage of Austrian handling of the situation. However, the continuing influx of refugees, images of refugees sleeping on lawns in tabloid media, a conflict between the federal and state governments over the management of accommodations, public pressure, as well as Germany decision to process refugees at the Austrian border have drastically shifted the government’s strategy (ibid). It is also important to consider the role of the right-wing party FPÖ and its “ever-increasing pressure” on the topic of asylum and migration in the run-up to the Austrian parliamentary elections in 2017 (Rheindorf, Wodak, 2018). Its anti-refugee, anti-Muslim rhetoric shaped the political agenda by appealing to the public fears over the refugee invasion, border control and security. In the wake of poor crisis

management, the FPÖ offered a desired alternative - a protection that other parties and the EU could not offer to Austria (Perchinig, 2012).

Faced with the FPÖ's popular rhetoric on "rejecting all forms of migration" and media-fueled concerns regarding the inflow of refugees, SPÖ also took a restrictive stance on the incoming migration and integration and argued for "reduced migration with the sense of proportion", mandatory integration and protection of the EU borders (SPÖ Manifesto 2017). Similarly, ÖVP started proposing "protection centers" that would keep asylum seekers outside of the European Union (ÖVP Manifesto 2017). The ÖVP's leader Sebastian Kurz, for instance, called for the closure of the Western Balkans route, securitization of the EU's external borders and cooperation with Turkey as the decisive instruments for reducing the influx of refugees (Rosenberger, Gruber, 2020). The rhetoric of these parties along with the decision of the winning party (ÖVP) to form a coalition government with the FPÖ in 2017 shows that the response of the mainstream parties in Austria was to adapt and collaborate on restrictive integration and migration measures to retain their voters (Hafez, Heinisch, Miklin, 2019). This led to the decision to close the southern border, introduce a limit to asylum seekers and a "normalization of exclusionary rhetoric" towards newcomers (Rheindorf, Wodak, 2018, p.33).

At the end of 2017, the coalition of ÖVP and FPÖ promoted the type of integration that conditioned refugees and posed requirements along with providing a humanitarian shelter and justified it on the official level as a prevention of asylum and welfare "abuse" and concern over social protection and cohesion (Rheindorf, Wodak, 2018). The FPÖ nominated Minister for Integration, Karin Kneißl, stated it clear that "for the refugee crisis not to become an integration crisis, the participation and co-responsibility of all immigrants is needed" (Integration Report, 2018). The principle of demanding and promoting integration remained in place, however, now with the higher emphasis on the demand: "they [refugees] would have to strive more actively for their integration and their progress in society, acquire German language skills, participate

in the labor market and accept Austrian and European values” (ibid). The Minister for Integration expressed a special concern over refugee women and noted that “patriarchal structures of their countries of origin” should not hinder their participation in the labor market and make them vulnerable to violence. Refugees, thus, were portrayed as culturally different from Austrians and, thus, in need of “integration” to peacefully coexist with “locals”. The meaning of integration promoted by the Minister also included "identification with the host country" and adoption of a "common foundation of constitutionally anchored values” (ibid).

As noted by some scholars, the demand for internalizing Austrian values and a culturalized perception of integration are close to the three classic FPÖ-topics: enforcement of an Austrian identity, patriarchal oppression of migrants and the fight against political Islam (Rosenberger S., Gruber O., 2020).

After the corruption scandal around the FPÖ in 2019, the extreme right party was removed from the ruling coalition government, but as the subsequent chapters of the Thesis will show the refugee integration policies that are based on the logic of “preventing integration crisis,” refugee obligations, “Austrian values” and individual responsibility have remained in place (Speer, 2018).

5 Analysis of refugee integration policy in Austria

Considering the socio-political context outlined above, this chapter aims at deconstructing the content of the refugee policies and brochures to reveal the “rules” for integration and membership in Austrian society. The first subsection analyzes the definitions of integration throughout the Austrian legislation and the two brochures in focus, while the second and third examine the questions of where refugees are expected to integrate and how.

5.1 What is “integration”?

The national framework for integration of refugees in Austria is outlined in the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP, 2015), which defines “integration” as a two-way process that is “shaped by mutual appreciation and respect, whereas clear rules secure social cohesion and peace”. This definition suggests that the Austrian government subjectifies refugees as a potential “threat” to “social cohesion and peace” that must be “secured” with “clear rules”. Therefore, the main requirement for refugees that is repeated several times in the text is the adherence to laws, peace, norms, and show respect for “Austrian values” and different lifestyles (NAP, 2015). As it was discussed in the theoretical chapter, the perception of refugees as a potential “threat” is due to the long tradition of methodological nationalism and the constructed image of (forced) migrants as “invaders” who challenge the harmonious state of order in the nation-state. Thus, their presence has to be regulated, which in the nation-state logic means ensuring compliance of “their” [refugee] behavior and values to “our” [“Austrian”].

Similarly, the introductory part of the ‘My Life in Austria’ (2016) brochure states:

“It is essential that you understand the fundamental values, respect them, and put them into practice... You must acquire the ability to share our value system. [...] The rules based on which people in Austria deal with one another may differ from those in your home country. Although you might not be used to our laws and regulations, they must be observed by everyone who immigrates to Austria”.

Value and norm-based approach to refugee integration suggest that integration is perceived as, among others, a “cultural problem” that might potentially lead to the divide and parallel societies in Austria. Thus, the legal response to the presence of refugees in the country is to convey the “Austrian way”. An additional responsibility is to prohibit some cultural practices that are not in line with the “Austrian way”. For example, the Anti-Face-Covering Act (2017) prohibits face-covering in public in the name of integration, stating that this measure is needed for “strengthening participation in society and securing peaceful coexistence in Austria”. The Act clearly targets Muslim women (Josipovic, Reeger, 2020) and sends signals that a certain way of conduct is not compatible with the Austrian vision of “integration” and “co-existence”.

The Integration Act of 2017 defines integration as “a process involving all sections of society, whose success depends on all people living in Austria... It intends to “enable persons to participate in social, economic and cultural life in Austria” (Integration Act, 2017 §2 (1)). The Act states that integration of individuals into Austrian society can be possible if systematic integration measures and appropriate resources are offered (“integration promotion”) and obligations to participate are in place (“integration obligation”). The success and the final point of the integration process is marked to be the acquisition of Austrian citizenship (§2 (1)). It is interesting to note here, that in Austrian naturalization policies citizenship is not regarded as an instrument that aids immigrant’s integration, but rather an endpoint. Thus, Austrian citizenship is given to those who “make it till the end”, and symbolizes a reward for those who “earn” and “deserve” it (Borkert, 2015).

The Act clearly states that integration is not merely the desired outcome of refugees’ social interaction with Austrians, it is a legal duty. Therefore, together with the integration agreements and the Integration Year Act, it legally binds refugees to social, economic, and cultural integration, and makes non-compliance punishable through cuts on allowances (ibid).

Other aspects of integration outlined in the policy and stressed by the back then Director of the Austrian Integration Fund, Franz Wolf in the forewords of the “Living together” brochure (2016, p. 75) are German language competence and “financial independence through work”. Acquisition of German along with entrance to the labor market is highlighted as a “good start here in Austria” (ibid). The self-financing requirement is also mentioned in the Integration Act that states: “...of key importance are participation through gainful work, access to and acceptance of education offers, equal treatment of the sexes, and the rapid achievement of the ability to earn one’s living” (Integration Act, 2017 §2 (2)).

If considered against the outlined above discourse of “welfare abuse” around the topic of asylum, one could conclude that these aspects are not merely about “empowering” refugees to become autonomous members of the polity. It is rather about signaling to refugees that they should not become a “burden” and are expected to quickly start self-sustaining themselves and their families despite their physical and psychological conditions. Integration is expected to occur “as quickly as possible” (ibid., p. 75) through obligatory participation in AMS organized seminars, language, and orientation courses.

Lastly, the 50-Points Integration Plan (2015, p. 6), explicitly states that integration is an “issue” and that state’s involvement in facilitating integration is essential because of “history lesson learnt” (without specifying what part of the history), that “...integration does not happen by itself” and, moreover, “the question where one has to integrate into cannot be left to the individuals’ discretion. The basic framework must be decided by the state” (ibid.). Thus, by turning to the undefined past, the state justifies its management of the “issue”, as well as its rational and “indisputable” (ibid., p 7) choice of integration route.

The Plan stresses the decisive influence of the integration on the society as a whole, all areas of life and future of Austria. It, therefore, outlines the involvement of the “host” society

and institutions in the integration process. It defines seven areas of integration, namely: Language and Education, Work and Employment, the Rule of law and values, Health and social issues, Intercultural dialogue, Sports and leisure, Housing, and the regional dimension of integration. The Plan assigns “roles” and “tasks” to kindergartens, schools, teachers, volunteers, and potential employers in supporting refugees in obtaining skills, language learning, completing education and recognizing their qualifications. For example, it discusses the funds for and work of teachers and schools in arranging language support classes for refugee children after school and during summer holidays and offers concrete measures of inviting retired teachers to assist in the integration process (ibid., p. 9).

All in all, the plan provides 50 points that can include refugees in systems of education, culture, sports, language, and labor market. Although criticized for being incomplete, the Plan is said to be successful in structuring language promotion and support for refugee children (Meier, 2018). Besides, along with stating refugees’ obligations to integrate and “start earning as soon as possible” (ibid.), the Plan also presents policies for state and “host” actors’ support in organizing conditions for integration.

The “problem” of refugee presence, thus, seems to be “solvable” by means of their German language, “Austrian values” acquisition and employment on the one hand, and institutional support, on the other hand. This is a task that is “structured and managed” by the state. The Integration year Act (2017), for example, outlines step by step measures for accelerating labor market integration, language skills, social inclusion and economic self-preservation.

Although it is claimed that integration “serves the public’s interests” (Integration Act, 2017), the policies clearly establish the power of the Austrian government to define the route

of integration as the only “right” one. Power is also expressed in legal control, and ability to apply financial and administrative sanctions for non-compliance with integration rules.

So, the definitions of integration used in Austrian integration legislation and brochures subjectifies refugees as “culturally different” and constructs a certain way of their conduct, in particular their obligatory acceptance of “Austrian values,” active participation in social life and rapid employment. Persons who were recently forced to flee their home countries to escape war and persecution, are assigned new “tasks” in Austria and are expected to perform certain roles. This shows how integration policy intends to shape the behavior of newcomers and impose certain expectations from the start. Similarly, the policy shapes the behavior of the receiving society, schools, integration agencies, which are assigned to provide systematic integration measures and serve as a conveyor for converting aliens into residents.

5.2 Where to integrate to? The image of Austria in the policy

Throughout the policy documents, Austria is presented as a liberal and democratic state (NAP, 2015) “characterized by security, freedom and human dignity” (My Life in Austria. Chances and Rules, 2016). Along with the basic demographic and geographic facts about Austria, the brochure “My life in Austria. Chances and rules” introduce the dark chapter of Austria’s history –the Nazi regime – to illustrate that Austria was not always as free as it is now. As described in the brochure, after World War II, people worked hard to achieve what they have now, and, therefore, securing current peace, democracy, and freedoms under all circumstances is important for Austria’s future prosperity (ibid, p. 83-87). The reference to the past and significant efforts to rebuild Austria after the war makes the readers better understand the Austrian society and its stands. At the same time, the story of the war might be intended to

allow refugees to relate their situation of fleeing from the war to the needed efforts to re-build their lives in “peaceful Austria”.

The brochure stresses that “Austria has learned from its past” and “everybody who lives in Austria now must uphold and contribute towards the principles of:

- Maintaining peace
- Respecting fundamental and human rights
- Safeguarding democratic and rule of law structures, observing the constitution and the laws
- Contributing towards political and economic stability
- Maintaining the education, healthcare, and social systems
- Using natural resources carefully and preserving the environment” (ibid., p. 86).

These principles are said to be “unnegotiable” and form the basis of co-existence for the diverse Austrian population (ibid). The 2017 Federal Integration Act states that these values and principles are “identity-shaping characteristics of Austria...that form basis of the peaceful coexistence of people of various origins and thus, they [values, principles] are essential for a cohesive Austrian society” (Integration Act, 2017). Therefore, one of the objectives of the Act and other integration policies is to preserve these values and principles (ibid., §1 (2)).

Another Austrian principle, underlined by Sebastian Kurz, who was a Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs at the time the brochures were written, is the responsibility for oneself and the necessity to participate in the labor market and education (My life in Austria, 2016 p. 74). Kurz presents Austria as a country of opportunities, which, however, also implies responsibilities for its members: rights go along with obligations (ibid). In the foreword to the brochure “My life in Austria. Chances and rules” he states:

“You are now in Austria – together with over eight million other people, a country where you can live in peace and play your part in ensuring our shared prosperity. Each of us is responsible for enabling all of us to live together in harmony” (My life in Austria. Chances and rules, 2016).

Additional principles, outlined in the second brochure “Living together. Co-existence in Austria” include Freedom (Freiheit), Rule of Law (Rechtsstaat), Democracy (Demokratie), Republic (Republik), Federalism (Föderalismus), and Separation of powers (Gewaltenteilung) (Living together. Co-existence in Austria, 2016, p.6). They are complemented with the eighteen “shared” values (shown in graph 1 below), which derive out of each principle, and all together convey the one main idea of “Human dignity” (Menschenwürde).

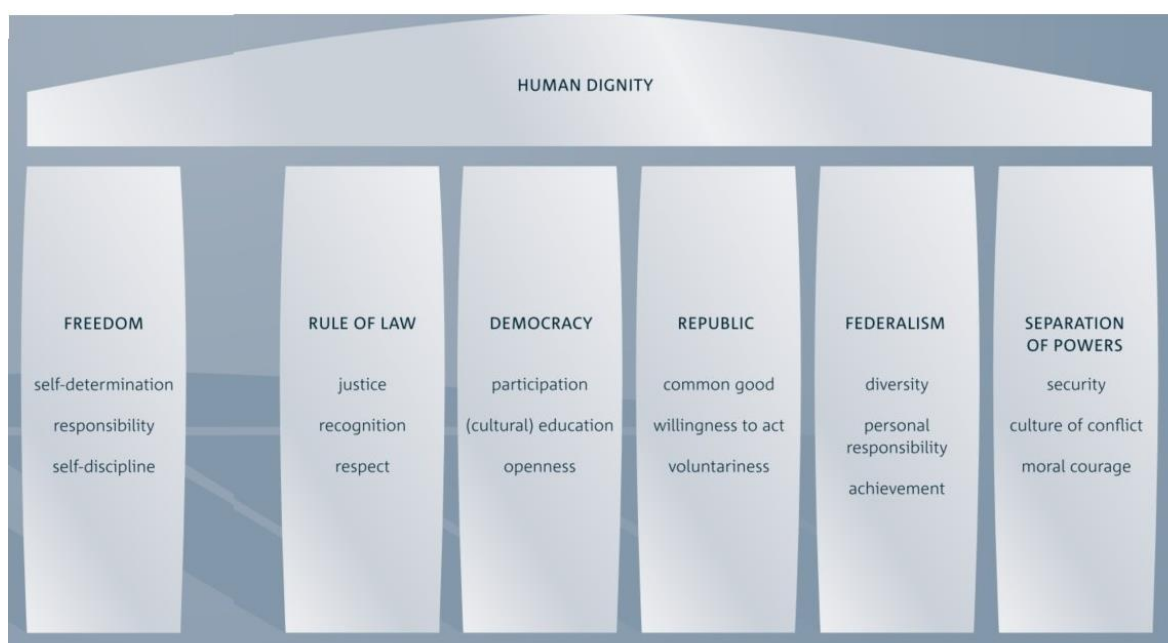


Figure 1. One idea, six principles, eighteen values (Living together. Co-existence in Austria)

As noted by many scholars (Heinermann, 2017; Rosenberger, Gruber, 2020) these values represent an attempt of the Austrian government to reflect on and define Austrian “cultural identity” in response to the recent refugee and migration flows. Although the analysis of Austrian identity politics is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that language

requirement, civic knowledge, and proved allegiance are typical markers of national building projects (Kostakopoulou, 2010). Thus, a demand for refugee integration in Austria may well be a contemporary example of the nation-state's coercive attempt of turning newcomers into "good citizens" (Laurence, 2012 p. 11).

Although most of the values are rather abstract concepts, the brochure "Living together. Co-existence in Austria" tries to translate them into everyday life through positive images of people with different ethnic backgrounds, examples of social etiquette, and behavioral practices "common" in Austria. For example, the principle of Freedom is described as follows:

"In Austria everyone has the personal freedom to choose how they lead their lives. You are free to choose how you wish to act and behave within the limits of the law. You are also free to choose your lifestyle, your job or your religion" (ibid. p.12).

Freedom is also said to include responsibility and self-discipline when it comes to one's own interests and needs ("... you have to hold back at times so that others can enjoy their freedom") and limits, which are defined law (ibid., p.13).

With these explanations, the Chapter on Freedom offers three values that a newcomer should embrace:

*"Self-determination: I take responsibility for my life.
Responsibility: I take responsibility for the lives of others.
Self-discipline: I respect orderly co-existence."*
(Living together. Co-existence in Austria, 2016, p.13).

The use of the first-person narrative ("I" ("ich")) throughout the brochure gives a reader a subjective view on reality rather than "dry facts". This limits readers' perception of Austria to the narrator's [policymakers] understanding of what "Austria" and "Austrian values" are, and the narrator's goals and visions, rather than an objective state of affairs. This shows how policy and brochure texts are shaped by the state and its power to subjectify reality.

It should be noted that the image of Austria is idealized in both brochures analyzed. The principles, such as democracy, federalism, separation of power, rule of law, and human dignity are presented flawlessly despite many criticisms that exist towards Austrian federalism (Clar, 2017; Speer, 2018), the existence of the right-wing party that puts under question Austrian democracy (Müller, 2002; Hafez, 2017), corruption on the governmental level (Eurobarometer, 2012; FPÖ “Ibiza scandal”, GRECO, 2020) and discriminatory practice in everyday life that undermine human dignity (Weichselbaumer, 2015; Wanka, Wiesböck, et al. 2018, Zara Report, 2019).

Austrian values are also presented as if they are equally shared by every person in the country, from the farmer in the village to the University professors in cities. Undifferentiated values can be explained if we turn to the modes of methodological nationalism, which allow for homogenous grouping and a “container” like a vision of the society. National framing of the integration process illustrates how Austrian society is portrayed as a static entity the entry to which is defined by the states.

The fact that the values and principles are taken from the Austrian constitution and laws might explain the logic behind their “unnegotiable” and homogenized nature. However, additional codes of conduct and social etiquette described in the brochure for the orientation course seem rather as a practice of state “disciplining” and imposing a certain pattern of social behavior, which in reality may or may not be observed by all “Austrians”. Moreover, the usage of the first-person narrative in the brochures imposes the “shared values” without any room for discussion and negotiation. What is also interesting is that the values are seen as shaped by the Austrian past (“the world they belong to”) and intended to preserve a certain future for Austria. In a way, refugee integration gains a new meaning: it is now a national project, in which Austria “teaches” its values and language to soon have “new members”, who will contribute to the country’s development.

5.3 Membership “rules”

If following Sara Goodman’s framework for memberships outlined in the theoretical chapter, we assume that integration measures for refugees “spell out” the rules of membership in Austria, then the examination of policies, orientation brochures along with the context and discourses outlined in the previous parts of the paper, helps to identify the type of belonging and boundaries of the membership that are set for the current refugees in the country.

First, as mentioned in all laws analyzed, the brochures and by political leaders, knowledge, and acceptance of the “Austrian values”, principles, and ways of conduct constitute an important and initial step in “earning” membership. “Knowing our values is important for you to become integrated in Austria: After all, to become part of Austrian society you first need to know what it is based on!”, stated former Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and current Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz to the newly arrived refugees (Living together, 2015). Respect for the legal system and the rule of law is equally important as the refugees are expected to adhere to the law and maintain peace and social cohesion.

Second, membership implies linguistic conformity, violation of which can result in welfare reduction and sanctions. German language courses are at the heart of the integration package and are mandatory measures of the Integration Year for refugees. The language courses also represent a continuation of cultural education that begins during the value and orientation courses, as the German course curriculum is structured to learn the language and discuss important aspects of living in Austria.

Both steps – value and language learning – can be achieved by refugees with the existing institutional arrangements and considerable support of the Austrian government. At the same time, refugees are expected to be active in learning processes and open to “the new,

the unfamiliar” (Living together. Co-existence in Austria, 2016, p. 21). Their willingness to accept the values is unnegotiable as the values are portrayed as the only ones possible.

Third, labor market participation and economic self-preservation are marked as underlying characteristics of Austrian membership. Analyzed against the background of right-wing party accusations that refugees are burdens for the welfare, this expectation shows that integration in Austria aims at turning newcomers into self-sustainable members who will not only benefit from the Austrian welfare but also contribute to it as quickly as possible. The Integration Year Act is fully devoted to equipping refugees with needed training and skills for their employment and integration into the Austrian labor system.

Fourth, along with personal economic responsibility, the refugees are invited to participate in social life: “whenever possible you stand up for the rights of others and are prepared to act in solidarity then you will be contributing every day to the common good in Austria” (ibid., p.25). Solidarity is said to be achieved by acceptance of the “shared values” (ibid.). Refugees are imposed to community work during their Integration Year, as a part of their employment preparation. Thus, the practices of responsabilization of refugees (Oelgemöller, Allinson, 2020) for their own and community’s well-being are used by the state to show that social participation is important for being part of the Austrian society.

Fifth, one could argue that in order for refugees to become “Austrian” members, they are also expected to give up parts of their identity, which are not compatible with the Austrian way of life, values, and principles. The Anti-Face-Covering Act is one explicit example of the Austrian ban of certain cultural practices in the name of integration. Although it was not aimed specifically at refugees, but generally at women wearing niqabs and burqas in Austria¹³, it still

¹³ Approximately 150 women in Austria were affected by this law https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/oesterreich/871996_Die-ominoesen-150.html

sent a signal that certain minority group practices, especially towards women, are not tolerated in the country.

Sixth and last, acquisition of citizenship is marked as the final point of integration and achievement of (legal) membership. None of the documents analyzed assumes citizenship as a tool for enhancing integration, it is rather seen as a sign of successful integration, achieved by refugees with the support of the Austrian government, institutions, schools, and teachers.

The analyzed type of membership shows the power of the state in deciding where to integrate to, regulating the (external) behavior of the refugees, and forcing them to act within a certain frame of conduct. The shift in the obligation of “belonging” (i.e., integration) on newcomers is combined with the support in integration. Refugees are claimed to have rights to social welfare as long as they perform their “duties”. Moreover, there is an idea of “deserving” membership in the imaginary community and “earning” it through concrete integration courses, language acquisition, agreements, and tests. It is important to share the “burden of the commonwealth” (Kostakopoulou, 2010), to adopt presumably shared “values” of the majority, and integrate linguistically, socially, and culturally.

6 Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the aim of the study was to explore the ideology behind the “integration” and the implications that integration policies have on the acquisition of membership in Austria. The research question of the thesis, namely how the Austrian government defines and regulates membership in its society in current integration policies for refugees, was answered by analyzing the integration measures towards refugees in two steps. The first step included contextualization of the integration policies. By examining the socio-political context and discourse around integration, it was established that Austria has a history of conditioning measures for migrants and that since the 1990s due to the growing popularity of the right-wing ideas, it has adopted civic integration policy for labor migrants. As it was unveiled, the aim of these policies was not just to “integrate” and empower the newcomers, but also to please the electoral voters, strengthen migration control and state power over selecting the most “adoptable” migrants. With the refugee flows in 2015, concerns over security, and the increasing influence of the ÖFP, the Austrian government once again took a restrictive turn and started conditioning refugees’ access to social benefits on their integration efforts. Justified on the official level as concern over social protection and cohesion, integration of refugees became a national project associated with preventing “asylum and welfare abuse” and preserving “Austrian values” (Rheindorf, Wodak, 2018).

This background was essential for the second step in the analysis – the deconstruction of the policy. The interpretative analysis of the policy documents revealed the hegemonic power of the state in establishing the terms of integration and “rules” that can “secure social cohesion” between refugees and “Austrians” (NAP, 2015). The policies analyzed prescribe a certain path to “integration”, as if “it was the only possible one” (Wright, Shore, 2003) and other refugees by producing assumptions that “they” are inherently different in culture and

values from “us” [“Austrians”]. They also impose certain expectations from the start, assign new roles and duties, and shape the behavior of refugees by applying financial sanctions for non-compliance with integration requirements. Refugees are expected and legally obliged to conform to the values and norms of Austrian society, which include human dignity, freedom of speech, equal rights, tolerance, self-discipline, rule of law and etc. The unnegotiable character of the values and their homogenized nature (as if everyone in Austria shares these values) gives refugees a somewhat imaged vision of Austria. Throughout the brochures, Austria was found to be largely idealized, as all the aspects of life in the country are presented as harmonious and flawless, with no mention of discrimination and racism that may hinder the integration regardless of the refugee’s efforts.

The other terms of integration for refugees include German language requirements, ability to “start earning as soon as possible”, active participation in social life by the means of volunteering and contributing to the common good (50-Points Integration Plan, 2015). Acquisition of citizenship is said to signal successful completion of their integration, rather than a tool for achieving the integration.

Based on the policies and brochures analyzed it could be concluded that integration policies for refugees define membership in Austrian society as a “valuable asset” that can be achieved by internalizing Austrian values, acquiring German skills, gaining economic independence, and eventually Austrian citizenship. While putting the obligation for achieving membership and belonging on refugees, the Austrian government provides support on the way to integration. In a way, refugee integration gains a new meaning: it is now a national project, in which Austria “teaches” its values and language to soon have “new members”, who will contribute to the country’s development.

Benedict Anderson suggested once those nations are “joinable in time”: they are “conceived in language, not in blood”, this way “one could be 'invited into' the imagined community” (Anderson, 1983). It is yet too early to claim that the Austrian government is inviting the refugees into nationhood by constructing a certain path to integration. However, what is clear is that the civic integration practices “spell out” the rules of membership in Austria and offer the type of belonging that is based on the commitment to common values, culture, and language proficiency, which altogether can be seen as a step in gaining state identity and (later on) in receiving or earning full membership. A further investigation of refugees’ individual experiences of settlement, their encounters with the state, bureaucracy, local people, as well as their local and transnational ties are needed to better establish the nature of contemporary state-defined membership and belonging.

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