DUTCH APPROACHES TO CITIZENSHIP: FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO SHARED CITIZENSHIP

ABSTRACT

Shared citizenship is currently the leading notion behind naturalization and integration policies in the Netherlands. This concept has a strong normative dimension as it refers to Dutch values and identification with this country. This article discusses recent developments in the Dutch approach to citizenship and the current situation of immigrants in terms of legal citizenship, substantial citizenship, civic practice and civic identity.

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Over the last decade, the Netherlands have witnessed a remarkable shift in citizenship discourse and citizenship policies. This shift is not only manifest in naturalization policies, which deal with the legal aspect of citizenship, but also in integration policies aimed at enhancing the position of immigrants in Dutch society. These developments in citizenship policies and practices coincide with changing perceptions about immigrant incorporation in the Netherlands and the effectiveness of integration policies pursued in the past. Many critics have pointed to the integration deficit in the Netherlands with regard to ethnic minorities, in terms of their lagging socio-economic performance and failed sociocultural integration (Koopmans 2002, Scheffer 2007). Poor results of former integration policies as well as a sense of urgency concerning the lack of social cohesion have led to a reformulation of the integration model and a new conceptualization of citizenship. In fact, the Dutch integration model has changed from a model focusing on group emancipation and minority rights (the multicultural model) to a model in which the individual as a citizen with rights and obligations vis-à-vis the larger society is the focus of attention. Integration of immigrants, since the mid-1990s, has increasingly been coined in terms of active citizenship, which implies active participation of immigrants in all strands of society – in the labour market, in the educational system and in civil society. More recently, a new dimension has been added to the discourse on citizenship, which now also includes issues of identification with Dutch society and acceptance of Dutch norms and values. This development is captured in the phrase "shared citizenship," which includes, broadly speaking, speaking the Dutch language, abiding by fundamental Dutch norms and active participation in society (Integration Report 2003). As some scholars note, issues of identity and identification with Dutch society have in recent years entered the official discourse on citizenship in the Netherlands (Spijkerboer 2007, Scientific Council for Government Policy 2007). According to Vermeulen (2007), citizenship in the Netherlands is increasingly defined as a moral category, which refers to attachment and a feeling of belonging and the wish and capacity to be a full member of the political and social community. Whereas previously, citizenship implied above all a legal status from which further integration would or could ensue, nowadays citizenship also implies a more normative dimension. As Driouichi (2007) remarks, Dutch citizenship has evolved from a "thin" to a "thick" concept of citizenship.

Civic integration and citizenship policies

These changing notions of citizenship and immigrant integration manifest themselves in integration and naturalization policies. In 1998, the Netherlands was the first country to introduce compulsory civic integration courses for all new immigrants. These courses, which were provided by local municipalities, consisted of language training and orientation – mainly in practical terms – to Dutch society. These civic integration courses were considered to provide a first step towards further integration and as a means of stimulating active citizenship. Integration was in those years still considered in terms of mutual obligations; in other words, the obligation of the immigrant to participate in civic integration courses was set against the obligation of the local government to provide these courses.

Poor results of these first civic integration policies and a growing uneasiness about the poor socio-economic and sociocultural integration of immigrants led to the formulation of new – more demanding – civic integration policies in the early 2000s. In 2006 the *Civic Integration Abroad Act* was introduced; it stipulates that immigrants who wish to establish themselves in the Netherlands first have to pass a basic language and orientation exam before being granted a visa. The specific objective of this law is to make sure that immigrants arrive better prepared in the Netherlands and to select only those immigrants who have demonstrated the willingness and the ability to learn the Dutch language at a basic level and to acquaint themselves with various aspects of life in the Netherlands. While the Act applies to all foreign nationals who wish to immigrate to the Netherlands for the purpose of family formation or family reunification, it was drafted to deal particularly with the integration problems of non-Western immigrants. As a matter of fact, in policy documents the different sociocultural background of these immigrants was identified as a serious obstacle to successful integration in the Netherlands (Integration Report 2005).

The 2007 *Civic Integration Law* is far more encompassing than that of 1998. Currently all foreign nationals between 18 and 65 years of age are required to pass a civic integration exam at a minimum level of language proficiency within five years. The new law targets new immigrants as well as resident foreign nationals who cannot show proof of sufficient knowledge of the Dutch language. Failure to comply with this obligation can lead to the imposition of administrative fines and denial of a permanent residence permit. Ultimately, passing the exam is a precondition for acquiring Dutch citizenship. By imposing these incentives (and disincentives), the government hopes to achieve better integration results than in the past. More than the previous law, the new policies not only focus on improving Dutch language proficiency among immigrants and thereby on fostering active citizenship, but also include a more normative dimension of integration and citizenship. This normative approach is particularly manifest in the terms of reference of the exam on knowledge of Dutch society. In the description of the examination levels, for example, it is stated that not only is knowledge of different social manners expected, but migrants should deal with differences in social manners and norms and values in a socially accepted way (Bureau ICE/CITO 2006). As Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) note, a certain degree of acculturation is expected of immigrants for successful incorporation into Dutch society.

With respect to naturalization policies, a similar development towards a more normative concept of citizenship can be seen. Naturalization has become more difficult since the late 1990s as various new measures restrict access to citizenship. Many political parties felt that acquisition of Dutch citizenship had become too easy, and this had led to a devaluation of its significance. In an effort to revaluate Dutch citizenship, acquisition of dual citizenship was restricted and a naturalization exam was introduced in 2003. Since then, all citizenship applicants must pass a naturalization exam in which knowledge of the Dutch Constitution and society is tested as well as the ability to speak, understand, read and write Dutch.[1] In addition, in 2007 a compulsory citizenship ceremony was introduced; it is held in August each year. The latter is above all meant to give more importance to the naturalization process and to becoming a Dutch citizen. Knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch norms and values, as well as identification with and exclusive loyalty to the Netherlands, have increasingly become markers of Dutch naturalization policies (Driouichi 2007). As Groenendijk (2004) remarks, current naturalization legislation shows that citizenship is increasingly viewed as remuneration for completed integration and not a prerequisite for integration.

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Citizenship outcomes for immigrants

If we look at the current situation of immigrants in terms of a broad concept of citizenship, several aspects have to be taken into account – citizenship as legal status, citizenship as civic identity and citizenship as civic practice (including participation in core institutions of society). The outcomes of these dimensions of citizenship are briefly discussed below.

In recent years the number of naturalizations in the Netherlands has hovered around 15,000 annually. However, a downward trend in the number of naturalization has been observed. Between 2000 and 2002, 30,000 foreign nationals acquired Dutch citizenship annually. Naturalization rates were higher between 1995 and 1999 and fluctuated in that period between 40,000 to 50,000 naturalizations per year (Statistics Netherlands 2008). In other words, in recent years, progressively fewer immigrants have acquired Dutch citizenship. As we will argue below, changes in naturalization legislation have significantly affected naturalization rates.

With respect to the participation of immigrants in the labour market and educational system, two important conclusions can be drawn. On the one hand, structural progress has been made over the last decade with respect to the educational achievement of immigrants (most notably among the second generation) and employment and participation rates. Yet, despite this progress, immigrants have not been able to catch up with the native Dutch population. In 2006, average unemployment rates were approximately three times as high among the non-Western immigrant population than among the native Dutch population (Dagevos 2007). In addition, a quarter of the non-Western immigrant population between 15 and 65 years of age received social assistance against only 13% of the native Dutch population. And finally, directly related to the high welfare dependency rate among non-Western immigrants, poverty rates among these immigrant groups are significantly higher than among the native Dutch. Almost three out of ten non-Western immigrant households have a low income. This share is three to four times higher than among the native Dutch (Ibid.). So, in terms of substantial citizenship the outcome for immigrants is still unfavourable. Many studies have shown that the educational background of immigrants is by far the most important factor explaining the vulnerable position of immigrants in the Dutch labour market (Odé and Veenman 2003, Dagevos 2007). Yet other factors, notably poor language proficiency, also contribute to the poor socio-economic performance of immigrants (Ibid.). This finding had spurred the introduction of civic integration courses in the first place.

With regard to civic practice, only the element of political participation is discussed here. It should first be noted that the Netherlands is one of the few countries that grants local voting rights to resident foreign nationals. Since 1985, immigrants obtain voting rights after five years of legal residency. These voting rights allow immigrants to express themselves politically at the local level. At the national level, voting is still restricted to Dutch citizens. Turnout rates for immigrants at local elections, with the exception of Turkish immigrants, have always been much lower than the Dutch average (Michon and Tillie 2003). However, recent study among immigrant youth in the city of Rotterdam (both first and second generation), shows a remarkable increase in political engagement and participation between 1999 and 2006 (Entzinger and Dourleijn 2008). The authors comment that this increase might be a positive side-effect of the heated debate on immigrant integration in the Netherlands, a discussion that was particularly fierce in the city of Rotterdam. The response has not been a withdrawal from the political arena, but instead seems to have fuelled political participation of immigrant youth in Rotterdam.

Finally, with regard to civic identity, we look at patterns of identification with the Netherlands and the interaction between different ethnic groups. As Odé and Klaver (forthcoming) note, integration on these dimensions does not take place in a straightforward way. When looking at social contacts, a rather stable pattern of inward-group orientation appears. Similarly, a trend towards a stronger ethnic identification can be witnessed (Dagevos et al. 2007). Also worrying is the fact that mutual cultural acceptance seems to have decreased over the last years. Entzinger and Dourleijn (2008) show that ethnic minorities claim more cultural freedom than the native Dutch are willing to give them. This discrepancy has grown over the last few years. In the opinion of the native population the cultural gap with immigrants has increased, even though this opinion is not supported by evidence. In fact, especially among the more educated and the second generation, modern notions with respect to the education of children, the autonomy of thought and the position of women are garnering increasing support. Thus there is a gap between perceptions of cultural difference and the actual reality. The authors note, however, that in response to this atmosphere of polarization some immigrant groups tend to strongly emphasize their own – ethnic – identity (Ibid.).

Concluding remarks: Citizenship, immigrant integration and social cohesion

The relationship between the outcome of citizenship in the Netherlands and the pursued integration and naturalization policies is not straightforward. Even the outcome itself is not unequivocal – in some ways the position of immigrants is moving in a positive direction, while in others, developments are far from favourable. In this final section, some general thoughts are presented with regard to the possible effects of the current Dutch approach to citizenship on immigrant integration and social cohesion.

The development of a more normative concept of Dutch citizenship had direct consequences for naturalization rates. The restrictions on dual nationality in 1997 and the introduction of more rigorous citizenship testing in 2003 have both led to a dramatic reduction in the number of applications for citizenship (Van Oers 2007, Böcker et al. 2005). In fact, the attempt to create homogenous citizens seems to have led to a decreasing willingness to acquire Dutch citizenship. This implies that many immigrants will reside as permanent resident foreign nationals in the country without becoming full-fledged members of the political community. Thus, while aiming at (conditional) inclusion, the effect has become partial exclusion. Above all, this affects immigrants' opportunities to participate in national elections. In other domains, citizenship has little influence on rights and access to services. For example, with respect to entitlements to social security, nationality is not a criterion.

The strong focus on singular loyalty to the Netherlands and on Dutch norms, values and rules of conduct in civic integration and naturalization policies might have negative consequences for normative and emotional identification of immigrants with the Netherlands and for creating a sense of belonging. Presently, immigrants have little influence in shaping "shared citizenship" as this is largely defined by Dutch elements. The increasing demands that are made of immigrants might contribute to the feeling of never being able to live up to expectations despite the progress that is made on many indicators of integration. There is a risk that in response to this rigid conception of citizenship, minorities will withdraw into their own ethnic groups. The

Table 1
First generation migrant population in the Netherlands, 2008

Total Dutch population	16,428,360
Total immigrant population	1,619,314
Total non-Western immigrant population	1,017,184
Total Western immigrant population	602,130

Source: Statistics Netherlands, 2008.

current approach to citizenship in the Netherlands might then become counterproductive in terms of stimulating integration and social cohesion. As we saw above, there is empirical evidence on a growing identification with one's own ethnic group that supports this claim. Yet, there are also signs of a growing readiness for political involvement and action among immigrant youth. These findings seem to suggest that the polarization of the integration debate in the Netherlands and the ensuing nationalist approach to citizenship might have a contradictory outcome. It seems on the one hand to have negative consequences for civic identity, in terms of identification with the Netherlands, but positive effects for civic practice in terms of political engagement and participation, on the other.

It is hard to predict future developments in the Dutch approach to citizenship. The present government puts much emphasis within the existing legislative framework on the participation of immigrants in the workforce and in other segments of society. Discussions in parliament and elsewhere on problems with respect to the socio-cultural integration of immigrants – and more specifically those of a Muslim background – have, however, far from subsided. Nevertheless, there is a renewed emphasis on stimulating substantial citizenship in which not only the individual migrant has a responsibility, but also in which the government plays an active role in helping immigrants to learn the language and become acquainted with Dutch society. While in recent years much concern has been expressed by academics and migrant and human rights organizations with regard to the compelling and normative course of Dutch civic integration policies, it should not be forgotten that an important rationale for these new policies was to boost the socio-economic situation of immigrants. The merits of the Dutch approach should therefore also be assessed by its ability to significantly improve the language proficiency of immigrants and to offer real opportunities for participation. Due to the recent introduction of new policy measures, no data are yet available on the effects of the implemented policies on substantial citizenship. Hopefully as new data become available, it can be assessed whether the end results justify the means.

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Note

[1] In 2007, the Civic Integration Exam of the new *Civic Integration Act* replaced the Naturalization Exam.