6. General Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I first discuss the value added of approaching the subject of naturalisation from two angles using two different methods. The first section closes with directions for future surveys and a short excursion on the epistemological pitfalls of my research design. In the second section, I summarize main findings and reflect on their implications. I conclude with directions for future research on symbolic boundary negotiation and naturalisation.

6.1 Insights from Mixed Methods

What is the value added of applying two methods to answer my twofold research question? The aim of this research was to understand low naturalisation rates in spite of dwindling legal hurdles. The theory-driven idea was to think of legal and symbolic dimensions of citizenship as intertwined and to understand naturalisation as motivated by legal and symbolic considerations. Certainly both parts of the study illuminate aspects of legal and symbolic membership and their role in naturalisation intentions, but what are the concrete advantages of the mixed methods design?

A major gain of the sequential mixed methods design as applied here is its reflexivity aiming at objectivation of the researcher and at overcoming the dualism of structure and agency (Fries 2009; Robbins 2007; Bourdieu 2004). For once, in-depth interviews objectivate the researcher and his perspective by accounting for the subjects’ perspectives and questioning the results of quantitative analysis. In other words the quantitative constructions can be deconstructed before the abstractions are reconstructed based on qualitative analysis and used to build new typologies. Second, mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods mirrors Bourdieu’s dialogical understanding of interacting social and individual structures. Individuals are influenced by, but at the same time, producers of social structure. While the survey confronts them with structural givens that shape their naturalisation, in-depth interviews focus on minority members’ subjective perceptions of those structures and their involvement in stabilizing or changing them. Put differently, the application of several methods allows for identification of clashing and reinforcing evidence (Bryman 2003). Along these lines, this
chapter shows how the quantitative and the qualitative approach complement each other. The survey had a twofold goal. The first one was to develop an understanding of the general significance of symbolic motives (related to symbolic membership) compared to legal motives (related to legal membership). I aimed to develop an index variable of boundary perception and experienced exclusion based on the survey. However, it proved impossible to summarize the respective items into a single coherent index. Consequentially, the interviews aimed at refining the theoretical understanding of symbolic boundaries. I found respondents to vary in the ways they perceive symbolic exclusion and in the responses they provide. Ethnic minorities’ ‘responses to stigmatization’ in other countries are relevant landmarks for this research. In-depth interviews compared to survey questions account more explicitly for the agency of migrants. Overall, the particular strengths of each method should complement each other leading to better understandings of symbolic boundaries and naturalisation intentions.

Complementary Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The comparison of the quantitative and the qualitative part of my research project yields two major results. First, both elements of the study support the notion that a joined consideration of legal and symbolic motives yields a better understanding of naturalisation intentions than either kind of motives in isolation. Second, the theoretical model I tested in the quantitative analysis is unfit to account for migrants’ responses to stigmatization. Qualitative interviews expose this theoretical shortcoming and provide input for a more fine-grained view of symbolic boundary perception. These interviews are no adequate instrument to check the effects established in multivariate analysis of survey results one by one. Their main purpose was to complement survey findings with a more subjective perspective of migrants. In-depth interviews allow for the interpretation of selected inconsistencies between theoretical predictions and empirical findings in multivariate analysis. Taking into account insights from in-depth interviews, I interpret anew the effects for perceived discrimination, the interaction of feeling at home and perceived discrimination, and the interaction between family effects and age.

Personal vs. Group Discrimination

One curious multivariate finding concerning symbolic aspects of citizenship is that perceived personal discrimination is on average lower than perceived group discrimination ($\bar{x}_{\text{group}} = 2.64$; $\bar{x}_{\text{personal}} = 2.26$), a phenomenon that is well known