Article

Consonant and Dissonant Experiences—Young Migrants' Understandings of Integration: A Cross-Country Comparison between Germany, Luxembourg, and Norway

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Abstract: Our article addresses two aspects of young migrants' understandings of integration: their own ideas of what integration is, and their perception of the destination society's concepts and expectations regarding their integration. We analyze qualitative interviews which were conducted in the Horizon 2020 project MIMY, in Germany, Luxembourg and Norway, using the grounded theory methodology. Our exploration shows that the young migrants' awareness of the existing ideas of integration surrounding them creates a complex reflective interaction between their own ideas and the (perceived) expectations from society. We identified aspects of consonance, where young migrants' ideas coincide with the expectations they perceive. More importantly, however, our research has discovered that the youth experience tensions and dissonance between their own ideas of what integration should be and the concepts and expectations regarding integration they feel confronted with by society. Our analysis revealed that while young migrants' understandings of integration are very close to state-of-the-art scientific conceptualizations of integration, this view is not matched by the meaning of integration they perceive around them.

1. Introduction

Although there has been manifold theoretical contemplation and empirical research on integration over decades, the concept of integration has retained its image of being floppy, slippery, chaotic and contested in the normative and theoretical discourse (Ager and Strang 2008; Alba and Duyvendak 2019; Brubaker 2013; Grillo 2011; Jenkins 2011; Rytter 2018; Schinkel 2018; Wieviorka 2014). It has produced—due to its fuzzy and multicomplex character—a range of theoretical misunderstandings and controversies and has from day one challenged empirical research. When the term is used, it is often done so with minimal definitional accuracy, in particular regarding its differentiation from other concepts such as 'acculturation', 'accommodation' or 'assimilation' (Ager and Strang 2008; Alba and Nee 2003; Anthias 2013; Brubaker 2004; Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018). As Jenkins puts it, 'people use the same word but frequently talk past each other, about very different things' (Jenkins 2011, p. 256).

In contrast to the rare exceptions that have looked at migrants' own understandings of integration (Cederberg 2014; Erdal 2013), we explicitly analyze the perspectives of young migrants on 'integration', addressing young migrants aged 18–29 in three case studies (Germany, Luxembourg and Norway) in a comparative approach. The empirical research was conducted within the scope of the EU Horizon 2020 project MIMY (EMpowerment through liquid Integration of Migrant Youth in vulnerable conditions)[1] in 2021 and 2022.

One important source of confusion with the term 'integration' is that its use in practice often blurs the world of 'being' with the world of the 'ought to be'. In other words, definitions and debates on integration often confound normative understandings in the sense of accentuated wishes of the world as to how it should stay, continue or develop in the future with descriptions of actual outcomes of interaction practices (Skrobanek et al. 2019). This is the case for emic perspectives of integration of practitioners or of policy makers as well as for etic perspectives from integration studies.[2] These kinds of normative understandings range from wishes or expectations that the so-called newcomers 'completely absorb the existing' (hence becoming identical) (Brubaker 2004, p. 119), that they are 'achieving full embeddedness and social mobility within it' (Anthias 2013, p. 329) or that they become, if not 'identical', then at least somehow 'alike' or 'similar' to a whatever existing or defined reference point (a group, the majority) (Brubaker 2004). A careful distinction between the normative and the descriptive level, however, is crucial for a debate on the concept of integration as well as for an understanding of integration processes in practice. For the purpose of our paper, this is relevant in several ways.

Firstly, the most salient normative concepts of integration with the most important impact on migrants' lives certainly can be found in the programmatic concepts of integration enshrined in state policy. As Penninx (2009) notes, integration policies are normative as they define the aim a state wants to achieve regarding integration. Even if it continues to be mostly nation states that define integration policies, the influence of integration research (cf. Scholten 2011 on the Netherlands) as well as public discourse for the emergence of dominant normative ideas of what integration 'ought to be' should not be dismissed.

Secondly, in all our three case studies, migrants inevitably make contact with and relate to these normative concepts of integration or at least interpretations of those, e.g., through the interaction with institutions, social workers, teachers or other migrants who arrived earlier. The conglomerate of normative integration concepts in policy, research, and discourse is hard to disentangle. However, analyzing the understanding of integration from the migrants' perspectives makes it possible to look at these concepts through the eyes of the young, enquiring, which expectations towards themselves they observe, how they relate to them, and how they accept, negotiate or resist them within their own understandings of integration.

Thirdly, migrants have their own ideas, frames or understandings of what, according to them, integration ought to be. While there has been research on the understandings of integration among policy makers and elites (Penninx 2009), the perspectives of migrants themselves on the concept of integration have so far received little attention (Erdal 2013). Rather, research including the perspective of migrants themselves focusses on lived experiences and barriers encountered on the way to 'integration' (Ager and Strang 2008). We argue, however, that research on migrants' own approaches to integration are of particular relevance since they cast light on the tensions, consonant or dissonant experiences and practices regarding their own expectations and factual given opportunities and as such inform and motivate the migrants' doing (Bygnes 2021).

In contrast to the rare exceptions that have looked at the migrants' own understandings of integration (Cederberg 2014; Erdal 2013), we explicitly analyze the perspectives of young migrants aged 18–29. Seen from a life-course perspective, young people are in an exceptional transition situation from youth to adulthood. Young people are expected to 'qualify', to 'make commitments', to 'land a job', to become a 'responsible consumer' and 'engage' and 'participate' socially, culturally and be economically active in society (Hurrelmann and Quenzel 2013). As transition research has shown, the making of these transitions demands decision making and taking, maneuvring, finding and carrying out appropriate practice solutions in the context of growing decision and transition risks and insecurities (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Heinz 2009; Hurrelmann and Quenzel 2013; Buchmann and Solga 2016; Stauber et al. 2022).

If the consequences for young people who have grown up and been socialized in our case study countries are demanding, they are even more challenging for young mi-

grants in vulnerable conditions who have been socialized under different circumstances (Erel and Ryan 2018). Thus, especially young migrants in vulnerable conditions will be caught out by the increasingly 'fuzzy' nature of life's course (Heinz 2009, p. 3), intensifying individualized risks and uncertainties regarding their decisions and resulting practices. Regarding the understanding of integration, then, it seems important to address young migrants' perspectives in particular, as the 'double transition' (King and Koller 2015) they face—including adaption to a new place, but also the transition to adulthood—also differentiates them from adult migrants and might entail specific perspectives on the meanings of integration.

Against the background of the named transition expectations and tasks, integration means to participate socially as well as structurally, to make means–ends work and to change outcomes. However, by assuming that this comes into life as a never-ending lifelong process of interchange between person and structure and that societal structures affect the doing of life of young people in temporality in the context of given ecologies, in turn peoples' idiosyncratic action patterns likewise inform these societal structures, both cross-sectionally and in a longitudinal perspective (Mills 1959; Skrobanek and Jobst 2022). This understanding allows us to see 'integration' as a reciprocal lifelong exchange and adjustment of the individual and the institutions both embedded in temporal ecologies. In this perspective, our understanding somehow echoes the classical ideas of 'Vergesellschaftung' (Geisen 2010) and socialization (Hurrelmann and Bauer 2017)[3]. Considering this, we argue against classical assimilation perspectives, against understanding the ways of social and system participation as exclusively becoming alike or similar (Brubaker 2013; Skrobanek and Jobst 2022; Skrobanek and Jobst 2019). Instead, we assume a constant interaction between the individual and society, in which both are undergoing changes (Mills 1959; Skrobanek and Jobst 2019). As such, the here-proposed integration perspective serves as a kind of 'working hypotheses', which will be contrasted with perceptions, understandings and the 'doings' of the young migrants.

The MIMY project explicitly focused on migrant youth in vulnerable conditions. While no clear and uniform definition of vulnerability exists in the literature, the common conceptualization of vulnerability as an individual characteristic has recently been questioned (Ånensen et al. 2020) and 'experiential vulnerability' as the process of 'how they subjectively construct their vulnerability' has been put at the center instead (Gilodi et al. 2022). In this respect, our understanding of vulnerability is based on an approach that considers structural factors, i.e., we assume that the young migrants are in 'vulnerable conditions' which have an influence on their perception and development perspectives. While different vulnerability factors were taken into account in the selection of interviewees (see research design), it was equally important to identify possible further understandings of vulnerability and to include them in the analysis.

As has been stated at the outset, this paper takes a comparative approach. Regarding the specific context of young migrants' perceptions of social expectations regarding integration and their own subjective understandings of integration, the comparison across three different locations and—most importantly—three different national settings enables us to shed light on two important issues:

Firstly, within the broad spectrum of ideas regarding what young migrants might have, we can explore their understandings of 'integration', and, thus, how 'integration' should be understood from their point of view and contrast these understandings (a) with the integration perspectives and expectations they perceive from their environment and (b) with their concrete ideas of how to do integration. Here, we will mainly address the congruences, tensions and dissonances the young people experience between the perceived demands from the environment and their own understandings of 'integration'.

Secondly, we will use the unique chance to scrutinize commonalities and differences across our different case studies since this will help us to better ferret out the different (or common) normative integration expectations the young migrants perceive and their reactions to these expectations across these different contexts.

Against the background of controversy and ambiguities of the concept of integration, a rising number of researchers have invited us to relegate 'integration' to the dustbin of scientific history (Alba and Duyvendak 2019; Rytter 2018; Schinkel 2018; Wieviorka 2014). We chose the opposite way, by empirically exploring and reconstructing the idiosyncratic understandings of integration by young migrants. By considering the multifaceted, complex and processual nature of transition from youth to adulthood of young migrants in vulnerable conditions, their integration understandings and related experiences make a very interesting and promising research focus—in particular, considering the scarcity of systematic empirical investigations exploring young migrants' integration concepts. This research gap provides the starting point for our research.

The following section presents our methodological approach and the case studies. The empirical part is organized along four emerging central domains that the young migrants' conceptual accounts or ideas on integration address, namely language, assimilation/adaptation, the relationship between migrants and society (and their respective roles for integration), economic contribution and young migrants' perception of existing concepts and expectations from society regarding their integration. The empirical part is followed by a comparative analysis of, and reflection on, the main results, before we end with concluding remarks on the conceptual contribution to integration research.

2. Research Design

The interviews used for this paper were part of the MIMY project on the empowerment and integration of migrant youth in vulnerable conditions. The sampling included third country nationals between 18 and 29 years, living in our case study areas in Germany, Luxembourg and Norway for at least one year. Recruitment took place via local organizations (e.g., migration services, youth clubs, snowball effect). Following MIMY's understanding of vulnerability, we did use the concept in a broader perspective including dimensions such as negative life events, adverse childhood experiences, illness, injuries and disabilities or social, cultural and economic exclusion (MIMY 2019, p. 7). To prevent ascription, stereotyping or stigmatization, the young migrants could define for themselves if they experienced vulnerability or felt vulnerable. Thus, we were sensitive regarding their own perceptions and interpretations of vulnerability (MIMY 2019, p. 7).[4] All in all, our sample comprised 44 interviews from the three countries.

The interviews were conducted in 2021, in person as well as online. After an open biographical invitation to talk about themselves, and according to the MIMY projects' broad research agenda on the integration processes of young migrants in vulnerable conditions, the guiding questions explored the young migrants' experiences and expectations in different areas (e.g., family, education, work, housing, social contacts). Regarding the research focus of this paper, those parts of the interview targeting the interviewees' own understanding and practice of integration (UCSC 2021) were of special interest, in order to introduce young migrants' conceptual understandings into theoretical debates around integration. In many cases, the young migrants provided clear accounts of how they understand integration. However, some also had difficulties in explicitly defining or describing how to understand integration. In those cases, we used an indirect reconstructive approach exploring their ideas and perceptions via other thematic issues (e.g., social contact, plans and expectations for the future, education, work). The team members conducting the interviews in all three case studies were trained in qualitative interview techniques and ethical concerns regarding vulnerable populations. Some interviews were conducted by research team members who themselves are part of the researched community, so-called peer researchers (for the peer research concept applied in the MIMY project, see Ryan et al. 2011). As the interviewees were mostly newcomers to the countries of investigation with very diverse language backgrounds, the research took place under linguistic complexity which required a high level of situational adaptation. Most interviews were conducted in the country-specific official languages of German, French, and Norwegian or in English (which were mostly not the first languages of the interviewees), without interpreters in order

to guarantee a safe environment and a direct communication between researcher and researched. In two cases, the use of non-professional interpreters was necessary. Thus, while trying to meet the language preferences of the interviewees as far as possible, this decision came at the cost of some interviewees being limited in their expression.

We analyzed the interviews qualitatively using a strictly inductive approach inspired by grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1998), in order not to simply reproduce categories or domains for 'integration' known from migration research, but to reconstruct the interviewees' own perceptions and conceptualizations of integration and to place them at the center of the analysis.

Our research problem calls for openness and reflection (Charmaz 2014). This was achieved by several team members, including interview conductors, analyzing the data and recurrent discussions of the individual interpretations between the authors of this paper. For coping with the complexity of the data material, we focused on sequences of the interview within one narrative horizon. This enabled us 'to reconstruct layering the social meanings from the process of the action' (Flick 2009, 353). Thereafter, we moved gradually towards other interview sequences. In a first step, we explored and developed open codes which were continuously revised through data analysis and condensed into main codes. The authors continuously discussed open as well as main codes (Skrobanek and Vysotskaya 2022, p. 5).

The interviews from the case study locations were first analyzed per location and then compared across all three national contexts in a cross-validation process based on repeated topic-related discussions and juxtaposition of interview material from the different case studies. In this way, it was possible to identify similarities as well as aspects reflecting specific national or local conditions. In using a comparative case-based methodology, we did not aim to be representative or serve 'typicality' but to explore the multifaceted spectrum of consonant or dissonant experiences in the migrant youth's understanding of integration.

Sample description:

The case study localities for data collection in Norway were Bergen (regional center) and Sogndal (semirural, suburban). In Bergen 11, interviews were conducted with young migrants (mostly TCN) in vulnerable conditions who had been living in Norway for between 4 and 18 years at the time of the interviews. In Sogndal, six interviews were conducted with young migrants (all were TCN). The interviewees had been living in Sogndal for between 2 and 12 years. The Luxembourgish case studies took place in the cantons of Diekirch and Wiltz (semirural/suburban in the North) and Esch-sur-Alzette (de-industrialized city in the South). Almost all interviewees lived in reception centers. In Diekirch and Wiltz, six interviews were conducted with young refugees who have lived for between 2 and 6 years in the region. In Esch-sur-Alzette, the nine interviewees had lived for between 1 and 3 years in the region. In Germany, 12 interviews were conducted in Holzminden (semirural/suburban) with refugees who lived with relatives or in reception centers. The interviewees had lived for between 2 and 6 years in the area.

3. Concepts of Integration through the Eyes of Young Migrants

The young migrants' accounts revealed two dimensions of their own perspective on integration: expectations of 'how to integrate' that they perceived from society and institutions towards them, and their own ideas or understandings about what integration should look like. On the one hand, the young migrants seem to describe a society defined by specific 'scripts' or 'codes' of 'how to' integrate under new circumstances for making means–ends relationships work. On the other hand, they contrast this perception with their own ideas or understandings of integration and maneuvering and thus how they, from their points of view, think they can make means–ends work.

In the following, we discuss these two dimensions and how they intertwine within the young migrants' accounts on integration, addressing four central domains of integration which emerged throughout our analysis: language, economic contribution, 'becoming

alike', and the relationship between migrants and society (and their respective roles for integration). Special attention will be paid to 'convergences' as well as 'dissonance' that became visible between their own ideas of what integration should be like and the concepts and expectations regarding the integration they felt confronted with by society. During our explorative analysis we became attentive to 'processes of negotiation', strategies which the young migrants applied for coping with the 'mismatch' between perceived integration expectations and demands and their own understandings of (processes of) integration. Therefore, we wanted to further investigate how the young people coped with this mismatch and how they dealt with the tensions and perceived dissonances that result from this mismatch.

3.1. Language

When asked about what integration meant to them, the most recurring theme among the young migrants' accounts across the case studies was learning the language of the destination country as the key to be able to connect to the society, to be able to get access to social arenas and to the labor market.

> 'Generally, one is good integrated, if one actively and voluntarily participates in the most central parts of society, education, labor market and in social arenas. Personally, I think language is most important since it opens the doors to these arenas. However, language is not an easy-going topic. If you want to access the labor market it is much easier with Norwegian and much more difficult with the language from your home country since no one can understand or make use of your own language.' (MY1_NO_Bergen_f)

Similarly, in the case studies of Luxembourg and Germany, the young migrants stressed the importance of language as a key to access the social and structural domains of integration.

> 'Integrating [in] the country, it means that the language to find the job they create connections to the country.' (MY8_LU_North_m)

> 'Really, really the language very, very important here.' (MY4_GER_HOL_m)

However, their accounts also revealed how the perceived expectations from society regarding language learning influenced their perspectives. In all three case studies, the young migrants observed learning the local language(s) as an expectation from society towards them in order to integrate, as part of the 'script' they had to follow. Particularly the young migrants in the Norwegian case studies believed that many Norwegians think it is the migrants' task to learn Norwegian—and not the task of 'Norwegians' to learn other languages—in order to become able to participate in Norwegian society. Interviewees stressed that this put a range of challenges on them—especially on those from non-European countries.

While considering language as a key for integration themselves, as well as perceiving learning the language as an expectation from society towards them was a commonality across our case studies, some gaps and tensions between the young migrants' ideas of the relationship between language and integration and the societal 'script' they thought they needed to follow were emerging. In the German case study, for example, one young migrant reflected that integration schemes in Germany are designed to make young migrants find a job as quickly as possible, rather than to 'really' integrate. He said about language classes:

> 'So it's not a course for us to really learn German, it's only to help us communicate a bit to make it easier for us to get a job.' (MY7_GER_HOL_m)

This perception stands in contrast to his own understanding of integration through language learning that goes beyond the instrumental use of language to find a job and includes learning the language to a level where he can access good jobs and education, as well as be able to properly understand and communicate with Germans. This meaning of properly learning the language in order to be able to express oneself, understand others

and being understood deeply (and emotionally) as a central aspect of integration was also apparent in the following quote:

'Well integrated? If someone understands me, then for me that's it.' (MY2_GER_HOL_f)

Hints to the forcing power of the environment regarding language were especially apparent in the Luxembourgish case study. Luxembourg with its three official languages French (as the legal language), German (as the administrative language), and Luxembourgish (as the national language) is a special case as the languages are not related to specific regions of the country, but to specific fields of (daily) life. Depending on the work sector in Luxembourg, it might be important to know English and/or Portuguese. The young people cannot think about integration without thinking about language, as the multiple languages and the possibilities of accessing certain parts of the society based on skills in certain official languages is such a central issue (also for people born and raised in Luxembourg).

'If you work at the cashier they say okay you need to speak English, French, Luxembourgish and it's like okay calm down with the languages. And you can't really compete with people who grow to learn 5 languages and you come here. I already speak 3 languages but only 1 of them is kind of used here which is English, Arabic and [Kurdish] aren't important languages over here but yeah now I'm trying to learn French and Luxembourgish and maybe I can do something with that. And some places, you go there, they even require German which is crazy. Just must make up your mind and pick one language or just speak Luxembourgish, if learn Luxembourgish not if when I learn Luxembourgish I'm just gonna keep talking Luxembourgish and tell the other Syrian people just speak Luxembourgish we're in fucking Luxembourg just speak Luxembourgish, forget about the other languages maybe we can change something.' (MY1_LU_South_m)

The young migrants' accounts also point to the particular meaning of Luxembourgish as the most 'national' language in terms of identity as opposed to German or French, which are perceived as more 'formal' languages. In addition, some areas of society (e.g., the most prestigious branch of public secondary education) require knowledge of this language. As this quote of one young migrant shows, however, young migrants might think that society does not want them to learn Luxembourgish:

'I don't know what it is, but they're making it very, very hard and I have noticed recently that they really don't want you to learn Luxembourgish as well. I don't know why. But maybe because it's the national language, and you would be treated slightly differently if you were to speak that. Because everywhere you go; you're like 'I want to learn Luxembourgish', they're like 'no, no learn French'; you're like 'why', they're like 'it's more important', but they won't tell you why. Then you wonder; [if] you apply for a job they're like: 'you don't speak Luxembourgish'. 'Yes, but I speak French'. [. . .]And you're like 'fuck what do I do', then they say you have to go back and learn Luxembourgish.' (MY1_LU_South_m)

From the perception of the young migrants, they are expected and required to learn the various (dominant) official languages as an effort to integrate successfully. In contrast, they themselves considered good learning of one of the languages to be sufficient for fair treatment from the society. Not learning all dominant languages, and here the interviewees were quite clear, produces penalties often leading to non-, or restricted access to areas of society. Furthermore, their own idea that learning Luxembourgish would be best for integration in terms of feeling part of the Luxemburgish society stands in contrast to their observation that society does not want them to learn Luxembourgish.

Thus, learning the language as a central part of integration emerged, across our three country cases, as a topic where the young migrants' own understanding of integration and their perception of what they should do in the eyes of society converged. Here, we found more consonant than dissonant perceptions of the role of language in the context of integration. Nevertheless, we also found slight differences in this domain between societal

expectations and young migrants' understanding of the purpose of language learning. While the perceived demands relate primarily to practical or pragmatic purposes (e.g., being able to hold down a job), the perceptions of some of our interviewees went beyond this and saw language learning as a universal means of (mutual) understanding and being understood.

3.2. Economic Contribution

In all case studies, the young migrants understood being economically active to achieve financial independence to be a central aspect of integration.

However, the young migrants' understanding of integration as working and being economically active cannot be understood without their perception of societies' expectation for them to contribute economically. In the German case study, for instance, one interviewee who stated that for him integration meant (among others) quickly finding a job, also observed that Germans only like migrants who are 'not sitting and eating and taking money and so on' (MY4_GER_Holzminden_m)

The perception that, for society, integration means contributing economically was particularly salient in the Norwegian case.

'Yes, what does it mean "integration"? I think first of all that one pays tax, that you have a job and that you can live on your own. In Norway many people think that tax money goes to migrants, that migrants take advantage from the state and from the Norwegian people. Therefore, it is important to be economically independent and not to rest on social benefits. [. . .] As a migrant one has to work pretty hard at the beginning, one should not NAVE [a special saying in Norway for depending on social benefits and state support], it is important to find a way for earning your own money, otherwise you become stigmatized.' (MY15_NO_Bergen_f)

Another young woman in the Norwegian case study points to the pressure that the constant need to disprove the stereotype of migrants depending on social security creates:

'I feel that I have to perform all the time. I can't stop because then I feed stereotypes that foreigners are just NAVERE [depending on social benefits, see above]. I think they [Norwegians] mean it as motivation, but it's a lot of pressure.' (MY2_NO_Bergen_f)

Here, it becomes clear that the framework conditions—in this case the societal understanding of the welfare state system (Esping-Anderson 1990)—have significant influence on the perception of the expectations directed at the young migrants by society. On the one hand, perceptions of the demands placed on them coincide with young migrants' needs, e.g., to become independent. At the same time, however, this can also cause considerable pressure, which may make it difficult or impossible for them to decide independently for or against a particular path.

Furthermore, this pressure stands in contrast to the young migrants' own aspirations and understanding of 'real' integration. Several interviewees explicitly state that for them integration is not about just finding 'any job', but about getting education to find a 'good' or 'appropriate job' and as we learned from the Norwegian case to become 'independent'.

Moreover, another tension becomes apparent in the responsibility for family members expressed by some interviewees. As the following quote from the south of Luxembourg shows, the high relevance of financial income within the understanding of what integration means is related to the aim of young migrants to provide for themselves as well as for others:

'When I've got a good job and I reach my goal, when I finished my study and got a good house to make a good condition for my mother and my sister. After I can think, OK here is my country.' (MY12_LU_South_f)

Again, regarding the understanding of (successful) integration as contributing economically, the difference between the youth's own understandings of integration and the

expectations from society they react to cannot clearly be distinguished. On first sight, the interviewees' own ideas of what integration should look like coincide with societies' expectations for migrants to contribute. However, the young migrants' accounts also show how their perception of societies' disregard for migrants who receive financial benefits from the state influences their own views and exercises pressure on them to quickly produce income to live up to these expectations.

3.3. Becoming Alike

Another salient aspect of the young migrants' reflections about integration reflects their thoughts on integration in the sense of becoming 'like' or 'equal to' the rest of society. Some young migrants in our case studies affirmatively understand becoming alike as an important part of integration. On the one hand 'becoming alike' was referred to positively in the sense of belonging and becoming a full member of society, or to 'become a Luxembourger' (MY1_LU_South_m) in the case of the Luxembourgish South. In this context, across case studies, social contacts and finding friends were very important for the young migrants' understanding of integration:

> 'And the third important pillar of integration is to make, to find Norwegian friends, become part of their social relations.' (MY15_NO_Bergen_f)

When talking about integration and finding friends, the young migrants mostly referred to creating social ties with nationals, both as an aim and a means to become alike.

On the other hand, the young migrants showed understandings of integration in terms of adopting the 'culture' and behavior of their respective destination contexts:

> 'So, wherever you go is your country is your home. You have to make it your home. [. . .] you have to settle where you go; you have to adopt the culture. You have to do what other people do.' (MY3_LU_South_m)

Similarly, in the German case study, several young migrants understood integration to mean knowing and respecting the rules. Some interviewees expressed this understanding when stating that integration meant migrants had to 'live like people here' (MY4_GER_HOL_m) or 'you must think like them, you must work like them, you must eat like them' (MY5_GER_HOL_m).

Note here the verbs 'must' and 'have to' the young people use. These indicate a 'matter of fact' understanding of what a person needs to do to integrate under the current conditions rather than what they themselves think 'integration' should mean. However, it can also point to perceived expectations from society about what migrants 'must' do to be considered 'integrated'.

In the German case, the perception that integration means to adopt the rules and ways of living appears to be particularly strong, as these narrations of one young woman show:

> '(What does integration mean to you?) Integration. For example, if I want a life here, then I must, rules, in Germany, I must know all the rules and like the other people, yes, the good things other people do, I must also. Is that right?' (MY2_GER_Holzminden_f)

Apart from the verb 'must', in this case the interrogation 'is that right?' indicates that the idea of knowing the rules and adopting the behavior of other people is not so much the understanding of integration of the young woman herself, but the concept she has perceived in her surroundings to be the 'correct' meaning of integration.

Similarly, in the Norwegian case studies, interviewees talk about a perceived latent or manifest pressure to become 'culturally' alike:

> 'I think the most important thing I did was to create a network that was Norwegian. I tried to avoid people who were not from Norway . . . I wanted to become somewhat "one" with the culture so that I knew how to sell myself (in relation to work and creating relationships with others.' (MY3_NO_Bergen_f)

Here, the mention of 'knowing how to sell herself' points to 'becoming alike' and thus to assimilation as a strategic adaptation to society's expectation for migrants to become part of society.

Another important and contested issue connected to the idea of 'integration' the youth expressed was the relationship between integration and religion. This is particularly salient in the German case study. While one young man expresses his wish that integration should work 'without religion [...] just meet with me, I am a human' (MY4_GER_Holzminden_m); another states explicitly that for him integration includes culture but excludes religion: 'I am not going to act like . . . you cannot force me into your religion' (MY5_GER_Holzminden_m).

Therefore, across the case studies, we observed that 'becoming alike' and 'following the rules' was an important aspect of the young migrants to make means–ends work. However, as the use of the words 'must' and 'have to' indicate, these understandings are strongly linked to and influenced by their perceptions of what they are supposed to do in the eyes of society in order to be considered integrated. This rather points to perceived expectations regarding assimilation and not to integration. Furthermore, as the example of the role of religion for integration shows, the young migrants negotiate the perceived pressure to assimilate by drawing lines, as to which part of their lives they consider becoming alike to be part of how assimilation should work, and which areas they think should be exempt from this process with respect to a more mutual, equal two-way integration process.

3.4. The Relationship between Migrants and Society (and Their Respective Roles for Integration)

The young migrants' accounts of becoming similar to society suggest that their understandings of social and structural participation are rather closer to a one-way (thus assimilation) than to a two-way concept. This, however, stands in contrast to their reflections about the role they themselves and society have or should play in the process of social and structural integration. In particular, they reflect on whether integration is and should be a two-way or a one-way process. When talking about how integration should work, several young migrants stressed their wish for reciprocity, i.e., for integration to be a two-way process. Young migrants in both the German and the Norwegian cases stated that integration for them was about getting to know, understanding and respecting 'each other', rather than migrants unilaterally learning and adapting to the national society. As such, young migrants seem to somehow distance themselves from assimilation perspectives which they perceive from their environment while articulating clear preferences for mutual, dialogic exchange between equal rational actors.

In this context, another interviewee stated:

'For me integration means to be an active part of a society, that I feel I belong to something, that I actively contribute to society . . . it is a place where I like to live, were I feel somehow attachment and belongingness. . . . Integration is built on both sides of the coin, the doing of the minority and the majority. Both have actively to contribute, they have to give their part. . . . It [integration] also means that my doing is not for others, for the reason to fulfil others' expectations, it is rather for me . . . that I actively contribute with my doing, that I shape the outcome. Norge owns me somehow, but I also own Norway. If one is integrated one has the feeling to belong to Norway, but one also feels that Norway wins something because I live and actively contribute here.' (MY3_NO_Bergen_f)

Here, the interviewee expresses a wish for integration to be a mutual process of contribution to integration by migrants (as 'the minority') and the local society (as 'the majority') and that through this possibility of contributing, migrants could attain a sense of belonging.

As already indicated, however, this idea of integration stands in contrast to the young migrants' perception of their reality and the expectations of society towards them. This is particularly obvious in the Norwegian case. Even though the Norwegian government has

stated that it will go both ways (i.e., two way), interviewees feel that they have to do all the work. As one of the informants put it clearly:

'Migrants usually have to make two or even three steps while Norwegians only make one step.' (MY2_NO_Bergen_f)

Thus, the young migrants' ideas of how integration should work across the case studies showed a strong understanding of integration as a reciprocal and two-way process, including actions and adaptation by society. This ideal understanding of integration stands in stark contrast, however, to the youths' perceived concept of social and structural participation and the behavior of society, which they observe and judge to be a one-way process, where it is the migrants' duty to integrate and adapt while society remains inactive and static.

4. Consonant and Dissonant Experiences in Young Migrants' Understandings of Integration in Comparative Perspective

Our analysis shows a constant search by the young migrants, moving between (perceived) expectations and their own ideas of 'integration'. They try to decipher 'scripts' and 'codes', notice expectations imposed on them and, in a first step, try to fulfil them. In the process, however, they also problematize contradictory or unclear demands. In addition, there are the young migrants' own ideas about how or what 'integration' should or should not be. These two analytically different dimensions in the narratives are of central importance for understanding 'convergences' as well as 'dissonance' and resulting tensions in perceived expectations and subjective ideas when it comes to processes of social and structural embedding: The first dimension focuses on 'taken for granted' ways of assimilation and assimilation concepts the young migrants are confronted with from others. Here, interviewees describe 'scripts' of how to become part of society, e.g., learning the official language, contributing to the economy, or following and incorporating the local rules and ways of living, and of the 'how to' of 'doing the normal'. The second dimension focuses on the 'ought to be', wishes, imagination and dreams of the young regarding their future place, their roles and participation in society. Here, the ideas are salient which envisage mutual exchange at eye-level.

The explication of these two narrative dimensions of young migrants' understandings of integration enabled us to reveal important gaps between the social or political expectations (from the perspective of the interviewees) and their own ideas on integration. On first inspection, we find apparent correspondences between these two dimensions. Learning the language, contributing economically, becoming alike and following the rules figure importantly in both young migrants' own ideas and their perception of expectations towards them. Both dimensions are strongly interlaced and thus hardly distinguishable.

A closer look, however, exposes tensions and dissonances in the identified domains: the young migrants' own ideas about which language to learn and in which way differ from the perceived expectations. The young migrants single out areas where they do not want to become alike (such as religion) and, most importantly, their idea of integration as a mutual, two-way process is not met by what they perceive from society. It also became apparent that their awareness of and reflection on the expectations towards them highly influenced their 'doing' of integration, as in the case of the need to disprove the negative image of migrants being socially or economically free riders.

The comparative perspective revealed particularities in the perceived integration schemes of our different case studies. In Luxembourg, the meaning of language(s) is aggravated due to their different usage in different specific fields of life, which is hard to decode. This leads to an increased effort in the estimation of the languages' usefulness and even to ideas of (conscious) exclusion from Luxembourgish society and institutions. In the Norwegian case study, particular attention to valuations resulting from the principles of the welfare system can be found in the narratives of the young. Not depending on the benefits from the welfare state but actively contributing to the general welfare by becoming economically independent was perceived as an overall goal and entrance ticket

into Norwegian society. In the German case study, the importance of following 'rules' and living like 'the others' was highlighted in the narrations from our interviewees.

Overall, the comparison shows that 'integration' in the here preferred sense of growing together is not a uniform process with rules that can simply be learned and used. Depending on the national and sometimes even local context, young migrants are expected not only to learn one (or more) other language(s) and legal requirements, but also expected to understand codes, existing concepts and modes of interaction, evaluations of work and social support. They must identify and understand the dominant expectations of their environment in order to 'pass', to 'belong' or to 'fit in'. The analysis of the interviews revealed constant efforts to understand existing temporal expectations and their contexts, to become familiar with them, and to compare and balance them with their own experiences and ideas. In doing so, our interviewees simultaneously adapt to prevailing concepts, but also negotiate interpretations and options, and introduce, do and practice their own considerations.

5. Conclusions

Concluding, our results underline that young migrants often have hybrid understandings of integration. On the one hand, their accounts displayed the perceived expectations of the environment regarding their integration and derived practical steps they needed to take in order to participate in society under the given circumstances. Here, they followed the classical assimilation approaches for making means–ends work. On the other hand, most of our interviewees contrasted this 'awareness' of societal expectations and the status quo with their own ideas on how integration *should* work. Reciprocity, mutual acceptance and communicative action-based integration figure prominently among these ideas. This understanding imagines 'integration'—and not 'assimilation'—as a reciprocal lifelong exchange and adjustment of the individual and its institutional and broader structural surroundings both embedded in temporal ecologies. In this perspective, the young migrants' understanding echoes the classical idea of 'Vergesellschaftung' where individuals 'on the basis of - sensual or ideal, momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, causally or teleologically driven – interests grow together and within which these interests become realized.' (Simmel 1908, p. 6) (own translation). This perspective on integration hints at a reflexive processual understanding of interest realization and given constraints by conceptualizing individual development as interlaced with institutional and broader structural evolution. However, the predominance of dialogical approaches among the young migrants' also revealed the conflictual potential of such ideas of integration as a back-and-forth process between migrants, society and institutions; our interviews showed that these expectations of reciprocity mostly are not met by the reality of integration that the youth experience. Rather, they are confronted with one-sided concepts of becoming 'similar' or 'alike' and practical barriers, especially for the group of young migrants we talked with. Here, our findings suggest that those youth put middle range tactics to work. These middle range tactics are marked by a constant re-evaluation and negotiation between the meaning of integration or making it 'into' society for the young migrants themselves and a kind of hyper-awareness of the idiosyncratic meanings of 'becoming part' that the youth are confronted with in their surroundings.

It becomes apparent here that the young migrants' idealistic understanding of how they want integration to work is very close to the idealistic conceptualizations of integration in migration studies (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Schweitzer 2017; Spencer and Charsley 2021) as well as to our initial definition of integration as an open ended, dynamic process that does not only include the migrants' efforts and change but implies change in societies and institutions as well (MIMY 2019; Skrobanek and Jobst 2022; Skrobanek and Jobst 2019; Skrobanek et al. 2021). However, the young migrants' perception of the 'status quo' of integration in all case studies clearly showed that this concept of integration is not (yet) the reality for young migrants seeking to build their lives in these countries.

Notes

[1] MIMY has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 870700. For further information on the project see (MIMY 2019).

[2] According to Rytter (2018, p. 15), 'emic refers to descriptions and understandings formulated by people themselves, while etic is the description provided by the analytical observer or social scientist'.

[3] '"Vergesellschaftung" is therefore the form, realized in innumerable different ways, in which individuals on the basis of - sensual or ideal, momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, causally or teleologically driven – interests grow together and within which these interests become realized.' (Simmel 1908, p. 6) (own translation)

[4] The interviewees were provided with an oral and written explanation about the procedures with the recordings and their narrations that was approved by the Ethic Committee of each university or a national ethic approval and gave their consent. The interviews were conducted either by staff members or by peer researchers, who were recruited along criteria like similar age group and shared migration experience and received an intensive training from the MIMY project and the local project staff.

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