



Discussion



/ A passport is not a panacea* /

*but it can make a big difference in an immigrant's life

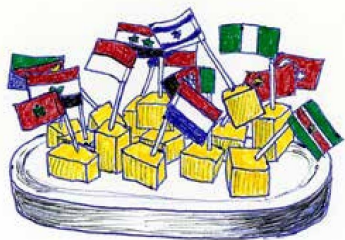
It takes five years of uninterrupted stay in the Netherlands for a foreigner to become a Dutch citizen through naturalisation. According to some political parties, this is too short a period to become a full member of society. The government now plans to increase the minimum residence requirement to seven years. Maarten Vink, professor of Political Science at Maastricht University, is against the proposal. "It's not based on any scientific evidence."

In recent years Vink has been studying the citizenship policies of different countries around the world. He discovered that the requirements for naturalisation – minimum length of stay, application fees, knowledge of a country's language and culture, the need to renounce one's prior citizenship or not – vary greatly from one country to another. "Immigrants in Belgium and Finland can apply for citizenship after five years of permanent residence, as is currently the case in the Netherlands and in most members of the European Union", he explains. "In Austria and Spain, this is only possible after ten years." Another example: whereas the application procedure in Hungary is free, it costs more than €800 per person in the Netherlands.

"Policies differ not only between but also within countries, depending on who is in power", Vink continues. "Traditionally, parties on the right of the



political spectrum regard the acquisition of citizenship as a reward for successfully completing the integration process. Leftist parties view it as an incentive to reach this goal. What they have in common is that their ideas about the relationship between naturalisation and integration are based on political assumptions instead of academic research." This is partly due to a lack of research investigating the specific nature of this relationship – a gap Vink and his team hope to plug with the help of a grant worth nearly €2 million from the European Research Council (ERC). >>



Prestigious

“Intellectual freedom – that’s what this grant means to me. The ERC has the most prestigious funding scheme in Europe, a Valhalla for researchers. It gives me the opportunity to hire PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers to do comparative research in six European and two North American countries. Our aim is to really get to the core of the relationship between naturalisation and integration.”

The decision to pursue naturalisation is influenced by many factors: an immigrant’s country of origin, marital status, family situation, educational background and length of stay in the host country. The problem is that these factors may also influence why some immigrants are more or less integrated. It is, in short, difficult to determine what causes what. “Previous research has focused almost entirely on this question of causality and the methodological means to investigate it”, Vink says. While this remains central to his research project Migrant Life Course and Legal Status Transition (MiLife-Status), the project adds a new theoretical angle.

“What citizenship means for the life of an immigrant depends on who you are. Obtaining a Dutch passport has different implications for a Somali mother than for a German businessman. We ask under which conditions

naturalisation could help individual immigrants to integrate, by investigating why, how and for whom legal status transitions matter. And how variation in policies between countries affects this relationship.”

Groundbreaking

This calls for an innovative approach known as the life course perspective. Using big data from central population registers and longitudinal surveys, Vink and his team are able to monitor the life course of individual immigrants over a long period of time. The fact that they are doing so in eight countries – the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, Canada, and four Scandinavian countries – adds to the groundbreaking character of the project.

Early results by Vink and colleagues Floris Peters and Hans Schmeets show that naturalisation improves the chances of finding paid employment particularly for immigrants from non-Western, unstable countries who naturalise after five years of residence. If they naturalise later, their chances drop. In other words: the timing of naturalisation matters. Seen in this light, increasing the minimum residence requirement to seven years hardly seems like a good idea.

“I’m not saying that obtaining a passport will solve each and every problem in an immigrant’s life”, Vink says. “But it does give you a secure residence status, as well as certain rights and opportunities to participate in society. What’s more, it encourages a sense of belonging. When properly timed, immigrants can get the most out of it, which is beneficial for them and for society as a whole. Of course I hope that politicians and policymakers will take our findings into account. This topic is too important to leave up to opinions; we need facts.” <<

Read more about Maarten Vink’s research project MiLifeStatus at www.milifestatus.com.



APSA Best Chapter Award for Floris Peters and Maarten Vink

The migration and citizenship section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) has awarded the 2016 Best Chapter Award to Floris Peters and Maarten Vink. Their chapter, titled ‘Naturalization and the socio-economic integration of immigrants: A life-course perspective’, was published in the Handbook on Migration and Social Policy, edited by G.P. Freeman and N. Mirilovic (Edward Elgar, 2016).

In the chapter, the authors discuss the literature on immigrant naturalisation and its associated outcomes, and identify substantial empirical ambiguity. The chapter then develops a novel theoretical approach that draws on the sociological life course paradigm, which provides a useful starting point to explain heterogeneous findings in the literature. The chapter received the award for its valuable contribution to the migration and citizenship literature.

A paper published in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies in 2016 by Peters and Vink, co-authored with Hans Schmeets, also received an honourable mention for the Best Article Award by a different committee of the APSA migration and citizenship section.

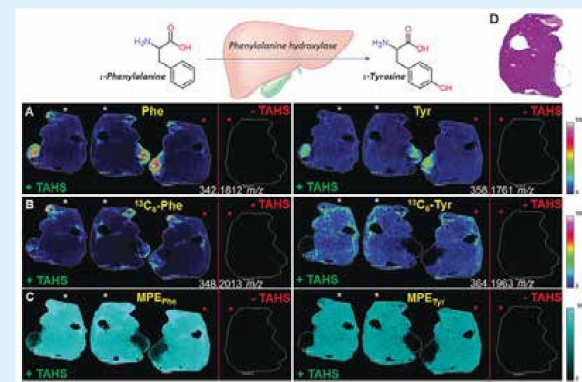
Peters is currently completing his PhD dissertation on immigrant naturalisation and socioeconomic integration. Vink directs the ERC-funded project Migrant Life Course and Legal Status Transitions. (see page 24 for an interview). <<

“We are creating the Google Maps of tissue”

Using mass spectrometry imaging (MSI), researchers at UM recently succeeded in visualising dynamic metabolic changes through amino acid conversion in the liver. This is the first time scientists have been able to identify the dynamics of biochemical processes in human tissue. The research team – headed by Zita Soons and Martijn Arts under the supervision of Ron Heeren (M41) and Steven Olde Damink (Surgery) –

published their findings in the international edition of the prestigious German journal *Angewandte Chemie*.

MSI is a technique used to create a molecular map of living tissue in a single image. Researchers use it to determine the precise location of certain molecules and how they are influenced by diseases. “In a sense, we’re creating the Google Maps of tissue”, says Arts. “What makes our research so special is that we’ve developed a method that allows us to visualise molecular changes as they are happening and pinpoint their exact location. In the future, this will allow us to determine things like how tumour tissue behaves in a patient. This information is important for making diagnoses, but potentially also prognoses.” <<



Six Vidi grants and five Veni grants for talented UM researchers

The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) awarded Vidi grants, each worth €800,000, to six experienced Maastricht researchers: Prof. Pamela Habibovic (FHML/MERLN), Dr Joost Lumens (FHML), Dr Ann Meulders (FPN), Dr Benedikt Poser (FPN), Dr Vera Schrauwen-Hinderling (FHML) and Dr Stephan Smeekes (SBE). The grants will enable them to set up their own research groups and develop innovative lines of research over the course of five years. The NWO awards Vidi grants every year. A total of 590 researchers

submitted a research proposal in this funding round, 89 of whom were awarded grants.

Further, five young UM researchers received Veni grants from the NWO worth up to €250,000 each. Lars Hausfeld and Lotte Lemmens from the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience and Lucas Lindeboom, Veerle Melotte and Paul Wieringa, all from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, are now set to develop their research agendas over the next three years. Of the 1,127 applications, 154 were selected for funding (a success rate of 14%). <<



Maarten Vink (1975) studied Political Science in Leiden, where he obtained his PhD in 2003. He currently holds the Chair of Political Science with a focus on Political Sociology at Maastricht University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He is co-director of the Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) and the Global Citizenship Observatory (GLOBALCIT).