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# Selected Aspects of Norwegian Immigration Policy Towards Children

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*This article, through the prism of immigration policy models proposed by Stephen Castles (1995), Steven Weldon (2005) and Liah Greenfeld (1998), discusses those aspects of Norwegian immigration policy that refer directly to children. Areas such as employment, education, housing and health care influence the situation of an immigrant family, which in turn affects the wellbeing of a child. However, it is the education system and the work of Child Welfare Services that most directly influence a child's position. Analysis presented in this article is based on the White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament, and data that were obtained in expert interviews and ethnographic observation in Akershus and Buskerud area in Norway, conducted between 2012 and 2014. The article raises the question whether the tools of immigration policy used by social workers and teachers lead to integration understood as an outcome of a pluralist or individualistic-civic model of immigration policy or are rather aimed at assimilation into Norwegian society, attempting to impose the effect of assimilation or the collectivistic-civic policy model.*

*Keywords:* immigration policy; Norway; child welfare

## Introduction

Migration processes in Norway have a long history dating back to the year 900 (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008). Despite the common belief that immigration is a new phenomenon in Norway, the country has received incomers many times in the past, and was relatively homogeneous only in the post-war period (*ibidem*: 13–14). However, migration to Norway, as we have become accustomed to think of it today, refers to the flow of a ‘new immigration’ that began during the 1960s and 1970s. Currently, immigrants represent 13 per cent of Norwegian society and Norwegians born to immigrant parents amount to 2.6 per cent (SSB 2015b). They originate from 222 countries and independent regions (SSB 2015a) with the biggest groups coming from Poland, Sweden and Lithuania, while among Norwegians born to immigrant parents, the majority are of Pakistani, Somali and Iraqi origin. People of immigrant backgrounds inhabit all the municipalities in the country, but the biggest concentration of them has been observed in the capital city, Oslo (where 32 per cent of the population has a foreign background) and the city of Drammen (27 per cent) (*ibidem*).

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Mobility processes affect not only adults but also children. 13.6 per cent of all children living in Norway are immigrants themselves or have an immigrant background. 96 100 children and youths aged 0–22 are migrants themselves and 101 800 were born in the country to immigrant parents (Dyrhaug and Sky 2015: 4).

Enabling young people to gain language proficiency and a deep understanding of their new culture aids their successful integration into the new society and helps to avoid the common problems facing first-generation newcomers. For the state, from an economic point of view, it implies lower costs in terms of immigration policy and social benefits in the future, as well as higher income from taxes. As some studies show (Froy and Pyne 2011), well-educated youths with immigrant backgrounds are more likely to be successful in the labour market in the future than those with poor socio-cultural capital. Therefore, children and youths should be considered as an important target of immigration policy. This importance of children and youths as actors of mobility processes is reflected in the research on the subject. They are often discussed with reference to their health problems (Sam 1994; Sam and Berry 1995; Brunvand and Brunvatne 2001); the accompanying Child Welfare Services (Kalve 2001); the work of Norwegian immigration officials and their cultural blindness (Engebriksen 2003); the political alienation of non-Western students (Solhaug 2012); school achievements and education (Lauglo 1999; Bratsberg, Raaum and Røed 2012); housing conditions (Løwe 2008); and identity issues, including a sense of belonging and gender construction among immigrant youths (Andersson 2002; Prieur 2002; Mainsah 2011). With regard to the adaptation of immigrant children and youths to Norwegian society, some excellent research was conducted by Iduun Seland (2011) in her PhD thesis in which she discusses the role of primary school in creating national identity and its impact on how well immigrant youths adapt to the new society.

However, the existing studies, especially those published in English, focus either on official recommendations or on the effects of immigrant youth acculturation in Norway. Little has been said about the actual practices of teachers, municipalities and Child Welfare Services officers aimed at immigrant children and youths, even if the teaching plans and governmental recommendations are thoroughly analysed (see Seland 2011). Recognising the significance of existing works on the subject, this article aims to bridge the gap between theoretical discussion of immigration policy<sup>1</sup> and analysis of that policy's results, such as immigrant pupils' school achievements, challenges and identity construction, as well as their later adaptation to the labour market. The article seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the adaptation of youths in Norway by presenting declared practices of the teachers and officers in schools, Child Welfare Services and municipalities, which are aimed at facilitating immigrant youths' functioning in the host society. The aim is thus to provide the missing link between the assumptions of the immigration policy and its results. The practices are discussed with regard to academic models of immigration policies that are described broadly in the following section. The article seeks to answer the question whether the tools used by the schools, municipalities and Child Welfare Services actually lead to integration or rather aim at the assimilation of immigrant youths into the host society. To avoid definitional inaccuracies, the author refers to adaptation as any kind of immigrant adjustment to the host society without indicating its features. Integration will be regarded as an outcome of adaptation to the host society within the pluralist or individualistic-civic model of immigration policy. Assimilation will be understood as a consequence of adaptation within the assimilation or collectivistic-civic model of immigration policy. The article is based on data obtained from an ethnographic observation in Drammen conducted between 2012–2014, semi-structured expert interviews with a bilingual teacher from Bærum municipality, an expert from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs in Oslo, an expert of minor language education based in Oslo, an expert from Drammen municipality, a school teacher from a school with low immigrant numbers in Akershus, and a school teacher from a school with high immigrant numbers in Buskerud. The interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2014<sup>2</sup> and interlocutors were chosen with the purpose

of representing a diversity of tasks, structural levels and work conditions. Additionally, besides available academic works and reports on the subject, the article makes use of the White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament issued on 26 October 2012 and entitled *A Comprehensive Integration Policy: Diversity and Community* (hereafter: *A Comprehensive... 2012*). A White Paper is a document that presents current government policy on a particular subject but, at the same time, it invites comments and reflection concerning the issues it covers. Regarding the ethnographic data, the interviews and the text of the White Paper itself, a content analysis has been conducted. The threads concerning immigrant youths were identified and analysed in the context of immigration policy models described below and they are presented in the third section.

Taking into account the qualitative nature of this study, the reader must understand certain limitations of this article. Particular practices may differ from municipality to municipality according to the actual needs of their population. Consequently, this article does not seek to provide a comprehensive policy review. Rather, it discusses, through the prism of theoretical models of immigration policies, chosen aspects of the official recommendations for immigrant children and youth adaptation and links these to the practices of social workers, teachers and experts working with immigrants, analysing how the recommendations have been implemented.

The first section of this article presents theoretical models of immigration policies drawn up by Stephen Castles (1995), Steven Weldon (2006) and Liah Greenfeld (1998), which form the framework of the discussion. The second section, based on the 2012 White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament and available academic works and reports, presents the main goals of Norwegian immigration policy. The third section discusses, through the prism of adaptation theories, elements of the policy aimed at children and youths, such as the education system and the work of Child Welfare Services, and links them to the practices of social workers, teachers and experts. In the final section, the author discusses whether the tools used by the practitioners lead to the integration or assimilation of immigrant children and youths, answering the question raised at the beginning of this article. This section also invites other researchers to engage in further discussion on the adequacy of these tools for the purposes of future immigration policy.

### **Three models of immigration policy: where does Norway fit in?**

Immigration policies of Western European countries, as some scholars argue, are convergent, having similar solutions for dealing with growing immigration waves (Mahning and Wimmer 2000). Recent studies based upon the dimensions of the cultural and legal rights of immigrants have developed a general typology of citizenship regimes (Weldon 2006) which corresponds to the actual immigration policies of particular countries. Those ideal types, even if based on similar general assumptions, can be translated into the different actual conditions of an immigrant in a host society, and they influence among other things the social tolerance of that society and the acquisition of social capital by the immigrants themselves in the host country (Weldon 2006; Lupo 2010). Stephen Castles (1995) labels them as differential exclusionist, assimilation and pluralist models while Steven Weldon (2006: 334), after Liah Greenfeld (1998), puts them respectively as collectivistic-ethnic, collectivistic-civic and individualistic-civic regimes. Although the regimes refer to the ways citizenship is granted in particular countries, following other scholars (see Weldon 2006; Lupo 2010), the author treats them as a set of factors that influence the final model of an immigrant's adaptation to the host society.

The differential exclusionist or collectivistic-ethnic model assumes that citizenship is equivalent to ethnicity. One therefore cannot gain or lose citizenship (Weldon 2006: 334) and countries which follow that model aim to prevent permanent settlement and they treat immigrants as 'guest workers' (*ibidem*; Castles 1995: 293). This model does not provide any type of adaptation of immigrants to the host society. The assimilation or collectivistic-civic model is based on the idea of loyalty towards the national state which is understood as a political community (Weldon 2006: 334). Citizenship is not granted exclusively to people of a particular

ethnic background and immigrants are provided with instruments to facilitate assimilation into the host society and are expected to 'give up their distinctive cultural characteristics' (Weldon 2006: 334). The language of the native population is to be used by immigrants, and immigrant children are entitled to participate in the mainstream education system (Castles 1995). Any cultural traditions may only be maintained in private. The outcome of adaptation within the framework of this model is often referred to as assimilation and it does not provide a way of expressing the culture of origin in public. Countries following the third model of policy, pluralist or individualistic-civic, which is sometimes also called multicultural, grant *jus soli* citizenship upon birth and permit cultural diversity among its citizens by providing them with the right to express their cultural traditions publicly (Weldon 2006: 335). This model, out of the three described here, is according to Stephen Castles (1995) the most fruitful when it comes to successful adaptation of immigrants into the host society and its outcome has traditionally been referred to as integration.

In the case of Norway, the assimilation model of immigration policy was officially rejected in 1980 (Hagelund 2002: 407) and the state decided to take responsibility for maintaining the cultures of minorities living in Norway. Some scholars (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007: 197–198) propose to call Norwegian immigration policy 'de facto multiculturalism'. This notion refers to the actual actions of the government which aims to include immigrants in society; however, this is without labelling the policy officially as multiculturalism. A similar belief is also present in a common discourse that assumes that the immigration policy of Scandinavian countries generally reflects multiculturalism and is aimed at *integration*. Nevertheless, the fact that the *jus soli* citizenship principle has never been given to children born to immigrant parents in Norway disqualifies the country from representing fully the pluralist or individualistic-civic model. To obtain citizenship a number of requirements must be fulfilled. Immigrants among others must reside in Norway for a minimum of seven years out of the last ten years; they have to acquire a good command of the Norwegian language and possess knowledge of Norwegian society.<sup>3</sup> In the case of children born to immigrant parents, citizenship is awarded together with the citizenship of the parents, unless a child applies for it themselves at age 12 or over.

The targets of Norwegian immigration policy are both the immigrants and the host population. Its goal is not only to facilitate the life of an immigrant but also to change attitudes in Norwegian society towards cultural diversity (Østberg 2008: 51). The policy recognises the right to diversity and the right to disagree which, in turn, fully reflects the principles of the pluralist or individualistic-civic model of adaptation. The policy attempts to prevent discrimination and solve the problem of high crime rates among young male immigrants through access to education. Immigrants in Norway are granted the right to express their cultural and religious traditions. All actions must, however, be in accordance with Norwegian law and central Norwegian values.

Traditionally Statistics Norway (SSB 2015b), and after it, many other reports and publications, follow the general division between so-called 'Western' and 'non-Western' immigrants, classifying them nowadays into these two main groups according to the country of origin: 'The EU28/EEA, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand' and 'Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, and Europe except the EU28/EEA' (SSB 2015b). In a public discourse in Norway, members of these two groups are *implicitly* ascribed different characteristics and problems; 'non-Western' immigrants are considered to generate costs for the Norwegian state and to be culturally distinctive (see Storhaug 2013). Even though Norwegian immigration policy is aimed at all immigrants, the latter group from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania, except Australia and New Zealand, might be seen as the policy's main target. This article discusses the problems of children and youths originating from different ethnic backgrounds, and from both immigrant groups. It should, however, be underlined that some of the problems described are relevant only for particular ethnic groups and there are groups of immigrants such as Swedes who might generally not have any adaptation problems, being rather irrelevant as a target of the immigration policy's actions.

The principal values of Norwegian immigration policy are the values widespread in Norwegian society, such as ‘gender equality, equal rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and belief, solidarity, socio-economic equality, tolerance, participation in working life, democracy and civil society, protection of children’s rights’ (*A Comprehensive...* 2012: 12). Over the years the main goal of Norwegian immigration policy has been the participation and inclusion of immigrants into society, equality and providing rights and duties towards the society equal to the host population (Østberg 2008: 69–70). Today, besides these principles, another aspect has been added. As the 2012 White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament puts it, cultural diversity and multilingualism are treated as resources that contribute to the development of Norwegian society. Language competence and employment are seen as a basis for successful adaptation by the newcomers (Østberg 2008: 70). The White Paper underlines the fact that the presence of immigrants in Norway contributes to the economic growth of society, provided they are employed. It also outlines the negative consequences for the whole society that can arise as a result of the detrimental situation of immigrants, such as the increased costs of social benefits and loss of taxation revenue. The document calls everyone who is settled in Norway Norwegian, regardless of their ethnic background.

As Hagelund (2003) argues, Norway, like Denmark, has struggled with many questions concerning multicultural immigration policy, in contrast to Sweden that has declared multiculturalism to be official immigration policy.<sup>4</sup> Taking into account this statement, as well as the examples mentioned previously, it might be said that classifying Norwegian immigration policy as reflecting multiculturalism is not as simple as it might be regarded in common discourse. This article rejects the assumption according to which Norwegian immigration policy reflects multiculturalism or, following the terminology proposed at the beginning of this section, the pluralist or individualistic-civic model of immigration policy. Starting from this viewpoint, it seeks to analyse those aspects of immigration policy that refer to youths and to answer the question whether those aspects and their practical solutions lead to integration, understood in the way it is regarded in a pluralist or individualistic-civic policy model, or rather that they reflect the features of other models.

### **The framework of Norwegian immigration policy**

We begin by sketching the overall framework of Norwegian immigration policy. The framework provided below is based mainly on the 2012 White Paper to the Norwegian Parliament (*Meld. St. 6...* 2012). The intention is to present the recent views of the government on the presence of immigrants and compare them to the practical solutions in the field.

One of the areas of interest of Norwegian immigration policy covered by the White Paper is employment. Norway recognises its own need for an immigrant workforce and aims to provide good employment conditions for newcomers, since having immigrants in labour market favourably affects the economic situation of the country. Moreover, ‘employment is the key to participation, financial independence and equality’ (*A Comprehensive...* 2012: 4) for immigrants and it contributes to their general wellbeing and that of their families. Access to job positions must not be limited by ethnic background or gender and all newcomers must be able to utilise their skills in employment. Women’s participation in the labour market is especially underlined.

Another important area mentioned in the 2012 White Paper is education and equal opportunities for children with an immigrant background. Full access to education and provision of solutions fitting the particular needs of immigrant children are prioritised by the policy. Successful education can lead to a rewarding job or career. Immigrant children are provided with the necessary tools to reach language competence such as introductory classes where they can learn Norwegian before they start school, and they are encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities which contribute to their socialisation into the new environment. Children born in Norway to immigrant parents are invited to kindergartens which are seen as the best way to develop language

competence. Basic human rights of immigrant children and youths, such as the right to health care and housing, non-discrimination and the right to choose a livelihood are of high importance for the 2012 White Paper. This involves youths' participation in everyday activities of young people in Norway, such as meeting friends, taking part in sports activities and continuing education, as well as the right to decide about one's own body and the right to choose a spouse. No less important is recognising the specific health problems of particular ethnic groups and providing housing facilities for the arriving families that are located in different areas of the city so as to avoid ghettoisation of some districts and the consequent social exclusion of immigrants (see Eriksen 1997).

All the areas discussed above – employment, education, housing and health care – influence the situation of immigrant families<sup>5</sup> which consequently affects the wellbeing of children themselves. However, it is the education system and the focus on providing equal opportunities and specific freedoms that are the core issues of immigration policy aimed at children and youths. Therefore, the focus in this article will be the school system and the adaptation support given to immigrant children by municipalities and Child Welfare Services.

## **Children in Norwegian immigration policy**

### *The education system*

An important goal of the Norwegian government is to ensure that all children have a good command of Norwegian when they start school (*Meld. St. 23... 2009*). The education system is thus a crucial arena for immigration policy: '[I]n the first instance it is to prepare students for participation in society as adults and give them the knowledge they need to be independent and autonomous individuals' (Seland 2011: 60, author's translation). Norwegian schools, with Norwegian as the language of instruction, are known for their individualistic approach, where children are responsible for their own school achievements and development of their individual talents (see Ślusarczyk, Nikielska-Sekula 2014). This individualism is also reflected in immigration policy, which encourages the adjustment of teaching methods to the needs of a particular pupil (*Meld. St. 6... 2012: 56*). It is in school where most children and youths with immigrant backgrounds who arrive later in their life meet the host society for the first time, and where children born to immigrant parents in Norway may gain full language competence and knowledge of the society their parents have chosen to bring them up in. There is a clear difference between the needs of the former and the latter group. Children who immigrated later in their life usually meet language barriers which affect their school achievements and social adaptation. In their case, help with learning Norwegian is necessary. Norwegian immigration policy recommends provision of language support for those who face language barriers:

*From August 2012 the Education Law was introduced according to which municipalities and counties should be able to establish special training programmes for newcomer minority students, such as introductory classes. The purpose of the introductory offer is to enable students to learn Norwegian quickly so that they can participate in regular education. The training organised as an introductory offer cannot last longer than two years for an individual student (Meld. St. 6... 2012: 56, author's translation).*

Municipalities and counties are responsible for adjusting language support to the particular needs of children in their area. This is usually solved in two ways – either introductory classes (*innføringsklasser*) in Norwegian taught in a group, or bilingual teachers employed to support children individually. Sometimes both options may be used. The role of bilingual teachers is to explain the difficulties of the subjects discussed at school and

to help immigrants reach proficiency in Norwegian. Meeting with a teacher usually takes place after school. Introductory classes gather children from immigrant backgrounds who do not speak Norwegian, usually of a similar age, and they are taught Norwegian for the period of time that is necessary for a particular student to start at a regular school. Such language support, according to the 2012 White Paper, can be used by a child for no longer than two years. Sometimes, however, this period may be longer in some municipalities. As a school teacher from Akershus explains, in her school the help of a bilingual teacher is provided for much longer than stated in the 2012 White Paper: ‘They [immigrant children] have that supporting teacher only for three years. And then they can prolong it up to five, I think, years but in very special cases’ (School teacher 1).

Such language support is usually not necessary for children born in Norway to immigrant parents, thanks to their attending kindergartens. As the White Paper strongly underlines, immigrant children’s participation in kindergartens must be prioritised because this is where they can socialise with Norwegian society and reach a level of language proficiency that enables them to start school with no fewer resources than native Norwegian children have: ‘Participation in a qualified kindergarten has positive effects on children’s language development and social skills, which is important for children of immigrant backgrounds, so that they can have the same resources for learning as other pupils when they start school’. (*Meld. St. 6...* 2012: 51, author’s translation). The same conclusion drives an expert report: *Diversity and Mastery – Multilingual Children, Young People and Adults in the Education and Training System*:

*There is a broad consensus that participation in kindergarten is positive for children’s later participation and mastery of skills in education, employment and generally in society. The kindergarten is the most important arena for language stimulation for children of pre-school age. The linguistic foundation laid in early childhood is of fundamental importance for children’s social skills and their later learning (Østberg 2008: 74, author’s translation).*

From 2009, all children were granted a place at kindergarten as soon as they turned 1 (*Meld. St. 6...* 2012: 51). This applies also to children from immigrant backgrounds and it is the responsibility of municipalities and counties to provide as many places as needed. Immigrant children, however, are under-represented among all kindergarten participants and it applies especially to younger children. 95.1 per cent of all 3-year-old children living in Norway attend kindergarten compared to 83.7 per cent in the same age group of immigrant children. In the 2-year-old group, the differences are even greater – 88 per cent of the mainstream population compared to 59.4 per cent among the minority population (*ibidem*). The government’s migration policy is aimed at encouraging immigrant parents to send their children to kindergarten in early childhood. It suggests, for example, that good information sheets should be provided and distributed in health care centres (*Meld. St. 6...* 2012: 52). Moreover, since 2006 some areas inhabited by a significant number of children from immigrant backgrounds have been given funds for free core time at kindergarten. In 2012, selected areas were provided with 20 free hours at kindergarten per week, per child from the area (*ibidem*: 53). The goal was to ensure that children from immigrant backgrounds start school with the same opportunities as native Norwegian children. As evaluation of the project has proved, the number of immigrant children in kindergartens has increased and girls who took part in such programmes in the past have had better grades at school than those who did not (*ibidem*).

Another option for parents who do not want to benefit from standard kindergartens is the so-called ‘open kindergarten’ designed for children aged 0–6. A child may attend an open kindergarten accompanied by a parent who takes care of him/her. No registration is needed and a small fee is required. Open kindergartens are also an opportunity to learn Norwegian for children from immigrant backgrounds.

The official recommendations in Norwegian immigration policy seek to create a positive environment of inclusion and equality in kindergartens and schools, reflecting the pluralist model of integration. Diversity and

multiculturalism are seen as a resource, not a limitation, and values such as democracy and tolerance should be intrinsic to the school and kindergarten systems. Everybody should feel included (*Meld. St. 6... 2012*: 48–49). However, to obtain those goals, staff at the kindergartens and schools must have the aptitude to stimulate multilingual development in the daily life of the kindergarten and school and share an enthusiasm for cultural diversity. Moreover, they need to understand what it means to be bilingual.<sup>6</sup> The government thus sees the need to increase the competences of school staff and the people responsible for the functioning of schools and kindergartens in the municipalities. It also proposes education of teachers in a multicultural pedagogy and notes that knowledge of central policy documents is a must in order to attain the goals of immigration policy (*ibidem*: 51). The responsibility for enforcing government recommendations is put on municipalities and counties. They are expected to follow general suggestions formulated in official policy guidelines and adjust them to the particular needs of children and youths living in the area. For that reason, actual solutions may differ from municipality to municipality according to the budgets available and the needs of their populations. These solutions, however, should be based on the same principles of equality and inclusion.

Migration studies indicate that language proficiency has proved to be a crucial tool for participation in society (see White 2011). For that reason, the quest for proficiency of immigrants in Norwegian should be seen positively. Equal access to education is without doubt a sign of a pluralistic model of immigration policy. However, a strong focus on Norwegian as a teaching language concedes the assumptions of an assimilation or collectivistic-civic model (Lupo 2010: 77). Let us look more closely at the role of cultural diversity in the education system in order to be able to draw conclusions as to which model of immigration policy drives the adaptation tools used by the staff of Norwegian educational institutions.

#### *Cultural and language diversity at school*

An example of a school where traditions relating to pupil background are marked and valued is a school<sup>7</sup> in Drammen attended by a significant number of immigrant children. On the facade of the school 52 foreign flags representing pupils' countries of origin are displayed. Such attitudes towards multiculturalism overlap with the goals of immigration policy according to which diversity should be seen as a resource for Norwegian society and this definitely reflects a pluralist model. It should, however, be underlined that this school may be seen as unique due to its location in an immigrant neighbourhood. Actions taken by the school are not only aimed at the immigrant population but they also promote immigrant traditions among the majority population, thus broadening native Norwegian knowledge of immigrant cultures. Such a mutual understanding is necessary in order to create an environment of real equal opportunities regardless of ethnic background.

Another aspect of pluralism in the Norwegian education system is the declared role of the mother tongue. Norwegian immigration policy recognises the mother tongue as an important tool in learning Norwegian (*Meld. St. 6... 2012*: 50). As one bilingual teacher says, a good command of the child's mother tongue facilitates an understanding of Norwegian by giving a child a reference point of learned concepts. That is why kindergartens are obliged to support the use of the mother tongue by their immigrant pupils (*ibidem*: 52). It is possible to take an exam in a foreign language at secondary school to gain proficiency in one's own mother tongue. There are 14 foreign languages available as an option and there are plans to extend this to other languages. In addition, there is the possibility of studying the mother tongue at school, and this usually happens through meetings with a bilingual teacher:

*Usually a bilingual teacher teaches the mother tongue. This is how it works in other municipalities. Where I work, however, my task is to assist children in regular learning so the learning of their mother tongue takes place indirectly. (...) It has been changed here. After the adaptation class, when a child starts at the*

*seventh grade, his or her Norwegian is inadequate to the requirements and [is poor] in comparison to the Norwegian spoken by other children. These [immigrant] children lack the basic concepts required for learning! That is why it has been changed here and my task is to reach Norwegian through the mother tongue (bilingual teacher, author's translation).*

Moreover, a number of online resources for teachers and parents in multicultural education have been developed. NAFO's<sup>8</sup> home page ([www.nafo.hioa.no](http://www.nafo.hioa.no)) contains general information and tips for multicultural education for parents and teachers. The Centre has also launched a website [www.morsmål.no](http://www.morsmål.no) that consists of teaching resources for schools and parents in Norwegian and 13 other languages spoken among immigrants. Each language has its own sub-page where a set of subjects and information is displayed in both Norwegian and the mother tongue.<sup>9</sup>

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, with a view to minority needs, has designed online dictionaries ([www.lexin.udir.no](http://www.lexin.udir.no)) of both varieties of Norwegian – Bokmål and Nynorsk. The offer contains translations into 16 languages spoken by minority groups in Norway. Resources in the mother tongue are also available in local libraries, especially in areas populated by a significant number of immigrants. For example, in Drammen, the libraries subscribe to the Turkish newspaper *Zaman*. Foreign books, movies and music, as well as resources to learn Norwegian are also available.

The crucial position of the child's mother tongue as a tool that helps to develop Norwegian among bilingual children and the role of kindergartens in the learning process is confirmed by the practitioners:

*[I]t is believed that if the mother tongue is well developed then on the basis of its well-developed concepts second, third and fourth languages are quickly built. (...) This applies to children not born here [in Norway] even though immigrant children born here do not speak Norwegian either, because they are not sent to the kindergartens, and they do not integrate and hence grow up within co-national groups. Obviously, the mother tongue determines the successful learning of Norwegian (bilingual teacher, author's translation).*

Parents are encouraged to discuss subjects covered at school with their children in their own language, since it contributes to a better understanding of new concepts in Norwegian introduced during the classes (Ślusarczyk and Nikielska-Sekuła 2014).

Recognising language diversity in schools and underlining the status of the mother tongue in learning Norwegian could not happen in a school system that is aimed at strict assimilation. The existence of bilingual teachers and the availability of teaching and reading resources in minority languages points to the pluralist model of immigration policy. However, as the experience of a bilingual teacher shows, the classes designed for developing the mother tongue usually take the form of tutoring in Norwegian. This opinion is reiterated by a minority education expert based in Oslo:

*In my opinion, (...) teaching the mother tongue in schools is not fully respected in Norway. They call the form of class with a bilingual teacher tuition in the mother tongue. However, this has nothing to do with teaching the mother tongue in fact. The real form of mother tongue teaching appears and disappears all the time. It all depends on the financial state of the municipality (minor languages education expert, author's translation).*

The Norwegian education system does recognise the cultural diversity of the pupils and allows for its maintenance as long as the prioritised goals of adaptation such as Norwegian language proficiency have been fulfilled.

As the statements of the bilingual teachers and the minor languages education expert show, in practice, some schools often do not take responsibility for mother tongue development in immigrant pupils, leaving that task to the individual or his/her family. What is provided is rather tuition in Norwegian or general school subjects that is done with use of mother tongue. But mother tongue classes *sensu stricto* are rarely provided, according to the experience of the above-mentioned experts. There is thus a divergence in some schools and municipalities between official recommendations that reflect the pluralist model of immigration policy and school practices that are aimed primarily at assimilation into the host school system, which is seen as a condition *sine qua non* for educational success.

### *Equal opportunities and freedom of choice*

Norwegian immigration policy seeks to provide equal development and freedom of choice for all children and youths from immigrant backgrounds. Such freedom is seen as fundamental in a democratic system.

*The government is committed to facilitating young girls and boys making independent decisions about their lives and their futures, for example when it comes to education, career and a choice of a spouse. Government provision that parents and caregivers support young people's independent life choices is central to young people's freedom of choice (Meld. St. 6... 2012: 88, author's translation).*

These goals are in the author's opinion consistent with the problem of multiculturalism raised by Unni Wikan in her book *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe* (2002). Wikan criticises Norway for not protecting its own citizens from immigrant backgrounds, in the name of political correctness, and maintaining their cultures of origin. Indeed, in many cases, there is a conflict between the right of a group to maintain its culture and the right of an individual to choose his/her own way of life. Immigration policy seems to attempt to resolve that conflict by stressing that children's and youths' freedom of choice must be prioritised. There are special programmes to limit forced marriage and genital mutilation.<sup>10</sup> Also, the situation of LGBT<sup>11</sup> youths is taken into consideration in the official policy guidelines. LGBT children with conservative relatives may experience abuse and exclusion from the family and therefore should be provided with help from trained personnel from Child Welfare Services (*Meld. St. 6... 2012: 79*).

Freedom applies also to more everyday situations such as participation in peer groups and attending extra-curricular activities. These opportunities can be limited especially (but not exclusively) for girls of particular ethnic backgrounds who may not be allowed to meet friends after school or take part in sports activities together with boys. Some municipalities, such as Drammen, make special arrangements to solve this problem by organising activities for women only or providing 'female hours' at sports centres such as swimming pools. Findings obtained by the author from the interviews conducted in 2014 with first-, second- and third-generation immigrants in Drammen show that 'female hours' and the existence of female gyms contributes positively to the sporting activity of women.

All children, regardless of ethnic background, are granted access to help from Child Welfare Services. As an expert from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs in Oslo argues, some teenagers of particular ethnic background may become the wards of Child Welfare Services due to the difficult situation of maintaining their freedom within their families. They may be provided separate housing facilities where they can live without pressure from the family, even at the age of 15:

*In some families, the parents want to have much more control of the children than Norwegian children have. And then we work a lot to see what kind of support we can give to those families. And not very often,*

*but it happens, the child is taken from the family and social welfare gives the child another place to live. Not in another family or in the institution, but this was for a 15-year-old, and they got help to live in their own apartment or rather in their own room. (...) Depending on their age, they can live together with one or two other children [in the same situation] and they are in touch with a social welfare officer who looks after them (...). This can happen, from my own experience, if the family is very strong, if they don't allow a child to go out, if they put on a child very strong control. Also if they beat a child or put them in a forced marriage situation (...). Or if a child comes to school with no food or is beaten. But this is based on my experience (expert from Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs).*

This expert claims that sometimes the power of the services is misused due to lack of understanding of cultural nuances:

*There were some demonstrations in Norway against our Child Welfare System. People think that we lack competence to assist immigrants. That we use our Norwegian glasses and take children from immigrant families. Some of this is right. I think that the social welfare system in Norway lacks competence in dealing with immigrant families. We do. It is not as bad as they say, but yes. In many [regional] institutions the staff are white, Norwegian, middle class...and are not trained, they don't understand other cultures (expert from Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs).*

As an answer to that problem, the government suggests introducing training aimed at a better understanding of other cultures (see Meld. St. 6... 2012: 77). This suggestion expresses the pluralist immigration policy model by recognising cultural differences in raising a child and, as Wikan (2002) argues, these pluralist ideas do not always provide the best solutions for vulnerable individuals. On the other hand, the assimilation model that is often reinforced by Child Welfare Services in their practical actions, as exemplified above, does not allow the family to raise the child in their own way. Presented practices of Child Welfare Services' workers show that the preferred upbringing model is based on Norwegian values and that it is expected to lead to assimilation into the host society by sharing those principles. The family is encouraged to maintain its ethnic traditions, provided they do not interfere with the widely held values of Norwegian society.

#### *Extracurricular activities*

Extracurricular activities are tools of socialisation into society and they are frequented by children in Norway. Unfortunately, participation in them is not free and not all families can afford it. For that reason and also because of different views within families as to how children should spend their free time, some children may feel excluded. This applies especially to children from immigrant backgrounds whose families are over-represented in low-income groups. The government seeks to ensure that all children have a chance to develop their interests and be engaged in different activities. 'It is interest, not social background, gender or an experience of discrimination, that will determine to what extent and where [and in which activities] children participate' (Meld. St. 6... 2012: 75, author's translation). In 2012, two counties introduced free cards for extracurricular activities for children. Expanding this project to the whole country could be of great help for many immigrant families. As one bilingual teacher notes, some children of Polish origin in Norway do not participate in extracurricular activities because their parents do not understand the importance of these activities to Norwegian society. Since the character of their migration was economic, they don't want to spend money on something they assume to be unnecessary. Another reason for skipping extracurricular activities frequented by ethnic

Norwegian children, as observed by a school teacher from Buskerud among some pupils of Turkish origin, is their participation in a time-consuming Qur'anic School:

*Because many parents choose that children should attend Qur'anic School, they miss a lot of their free time and do not get an opportunity to participate in [extracurricular] activities together with others from the class. Qur'anic School takes the whole afternoon, because there is both teaching and homework there. It takes place four to five times per week. So there is no time left for socialisation. (School teacher 2, author's translation)*

As the statement above shows, activities referring to ethnic cultures of children from minority backgrounds are seen by some practitioners as a limitation, not an opportunity for socialisation. Immigrant children and youths are thus expected to share the interests of ethnic Norwegian youths by taking part in the same extracurricular activities. This is an attitude recognised in the assimilation model of adaptation of immigrants to the host country.

According to an expert from the Drammen municipality, having a meeting place after school hours where children from immigrant backgrounds can develop their talents and proficiency in Norwegian is crucial for successful adaptation. The municipality decided to launch a project called Fjell 2020 which is aimed at having more people from the Fjell area in Drammen at work in 2020 than there were in 2010. One of the goals is to build a hall which will be a meeting place providing opportunities to develop individual skills.

*There will be a big hall (...) [b]ut additionally we will have a school close by. So some of the school's functions such as the school kitchen, music room, drawing room or others will perhaps be located in the hall. Moreover, the library will also be placed there (...). There will be a big library there and we are thinking about running a cafeteria around it, or the club that we already have with afternoon activities (...). This will become a meeting place for children, youths and elderly people (expert from Drammen municipality – author's translation).*

As an example of Drammen municipality, where the population of immigrants is high, shows government suggestions to try to meet the goals of immigration policy are treated seriously. According to the author's ethnographic observations conducted between 2012–2014 in Drammen, immigrant children benefit from their right to maintain their culture of origin by wearing traditional clothes during activities organised by local libraries and they have access to resources in their mother tongue. Simultaneously, they are provided with a cultural and sports option where they can participate in activities organised by the associations that represent their cultures of origin. However, as the example of the Qur'anic School shows, 'ethnic activities' are not seen by some teachers as a valuable platform for a child's adaptation where they can develop their identity and sense of belonging to a group of origin. As it has been argued in this article, some educational workers would prefer them to follow activities frequented by the majority population. Such an attitude reflects assumptions of the assimilation model of adaptation.

## **Conclusion**

Through the prism of immigration policy models defined by Castles (1995), Weldon (2006) and Greenfield (1998), this article has discussed certain aspects of Norwegian immigration policy directed at children, such as the education system, the work of Child Welfare Services, and children and youths' right to freedom of choice and access to extracurricular activities. It has been argued that the official recommendations of the

policy incorporate a pluralist model of adaptation, whereby immigrant children and youths should be provided with equal rights to education, Child Welfare Services and extracurricular activities. What is more, the government has declared that it will take on the responsibility of maintaining the mother tongue of minority pupils by suggesting the introduction of mother tongue classes in schools. It also gave minority pupils the right to express their culture of origin in public. However, the practice of teachers and social workers has proved that many of the adaptation tools that are in use are aimed at assimilation, not integration. The mother tongue classes often serve as a Norwegian language learning opportunity, extracurricular activities dedicated to some aspects of minority cultures are undervalued and the actions of Child Welfare Services are aimed at putting into effect the model of upbringing possibly closest to, or at least not interfering with, a Norwegian one. The right to maintain the cultural background is seen by the practitioners as a limitation rather than an opportunity and resource, and is welcomed only if the assimilationist goals have been reached and as long as it does not interfere with common Norwegian values. Such attitudes of teachers and social workers might stem from sceptical social attitudes towards immigrants and their cultures. As some scholars argue, discrimination against immigrants has been present in Norway (see Brox 1991; Wikan 1995, 2002; Andersson 2003; Alghasi, Eriksen and Ghorashi 2009). Traditionally, the discrimination debate which took place in Norway in the 1990s had two sides (Eriksen 1996). One side supported the idea that a strong maintenance of ‘culture of origin’ among immigrants limits or even prevents their successful adaptation. The other side blamed unsuccessful adaptation on ethnic discrimination against immigrants on the part of the host society. Attitudes observed among practitioners that underestimate the importance of pupils’ cultural background and treat it as a limitation of adaptation would appear to echo the former side of the debate.

As Stephen Castles (1995) argues, integration is the most successful result of immigration policy. Taking that statement into account, this article invites scholars to engage in a discussion on the role of the adaptation tools being used in Norway at the present time. The question that arises here is whether the tools aimed at assimilation and attitudes of those practitioners who seem to value assimilation over integration, as it was argued in the third section of this article, may cause problems faced by immigrant pupils, such as poor school achievements.

As Marianne Gullestad (2002: 20) argues, the notion of integration is complex and requires caution while using it. It has recently made excellent headway in both academic discourse and in public debates concerning immigrants. Because of this, and in line with many other scientific notions that have been introduced to everyday use and are generally accepted, the concept of immigration has lost its original meaning whereby it was viewed as a pluralist adaptation to the host society, and has become a vague and problematic concept. Some scholars even argue (Ibanez 2015) that the notion of ‘integration’ often serves as a euphemism for assimilation masked as political correctness. This article has shown that the existing terminology is confusing and what is commonly called integration may express values traditionally assigned to assimilation. Consequently, it seems that Migration Studies, especially those studies focusing on immigration policies, either need a revision of their terminology or should use existing notions reflexively. The discussion of that problem, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of immigration policy discourse in Norway see Hagelund (2002, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The fieldwork was conducted as part of the author’s doctoral project financed by Telemark University College in Norway. Nevertheless, some expert interviews were conducted with the cooperation of Dr Magdalena Ślusarczyk as preparatory work to the project *Doing Family in Transnational Context. Demographic*

*Choices, Welfare Adaptations, School Integration and Every-Day Life of Polish Families Living in Polish–Norwegian Transnationality* held at the Department of Population Studies at Jagiellonian University in Poland. See also Ślusarczyk and Nikielska-Sekula (2014).

<sup>3</sup> For citizens of other Nordic countries there are other requirements (see *Lov om norsk statsborgerskap*).

<sup>4</sup> For the discussion on immigration policies of three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, see Brochmann and Hagelund (2010).

<sup>5</sup> The notion ‘immigrant family’ refers in this article to families where at least the parents have migrated to Norway. The notion ‘immigrant children and youth’ refers to both children who have migrated themselves, accompanied or not by adults, and children born in Norway to two immigrant parents.

<sup>6</sup> There is an observed tendency, supported by the immigration policy, of hiring people from immigrant backgrounds in kindergartens. This surely contributes to the multicultural environment of education, reaching a goal of ‘mirroring the society’ (see *Meld. St. 6... 2012*: 48). However, some of the hired staff have been living in Norway for a relatively short period and they lack full language competence, having learnt Norwegian from fellow staff members or native Norwegian pupils rather than being trained to teach it. The question that is raised here is how the presence of the staff that do not have proficiency in Norwegian may influence the language development of children in kindergartens.

<sup>7</sup> 44 per cent of the population in the school neighbourhood are of immigrant origin (Høydahl 2014).

<sup>8</sup> *Nasjonalt Senter for Flerkulturell Opplæring* (National Centre for Multicultural Learning).

<sup>9</sup> An example covers deciduous and coniferous trees, containing suggestions for teachers in Norwegian and Turkish, text on the subject and a task sheet with pictures. Another topic concerns acids and alkalis, comprising a set of facts on the subject in Norwegian and Polish.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: *Handlingsplan mot tvangsekteskap (Action Plan Against Forced Marriage)* (2008–2011); *Handlingsplan mot kjønnslemlestelse (Action Plan Against Genital Mutilation)* (2008–2011).

<sup>11</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

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