Transition in Switzerland: Key thematic areas for citizenship enhancement

THE TOBP CASE STUDY RESEARCH PAPER

Author Filippo Bignami, SUPSI

Version 1.0
Date 19 June 2019

Reviewers Birgit Jentsch, DJI & Regina Klein, CUAS

Editor Kateřina Sidiropulu Janků, CUAS

Without language proofreading

Based on TOBP original application, concept and design, created by Regina Klein

Please, refer to the document accordingly: Bignami, Filippo. 2019. Transition in Switzerland: Key thematic areas for citizenship enhancement. The TOBP Case study research paper. SUPSI, CUAS.

1. Executive Summary

In Switzerland have been conducted 5 interviews between March and April 2019 in the Cantone Ticino, in particular located in Lugano. The interviewed family comes from Syria, is composed from father, mother and two little daughters, twins 3 years old, is in Switzerland from October 2016 and is completing the procedures for the official recognition of refugees status.

The service providers/professionals are 3 intercultural mediators (one of them also social worker) and one expert social worker also trainer of social workers.

The methods adopted to select the sample are, for the service providers/professionals: connection with SUPSI social work academic courses; connection with association SOS services of support for migrant families and refugees; more than 5 years in this specific field.

For the migrant family the method adopted to choice is basically the arrival in Switzerland from more than one year and the usage of services and facilities available for public immigration department of the canton Ticino (for more details see the point below).

The interviews were conducted in a optic on one hand to reveal the experiences of both professionals in the field of transition mentoring (it means in this case professionals that work continuously with migrants and migrant families) and migrant families themselves. The informations collected, on a basis of a questionnaire with questions that could be defined semi-structured, aims at highlighting:

- Experiences of family in Switzerland/with migrant families of professionals
- Experiences with social and health services for the family
- Competences and skills needed or perceived as useful
- Competences of professionals/service providers
- Addressing challenges and hints on improving
- Citizenship broadening

The main thematic areas emerged from the interviews, that below will be better explained and examined, concern:

1. Participation and supporting strategies, like availability of spaces, participation to social, political or volunteering activities
2. Work as a driver of active and civic citizenship
3. Reference of one person able to function as a "hub" to address migrants' and migrant families' needs and requests
4. Awareness of contextual social, political, administrative rules and cultural characteristics
5. Tasks assignments and valorisation of the city setting as citizenship enactment for migrants in an optic of proximity and collective development

2. Background/Context

The five interviews were conducted within the TOBP project, IO1 Transcultural Competence Profile for Transition Mentors. In order to define the characteristics and peculiarities of transition events and process, the survey is addressed to delve into key aspects of experience, competences, services and, in case of the Swiss focus, in particular on citizenship issues and which are the drivers to enable a transition mentoring process paying a specific attention to such issues.

The survey is located in the Cantone Ticino region, south of Switzerland (around 400.000 inhabitants) and in particular in Lugano, a city of about 70.000 inhabitants, and the period of carrying out was between March and April 2019.

The sample is composed by the following persons, detailed with the place and date of interviews accomplishment.

Sample	Memo/Fieldnote
GR Intercultural mediator	SOS service association, Lugano, 8.4.2019.
CM Social worker expert and trainer of social workers	SUPSI, Lugano, 3.4.2019.
CDS Intercultural mediator and Italian teacher	Her home (and also domicile office) in Lugano, 13.3.2019.
EBK Intercultural mediator and social worker	SOS service association Lugano, 19.3.2019.
Family MAH Migrants from Syria	Their home, an assigned public apartment (bestowed to the family from the canton Ticino) in Lugano.

The sample was chosen basing on (for service providers/professionals): connection with SUPSI social work academic courses; availability and interest to follow project's advancements; connection with association SOS services of support for migrant families and refugees; knowledge of migration and migrants families setting; participation and interest in social and cultural initiatives for migrants; more than 5 years in this specific field.

For the migrant family the method adopted to choice is basically: arrival in Switzerland from more than one year; usage of services and facilities available for public immigration department of the canton Ticino; participation to institutional initiatives for integration/information; residence in the Ticino area.

The method adopted was direct interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire, in all five cases. Four of the five interviews were also recorded (in one case the person interviewed denied the authorisation to record). This method allowed on one hand to collect information with a common and comparable structure, on other hand to deepen and open up specific matters and arguments where and when opportune.

3. Findings/Results

In this section are reported and exploited the five thematic areas identified in the abstract, and for each of them are deepened the survey findings and the reason raising to these findings, on sides both of the family and the professionals/service providers surveyed. The list is sequenced by number, but it is not a priority rank, each thematic area was raised and processed with the same importance and according the source highlights.

1. **Participation** and supporting strategies, like availability of spaces, participation to social, political or volunteering activities.

Both from family and service providers/professionals soundly emerge that an important element to facilitate the transition phase is to foster participation of migrants (family and/or single migrant) in social, cultural, political, sport or volunteering initiatives. This is not a willingness that can be left to the individual choice, simply because in several cases might be possible that the environment and the condition hamper them to participate despite their wish to do it. In the surveyed sample is clear how the lack of participation in activities able to share interests, share the link between individuals on a horizontal level of citizenship (between members at the same level of the society), is a problem for migrants and migrant families, that are left in their own realm and, de facto, the most of times isolated in an unknown setting.

A transition mentor, to increase his pertinence and capacity to support the transition process, needs then to be equipped with skills (or also competences) concerning the citizenship dimension of participation, understanding how it plays a key role and also how to propose activities and initiative going in this direction.

Practices of participation passing through partaking an association, practicing a sport, sharing an interest in a group, being involved in a cultural activities making available individual skills and knowledges, partaking volunteering initiatives in the neighbourhood are just some examples of how a participatory attitude can be supported and helped to induce positive effects. Participation in such means has manifold advantages and zero weaknesses, since is positive for the society and for the individuals/family.

Strictly linked with participation is the raised topic of lack of spaces, in the city, where to exploit and host such participation. This has to be intended both as lack of dedicated concrete slots or rooms where to group for activities (common hobby, cultural or aggregation points) and as lack of public spaces in the city where to co-decide together and in a open and continuous cooperation how to use and how to interpret the space of the city in a practical or also symbolic and networking way.

Participation issue is then seen as a powerful mean to facilitate transition, and a transition mentor should learn how to promote, propose, in certain cases also push and enable such participation in a appropriate way and in a contextualized and situated approach.

2. **Work** as a driver of active and civic citizenship

All the sample converge in identifying the work as a paramount variable able to facilitate transition. It is of course clear that in some conditions is not possible to immediately access or plan a work for migrants (for example in refugee cases), but all interviewed persons, including parents in the family, claim that being without a work after years (in this case the family is arrived in Switzerland in 2016) is humiliating and saddening. Being for time without work exposes individuals to a a sense of failure, sense of vain and waste of capacity that can drive to significant negative aspects in term of motivation, influencing also the will to participate, till reaching in some cases health problems of depression.

A Transition mentor should learn how to propose and motivate migrants to gain an occupation, since the work is as well a powerful mean to reach a role in the society as a worker of course but also as a citizen, since work is, according to Dahrendorf an excellent exercise in term of

entitlement and provision to reach awareness of each one role and place in the collectivity, giving force to the polity as a balanced system of roles, representation and constituencies for a democratic live of a collectivity (Dahrendorf, 2007).

It is of course clear that in certain cases (e.g. the procedure of refugee status) migrants are not allowed to work in certain countries (In Switzerland is like that), but as well this is a crucial issue that has to be addressed also towards authorities and decision makers in this field. The interviews soundly claims that the possibility to enter the labour market would be a strong driver of motivation and of self-perception of being member of a society, with a role and a shared aim. Indeed work is an argument that also poses risks of exploitation of workforce or of illegal employment, but enabling also a specific control and verification procedure could help to find a balance and counteract this peril.

Work is a mean to obtain money on a par condition, avoiding the sense of charity that sometimes can affect, for example in the process of evaluation of refugee status.

The transition mentor should then be equipped with the capacity to deal with the work topic. Of course not in term of acting merely as a job seeker, rather in posing the topic and enabling a process of empowerment that include the consideration of work as a nodal ingredient for a smooth transition process.

3. **Reference** of one person able to function as a "hub" to address migrants' and migrant families' needs and requests

Three out of five sample claim that the knowledge about the access to services and facilities and how to access them represent a problem in transition phase for migrants. Each country, each region and each city has specific organizations and settlements of services, sometimes are public services operated by private or non-profit institutions, sometimes there are specific rules and norms, sometimes are needed certificates or documents. Actually the situation is very fragmented in this field, since operators, social workers and intercultural mediators do not have the knowledge to take in charge the migrants acting as a sort of "hub" to address and to instruct them how to reach services, how to deal with administrative procedures, how to obtain documents in due time, etc. It is indeed a need related to bureaucratic or administrative aspect, but still is not the case that the professional is requested to be a public officer or a clerk, rather to know with more precision where to indicate the migrant in the different steps of the transition process and guide in finding solutions (e.g. guiding him with appropriate timing towards due documents and in the right offices).

4. **Awareness** and knowledge of contextual social, political, administrative rules and cultural characteristics

This thematic area is intertwined with the previous one, but is different since the previous is more targeted on the role of transition mentor, this theme is wider, and involves different actors and a different levels of implementation.

Usually, the sample almost entirely observes, the training and the integration support offered in Switzerland, are addressed to language or basic skills, like use of computer, some little

intercultural courses, but often limited to facile aspects, like cooking or general habits. These initiatives are indeed helpful and necessary, though, for an effective support of transition allowing also a civic citizenship development, would be necessary some basic notions regarding:

- Social aspects: how is settled the society, how is shaped the country, how the country is scaled in the international frame, rights and duties, etc.
- Political aspects: how is settled the polity, the politic and the public political debate in the country, map of the élites, etc.
- Administrative rules: is necessary getting acquaintance about administrative and bureaucratic steps and timeline to obtain documents, authorisations, permits. A plus would be also to have information about labour market access. If this awareness would be improved in the initial phases of transition process, this could help definitely in organizing in a efficient way the daily activities
- Cultural characteristics: as evident looking at the Cultural iceberg, most of resources and priorities are not visible and sometimes also originate troubles or problems. For this reason a confrontation and an effective action of transition mentoring is also necessary to delve in these deep elements, opening up a reflection and also a frank exchange around what is perceived and how from the migrants.

5. Tasks assignments and **valorisation of the city setting** as citizenship enactment for migrants in an optic of proximity and collective development

Two out of five sample claim a relevant issue that they experienced. It is the positive effect originated by involving migrants in a city setting activity for social and volunteering activities. Helping elderly people, engaging in social initiatives according their own expertise or skills (playing instruments, storytelling of experience, sharing sport capacities, playing theatre), or collective urban initiatives for revive a neighbourhood, waste collection in public parks are only few examples of how the city can be a powerful and open-ended tank of ideas to train migrants to "use" the city. In this way, from the experiences carried out from the two professionals, migrants gain motivation, sense of collectivity and membership.

Working collectively is also a reflective practice, it is a reciprocal help fostering the capacity to interact among migrants themselves and with the local community. To reach this goal is necessary the ability of the transition mentor to work on a proximity basis, linking his activity with local associations, NGOs, volunteering groups and initiatives. It is then necessary a vision on the local setting with an eye on the global citizenship.

It is worth mentioning the indications collected regarding the competences assumed as crucial for a transition mentor. The list below was proposed to the sample, and the opinions about the competences are as follow:

- Addressing language barriers: this competence is considered as a basic need, and of course necessary. Medium importance.
- Self-reflection, curiosity, openness: this is a fundamental requirement to support in a efficient way a transition. It is not possible to support and indicate with participation and sense of understanding if the professional is not himself curious, able to listen different experiences with attention and with responsive feedbacks. High importance.
- Commitment to help/support: since the transition mentoring working area is considered a social work and a service, engagement and commitment from the professional is a key element to enable empathy that is the base for an efficient transition. High importance.
- Knowledge (local services available for families; cultural, legal knowledge; in-depth understanding of families'): this competence is useful but in an optic of above mentioned role of "hub" as a unique reference person. It is not important that the transition mentor is an expert in these fields, rather is important that he is able to guide and connect with the right offices/institutions in the appropriate moments. Low importance.

4. Discussion

The situation in Switzerland regarding migration and migrant family policy is quite particular, since the migration strategy and policy is quite restrictive and rigid, therefore the migration flow is very limited in general. The migration is allowed primarily if related to work1; irregular migration is almost inexistent due to the high territorial control and there are controlled stocks of refugees, sometimes also of families, coming from war or other difficult areas.

In Switzerland, family policy issues are related to taxes and social insurance issues, mainly in the form of tax savings and reliefs and cash benefits like family allowances. Family policy is therefore largely a cantonal and municipal issue, and cantons (with local authorities agreement) authorize the presence of migrant/refugees families. At this institutional level, family policy is made by means tested benefits, tax breaks and services provisions. Protection of children, support to parents and educational measures are the main fields of implementation of the family policy at cantonal and municipal level.

These fields are differently developed in the Cantons. In particular, there are large gaps in the field of reconciliation of work and family life and in early childhood development, education and care. In this context, immigration and in particular refugees raise important challenges. Parents, in particular wives, may not easily find a job, child poverty is rising and immigrant children encounter often difficulties in education and hence in citizenship dimensions and social inclusion.

---

[1] In Switzerland in fact there is a rate of resident not Swiss citizens of 25% (Federal Statistical office, data 2018), but due to work permits and also due to the difficult procedure for the naturalization, so that more than half of these immigrants reside in Switzerland from more than 10 years: the rate is high but flow is then very limited.

The quality of transition mentoring is a crucial topic for both quality family life and as shaping variable for the decent and correct transition and contextualization of the migrants. This implies policy strategies to upgrade competences and education towards transition mentors and also towards migrants and families. An adequate offer of services for transition mentoring and the simplicity of access to these services are essential in this respect. But this is not enough. It is also necessary to intervene at the families' level, in order to make sure that the investment in services becomes more effective. Among these interventions, as outlined in the five interviews above depicted, we should concentrate on five citizenship enabler factors, namely:

- Participation
- Work
- Reference
- Awareness
- Valorization of the city setting

To match these five enabler factors seems important introducing the correct interpretation of concept of citizenship, that generically tends to apply in any social context and not only specifically in the environment of political relations between citizen and State. Following the suggestion of Seyla Benhabib in relation with the integration path of foreigners, it is possible to identify different levels of citizenship, distinguishing between the entrance conditions in a country, the temporary and permanent stay conditions, working conditions, social participation and the political enactment (Benhabib, 2004).

Working on the development of a similar dimensions of citizenship competences allows to consider different ways of evolution of a sense of participation and membership within the society, of participation in deliberative process and in labour market, of sharing the burdens of civil living together, not reducing them to the sole political dimension.

This explains also the interest of a wide meaning of idea of citizenship education, beyond the tight civic education, applied on political relations of the citizen (and youngsters citizens and families) with the state and its policies. The objective of citizenship understood in this sense is to equip the citizen with interpretative, critical and planning instruments for/with his relation with others and to society and to develop individual and social sense of responsibility for a correct interpretation about quality of work. Understood in this way, it considers the social and political arena as enabler of values as a pertinent environment of our own action, including values connected to work in a given context. It is, for this reason, essential that the transition mentor is equipped with competences to act as cooperative member also in the working activity, by giving proof to possess all the necessary virtue to assume the own professional role with a sense of responsibility and loyalty. Then, is necessary that the transition mentor is trained and motivated to support and transfer these knowledges and skills towards the migrants, starting a virtuous cycle of knowledge transfer. This influence behaviours and attitudes. This approach declines in this field also as citizenship education, in particular in situations where value and cultural conflicts with others may arise.

Regarding a competence related to being able to act in the city on one hand and to "use" appropriately the city on other hand, is worth mentioning that the city is the most significant

material and immaterial space where the dimensions of citizenship are shaped and concretized (E. F. Isin, 2007; Sassen, 2005; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012). It enables right and duties, participation, identity and membership. Further, citizenship ensures the uniformity of rights and duties linked with political participation, and therefore has the potentiality to mitigate political effects of social inequalities. Citizenship needs to be discussed under the perspective of a urban setting as a possible contemporary alternative to long-established notions of citizenship, those built on the pillars of rights, duties, identity and membership to a political entity, usually a nation-state (Purcell, 2003). The urban dimension of citizenship started to be discussed more vigorously in the end of the 20th Century, when was clear that the nation-state was anymore adequate to collocate the concept of citizenship (Sassen, 2002). In reaction to diverse pressures, simplistically definable using terms such as neo-liberalism, globalization, social inequality, economic rescaling, migration flows, spatial segregation, invasive corporate control and financial pantheism (Bignami, 2017, p. 133), the link between city and citizenship is emerged to better reflect the identity, participation and entitlement to exploit the city of city dwellers themselves, regardless if they are migrants or not.

5. Conclusion

The survey conducted in Switzerland exposed in this case study is addressed primarily to transition in a perspective of understanding and highlighting the citizenship dimensions and their drivers/enabler. In this light some important competence areas are emerged and are worth to be developed in term of definition of a transition mentor's competence profile able to challenge the transition process equipped with appropriate know-how.

Such competence areas are:

- Participation: is necessary to transfer the ability to clear the importance and the need of a participatory attitude. Participation can assume different shapes and activities, but in a specific affordable context is always to be encouraged and pushed both in transition mentors and multiplied from them to migrants.
- Work: sharing rights and duties within a collectivity implies also having a role as productive agents. The waste of know-how and the waste of individual abilities, in time, cause a sense of failure and vain that can influence negatively the transition process. Work then is seen as a enabler of citizenship, as Dahrendorf doubtless demonstrates.
- Reference: learning how to represent a "hub" as a reference person is also necessary, in order to develop listening capacity and responsibility to cover a role of key reference for migrants and migrant families. Sense of empathy is fundamental to transfer the capacity to be empathetic.
- Awareness: in this case means acquiring the will to act as informed agents in a collectivity. It includes for example being able to differentiate between fact/opinion, reality/fiction and different viewpoints/perspectives.
- Valorisation of the city setting: leaning how to connect city with citizenship entails different perspectives, as underscored above. It steps from the understanding of material and immaterial values of the spaces of a city till understanding of how to live appropriately public spaces; from partaking public initiatives in the city till sharing the

will to revive or push on a decision making process to re-shape a neighbourhood or a city space.

Appears then clear the connection between the Cultural iceberg and the dimension of citizenship raised in this case study, by delving in two important components and their features:

1. Knowledge and comprehension:
- Cultural self-awareness, which means the ways in which one's culture have influenced one's identity and worldview.
- Deep understanding and knowledge of culture, roles and identity (including contexts, role and impact of culture and others' worldviews).
- Values, priorities and assumptions-specific information.
- Sociolinguistic awareness.

This component of citizenship competence is of specific interest to educators and learners in a transition setting, who have the objective to develop it. It should be noted that knowledge for development of citizenship competence could be transmitted quite easily through lectures or/and seminars and could be rather objectively assessed. Nevertheless, the frequent visits to other cultures or learning in international groups could facilitate the transfer of such knowledge.

2. Skills:
- Listening
- Observation
- Interpreting
- Analysing
- Evaluating
- Relating

These skills are necessary for the processing of knowledge: obtaining, keeping and reproducing the information. The skills dimension is associated with the behavioural aspect of citizenship competence.

The application of such a perspective allows a profound reflection firstly on how to equip citizens with the capacity to be aware of their potentiality. In a nutshell: it's crucial understanding how to increase the competence of the social, political and economic (potential) power the concept of citizenship implies to enable a performative citizenship approach (Engin F. Isin, 2017). It's crucial shedding light on these topics and furthermore act to pursue this aim in term of competence setting-up for an effective and efficient transition process.

6. Annexes

In this section are reported some quotes from the interviews regarding citizenship topics above examined. The text has been recorded in Italian and translated in English from the author of this document.

GR, Intercultural mediator
"A smart transition mentor is able to work for increasing motivation and awareness of entitlements and provision characterizing the specific context. A good example is to guide migrants to understand how to reach services, work, training, etc."

CM, Social worker expert and trainer of social workers
"Involving migrants with an approach of assigning them tasks and roles, such social engagement and/or volunteering, is a key factor for support their participation and sense of membership. Sharing activities in the city setting is a reciprocal and strengthening confrontation and exchange of experiences, responsibility and intercultural tips in a collectivity. Confrontation and mutual help are a powerful meta-reflective practices and a mentor should be trained to push these activities as citizenship enabler."

CDS, Intercultural mediator and Italian teacher
"To support a citizenship enactment is not enough to mix cultures by organizing intercultural meals or food festivals. These events can maybe help, but this example is only a facile and to some extent too silly way. Beyond the language, that is obviously the first requisite, for a successful transition process the need is to dedicate shared spaces, places and ways of aggregation. Foster associations, partnerships and share stories must be encouraged."

EBK, Intercultural mediator and social worker
"Being able to act as a reference for migrant families and migrants in general is a key competence for a mentor. During the transition there are manifold moments where disjuncture events, difficulties, barriers are perceived from these persons. Having a unique reference point able to support and address to the right places/institution/further supporting professionals is crucial for their sense of being understood."

Family MAH, Migrants from Syria
"We don't want to be considered indigent or beggars. We would like to find a mentor able to support us in participate in the social, economic and political local context. Each migrant, according his capabilities, education, know-how and experience, can interact with the place where is integrated, but not if confined to be perceived as a person just needful of charity."

References

Benhabib, S. (2004). The rights of others. Aliens, residents and citizens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bignami, F. (2017). Going intercultural as a generative framework of a respondent citizenship. In M. G. Onorati, F. Bignami & F. Bednarz (Eds.), Intercultural Praxis for Ethical Action. Reflexive Education and Participatory Citizenship for a Respondent Sociality. Louvain, Belgium: EME publications.

Dahrendorf, R. (2007). The Crisis of Democracy. London: Gibson Square Books.

Isin, E. F. (2007). City.State: Critique of Scalar Thought. Citizenship Studies, 11(2), 211-228. doi: 10.1080/13621020701262644

Isin, Engin F. (2017). Performative Citizenship. In A. Shachar, S., Bauböck, R., Bloemraad, I., Vink, M. (Ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship (pp. 500-523). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nyers, P., & Rygiel, K. (Eds.). (2012). Citizenship, Migrant Activism, and the Politics of Movement. New York: Routledge.

Purcell, M. (2003). Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World Order,. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 27(3), 564-590.

Sassen, S. (2002). The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics. Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 46.