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# 19 Naturalization and the socio-economic integration of immigrants: a life-course perspective

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## INTRODUCTION

Is citizenship an important instrument for the economic integration of immigrants into the host society, and if so, why do some immigrants naturalize while others do not? Although research on these questions dates back decades, the literature provides no straightforward answer. While most empirical evidence indeed suggests a positive association between citizenship and labor market integration, not all studies support these findings. For example, Bratsberg et al. (2002), Steinhardt (2012), and Helgertz et al. (2014) found evidence of a positive association between citizenship and labor market integration in the North American and European context. However, Chiswick (1978), Scott (2008) and Bevelander and Veenman (2006) found no such effect, or even a negative relationship. While this empirical incongruence hardly comes as a surprise, given the wide variation in empirical contexts, types of data and methodological designs that characterize studies in this area, much of the literature is preoccupied more with the question of whether there is ‘a’ citizenship premium, instead of the question to whom, and especially under which conditions citizenship matters for immigrants.

In this chapter, we argue that the literature would benefit from a more comprehensive theoretical model that can account for how immigrant naturalization outcomes and socio-economic integration can be understood in light of variation in destination countries’ demographic composition and institutional setting (e.g. Bauböck et al. 2013; OECD 2011). We draw especially on the sociological life-course paradigm (Elder 1974), where life-course development is analyzed as the product of personal characteristics and individual action as well as of cultural frames and institutional conditions (Mayer 2009). Life-course perspectives have been increasingly popular within migration studies (Wingens et al. 2011), yet so far under-utilized in naturalization research. In our view of the state of the art of the field, a life-course perspective chimes well with research that demonstrates that the decision to naturalize is not solely the result of an individual deliberation, but rather made in the context of the family situation and broader social network in which immigrant lives are embedded (Bevelander and Helgertz 2014; Street 2014). Comparative research has demonstrated that the decision to naturalize is contextualized by the institutional setting, especially the relative accessibility of destination country citizenship policies and origin country dual citizenship policies (Vink et al. 2013). A more developed theoretical framework that accounts for these institutional and social aspects of naturalization may reveal why certain immigrants naturalize and benefit from citizenship acquisition while others do not, thus providing potential to go beyond merely observing empirical ambiguity in the literature.

Methodologically, a life-course perspective also fits with the increasing use of

longitudinal, rather than cross-sectional, data in order to deal with the frequently observed problem of self-selection in naturalization research. After all, it could be argued that migrants who are better equipped to perform well on the labor market, regardless of their legal status, are also more likely to naturalize, as concluded by Scott (2008) and Engdahl (2011) in the Swedish context. However, longitudinal analyses by Steinhardt (2012) contradict these findings for Germany, revealing a substantial wage growth for male immigrants after naturalization. By emphasizing the way in which early life events promote or stifle subsequent events, and by acknowledging how biographical actions and plans are embedded in the social and institutional context in which these take place, a life-course perspective may aid the development of a theoretical model that can account for both the institutional and social context of naturalization and labor market outcomes.

This chapter is in three parts. First, we review the state of the art, both on immigrant naturalization and on the relationship between citizenship and labor market outcomes. The second part then introduces the sociological life-course paradigm, outlining its key concepts and methodological principles. Third, we return to the state of the art on immigrant naturalization to illustrate how a life-course approach has the potential to go beyond the empirical ambiguity in the literature, differentiating between biographical and ecological aspects of immigrant naturalization decisions and labor market outcomes. Finally, we discuss the implications of this approach to future research on citizenship and reflect on its limitations.

## LITERATURE ON NATURALIZATION

Traditionally, research on immigrant naturalization has been strongly embedded in a broader literature on integration and adaptation processes of immigrants in the host society, both on a socio-economic and socio-cultural level (e.g. Barkan and Khokhlov 1980; Bernard 1936; Beijbohm 1971; Chiswick 1978). In his seminal work, Yang (1994) introduces a cost–benefit model of subjective utility maximization that forms the basis of the dominant theoretical framework on citizenship acquisition. In this utility model, benefits comprise political and socio-economic rights and privileges, while costs include the effort spent in an application process, the potential loss of the former nationality and the rights it offered, increased citizen obligations in the host country and potential financial expenses (Bevelander and Veenman 2006; Yang 1994).

The continued development of the literature has centered on identifying which elements play a role in this deliberation. One strand of research puts emphasis on the origin context and personal characteristics and the way in which these properties condition the perceived utility of citizenship acquisition. A lack of economic freedom, political security and low standards of living in the country of origin may discourage migrants to return. In these cases, citizenship of the host country offers security by providing unrestricted access to its territory. Research shows that these migrants naturalize quickly and in large numbers (Bueker 2005; Chiswick 2009; Dronkers and Vink 2012; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; Vink et al. 2013). By contrast, for immigrants from highly developed countries the perceived benefits are typically lower given the value of citizenship in the country of origin. For such immigrants, if they choose to naturalize at all, years of residence plays a crucial role (Vink et al. 2013).

Furthermore, the origin context not only conditions the relative value of citizenship of the destination context, but also plays a role in determining whether people are required to renounce their original citizenship on acquiring another. Losing original citizenship can have important implications, for example with regard to ability to work, hold property or invest in the origin country, as well as the loss of rights to its public services and social benefits (Bloemraad 2004; Jones-Correa 2001; Mazzolari 2009). Furthermore, the loss of mobility rights may imply a more permanent disconnection from relatives and friends in the origin country. A cost–benefit framework counts the automatic loss of the original citizenship as an important deterrent to naturalization. Empirical findings in the literature, however, produce an ambiguous picture and do not universally support the hypothesis that being able to retain the citizenship of the origin country increases the propensity to naturalize in the destination country (Dronkers and Vink 2010; Jones-Correa 2001; Logan et al. 2012; Mazzolari 2009; Scott 2008; Yang 1994).

Besides the origin context, the value and meaning of citizenship depends on one's current life situation. In this regard, one of the most important personal characteristics that is consistently found to be positively related to citizenship acquisition is length of residence (e.g. Bueker 2005; Dronkers and Vink 2012). Prolonged residence is not only in most cases a requirement for naturalization, but also increases commitment to the host society through the gradual accumulation of socio-economic, political and cultural resources specific to the host country. The literature is less conclusive about the relevance of other personal characteristics, such as age. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1986) find a negative association between age and citizenship acquisition. They argue that, as age increases, the period of time in which one may enjoy the benefits associated with the destination countries' citizenship reaches a point where one may feel it no longer justifies the effort to acquire it. In contrast, Yang (1994) finds a curvilinear relationship and Chiswick and Miller (2009) a positive association. Another example of contradictory findings relates to the role of children. While Yang (1994) finds that having young children increases the odds of naturalization, these results are often contradicted in subsequent contributions (e.g. Chiswick and Miller 2009; Vink et al. 2013).

The relevance of marital status is relatively undisputed. Yang (1994) argues that marriage provides stability and societal integration, which may facilitate naturalization. Furthermore, marriage with a native born not only increases commitment to the host society, but may also lower potential legal obstacles to naturalization such as a residence requirement. Most empirical findings indeed support the notion that marriage is positively associated with citizenship acquisition (e.g. Bueker 2003; Liang 1994; Vink et al. 2013). Recently, Bevelander and Helgertz (2014) analyzed this relationship in further detail using longitudinal data, finding that marriage with a foreign-born citizen subsequently increases the propensity to naturalize, particularly during the year in which the spouse attains citizenship. Notwithstanding the dominant view of naturalization as a product of an individual utility-maximizing calculation, these results indicate that the decision to naturalize is a joint resolution between partners based on a shared ambition to invest in a long-term settlement in the host country. These social aspects of naturalization are also emphasized by Street (2014), whose work reveals the intergenerational motivation for citizenship acquisition by immigrants in Germany in order to guarantee citizenship status for their children.

A recurrent trait of many contributions that analyze individual incentives for

naturalization based on the origin context and personal characteristics is their focus on a specific point in time and a single destination context (e.g. Chiswick and Miller 2009; Yang 1994). The lack of a cross-national and longitudinal analysis leaves little room to address the relevance of the destination context, for instance in terms of citizenship policies. However, citizenship law constitutes a legal framework that determines the conditions for citizenship eligibility, and is thus of crucial importance. This is particularly the case in Europe, where citizenship policies vary significantly (Vink and de Groot 2010). Consequently, a separate strand of literature specifically investigates the relevance of the destination context in terms of migration history, citizenship policies and the political landscape across countries and time (e.g. Aleksynska and Algan 2010; Gonzalez-Ferrer and Cortina-Trilla 2011; Janoski 2010; Reichel 2011). This research clearly illustrates the relevance of the destination situation by revealing large discrepancies in naturalization rates between countries, and the role of the above factors on these patterns. However, as most of these macro-level studies employ aggregate data, they provide limited controls for the demographic composition of migrant populations, for example with regard to levels of education, wealth or migration background. In other words, such studies may compare countries that are in compositional terms highly dissimilar and run the risk of drawing inferences about individuals based on aggregate data (better known as the ecological fallacy). In other words, while there is literature taking into account variation at the level of immigrants, as well as works that take into account macro-level variation in institutional contexts, these lines of research complement each other, but mostly exist in isolation (see Vink et al. 2013 for an exception).

## NATURALIZATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

It is widely accepted that the labor market performance of immigrants regarding employment and earnings is worse when compared to natives (e.g. Algan et al. 2010; Fleischmann and Dronkers 2010; Schmidt 1997; van Tubergen 2006; van Tubergen et al. 2004). Research has identified five major reasons for this discrepancy: social capital theory states that social networks, and the resources they entail, can be beneficial to the labor market performance of immigrants (De Graaf and Flap 1988; Drever and Hoffmeister 2008; Franzen and Hangartner 2006; Lancee 2012; Lancee and Hartung 2012). Since immigrants are relatively new to the host society, they can be expected to have less social capital than natives (e.g. Nee and Sanders 2001; Schmeets and te Riele 2010), and as such are less able to employ their social network to attain employment. Social capital provides access to host-country specific human capital, which brings us to the second argument. Migrants are often less empowered by human capital, or possess human capital that is less relevant in the host society, than natives, to the detriment of their labor market performance in Western societies (Becker 1962; Heath and Cheung 2007; Schultz 1961). Educational credentials, as well as labor market experience from the country of origin, is not simply transferable to the country of destination, since employers cannot always readily interpret the relevance of said experience and qualifications. Also, due to restrictive regulations, immigrants may not have access to specific segments of the labor market, such as public sector jobs. Furthermore, most immigrants are at a disadvantage with regard to mastery of the native language when

compared to natives, which hampers their employability (Hayfron 2001; Shields and Price 2002).

Citizenship has the potential to mitigate some of these disadvantages (Bauböck et al. 2013; OECD 2011). The main mechanisms through which citizenship contributes to the socio-economic integration of immigrants are threefold: citizenship removes restrictions on public sector jobs, increasing employment opportunities. Also, the administrative costs of hiring and retaining a naturalized migrant are lower than those of a migrant who has not attained citizenship. Furthermore, citizenship acquisition placates employers' uncertainties about the educational qualifications, work experience and general work ethos of a migrant by signaling 'good' integration. Therefore naturalized migrants have more job opportunities, are less expensive and pose less of a risk to hire compared to those who have not naturalized (Bauböck et al. 2013; OECD 2011).

While these mechanisms may explain how citizenship can be beneficial to the socio-economic integration of immigrants, findings in the literature on this core question of the impact of citizenship are ambiguous (e.g. Engdahl 2011; Scott 2008; Steinhardt 2012). For instance, longitudinal studies in North America or Germany reveal increased wage growth after naturalization (Bratsberg et al. 2002; Steinhardt 2012). By contrast, a similar study performed by Engdahl (2011) and Scott (2008) in Sweden suggests that the relationship between citizenship and socio-economic integration is largely due to self-selection. In other words, immigrants who perform well in the labor market in the first place may be the ones who are also more likely to naturalize, and might consequently be positively selected before the act of naturalization. Each set of contributions tells a different story, but neither reflects on the mechanisms that might explain these results. In our view, this is surprising, given the differences in empirical contexts, types of data and methodological designs among these various studies. In other words, it may be possible that acquiring destination-country citizenship matters for some immigrants, but not for others. As such, what the literature needs is a more developed theoretical framework that may account for varying outcomes of naturalization across countries and time. To that end, we introduce the sociological life-course paradigm, whose concepts and principles may provide a useful starting point for such a framework. Subsequently, we apply this perspective to the field of naturalization studies.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL LIFE-COURSE PARADIGM

The sociological life-course paradigm (Elder 1974) can be characterized by the search for regularities in socially interrelated human lives, where life-course development is analyzed as the product of personal characteristics and individual action as well as of cultural frames and institutional conditions (Mayer 2009). Broadly speaking, life-course research concerns itself with the concepts of time, context and processes by analyzing the inter-related development of human biographies in transforming societal conditions (Diewald and Mayer 2009). As such, it represents a distinct way of thinking about and studying human lives that combines two conceptual models. On the one hand, it is essentially a multilevel approach that analyzes pathways of human life as the product of the interplay between micro- (individuals), meso- (societal structures and institutions) and macro- (historical time) level dynamics. In this manner, life-course research explicitly positions bio-

graphical actions and plans in the formal and social context of structures and institutions in which these take place, and which are similarly susceptible to changes through time. On the other hand, it is also a strongly longitudinal approach that attempts to go beyond the investigation of point-like states of being by analyzing human development through strings of life events. The key assumption here is that there is a temporal dynamic to life events, where past experiences and resources, as well as opportunities and ambitions for the future, promote or stifle certain choices and developments.

To translate these conceptions into models for empirical research, the life course is perceived in terms of trajectories and transitions. Transitions are changes in state that are more or less abrupt (Elder 1985), for example the change from being employed to being unemployed. While the perpetuation of a status is informative in its own right, it is arguably the life events that mark transitions between states that most life-course research questions are focused on. Trajectories are periods of time in life domains or institutions, such as education, work or health, in which transitions are embedded (Elder 1985). In this sense, a trajectory is the conceptual glue that ties various life events together in a meaningful way. Through trajectories, changes in states have cumulative effects that produce long-term advantageous or disadvantageous developments in the life course. Rather than a random sequence of idiosyncratic life events, the life course is at least partly a conglomerated structure of social pathways that follow a certain temporal, institutionalized sequencing (Mayer 2004). Societal institutions, such as educational and occupational systems, provide a framework of rules and regulations, as well as age- and time-scheduled sequences of classes that shape life-course trajectories. These models of standardized life courses are culturally endowed, and often dissimilar for different groups, such as men and women. For instance, the transition to a shared household or starting a family may signify the transition to a less active role on the labor market in the life course of women, in contrast to men (Algan and Cahuc 2003; Fortin 2005; Vella 1994). Furthermore, the life course is not simply the product of societal and institutional conditions at a given time, but is actively constructed within these contextual circumstances. Individuals are biographical actors who evaluate formal and social opportunities and constraints in light of past biographical events and outcomes, as well as ambitions and plans for the future. Thus trajectories represent the longitudinal way of thinking about actors in changing societies, by capturing the causal connections between transitions (Elder 1994, p. 4).

As the name implies, trajectories are characterized by a sense of direction. When a certain life event causes a fundamental shift in the direction of a trajectory, it is marked as a turning point. Since all transitions are thought to have long-term effects, a turning point is essentially a transition that has a discontinuous effect on its trajectory, relative to its predecessors. By their very nature, these transitions can only be dubbed as such with hindsight, since their defining features only become apparent in retrospect (Abbott 1997). Nevertheless, turning points can be an important concept to make sense of biographical development.

Life-course research has introduced a number of guiding principles that help us link trajectories and transitions to substantive theory that explains these lines of development (Shanahan and Macmillan 2008; Wingens et al. 2011). Here we discuss those that will prove most relevant to theory on citizenship, namely linked lives, life stage, accentuation and agency.

Linked lives' refer to the fact that life courses do not exist independently but are interconnected through a network of social connections and relationships (Elder 1994). These lines of association range from family and friends to colleagues and communities, and provide resources and opportunities that mutually affect people's lives. The 'life-stage' principle emphasizes the way in which the impact and meaning of life events change throughout the life course (Shanahan and Macmillan 2008). In other words, to understand how certain life events affect life courses, one needs to take into account the phase of life in which an event occurs (Wingens et al. 2011). 'Accentuation' means that, when environmental structures and conditions rapidly change, the values, beliefs and practices held before this transformation become more pronounced (Wingens et al. 2011). For example, a migrant residing in a foreign country may feel strongly connected to another individual solely on the basis of a shared cultural background, even though these qualities would not have been as relevant prior to migrating. The principle of 'agency' refers to the ability of individuals to actively plan and construct their life course within the boundaries of societal and institutional opportunity structures. As such, individuals evaluate their options in light of available resources, their ambitions and situational constraints, and actively react to changes in these conditions (Heinz 1996).

The central ideas of the life-course paradigm relate naturally to processes of migration and integration. As Wingens et al. (2011, p. 2) point out: 'Understanding migrants' behavior and explaining the cumulative effects resulting from their actions which, in turn, are embedded in societal structures and framed by institutions, requires just the kind of dynamic research approach the sociological life course perspective suggests.' However, so far the life-course approach is rarely used explicitly in migration and integration research, let alone in the literature on citizenship acquisition and its impact on labor market performance. However, we will show that these life-course concepts and principles neatly fit and complement the existing theoretical framework, while simultaneously highlighting the very elements that may prove crucial in explaining the current empirical ambiguity in the literature.

## A LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVE ON NATURALIZATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

How are the theoretical principles and concepts of the sociological life-course paradigm relevant to research on citizenship? Since migration and integration are life-course processes, the act of citizenship acquisition can be perceived as an important transition – from non-citizen to citizen – within this trajectory. To understand the underlying motivations that underpin this transition (why do immigrants naturalize?), and its implications (what is the impact of citizenship on their socio-economic integration?), the dynamic research perspective of the life course is needed to grasp both the social and institutional context in which immigrant decision-making is embedded, as well as the possible turning point that this status change may signify in the life trajectory of an immigrant's life.



## THE BIOGRAPHY OF IMMIGRANT NATURALIZATION

The literature on citizenship acquisition has developed considerably since the introduction of a cost–benefit model by Yang (1994), both in terms of incorporated variables and of methodological designs and data. However, throughout this period of development, the underlying theoretical model has remained largely unchanged, and at its heart still focuses on individual utility as the key motivation for citizenship acquisition. As such, it provides limited guidelines regarding the role of social relations. Yet recent findings in the literature clearly show that the decision to naturalize is not an individual deliberation, but rather made in close consultation with the spouse, or for the future benefit of children (Bevelander and Helgertz 2014; Street 2014). Therefore citizenship acquisition has to be understood in a biographical sense, where the utility of citizenship depends largely on the point in one’s life course at a given time. For instance, the value and meaning of citizenship will differ between migrants who are at a point in their lives at which they may want to start a family, compared to those who are either younger and whose plans and ambitions for the future are not as intertwined with those of others, or those who are older and for whom naturalization no longer carries the potential of a life-changing turning point. In other words, linked lives and life stage are crucial concepts to accurately portray the complex dynamic of human lives in which the decision to naturalize is embedded. This not only relates to the propensity to naturalize, but also to its subsequent socio-economic impact. For instance, Street (2014) demonstrates that a key motivation for naturalization of migrants in Germany was in fact not focused on personal gain, but rather on securing citizenship status for their children to promote their opportunities for upward mobility. Clearly, if the propensity to naturalize is not necessarily based on personal benefit, an individualistic model of subjective utility maximization is too limited. Hence we need a biographical understanding of the decision-making process, not as a substitute, but in addition to existing calculating explanations of immigrant decision-making; however, our understanding of an immigrant’s motivation to naturalize should refer not only to purely individual considerations, but also to those made at the family level.

A biographical perspective is not only a valuable addition to the model, but also provides an important starting point to address empirical findings, which seems puzzling in the context of the current theoretical framework. For example, Steinhardt (2012) finds that naturalization offers no wage benefit for women; from a life-course perspective, this may be partly due to dissimilar models of standardized life courses per gender (Algan and Cahuc 2003; Fortin 2005; Vella 1994). As mentioned earlier, certain life events such as marriage or having children may have distinct implications for men and women. Since Steinhardt focuses on migrants who are full-time employed, it is perhaps unsurprising that the women included in his analysis are highly motivated and skilled, since these women have chosen to remain highly active on the labor market in spite of alternative life-course patterns where women predominantly start working part time or leave the labor market at all after having children (Fortin 2005; Wingens et al. 2011). For this reason, we emphasize the importance of including marital status and having children in the analysis (Steinhardt 2012, p. 821).

Furthermore, the temporal dynamic inherent to a biographical perspective also builds on an ongoing methodological discussion in the literature that emphasizes the importance of using longitudinal data. Since citizenship acquisition is a selective process, this

entails the methodological risk that those migrants who choose to naturalize do so partly because of inherent qualities related to their labor market outcomes. In other words, immigrants who perform well on the labor market in the first place may be the ones who choose to naturalize, and might consequently be positively selected, even before the act of naturalization (Helgertz et al. 2014; Steinhardt 2012). By employing a life-course approach, the assumption of causality – where citizenship acquisition precedes socio-economic integration – is directly addressed through the longitudinal analysis of life events in the human biography. In that sense, a biographical approach that emphasizes both the temporal and social aspects of immigrant naturalization and labor market outcomes synchronizes well with current methodological developments in the literature regarding the increased usage of longitudinal data.

## THE ECOLOGY OF IMMIGRANT NATURALIZATION

A central idea of the sociological life-course paradigm is that individual lives are embedded in societal structures and institutions that shape biographical plans (Wingens et al. 2011). As such, institutional transformations at the macro/meso-level are consequential to life courses at the micro-level, as redefined opportunity structures open new pathways or close existing ones. Yet the literature on citizenship and labor market integration largely focuses on either the macro- (in terms of for instance citizenship law or the migration history of destination countries) or micro-level (in terms of individual incentives for naturalization). However, individuals evaluate societal and institutional opportunity structures against their life ambitions, aspirations and plans, and act accordingly (Heinz 1996). As Street points out: ‘Research on citizenship laws should be based on an understanding of the micro-foundations of naturalization behavior’ (Street 2014, p. 265). Similarly, an analysis of the individual’s decision to naturalize has to account for the societal and institutional context in which this deliberation takes place. However, the development of such a theoretical model is hampered by the fact that most contributions in the literature focus on a single destination country, and, when employing longitudinal data, choose not to analyze the impact of changes in the destination context through time (e.g. Bevelander and Veenman 2006; Bevelander and Pendakur 2012; Bratsberg et al. 2002; Mazzolari 2009; Scott 2008; Steinhardt 2012). Indeed, Steinhardt makes an empirical caveat on this point: ‘Given that . . . the effect [of citizenship] depends strongly on the legal requirements and consequences of naturalization within a country, the following discussion refers explicitly to the situation in Germany’ (Steinhardt 2012, p. 815).

While it is true that destination contexts often cannot be readily compared, given the limits of available datasets, we should at least theorize on their impact and strive towards a model that accounts for its relevance. For instance, with regard to personal characteristics, Yang (1994) finds a curvilinear relationship between age and citizenship acquisition, arguing that the utility of citizenship is particularly relevant during the period of time in which an immigrant is active on the labor market. By contrast, Chiswick and Miller (2009) find a positive relationship and Jasso and Rosenzweig (1986) a negative association. Chiswick and Miller argue that the absence of a curvilinear relationship may be linked to policy changes that have limited non-citizens’ access to social services, particularly increasing the benefit of citizenship for those of higher age (Chiswick and

Miller 2009, p. 32). As such, individual incentives for naturalization based on age are conditioned by the institutional context at a given time and place.

Similarly, Yang (1994) finds that having young children increases the odds of naturalization, but these results are often contradicted in subsequent contributions (e.g. Chiswick and Miller 2009; Vink et al. 2013). However, citizenship policy plays an important role in the relevance of children by conditioning whether naturalization can be employed as a strategy for intergenerational upward mobility (Street 2014). When Germany changed its citizenship policy in 2000 to include *ius soli* citizenship provisions, extending citizenship to immigrants' children born in Germany, citizenship rates actually lowered in contrast to political expectations. Even though the policy reform made citizenship acquisition easier for most migrants, a key naturalization motive for foreign parents, namely upward mobility for their children, was removed. In other words, opportunity structures defined at the macro-level condition the impact of personal characteristics at the micro-level.

Just as the impact of the institutional context depends on individual incentives to naturalize, so too the relevance of personal characteristics is conditioned by the destination context. Although restrictive citizenship policies are negatively associated with naturalization rates (Bauböck et al. 2013; Dronkers and Vink 2012), recent findings show that this is particularly true for migrants from less developed countries (Vink et al. 2013). Although further research on the underlying mechanisms is required, one could argue that, as citizenship policies become more demanding in terms of financial costs, as well as the required level of knowledge and skills, this will particularly present an obstacle to migrants from less developed countries. Thus, to understand the relevance of citizenship policies of the destination context, it is important to account for demographic properties of its immigrant population. For example, in countries with a large number of refugees, who predominantly originate from less developed countries, a restrictive citizenship policy might have a relatively strong impact.

Furthermore, the institutional context may not only reflect on naturalization rates, but also on the subsequent impact of naturalization on the labor market. Since German citizenship law was based almost exclusively on the *ius sanguinis* principle until 2000, it is possible that many migrants in the analysis of Steinhardt (2012) chose to naturalize to guarantee citizenship status for their children, rather than the core aim of improving one's employability. If the motivation for naturalization of immigrants is not so much motivated by these personal utility payoffs, but rather by those of others, then this may also be reflected in the relation between naturalization and labor market outcomes. Similarly, the particularities of labor market regulation should also be expected to matter; in highly regulated systems, the 'citizenship premium' may be expected to be larger than in those systems where access to the labor market generally is less restricted. For example, whereas it is common to state your citizenship status in job applications in some countries, such as Germany or Austria, in other countries, like Norway or Sweden, this is not the case (OECD 2011). In other words, citizenship acquisition is far less relevant for successful socio-economic integration in the latter countries. This may explain why the literature finds empirical evidence for a citizenship premium in Germany, and not in Sweden (Engdahl 2011; Scott 2008; Steinhardt 2012). Similarly, the *de facto* opportunities that naturalization provides, in terms of access to restricted jobs, the housing market or credit, which may increase immigrant mobility and thus improve labor market opportunities, differ between countries.

Again, in the Swedish context, naturalization has a very limited impact on these benefits (Scott 2008).

The impact of citizenship acquisition on labor market outcomes is not only conditioned by the institutional setting of the destination context, but also by the demographic composition of its migrant population. Sweden houses a relatively large number of refugees, who may be highly motivated to naturalize in order to reinforce their legal position in the host country. However, refugees are also particularly disadvantaged on the labor market (e.g. Krahn et al. 2000; Wooden 1991), which may go some way to explaining why Scott finds a negative relationship between citizenship and labor market integration in Sweden, while studies in some other countries do not (e.g. Bratsberg et al. 2002; Steinhardt 2012). Another example is the relevance of co-ethnic communities. Just as there are initially fewer obstacles to establishing social ties with co-ethnics compared to natives, so too is it easier to find and attain employment under an employer who shares your language and cultural background (Bevelander and Pendakur 2012; Edin et al. 2001). The benefit of citizenship of the host country, in terms of the having demonstrable possession of some country-specific human capital, cultural knowledge and basic language mastery (as required in many naturalization procedures) is in that case much less valuable. In other words, there are fewer incentives for migrants to invest in their labor market opportunities through naturalization when residing in communities with a high co-ethnic population, since their disadvantages are mitigated through opportunities offered by co-ethnic workplaces. Moreover, processes of accentuation, resulting from the societal change inherent in the act of migration, may motivate migrants to actively seek these work environments with shared values, cultural codes and habits from the country of origin (Shanahan and Macmillan 2008). The impact of the broader social environment in terms of ethnic communities on immigrants' propensity to naturalize has so far only been analyzed by Yang (1994), who found a positive association between the ethnic composition of a community and citizenship acquisition. Yang argues that a large immigrant community facilitates naturalization by providing its members with information concerning benefits, procedures and experiences of naturalization (Yang 1994, p. 457).

What is clear from all of this is that the theoretical lacunae lie not so much in omitted variables, but rather in a theoretical framework that ties the separate strands of literature focusing either on characteristics of individuals or countries together in a systematic fashion. In this regard, the sociological life-course paradigm provides the conceptual tools to simultaneously grasp the biographical and ecological aspects of citizenship, while a model of subjective utility maximization allows us to utilize these tools to systematically formulate hypotheses for analysis.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from the literature on the core question of the effect of citizenship for immigrants' socio-economic integration in destination countries are ambiguous. Instead of arguing for or against the existence of a so-called 'citizenship premium', this chapter explores the potential of the sociological life-course paradigm to strengthen the theoretical foundation of research on citizenship and socio-economic integration. We argue that the development of a more comprehensive theoretical model may aid the identification of

the conditions under which citizenship is effective. A review of the state of the art reveals two strands of literature. A first, longstanding strand focuses on individual incentives for naturalization based on the origin context and personal characteristics, but fails to account for the societal and institutional conditions of the destination country in which these individuals are embedded. A second, more recent strand of literature focuses on properties of the destination context in terms of citizenship policies, migration history and the political landscape, and changes in these characteristics through time, but ignores differences in the demographic composition of the migrant populations in these countries. When combining both these micro and meso/macro approaches with citizenship acquisition and labor market integration through life-course concepts and principles, a comprehensive theoretical framework appears that allows for the formulation of hypotheses that explain why some immigrants naturalize and benefit from citizenship, while others do not. More specifically, a life-course perspective emphasizes the biographical and ecological aspects of naturalization, where variation in citizenship acquisition rates and labor market outcomes can be explained by the social, institutional and demographic context in which immigrants are embedded. The added benefit of such an approach is that it provides potential to go beyond merely observing empirical ambiguity in the literature, thus increasing the comparative scope of research on naturalization and socio-economic integration.

Methodologically, a life-course approach to immigrant naturalization calls for longitudinal individual-level data and dynamic microanalyses embedded in multilevel models of social processes (Wingens et al. 2011, p. 6). This notion builds well on the recent emphasis in the literature on the importance of longitudinal data to account for self-selection concerning unobservable characteristics (e.g. [Helgertz et al. 2014](#); [Steinhardt 2012](#)). As such, a life-course approach to citizenship is highly compatible with contemporary methodological considerations in the naturalization literature, which emphasize the need for longitudinal data in order to disentangle the value and meaning of citizenship for individuals under particular social and institutional conditions. However, these high demands on the required quality of data also pose potential challenges, given that only in a limited set of countries are suitable longitudinal datasets available. As a result, much of the literature focuses on certain countries, such as Sweden, Germany or the USA, for which these particular types of data are relatively available ([Bratsberg et al. 2002](#); [Bevelander and Helgertz 2014](#); [Engdahl 2011](#); [Scott 2008](#); [Steinhardt 2012](#); [Street 2014](#)). Furthermore, comparability of the findings from these studies is limited given that these datasets are structured according to national specificities and do not facilitate cross-national comparison. In other words, opportunities to analyze the biographical and ecological aspects of naturalization and labor market outcomes are constrained by the limits of available datasets. While these constraints can be addressed through the use of 'big data' approaches, combining register data with available surveys, access to these types of data is limited so far to only a small set of European countries, such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries.

Finally, we reiterate our initial question: is citizenship an important instrument for the economic integration of immigrants into the host society? We would argue that there is no definitive answer, and indeed, that it is the wrong question. Instead, we argue the literature would benefit by focusing more on identifying the importance of citizenship. Doing so requires the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework and, in this

regard, we see a life-course approach to immigrant naturalization and socio-economic integration as the most promising step.

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