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## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON THE IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION ALONGSIDE THE RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM: EVIDENCE FROM GREECE

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to develop methodological tools which will contribute to estimate the impact of social capital on the integration of immigrants alongside the Rural-Urban Continuum of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki. The importance of this paper derives from the current debate in this respect with insufficient infrastructures for smooth integration of immigrants into societies and the need to develop an immigration policy which emphasizes the strengthening of policies on the development of multiculturalism and social cohesion. For this purpose, a survey was carried out in 607 residents of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki during the period June to November 2016. The data collected and other information were utilized according to simple descriptive or multivariate statistical analyzes as well as qualitative techniques. Based on the descriptive statistical analyzes the paper concluded that "social capital" is key component in the structure of the relationship between natives and immigrants and according to the results of CatReg models the main reason, which has a positive impact on the "integration" of immigrants, is their participation in community activities.

### Contribution/ Originality

The survey provides information for integration of immigrants, a topic not widely examined in Greece, and it is analyzed for the first time on the basis of rural-urban continuum theory.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of immigration is a recent and significant new challenge for all countries, and especially for the Euro-Mediterranean ones. Greek societies, particularly in recent years, have received a large number of immigrants (Kasimis, 2008). According to the results of the 2011 census of Greece more than 10% of the whole population in Greece are foreigners (ELSTAT, 2011).

Immigration brings importing positive long-term impacts to local societies and economies as it contributes to the increase of the host population and to improve its socio-demographic characteristics (age pyramids) (Imran *et al.*, 2019; Mitrakos, 2016; Boulet and Boudarbat, 2015). Moreover, immigration increases the local workforce especially in jobs that do not require specific qualifications (Sandeep, 2015; Schovánková, 2013; Williams, 2009; Peridy, 2006) and contributes to reducing inflation and boosting the local economies (Mitrakos, 2016; Piracha *et al.*, 2016; Kotani, 2012). On the other hand, in short term periods, immigration brings about negative changes to the social and political well-being of local population as it has negative effects on social cohesion and social capital of the area (Gilmartin and Migge, 2015; Putnam, 2007).

Social capital is an essential component of harmonious coexistence and contributes to boosting social cohesion and promoting integration of immigrants (Warburton, 2019; Schmidt, 2016; Tselios *et al.*, 2015; Beugelsdijk and Sjak, 2009; Cheong *et al.*, 2007). Societies with high rates of social capital have also positive attitudes to social issues (Herrerros and Criado, 2009; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Proper design of social capital can solve the problems that arise from the existence of different social groups within the communities (Bilodeau and White, 2016; Tham-Agyekum and Nimoh, 2013; Evergeti and Zontini, 2006; Jacobs and Tillie, 2004). According to Perkins and Long (2002), "sense of community" is an important dimension of social capital as it expresses the combined effect of networking, reciprocity and trust (Lowea *et al.*, 2016; Sama *et al.*, 2016; Jamshidi and Kenarsari, 2015; De Blasi *et al.*, 2012; Casieri *et al.*, 2010). Immigrants are an organic part of the host society and their integration must be a fundamental concern of societies. Integration is the result of political and social debates and derives from the interaction of different social groups (Gilmartin and Migge, 2015).

This paper aims to estimate the impact of social capital on the integration of immigrants in a typical Greek area. In addition, the paper seeks to develop modern methodological tools aiming to define the factors which contribute to the integration of immigrants alongside the rural-urban continuum of the study area and conclude empirical findings. In accordance with theory of rural-urban continuum areas and according to their distance (either the physical distance from other settlements or as travel time), the municipalities of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki are classified into a linear continuum (Liltsi *et al.*, 2014; Pateman, 2011).

The contribution of this research to scientific literature is particularly interesting and important as for first time in Greece, in a period which characterized by uncertainty, is carried out a survey to determine the interaction between social capital and integration of immigrants as well as to investigate the characteristics of immigrants that contribute to their integration. Social exclusion can be reduced by implementing appropriate programs and policy measures that boost social capital (Stanley *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, on the basis of the results and according to the characteristics of immigrants that contribute to their integration, policy recommendations will be drawn to identify a new immigration policy that encourages the social cohesion and will help to facilitate the social and economic integration of immigrants in host societies. The rest of the paper consists of the following sections: Section two outlines the employed methodological framework. The empirical results are discussed in section three and finally in the last section the conclusions are offered in combination with some emerging policy recommendations.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper draws from an empirical study conducted in 607 residents of the 14 Municipalities of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki during the period June to November 2016. The data were collected through a personal response questionnaire survey. According to the more recent census statistics (Table 1), the permanent residents of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki are 1.040.590 of which 69.961 (6,7 %) are immigrants (ELSTAT, 2011).

**Table 1: Sample distribution**

Municipalities	Real Population	Greece	Foreign countries	Questionnaires
Municipality of Ampelokipoi-Menemeni (Western)	52,185	47,703	4,424	27
Municipality of Kordelio-Evosmos (Western)	102,149	96,242	5,511	51
Municipality of Delta (Western)	45,523	41,505	4,334	15
Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies (Western)	84,384	78,791	5,95	41
Municipality of Langada (Western)	41,082	39,148	1,955	15
Municipality of Pavlou Mela (Western)	98,818	93,924	5,321	64
Municipality of Chalkidona (Western)	33,309	33,673	2,284	21
Municipality of Oraiokastros (Western)	38,861	37,201	1,116	14
Municipality of Thessaloniki (center)	325,321	299,874	25,308	225
Municipality of Volvi (Eastern)	23,317	21,583	1,895	10
Municipality of Thermaikos (Eastern)	49,964	45,951	4,313	16
Municipality of Thermi (Eastern)	53,295	50,506	2,695	15
Municipality of Kalamaria (Eastern)	91,046	88,814	2,704	46
Municipality of Pylaia-Chortiatis (Eastern)	69,950	67,959	2,151	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,109,202</b>	<b>1,040,590</b>	<b>69,961</b>	<b>607</b>

**Source:** Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT, 2011)

To meet the aims of this paper a qualitative research was initially conducted in a small pilot sample of residents of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki (two focus groups). According to the results of this qualitative research, the final questionnaire was structured, and the main quantitative research was carried out, using stratified random sampling through personal interviews, in 607 residents of the study area (each Municipality was a strata).

The survey questionnaire is divided into four sections (Figure 1). These sections consist of variables about: (1) the sense of community (2) the integration of immigrants (3) the impact of immigrants' installation in rural areas (4) the demographic and personal characteristics of the respondents. Aiming to increase participation, and in order to avoid the cognitive burden on respondents, a 5-point Likert scale was used where "1 = Strongly Disagree", "2 = Disagree", "3 = Neither Agree or Disagree", "4 = Agree" and "5 = Strongly Agree".

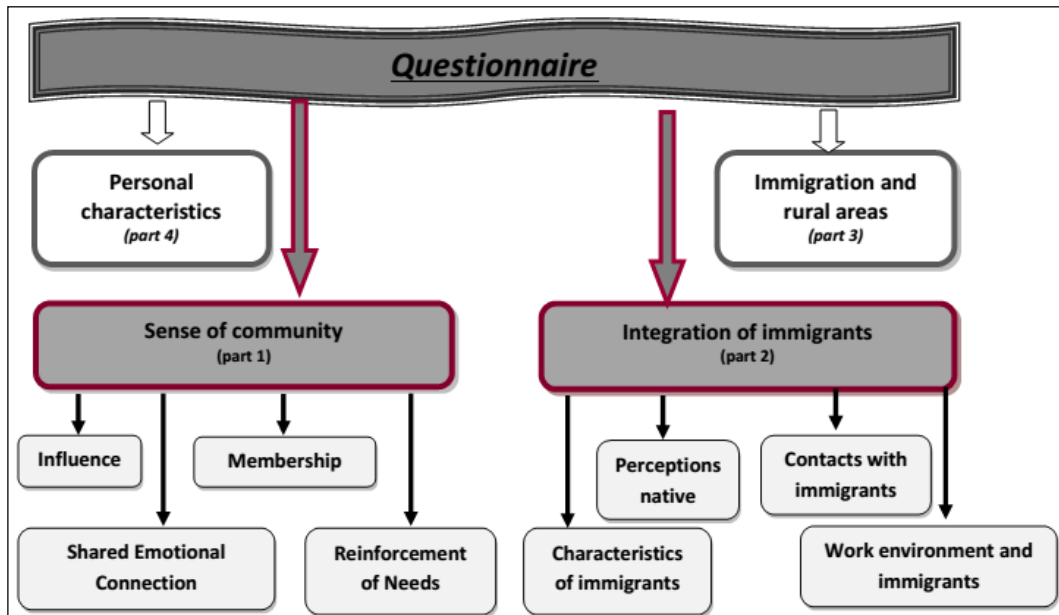


Figure 1: Questionnaire functionality

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of the paper was to estimate and map the "integration" and "social capital" in the rural-urban continuum scale (Figure 2). Using simple descriptive statistical analysis, the average size of "integration" and "social capital" was calculated for each Municipality and was designed on an in rural-urban continuum scale. Social capital is a key element in the structure of the relationship between natives and immigrants in most Municipalities in the prefecture, as municipalities with a high average social capital have higher levels of average "integration" (Chalkidona, Neapolis-Sykeon, Pavlou Mela, Thessaloniki, Kalamaria, Thermaikou).

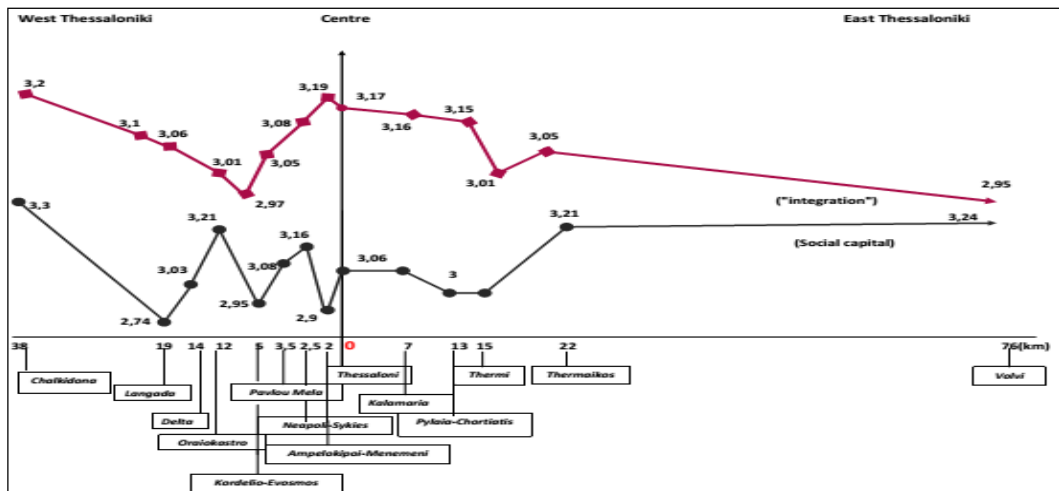


Figure 2: "Integration" and "social capital"

Therefore, Categorical Regression Model (CatReg), via SPSS v.23 for Windows, has been employed to correlate the factors that influence integration of immigrants (Loizou *et al.*, 2013;

Michailidis *et al.*, 2011). CatReg has been selected and used in order to explain and model the immigrants' integration in terms of socioeconomic attitudes while it can also handle better when compared to other regression models, nominal and ordinal (qualitative in nature) variables (Charatsari *et al.*, 2013; Chatzitheodoridis *et al.*, 2013; Michailidis *et al.*, 2012; Krikeli *et al.*, 2020). The applied CatReg model is well-performed and indicates a significant relationship between the dependent variable which is immigrant's "integration" and the group of selected predictive variables ( $R^2 = 0.962$ ). The results (Table 2) show that the most important factor of integrating immigrants, according to Pratt measures of relative importance, are "the participation of immigrants in community activities" (26.3%), "employment in jobs which do not preferred by the local residents" (8.9%), "help of locals to immigrants to find a job" (6.8%) and "the growth of workforce in community" (6.5%).

**Table 2: Relative importance measures of the empirical CatReg model**

Models	N	R <sup>2</sup>	Relative Importance Measures			
General	607	0.926	participation in community activities (0.263)	labor in jobs that the locals do not (0.089)	help from the locals to find work (0.068)	increase the workforce of the community (0.065)

**Note:** Dependent variable "integration"

Investigating further the integration procedure, according to the theory of Rural-Urban Continuum, the Municipalities of the study area were classified in three separate categories based on their physical distance from the main urban center (Municipality of Thessaloniki) and some certain characteristics of each area: a) urban, b) semi-urban and c) rural areas (Table 3).

**Table 3: Distribution of municipalities based on the theory of rural-urban continuum**

Municipalities	
Urban	Ampelokipoi-Menemeni, Neapoli-Sykies, Pavlou Mela, Thessaloniki, Kalamaria
Semi-urban	Kordelio-Evosmos, Pylaia-Chortiatis, Oraiakastro, Thermaikos, Thermi
Rural	Chalkidona, Langada, Volvi, Delta

In order to find out the factors that influence integration of immigrants alongside the Rural-Urban Continuum, several CatReg sub-models were employed (Table 4).

**Table 4: Relative importance measures**

Models	N	R <sup>2</sup>	Relative Importance Measures				Total explanation	
urban areas	403	0.943	participation in community activities (0.274)				27.4%	
semi-urban areas	143	0.974	participation in community activities (0.251)				25.1%	
rural areas	61	0.999	participation in community activities (0.242)	the participation of immigrants in elections (0.151)	friendly relations with migrants (0.145)	cooperation in the work environment (0.142)	increase the workforce of the community (0.149)	82.9%

**Note:** Dependent variable "integration"

The participation of immigrants in community activities is the major reason for "integration" of immigrants in urban (0.274) semi-urban (0.251) and rural areas (0.242). As for the inhabitants of

rural areas, they examine the importance of "integration" immigrants through cooperation in the working environment (0.142) as migrants contribute to the increase of the workforce in the region (0.149). They also believe that the development of friendly relations with migrants (0.145) and the participation of immigrants in elections (0.151) improve their levels of "integration".

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the paper results, the integration of immigrant's procedure in the study area adjusts satisfactory to the theory of rural-urban continuum. The employed multivariate statistical investigation supports the need for area segmentation alongside the rural-urban continuum as the integration factors of immigrants are different in the selected models. More specifically, for all models, the main reason, which has a positive impact on the "integration" of immigrants, is their participation in community activities. Nevertheless, the factors change significantly for the model of rural areas. Immigrants contribute to increase the workforce of the rural community therefore the cooperation in the work environment and friendly relations with immigrants improving contribute to improving integration levels of immigrants in rural areas (Gidarakou *et al.*, 2011; Kasimis, 2008; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007).

On the other hand, "social capital" is the key component in the structure of the relationship between natives and immigrants (Tselios *et al.*, 2015). In most areas, the relation that links social capital and integration is proportional, as areas with high social capital have higher levels of "integration" (Herreros and Criado, 2009; Martinovic *et al.*, 2009). Areas with high social capital reserves are less vulnerable and have greater opportunities to achieve high levels of prosperity and solidarity than those with low levels of trust and weak civil society (Wilkes and Wu, 2018). Efforts should be made to create hospitable societies in which immigrants are able to participate. By encouraging participation in society's activities, they increase the chances of interacting with the locals, reducing prejudice and creating new values that lead to improve levels of trust and social capital as well as the empowerment of local organizations and society (Paluck *et al.*, 2018; Häussermann and Siebel, 2001).

Therefore, there is an important need for an immigration policy that emphasizes the strengthening of policies towards multiculturalism and social cohesion. To achieve this, effective acceptance measures and programs should be considered to promote the development of social capital and the "sense of community". Through the proper structuring of social capital, it is possible to solve the problems that arise from diversity in societies, as areas with high levels of social capital reserves have a more positive attitude towards social issues.

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