

E-citizenship: a concept for the integration of migrants via the Internet

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Abstract: The main question of this research project is to explore as how the Internet and the concepts of e-government and e-democracy can be used to facilitate the integration of foreigners in their new home country. Our goal is to propose a concept of e-citizen: During the first year of migration the migrant has ties with his home country but also he/she develops new ties in the host country. Such a transition phase is characterized by a reduced role of citizenship, since the migrant cannot exercise his rights in full in his home country (except for some states that allow distant voting's) and also they cannot obtain citizen rights in their new host country, where they are employed. Thus we want to explore the possibility that the spectrum of citizen rights can be divided between the host and the home country. Depending on certain conditions (language, cultural, legal etc) the new group of e-citizen should get increasing right in the new country while at the same time he can keep and work on his ties with his home country.

1. Introduction and Motivation

A recent pilot study started from the following research question: Can the Internet and e-democracy help to facilitate integration of foreign students in their new study places?

Studying abroad has become an important feature in modern university education. Clearly, for many students when they become a member of a new university, this is their first stand-alone experience in a foreign country. The pilot study was focussed on the problems of such integration processes for foreign students and explores the possibilities to improve social, cultural, language and educational tools to speed up the integration process of foreign students. A questionnaire was prepared (in different languages)

and given to the students at the beginning of their stay at the new university. Then different options were possible to elicit from the questionnaire and various proposals can be explored as what are the needs of students for their new environment.

Extensions of this approach are possible:

Firstly, further questionnaires can be used to monitor the integration process over the study years (semi-annual or annual). Secondly, another goal is also to analyse if students want a human or computer interface (or what kind of mix) to solve their integration problems while they are studying and working in a foreign country.

Thirdly, preliminary results are available. A pilot study was conducted in Austria and Spain and suggestions will be made as how “supervised integration“ of foreign students can be implemented as a future Internet service.

The main conclusion of the pilot study was, that we couldn’t get enough students per semester in a reasonable time to fill out the questionnaire. Many universities have denied cooperation, i.e. the mailing to foreign students on the basis of data protection.

Also, we would have liked to get students from different faculties. While this is in principle possible on a singular basis, the students don’t feel obliged to fill out the questionnaire, since they are not involved in the goal of the study because of lack of information by a guiding persons, they are familiar or them they trust. Such studies need to have a simple questionnaire, but such a project is connected with the danger that the answers will be not too useful.

In summary, we have concluded that an empirical approach by questionnaires might be an interesting but tedious one, so we have to develop a new approach. Such a new approach will depend on the concept of e-citizenship and a new knowledge base approach to e-democracy called e-cognocracy by Moreno and Polasek (2003a,b). Thus we have spent considerable time to discuss the implication and the scope of the concept of e-citizenship. The results of this research are the table that is listed in Polasek (2007).

2. Towards an e-citizenship for migrants?

In recent months we have developed the basic concept of e-citizenship, which can be found in the appendix. We have taken this concept as basis for implementing future variants of e-citizenship. Given previous research

proposals on implementing e-government we expect several problems. Thus we have listed for all these points the pros and cons and we expect more work to come if different step of the e-citizenship concept will be realized. These details will be worked out in a future research step using experiences from other approaches, see e.g. Zimmermann (2005).

2.1 Integration of foreigners and e-learning

The main idea of this line of research is that e-learning is an easy and convenient way to facilitate the integration of foreigners. This assumes that the digital divide is not so large between the migrant home country and the host country and that the gap is becoming smaller quite fast over the next decade.

Also it presupposes a certain prior level of education on the side of the migrant and his family. Migrants could prepare by the way of e-learning even before they are coming to their new country. Political parties and large part of the society in the host countries might object to these ideas, sine it might be seen as an invitation to migration. But many rich counties have to face the reality of future: Population pressure in less developed countries will cause a constant pressure for migration to the rich countries. Europe has these problems on the southern and eastern neighbors of the continent.

Nevertheless, many problems could be potentially eased if information about the migration process can be obtained on-line.

2.2 Information flows via the Internet

Many experts think that modern worker and migration flows should be tied with information flows between the involved countries. Thus, it might be better for migrants to maintain their ties with the home country while getting a maximum of integration in the new country. Good ties to the home country will increase the probability that migrants will go back. Good integration into the society of the host country will decrease the chances of unemployment, conflicts with the law or even criminal activities. Also, good relationships between migration-connected countries will improve economic activities and trade relationships in the long run.

Thus, there seem to be long-term economic benefits involved when in early years of migration investments into the knowledge society is made. Last but not least it should be mentioned that if migrants are will integrated

into a society, the quality of life is increasing for both, the migrants and the people in the host society, since they are less exposed to hostility. Good examples for not working integration have been the riots in the banlieu of France in the beginning of 2006. Putting migrants and foreigners in suburbs that are closed off from the rest of the society creates the feeling of living in a ghetto.

High youth unemployment, high drop out rates in schools and frustration in the first and second generation of migrants has been the consequences. And the economic loss was and is considerable. Next to paying social subsidies to non-employed people or social welfare, the costs of the riots were also high: Many cars and shops were damaged, not only in the suburbs but also in city centers. New economic and social programs had to be launched to overcome the bad results of the riots. Thus it might pay to think in advance and get preventions measures out early.

2.3 Integration and e-Citizenship

Connected with the question of integration of migrants as newcomers into the society is the question of the status of citizenship. A simple definition of an e-citizen is a citizen that interacts via Internet with the local or national administrations. We think that there are more political and social opportunities that can be now developed with the concept of e-citizenship. Migrants are potentially citizens of 2 states: The original state and the new host states. But the host state is usually reluctant to give newcomers immediately the status of a citizen. New migrants have to prove that they are not short-time visitors but they are interested in the economic and political success of their new country.

In the EU there is a new attitude towards the citizenship of their citizens. Since one of the four basic freedoms is the right to move people freely within their member states, there are no restrictions (except for a transition phase for new EU member states) that EU citizens can move to another EU state and get employed. But employment rights do not imply that you get automatically citizen rights. But there have been suggestions that the political rights of migrants should be improved, and in the case of EU citizens that they should get at least local citizen rights after e.g. 3 years.

These developments lead to the concept of e-citizenship. Ordinary citizenship usually involves a set of rights for the citizen that he can exercise in his home state. E-Citizenship would now mean that these rights are split between the home and the guest state according to certain criteria and the

technological possibilities are now being developed via the Internet, in general via e-government.

As an example take the voting right, which can be exercised usually at a local, regional or a national level. It would make sense that a migrant get e.g. The local voting right at his new residence after 3 years (especially for EU citizens) and maybe the regional voting right after another couple of years, but he still can vote on a national basis in his home country, either via mail voting or e-voting.

3. Conclusions

Integration of migrants is a politically controversial issue. It addresses interests of people and politicians at a local, regional or a national level. The paper explores the idea that it would make sense for an improved integration process that a migrant gets e.g. the local voting right at his new residence after e.g. 3 years (especially in the EU for foreign EU citizens) and maybe the regional voting right after a another period of successful integration. A more detailed implementation plan can be found in Polasek (2007).

4. References

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