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INTI Project: One-Stop Shop: A New Answer for Immigrant Integration?

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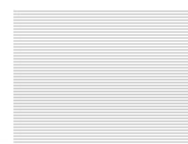
Evaluation of the One-Stop-Shop Project – Executive Summary

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Executive summary

The INTI-project “One-Stop-Shop: A New Answer for Immigrant Integration” is a European Commission (JLS) funded project that aimed to explore the feasibility of a specific format of service provision to immigrants within the more general framework of an integration policy for immigrants. The European Commission’s Common Agenda for Integration recommended the OSS as a useful format, which legitimates the initiative to explore its feasibility. The specific format as it was developed in Portugal since 2004 under the name National Immigrant Support Centres (CNAI) has been the exemplary source of inspiration for the project that was initiated and coordinated by the Portuguese High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI).

Key elements of the Portuguese CNAI-Centres are:

- services for immigrants are available and accessible at one particular physical point (concentration);
- such services cover in principle all domains that are relevant for immigrants (immigration and integration related services);
- such services are coordinated in time and content through intensive and on the spot coordination of the various services;
- services and their coordination include not only public (governmental) ones but also those relevant services provided by non-governmental organisations, which implies structural public-private cooperation;
- in the practice of providing the services, language and cultural mediation is made available on the spot to smoothen communication and to build trust;
- migrant organisations are involved as advisors in the setup and functioning of such centres, also as an element of trust-building.

Two national Centres (in Lisbon and Oporto) are operational since 2004. The International Organization for Migration has evaluated them positively in two reports (IOM 2006 and 2009). They represent “a clear example of concerted action of different Governmental agencies, in partnership with civil society” (IOM 2009, 37).

In order to explore the feasibility of this format of service provision to immigrants in other EU-countries the project brought together project-partners from six countries: Germany (Netzwerk Migration in Europa e.V.), Greece (Hellenic Migration Policy Institute), Ireland (the Immigrant Council of Ireland), Italy (the General Directorate for Immigration), Portugal (High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue) and Spain (General Directorate for the Integration of Immigrants). These partners accepted basically two tasks. The first was to make an inventory of immigration and integration policies in general and service provision to immigrants in their country in particular, specifically identifying service practices that come near to the One-Stop-Shop-format. This has been done in six country reports. Secondly, to mobilise stakeholders in the country in Advisory Committees and discuss with them – on the basis of the inventory - the feasibility and desirability of developing and applying that OSS-format. IOM Portugal was the seventh partner in the project that particularly helped in the comparative analysis of reports by making two working documents. The comparative process was given additional depth by organising three special workshops

on key themes of the OSS-format: one on the role of socio-cultural mediators, one on the comparison of practices of integrated service provision to immigrants, and one on partnership between NGOs and governmental actors in service provision.

This whole exercise was planned to result in a Handbook that would bring together empirical experience with OSS-practices, and advice and recommendations as to how best realise service provision in this format.

This evaluation of the project is done in this report on two separate levels. The first level evaluates the project procedurally as it has been implemented, measured against the original project plan. On this level of evaluation the conclusions can be pretty straightforward:

- the coordinator has steered the project with a combination of perseverance and diplomacy along the lines set out in the plan, has coordinated the activities, provided adequate internal communication, collected and disseminated several inspiring OSS practices, made results available (easily accessible on the website: <http://www.oss.inti.acidi.gov.pt>) and has written the Handbook (in co-authorship with IOM in Portugal).
- the 'country teams' have delivered country reports along the lines of a format that was developed in advance in order to facilitate comparative analysis; they have organised Advisory Committees to discuss the country reports and the desirability and feasibility of implementing the OSS-format in their countries (though results vary per country: see later).
- IOM has provided guidance and a framework for the comparative exercise by two working documents and has contributed to the Handbook.
- the special workshops have been to a great extent a common effort realised in a division of tasks among the various partners.

On this level of evaluation one can safely conclude that the project as a whole and the partners in particular, have lived up to the expectations of the original plan.

Whereas this first level of evaluation is purely technical-analytical (aims-procedures-outcomes of the project out of context), the second level of evaluation takes the broader context into account and asks questions about the relevance of the exercise and outcomes. It means that the OSS-format and its possible relevance and feasibility has to be evaluated against the general background in which it is supposed to have certain functions and serve certain aims: in this case against the background of the general policy framing of immigration and integration in a country, the existing institutional structures for such policies, the configuration of actors involved in it (governmental, NGOs, migrants themselves), and even the specific characteristics of the clients/immigrants. Viewed and evaluated from such a perspective a number of observations can be made.

The first is that there are a number of assumptions underlying the OSS-format that are related to the orientation and content of immigration and integration policies in general that should be fulfilled in order to make the OSS-format a *politically feasible* instrument. Not only do such general policies need to be coherent and pro-active, they also should be mobilising and trust-building – welcoming as some express it –, they

should be rights-based, client-centred, and prepared to cooperate with all relevant non-governmental organisations and receptive for the influence of immigrant organisations. These conditions should be fulfilled not only in the domain of integration, but at the same time also in the domain of regulation of admission and immigration. In actual practice, such conditions are found in only a few European countries. It is not accidental – from this perspective – that the OSS-format or model as described above was developed in Portugal, and that it finds quite some support in Ireland, as transpires from the project. Both are countries with a relatively short history of immigration; they start from what is sometimes called an ‘open situation’, not being hindered by a past of restrictive immigration policies and absence of coherent integration policies for immigrants (who were defined as temporary ‘guests’), as has been the case in most Northwest European countries.

A second set of assumptions relates to questions of institutional arrangements and divisions of competences and tasks in policymaking and implementation. I call this *structural feasibility*. The key elements of the OSS-format that are formulated above can only feasibly be organised, if institutional structures allow this. If services of OSS are supposed to cover all domains relevant for integration, then there should preferably be an organisational structure in which policies for admission and immigration and for integration are brought together in such a way that there is coherence. In most countries immigration and integration policies are located in different ministries; and not only that: these competences may also lie on quite different levels, like in Spain where immigration is a national competence, but integration is a competence of the autonomous regions and local governments. The independent competences, policy goals and orientations of these different agencies may well and actually do contradict each other. Again, here Portugal is the exception rather than the rule, having brought together the two domains in one governmental agency. The fact that the OSS in Portugal is able to include even services to illegal residents in its practice is unimaginable in most other European countries.

But there are also other institutional legacies that are relevant to realise the key elements of the OSS-format and that make it more or less feasible. The existence or absence of traditions of cooperation between state agencies and civil society in general is such a legacy, as is the tradition of more client or citizen orientated attitudes versus more passive and authoritarian orientations of governmental agencies. The latter characteristic often goes together with more or less openness for diversity, both in its consequence of allowing for influence of organised clients (immigrants and their organisations) on service provision and for more awareness that material equality in service provision may be seriously hindered by linguistic and cultural barriers and should thus be solved by using interpreters and mediators.

Finally, there is a third category of conditions that should be fulfilled for an OSS to function properly that pertain to *practical feasibility*: they have to do with the physical place of the facility (easy to reach), opening hours, internal communication between agents involved and with clients, a welcoming atmosphere, etcetera. Behind many of such factors – but surely not all – there is the question of funding. That may be defined as a practical question, but it is surely much more. The funding question is a good illustration of how the three levels of feasibility – the political, structural and practical

one - do relate to each other. The first level of political feasibility is the most important one. If there is a political orientation that fits the OSS-approach and a political will to implement it, then structural factors – even if these traditionally would not fit – can be transformed and adapted and funding questions can be solved. Practical feasibility questions are, in terms of their content, in principle solved on the basis of experience and proper management, but such solutions can only be applied if structures and funds are made available through a political will.

The distinction between the three levels of feasibility is a generally accepted one in policy analysis, in this case applied to the OSS-format of service provision. Looking through this analytical lens to the project, a few observations can be made on the project itself and its implementation.

The first is that the selection of the countries that have decided to be involved in the project has steered its content. When we look at the partners involved in the project, we see that five relatively new immigration countries (with a relatively 'open situation' to start from and at the same time a need to develop adequate instruments) are part of the project, while only one of the 'old immigration' countries is part of the project, Germany. It is particularly this latter case that illustrates not only the partial absence of the political conditions (although since 2000 much changed in the FRG), but also particularly a number of structural conditions and 'legacies' that do not directly fit the conditions. (This absence of 'old immigration countries' is not a consequence of deliberate choice before the project was conceptualised; it was – as the initiators made clear – a consequence of the fact that most of the old immigration countries asked as partners simply did not react to the invitation).

The second is the choice of the partner institutes involved. These partner institutes are very diverse, when it comes to their relation to policies. In three cases they were governmental institutes (Portugal, Spain and Italy), in one case it was an NGO closely related to immigrants (Ireland), and in the two other cases they were research institutes, a private one in the case of the FRG and a government related research institute in the case of Greece. Although in all cases researchers have been asked to do the country reports, staff members of the respective institutions have done all other tasks in the project such as the Steering Committee work, the management of the Advisory Committees and their discussions and deliberations on the Handbook. The project and the way it worked illustrate the consequences of the structural positioning of the partners.

The third is that the project itself was a hybrid one that combined elements of an analytical-scientific approach, particularly in the country studies, and an approach of mobilisation of stakeholders for OSS. The creation of the Advisory Committees in which policymakers from different Governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations and representatives from immigrant associations were brought together to discuss the OSS-approach, was on the one hand innovative and successful, in that it stimulated a dialogue between Governmental and Non-Governmental stakeholders and representatives of immigrant communities, as is illustrated in the minutes of these meetings (<http://www.oss.inti.acidi.gov.pt>). On the other hand such exercises

understandably followed more the logic of a policymaking process than the logic of an analytical scientific exercise.

The handbook that results from the common work reflects this diversity of contexts in countries, the positioning of researchers and project staff involved and the hybrid nature of the project itself. This has had both disadvantages and advantages. Among the disadvantages is a certain imbalance of the empirical data presented in the handbook. Most of the examples are coming from the five relatively new immigration countries; empirical material from 'old immigration countries' of the EU is relatively absent (while on the website there are some examples from the USA). There is also to a certain extent a lack of analytical clarity, which is first and foremost a consequence of the fact that often compromise formulations had to be used in the handbook in order to find consensus among the diverse participants of the project.

But the fact that the handbook is not primarily a scientific exercise, but essentially an effort to raise awareness and mobilise different stakeholders around a specific instrument to be used in policy implementation, also leads to the conclusion that as such the handbook is a valuable instrument, notwithstanding its scientific disadvantages:

- it provides the full range of elements that are relevant for policy makers and practitioners reading the handbook, be it formulated in political rather than analytical terms;
- it gives the full range of legitimising arguments for the approach, particularly focusing on legitimising arguments from EU-policy development; these may be particularly important in cases of politically open situations;
- it provides a comprehensive sample of examples of OSS-like instruments and their functioning;
- it gives a list of recommendations (do's and do not's) that are not such derived from a strong analytical diagnosis, but are negotiated compromises from a vary mixed team of participants, reflecting elements from these different backgrounds.

If one foresees that handbooks and their recommendations are always used differently, according to the need of the reader, it would seem that in this case advantages prevail. Some readers will be more interested in the political, legitimising arguments that are abundantly available in the first part of the Handbook; other readers will be more interested in empirical examples and recommendations based on such cases. Also these are fully available in the Handbook.