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Is citizenship worth it? Naturalisation attitudes among Swiss migrants to Germany and German migrants to Switzerland

Abstract:

Citizenship and naturalization seem to play vital roles in the integration and social inclusion of migrants within host societies. This paper aims to investigate the factors influencing the decision-making process of acquiring citizenship among Swiss migrants in Germany and Germans in Switzerland. A majority of participants in this study opt not to pursue citizenship despite being eligible. While political participation, representation, and a sense of belonging are relevant, they do not drive the desire to become citizens. The benefits of citizenship are pragmatically and individually evaluated and weighed against the costs, leading only a few to pursue naturalisation. This study offers valuable insights into the motivations and barriers that shape highly-skilled lifestyle migrants' decisions and contributes to a deeper understanding of citizenship acquisition dynamics in cross-border migration within Europe.

Tags: citizenship, naturalisation, intra-European migration, Switzerland, Germany

Introduction

In recent years, the naturalisation of intra-EU migrants has increased, drawing more attention to the phenomenon (Alarian 2017; Dimitriadis and Quassoli 2022; Graeber 2016; Koikkalainen 2019). As the formal recognition of an individual's belonging, citizenship¹ is not only a legal construct but also a social and psychological identity, influencing an individual's access to rights, services, and opportunities (Bauböck 2006, p. 32).

This study aims to explore the citizenship choices of two groups of migrants: Swiss nationals living in Germany and Germans residing in Switzerland, focusing on the motivations and barriers to citizenship in two wealthy Western European countries. Both groups mostly represent highly skilled lifestyle migrants to a geographically and culturally close country.

Within this context, the European Union (EU) has played a significant role by facilitating the movement of its citizens across member states and providing certain rights and privileges associated with EU citizenship (Cygan and Szyszczak 2006). Switzerland, through bilateral treaties with the EU, participates in the free movement of persons without being an EU member, which creates a unique legal framework. By comparing the experiences of Swiss migrants in Germany and Germans in Switzerland, we can gain insights into how EU citizenship affects the naturalisation decision-making process.

Motivations for acquiring citizenship are multifaceted and influenced by a range of factors. Economic considerations, such as increased employment opportunities, access to welfare benefits, and improved labour market conditions, which are often considered important drivers for migrants to seek citizenship, becomes less relevant within the EU context. Rather, political and social factors, including the desire for political participation, representation, and a sense of belonging, are productive reasons in the decision-making process (Dimitriadis and Quassoli 2022, pp. 1142–1143).

Understanding the barriers to citizenship acquisition is equally important. Factors such as lengthy and complex naturalization procedures and the cost associated with the process can function as deterrents for migrants considering citizenship (Waldrauch 2006, S. 135–159). Language proficiency requirements are of no concern; however, perceived discrimination and self-image are relevant factors impacting participants decisions.

¹ Citizenship and nationality can be synonymous, however, there are slight connotations of citizenship as civic and nationality as ethnic belonging, which will be considered in this paper.

I will first introduce my methodological approach and the sample of my research before diving into the conceptualisation of belonging and identity as well as citizenship and naturalisation. In the following two sections, I analyse participants rationale for or against naturalisation. The underlying understanding of citizenship quickly becomes apparent in their approach to naturalisation and how it relates to their own identity. The first section covers civic arguments, while the second follows national-cultural reasonings. Before concluding, I cover modes of belonging outside of national conceptions that contradict or expand on a sense of national belonging.

Methodology

For my research, I used qualitative interviews and participant observation. To capture people's lifeworld in its diversity, but at the same time find general statements on specific topics, semi-structured qualitative interviews with open-ended questions are the focus of the study. Additionally, I accompanied the Swiss association and some of its members in Hamburg, Germany over a period of four years from 2019 to 2023. My research in Switzerland took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that long-term observation and participation had to take place mostly online. To substitute, I conducted a discourse analysis (Foucault and Konersmann 2017) about Germans in Switzerland.

For my research, I was looking for Swiss and German migrants to the neighbouring country representing a diverse demographic. Since understandings of citizenship often overlap with belonging and identity (Maier 2021, p. 6–7), socialisation in Germany or Switzerland and one's own conscious decision to migrate were my actual criteria. This includes people with a migration background or dual citizenship as well as those who distance themselves from categories of citizenship and nationality.

In total, 68 people participated in my study: 35 Germans, 32 Swiss and one German returnee. In terms of gender, age, and duration of stay, both groups are close to the whole German and Swiss migrant population in the neighbouring country. People of working age (25-64) who migrated in their early career stages (20-40) and who have lived in the country of destination for about ten years make up the average Swiss and German migrant (OECD 2015; Federal Statistical Office 2023).

The majority migrated for professional or economic reasons, ranging from managers seeking new challenges, academic researchers working towards a professorship, creatives looking for a way to follow their dreams, to artisans with no prospects. Love and other relationship motives came a close second. In general, my participants represent lifestyle migrants: relatively affluent migrants in search

of a better quality-of-life, however that might individually look like (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, p. 609–610).

Swiss and German migrants are often assumed to be highly-skilled, even though there is no universally agreed upon definition of the term (Mahroum, 2000, p. 24). Within the OECD, tertiary education and jobs that require tertiary education are mostly considered highly-skilled (OECD 2015, p. 78). All participants in my research are considered skilled workers, either trained in a craft or having completed (or started) their tertiary education. 25 German and 18 Swiss participants obtained tertiary education; my sample overall represents a privileged group of highly-skilled migrants.

Almost all participants hold sole citizenship of their home country, although just over half would meet the requirements for naturalisation. Of the 68 participants, six hold dual citizenship (CH: 2 / DE: 4). Those six have lived in the destination country for more than 15 years, the longest being 50 years.

There are three exceptions: the first is a German returnee holding dual Swiss-German citizenship. Another German-born participant naturalised in Switzerland in his twenties and moved back after retirement as a sole Swiss Citizen. The last was born in Germany and has Swiss citizenship only. When the latter two acquired Swiss citizenship, dual citizenship was prohibited by the German government.

Belonging transnationally

„Migrating transnationally, however, is generally seen as one of the most dramatic identity alterations in the consistent fluctuation of ‘home’ and personal identity“ (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002, p. 132).

Belonging, as a basic human need, is a core concept when considering social affiliation and inclusion. Baumeister and Leary (1995) define it as the need to form meaningful bonds with others and to be accepted as a valued member of a community or group. This is often accompanied by a shared identity within the group, which may be based on cultural background, religion, nationality, or personal interests. For migrants, the process of belonging often goes hand in hand with acculturation, in the sense of adapting to the culture of the destination country while maintaining one's own socialisation (Jetten et al. 2012; Berry 1997). Earlier approaches to identity in the context of integration and assimilation emphasized ideas of migration as „*boundary crossing*“ (Alba 2008, p. 41). Thereby, migrants discard the identity of their homeland and create belonging to the destination country through assimilation. Transnational studies, however, emphasize the concept of „*boundary blurring*“ (Alba 2008, p. 41), where migrants remain part of the culture of their home country while at the same time integrating into the destination country. Migrants may still feel connected to both worlds without the need to decide between either country. *„In a free, peaceful, and democratic world*

it is possible to have two or even three overlapping national identities. [...] Double identity, double citizenship need not lead to split personalities, to tensions at the individual or the community level“ (Hieronymi 2008, pp. 17–18). The possibility leaves room for migrants to (re-)negotiate their belonging and identity in a dynamic way and to adapt it to changing environments.

Cervin (1953) points out that inclusion and exclusion in Switzerland is closely related to local communities and temporality: *„The Swiss themselves jokingly say that one must be a xenophobe to be a good Swiss. This may be true if we understand by the term ‘foreigners’ not only the non-Swiss but also the Swiss from a neighboring community, or even people whose ancestors settled in the community later than the speaker’s”* (Cervin 1953, p. 271). Thus – even though the focus of this article is on national belonging – it is important not to reduce such mechanisms of belonging and exclusion to the national level, but to also consider transnational, local, and non-territorial affiliations (Charmillot and Dahinden 2021, p. 2). Belonging cannot be seen in a static and essentialising way; situational, multiple, and lived belongings are much more dominant (Malkki 1992, p. 36).

The same applies to identity: even outside migration, people always identify as part of diverse groups, which can never be seen as a singular identity: gender, origin, profession, class, interests, and preferences interact with nationality (Sen 2020, pp. 20–22). In addition, there is a difference between self-perception and the perception by others, which do not always have to coincide. Even if the perception of others defines a certain identity, people can decide for themselves how important this aspect is for their self-perception.

However, this dynamic is dependent on a society where self-image and external perception are compatible. In countries where multinationalism is forbidden, officially being part of two countries remains impossible. The same applies on an informal level, when identity politics reinforce the division of a community into belonging people and undesirable elements: *“In the post-modern performance game between places, others are welcome, but some others are more welcome than other others”* (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002, p. 129). Consequently, agency is possible but limited, especially in the realm of external perception and national belonging.

Being and becoming a citizen

„Since [citizenship] can mean so many different things, it can be appropriated and put to work by a large diversity of agents and projects“ (Clarke et al. 2014, p. 16)

In Germany, there is often talk of a *Leitkultur*, meaning the dominant culture into which foreigners should assimilate or integrate. The discourse in Switzerland is similar. What this culture entails is a matter of controversy and depends on one's own world view. From a fundamental commitment to

law and order to a common socialisation and way of thinking, different ideas prevail (Maier 2021, p. 6). This also includes different rights and obligations for citizens and requirements for immigrants. In this article, participants view and understanding as citizens lies at the centre, which can differ significantly from the state's ideas.

Maier (2021, p. 14) identifies four different understandings of citizenship in Germany: critical ethno-culturalists, active democrats, liberal democrats, and cosmopolitans. The former see German culture as the basis of citizenship, which means that migrants should assimilate. They are sceptical about new immigration and the state, and do not feel connected to people in and from other countries. For active democrats, democracy is central; they welcome the participation of all residents regardless of status and are open to new immigration. Liberal democrats, like active democrats, trust and rely on the state, but do not believe that new immigrants belong directly to society. They increasingly emphasise the duties of citizens rather than their participation, placing responsibility on the individual. Cosmopolitans see themselves as citizens of the world and have correspondingly weak ties to the nation state and any national concepts such as national pride or a guiding culture. However, they may feel a sense of local belonging (Maier 2021, pp. 13–14).

In all four of these concepts, citizenship does not refer only to a legal status: *“Something shared between citizens is attached to all perspectives, be it through thick conceptions of shared ancestry, active participation, thin conceptions of shared institutions, or humanist connection”* (Maier 2021, p. 16). Ethno-culturalists see assimilation as the basis for migrants' belonging, active democrats invite immigrants to actively participate in society: the latter are also likely to feel they belong more quickly abroad. This is crucial in the discussion of naturalisation, which I will briefly discuss now.

There are two relevant types of transmission or granting of citizenship: citizenship through birth or naturalisation. Naturalisation remains the only way for first generation migrants to become citizens of their destination country. In Switzerland, it is a three-tier process - at municipal, cantonal and national level - with the municipal level being decisive in the inclusion or exclusion of potential new citizens. The lack of objective criteria and the emphasis on assimilation as a prerequisite for naturalisation made the system difficult for migrants to understand (Achermann and Gass 2004, p. 39). On national level, prerequisites are a stay of ten years (five for spouses or registered civil partners of Swiss citizens), integration into Swiss society, a commitment to the rule of law and financial security. In Germany, foreigners can apply for citizenship after eight years (facilitated: 3 years). The conditions are similar to Switzerland but more objective. The naturalisation rate in Switzerland is higher than in Germany, even though the Swiss system is considered stricter. In 2018 and 2019, 2.1% and 2% of the total population acquired Swiss citizenship. In Germany, the proportion was 1.1 and 1.2% respectively (OECD 2021).

Civic rationale

Nationality for my participants, was often associated with emotionality, while citizenship was seen as a formality. This is also accompanied by the differentiation of cultural integration or political participation as the goal of naturalisation. The former corresponds to a cultural understanding of citizenship (ethno-culturalists), while the latter goes hand in hand with civic categorisations (active and liberal democrats, cosmopolitans). Corresponding resistance to naturalisation is also justified in these categories (Maier 2021, pp. 2–3).

A ban on multinationalism is one of the biggest obstacles to naturalisation: Most participants would rule it out if it meant losing their own citizenship. *"For a long time, Germany did not allow a second passport. It would have been possible in Switzerland. I would have applied for the German one if I could have kept the Swiss one"* (Ursula, f/65, CH). For long-term residents, this was a major hurdle. At a later stage, Ursula could have applied for German citizenship, but by then she had accepted her status. Today, this is more so a rhetoric: dual citizenship is allowed if Germans are naturalised in another EU-state or Switzerland (Federal Office of Administration 2014).

In most cases, participants' reasons for or against naturalisation are multifaceted. I will first focus on civic or political factors before diving into ethno-cultural explanations. Civic or political arguments for or against naturalisation are political participation, social security, which also keeps option open in both countries, as well as external representation.

Political participation is mainly understood as a right to vote, which becomes important to politically active participants or those who plan their future in the destination country: *„I want citizenship at some point, because we got married and I'm already planning to stay here. And if I stay here, then I would also like to have a say at some point. At the moment, I vote in Germany, in a country where I no longer live "* (Maja, f/37, DE)². In terms of political participation, Switzerland scores highly with its direct democracy, as referendums mean that decisions in which the people have a say are made more frequently.

For Swiss participants, political participation is correspondingly a less weighty argument: *"In Germany, I get to vote once every four years and then I'm one of 50-60 million, or how many eligible voters there are"* (Ursula, f/65, CH). German citizenship now comes in the form of an EU passport, which opens access to another level of politics. For Romina, this higher body is more relevant: *"The other day was the European election, so I thought, yes, I can't vote. That would actually be the logical*

² Participants have been pseudonymised. The following info is given: (pseudonym, gender/age, citizenship of home country/eventual citizenship of destination country)

consequence, that you get involved and at least vote for the parties where you have the feeling that they do what you think is good" (Romina, f/38, CH). Swiss abroad are mostly interested and engaged in European politics but do not have the right to vote in EU-elections. On the contrary, for participants who do not exercise their political rights or prefer to do so in their home country, political participation is not an argument for naturalisation.

Social security includes seamless access to both countries but also security and stability in emergencies. Ida's case illustrates the pragmatism with which citizenship is often viewed: Ida and her family are German citizens. Ida is not opposed to Swiss citizenship in principle, but it has never been a priority. Now, her eldest daughter is eighteen and wants to study in Germany. Suddenly, the question of citizenship has taken on new relevance: Can the daughter return to Switzerland after her studies without citizenship? Ida believes her daughter could only return if she found a job. Indeed, the right of residence may expire after a longer stay abroad: both in Switzerland and in Germany, the right of residence expires after six months, unless prior arrangements or applications have been made (Germany: § 51 Abs. 1 Nr. 6 and 7 AufenthG / Switzerland: Art. 61 Abs. 2 AIG).

The settlement permit can be extended by up to four years, but it still does not offer the security of citizenship in the event of longer studies or other problems. Citizenship keeps Ida's daughter's options open regarding the labour market in both countries: *"Certain professions that are recognised here, let's say health professionals, are extremely poorly paid in Germany, have a very bad image, and in principle you can't support a family with them [...]. But here it is a completely normal profession for girls"* (Ida, f/50, DE).

Social security also concerns future political developments: Switzerland is not part of the EU and may be excluded in certain areas. At the same time, an EU passport for Swiss participants is helpful for future mobility within the EU. Security refers more to negative future scenarios. The Covid-19 pandemic and the short-term border closures made many participants aware of the borders between countries that were previously invisible. *"It was quite frightening with this whole Corona closure. You never know what can suddenly happen somehow"* (Oskar, m/41, DE). They were reminded that due to future pandemics but also due to political developments, borders could be closed again in the future, which would limit their seamless mobility. Dual citizenship allows for more or basic mobility in these situations. Even before the war in Ukraine, violent conflicts were conceivable prospects for the future. In these scenarios, Switzerland was usually considered a safe country because of its neutrality. Germany was considered less secure because of its history but also because of its political significance. Accordingly, Swiss participants were satisfied with Swiss citizenship, whereas it was an, admittedly, weak argument for naturalisation for German participants. In general, seamless access to

home and destination country are particularly important to people that are very mobile and closely connected to both countries.

The more important aspect of security is protection in the event of illness, financial hardship, unemployment, or incapacity to work. Germans who have lived and worked in Switzerland for more than five years can obtain a C settlement permit, which gives them the same rights as Swiss nationals - except for the right to vote (State Secretariat for Migration SEM 2021). However, the law states that a settlement permit may be revoked if *"the foreign national or a person they must care for is dependent permanently and to a large extent on social assistance"* (Foreign Nationals and Integration Act, Art. 63, Nr. 1 c). Although the duration of residence and other circumstances are considered, the fact that such a passage is anchored in the law creates uncertainty. For participants who want to build a future in Switzerland, this clause provides a reason for naturalisation. In Germany, there is no corresponding paragraph stating that indigence can lead to the revocation of a permanent residence permit (§ 51 AufenthG). Accordingly, indigence is not mentioned as a reason to accept German citizenship.

Lastly, there is the argument of representation: Michael has held German citizenship since 2013 and sees this primarily as a signal to the outside world. He wants to show his neighbours, as well as his private and social environment, that he feels a part of Germany and intends to stay in Hamburg in the future. To present himself as German feels *"completely correct and coherent"* (Michael, m/62, CH/DE), especially when he appears at international conferences as a professor from a German University. It is not a matter of an emotional connection, but a rational decision that allows him to take a stand.

For Eric, too, citizenship is partly a signal to the outside world: as the owner of a restaurant in a small town, it does not hurt to be Swiss. More so, however, it provides security for himself, his family as well as his business. He initially took Swiss citizenship after he heard that criminal foreign nationals could be expelled, strengthening his reason for security in the unlikely event something were to happen.

Eric's example shows that there is oftentimes more than one singular reason for naturalisation. Participants weigh up previously mentioned aspects and compare the benefits with the costs incurred. The advantages of dual citizenship are the right to vote, freedom of movement, maintenance of the right of residence during stays abroad as well as representation. For German participants, the security of staying in the country in case of prolonged neediness was added as a reason for naturalisation.

In addition to money, the effort involved in obtaining information and in the naturalisation process also plays a role. „I refuse as long as it costs me money. They want 3,500 francs here so that I can get a Swiss passport, and that's not going to happen“ (Henning, m/53, DE). The cost of naturalisation in Switzerland depends on the place and canton of residence and can range from CHF 800 to CHF 3,600 (Surber 2022). In both countries, the process is highly bureaucratic and takes one to two years. For Alice, political participation is an important reason to apply for German citizenship. Still, minor and mundane hurdles keep her from applying: *"Now I was just too lazy to do it. I would have to go to the office, I would have to do all that and I would have to take an exam and of course you have to study for it. You have to know certain key points. I would just have to get on with it, it's just an act of doing - and I want to do it because otherwise I'll have to apply for my residence permit again soon and then I'll have to take two days off again"* (Alice, f/59, CH). Only when her residence permit expires Alice found enough motivation to consider naturalisation again. In the end, most participants did not find enough reason for naturalisation: *"I don't know if such an EU passport is really such a big advantage"* (Sonja, f/55, CH).

For participants who are working in the destination country as sought-after professionals and who cannot imagine a long-term future in the country, naturalisation offers little benefit. For participants with plans in the destination country and an active political interest, the opportunity to help shape the country at the political level becomes important. For the latter, a purely pragmatic view is mixed with an emotional attachment: those who want to stay long-term and help shape the country are also likely to be emotionally invested.

Even though there are significant differences in identity and identity formation between German and Swiss participants, the narratives regarding naturalisation or the change of national identity are remarkably similar when considering political or civic reasons. Rational reasons come to the fore in both directions. Leimgruber (2016, p. 36) found that most Swiss abroad regard citizenship as a pragmatic matter. While they are proud to be Swiss and would not want to lose that citizenship, they will take on another if it benefits them. In my study, the same was applicable to Germans. At the end of the day, however, the benefits do not seem to outweigh the cost. Part of this stems from the fact that the settlement permits in both countries grant ample security and stability. In summary, naturalisation only provides few benefits in the EU area (Koikkalainen 2019, pp. 11–12)

National-cultural arguments

"Because you can't pretend. I think even if you live in China, you'll never be Chinese, right?" (Joel, m/38, CH).

In principle, citizenship has no meaning in terms of perceived belonging, i.e. naturalisation does not simply erase a person's previous national identity. Similarly, naturalisation does not automatically entail an emotional attachment (Conte 2002, p. 70). However, this conflation fits with an understanding of citizens as loyal residents of a country: „*Nation-states rely on the illusion of a loyal citizenry whose sense of belonging to the nation is uncomplicated and total*“ (Riggan 2011, p. 134). This link between nationality and belonging is also the origin of most of the arguments in both groups that regard the categories "German" and "Swiss" as natural and given - and therefore unchangeable.

"But I will always be Swiss. This need for security, for punctuality, that's what I have in me and that's what I like about these qualities, with which I do well and get on well with other people" (Joel, m/38, CH). Joel emphasised that he was different from the Swiss, that he was more open to new things and other people, less local and fundamentally more future-oriented. Similar differentiations can be found among Swiss emigrants in China and Scandinavia: „*Even though they refer to themselves as Swiss, they don't see themselves as the 'average person' back in Switzerland, who, according to them, lacks their own adventurous, energetic and entrepreneurial spirit as much as sophistication and openmindedness*“ (Camenisch and Müller 2019, p. 28). Nevertheless, Joel absolutely feels Swiss; he was born and raised in Switzerland and is Swiss at heart - represented by the core characteristics of the need for security and punctuality. His statement shows little possibility of future change.

In Maja's case, the possibility of change is at least hinted at, even if the fact that she is German will not change: *"I am indeed German, and I will always be German. I mean, there are simply 30 years of basic imprinting in there. I'll never get rid of that, and I'll never say, no, I'm not German, I'm Swiss. No, I'm not, I'm German and I may start to become Swiss now or I will do so little by little"* (Maja, f/37, DE). Maja's argumentation is based on her socialisation. She was born and raised as a German in Germany; therefore, she is and remains German. However, there remains the possibility that a Swiss identity may co-exist in addition to the German one.

When Stefan became a Swiss citizen, he noticed that the external perception of him did not change: *"How did the reputation of me change within Switzerland, and how did it change when I had the passport. I also thought that was exciting. Then, I was also Swiss on paper with my place of origin in Beinwil am See, and then came the next stage: yes, you are Swiss, but we are Confederates"* (Stefan, m/52, DE/CH). Confederates as a contrast to Swiss are often used in xenophobic discourses: The separation of nationality and citizenship was sometimes used against Stefan to show that he nevertheless does not belong to Switzerland.

Naturalised citizens are sometimes pejoratively referred to as *Papierschweizer*; people who are Swiss only on paper. This is in line with ethno-cultural understandings of citizenship. The distinction can also

be contextualised as a form of boundary making, where Swiss feel threatened by increased German migration to Switzerland and the blurring of the boundary between the two cultures. Small cultural differences lead to insecure cultural categories and a perception of threat, which can result in processes of self-differentiation (Theiler 2004, p. 648). No such threat is felt in Germany, since it is the more populous country and the dominant German-speaking centre.

When considering national categories of belonging, it has become clear that participants often identify strongly with their home country or certain characteristics through their socialisation. Accordingly, participants with a national-cultural understanding of citizenship are reluctant to acquire a second citizenship. Dual citizenship seems more coherent to participants who do not see their belonging as exclusive. Maja clearly sees herself as German in her socialisation, but she has a partner, a child, many friends, and positive experiences in Switzerland – even though she has only lived there for six years. Over time, her closeness to Switzerland will grow, which in her case is already accompanied by a greater feeling of foreignness towards Germany: *"Germany feels more foreign in a way, because I've spent so much time going back and forth and especially a lot of my free time here"* (Maja, f/37, DE). At some point, Swiss citizenship would be a natural development that goes hand in hand with a shift in the centre of her life.

This was also evident in the case of Klara and Frederike, who have spent most of their lives in the destination country and have started families there. Both plan their future in the destination country, which is directly linked to their family and grandchildren. Strong commitment and a sense of belonging are influential reasons for naturalisation. On the other hand, there are participants who, despite a strong sense of belonging, do not want to express their belonging through formal citizenship. In this last section, I will thus discuss alternatives to national belonging.

Alternatives to national belonging

"I have partly developed a local patriotism, of course. When you're somewhere and someone says 'oh, you Bernese, you're slow', I say 'no, it has nothing to do with slow. You're just a bit stressed, Bernese people just take their time'" (Sarah, f/40, DE).

The fact that Bernese people are slow is a well-known stereotype within Switzerland. Sarah's perspective shows that she feels attacked by proxy and defends the Bernese. After 13 years of residence, Sarah sees herself explicitly as Bernese. At the same time, she is recognised from the outside as part of the group, as the statements sometimes refer to Sarah. Sarah's regional affiliation is also clear in her language. She speaks Bernese German, although occasionally a word from other dialects or High German sneaks in.

Regionality and locality are also important aspects of Sarah's everyday life. She buys local produce from the farmer and visits her local corner shop. She keeps up with local and regional news and follows what is happening in the city through local apps and Facebook groups. Germany is relevant to her in that she follows general news and receives updates from old friends. However, her focus is on her home in Bern and Switzerland.

As a child of migrants, Sarah does not feel national belonging anywhere. Naturalisation in Switzerland would not be a sign of emotional belonging, but an opportunity to have a say in her new home country. Sarah's acculturation on the level of language and consumption are two aspects of a holistic and natural change, as she shows little resistance to them. Sarah has learned from her parents to integrate and assimilate, which goes hand in hand with an ethno-culturalist attitude (Maier 2021, pp. 13–14). In Sarah's case, however, this adaptation and the resulting affiliation does not take place at the national level.

For other participants, acculturation takes place to a lesser extent, as it is not a prerequisite for regional affiliation. This is the case for active democrats, for whom participation is more important than cultural integration. *"How can I contribute to creating open spaces and getting involved?"* (Romina, f/38, CH). Getting involved is an important aspect that is often negotiated exclusively at the national level. However, there are various ways to participate at the local or municipal level that are not limited to political engagement: *"Well, I can't vote, but I'm socially involved in other ways, where it doesn't matter whether I'm a naturalised citizen or not"* (Jette, f/56, DE). Jette noticed deficits in her place of residence that she could actively contribute to improving. She noticed that many older people were not financially well off, so she offered medical-cosmetic treatments to older or sick people at a lower price in her beauty salon. On the other hand, she concretely sought contact with the mayor to promote her place of residence as a liveable and economic location. Among other things, they developed bonus cards for local shops and organised a Christmas lighting for the city centre. The need to help shape one's own community or district is often linked to a felt sense of belonging to these places. Through local civic engagement and other unofficial practices, Jette acted like a stakeholder citizen (Koikkalainen 2019, p. 12) even without citizenship.

In the case of regionality, identity and belong do not seem exclusive. Different regional identities and belongings can overlap or manifest themselves in distinct aspects. Laila illustrates this very well: *"I call myself a Ber(li)nerin"* (Laila, f/29, CH). She sees herself as belonging to both Berne and Berlin. Having grown up in the canton of Berne and living in Berne for many years, she sees herself as a Bernese at heart. However, she also feels at home in Berlin: *"I feel very comfortable here. I think everyone can feel welcome here, in Berlin, because it's a cosmopolitan city: it belongs to everyone"* (ibid.). Berlin as an open and diverse cosmopolitan city makes it easier for participants to feel like

they belong. Berlin does not demand conformity; everyone is allowed to exist as they are and thereby be a part of the city.

This understanding also fits cosmopolitans, who have a complex and dynamic identity, are open to different cultures and are often highly mobile. They are interested in international affairs and show a high degree of tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences. However, they may also have a strong need for rootedness and connection to the local community. A strong local identity can also help to facilitate integration into the local community and bridge diverse cultures (Maier 2021, p. 14).

"I think at some point it doesn't matter where exactly you live. [...] We are here on the European continent" (Alice, f/59, CH). In this statement, Alice refers to Europe, but her concerns show that she is talking about global interdependence: *"I worry globally"* (ibid.). For Alice, the current focus should be on social and environmental problems that can only be meaningfully addressed as global problems. Accordingly, a solitary attitude that ignores the problems of one's neighbours is not helpful.

Consequently, however, she would like to become a naturalised German citizen so that she can actively participate in politics – not because she identifies as German. As a person and citizen of the world, she wants to solve the world's problems, which she can do as an individual by getting involved in her town and country of residence.

Some participants do not feel that they belong anywhere specifically, while others reject concepts of belonging based on national borders. Regional belonging is easier to achieve for many participants, partly because it is linked to places, people and actions that can be concretely grasped and experienced. An overarching national belonging is too often associated with abstract concepts and one's own socialisation. Regional belonging, on the other hand, seems to be more mutable or multiple and does not per se contradict conceptions at other levels.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations and barriers that shape the decision-making process of acquiring citizenship among Swiss and German migrants. Both groups of participants found similar reasoning in why or rather why not citizenship was important for their own identity or feeling of belonging.

Reasons for naturalisation are pragmatic and follow along the line of political or rational arguments. Concrete benefits such as voting rights, the security to remain in the country indefinitely and access

to the labour force are weighed against the financial and time costs. For most Swiss and Germans in the neighbouring country, taking up citizenship of their destination country does not seem needed, as it does not provide sufficient benefits compared to permanent settlement permits. The additional mobility and EU voting rights are not a sufficient reason for most Swiss participants to acquire citizenship.

Participant's identity seems more so influenced by their socialisation in the home country; they feel German or Swiss even after long stays in the destination country. Even if participants notice new influences, they never wipe out the original imprint but only complement it. While identity seems an unproductive reason for naturalisation, belonging rather leads to a desire to formally belong to a country. Also included here is a representative function of citizenship to show belonging to external entities. Migrants seek recognition and inclusion in their host society, and acquiring citizenship is seen as a means to achieve this. Citizenship represents a formal acknowledgment of their commitment to the country and provides a sense of identity and connection. However, most long-term residents with close family ties still do not feel the need for formal belonging. Rather, other forms of belonging complement the citizenship of their home country to form a transnational identity.

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