

# The World in One City: Immigrant Women Integration in Liverpool

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*Abstract: This exploratory study focuses on immigrant women who have been living in Liverpool since 2001. Its aim is to identify the difference - if any – between a subjective perception of integration of the respondents and the findings derived from an objective evaluation of their integration based on the collected data. The foreign women contacted had arrived from all over the world and the extensive questionnaire addressed a breadth of aspects relating to the individuals and their relation to the host community. The intention of the study is not to examine exclusionary or inclusionary practices at play in Liverpool. A wide variety of texts on immigration/migration was consulted and it was noted that literature has generally neglected the importance of immigrant women's integration into the host society, a gap this study attempts to fill. Purposive sampling, defined as a non-probability sampling procedure was used for the composition of the sample (Saunders et al, 2007). Data were gathered by mean of a questionnaire. The different sections related to demographic information, education, identity, and religion. A number of questions required the knowledge and practice of the local cultural approaches to daily life; in this way, focus was put on the lived experience of the respondents. To avoid bias, responses collected from the questionnaires were evaluated by using a purposely created mathematical tool (see page 6) which facilitated the formulation of an objective measurement of integration. The findings have shown a marked difference between the subjective perception of integration and the objective outcome. It is therefore possible to speculate that immigrant women in Liverpool are generally not integrated within the wider society of the city. Furthermore, the findings have shown that the knowledge of English, the level of education and the length of residence are useful indicators of integration.*

*Keywords: Immigrant Women, Integration, Host Country Language, Length of Residence*

## Introduction

The idea to investigate the perception of integration of immigrant women living in Liverpool has arisen from the fact that the city was nominated the *European Capital of Culture* for the year 2008. Liverpool called itself 'The world in one city' implying that in Liverpool people of different origins live in a cohesive society. It was therefore decided to test whether the feelings of belonging, as advertised by the Liverpool Council, corresponded to the reality derived from an objective evaluation of certain personal aspects of the life of the immigrants (Massey 1981; Jasso et al. 2000).

Immigration is generally associated with men, and when researchers refer to women, they mainly describe them as the wives who have followed the men in their migration (Chistolini 1986; Watts 1983; Simon et al. (1986) and Houstoun et al. (1984, 919) say that women "generally migrate to create or reunite a family" and this is still happening according to Yang et al. (2010). Women's historians and sociologists have mentioned immigrant women predominantly for their role as wives and mothers, for their religiosity, autonomy and self-esteem (Gabaccia 1991; Pedraza 1991; Buijs 1993). Scholars at large have ignored the feelings and attitudes of women in relation to their integration into the host country. The role of women in the family<sup>1</sup> is rather different than men (Tastsoglou et al. 2000). The role of women is generally recognised as fundamental in transmitting religious values to their children and perhaps husbands. For example on 27th October 2010 Pope Benedict XVI recognized "the many women who day after day enlighten their families with their witness of Christian life" (Wooden 2010). Similarly, Muslims stress that the most important aspects a man should look for in a wife is her religion. Al-Bukari states: "So you should take possession of ( i.e. marry) the religious woman otherwise you will be a loser" (quoted in Awad 2010, 92) . Therefore in migrating to another country women's task becomes more demanding because they, unlike the men, may be expected to protect their values and culture from the values and culture of the new environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Although this study is about women in general, the majority of them (79%) were married and with children, hence the references to mothers.

Women are also seen as “the weakest member of society” (Rinaldo Seitz 1995, 57; Abu-Lugod 2008) but in reality the family revolves around mothers; they can be identified as the engine. It has been said, for example, that Asian women in Halifax, United Kingdom, “besides traditional family responsibilities, are also responsible for the retention of ethnic identity within it” (Tastsoglou et al. 2000, 20). Thus, it is very important that immigrant mothers have the same rate of integration as their children. As they grow older children acquire independence and may interact more widely within the new environment than their mothers, perhaps even to an extent their mothers may not approve of (García Coll et al. 2002). When large differences, whether cultural or of values, arise immigrant mothers may face integration stress (Dion et al. 1996). This may be a compelling reason for immigrant women to strive for integration as this will alleviate potential intergenerational clashes within families and will help mothers to avoid conflicts with their children as these children progressively interact with the host society.

An immigrant mother is encouraged to relate to mothers who were born and bred in Liverpool or to immigrants from countries different than hers. These interactions will introduce immigrant women to new cultures and new approaches to navigate their daily life. To this end, immigrant women will have the advantage to choose the preferred way to conduct their lives and the life of their families. When the immigrant woman is not introduced to a new circle of acquaintances within the host society she may see the values of the host society as a threat to her indigenous culture.

Furthermore, mother-children differences in the rate of integration may be distressing also for the children of immigrant mothers; this may manifest negative moods and feelings. Sometimes the low rate of integration is caused by the fact that mothers do not speak the language of the host country, while their children acquire a good command of it. Another problematic communication factor can be that those children may no longer be so fluent in their mother tongue. These differences in turn will create a myriad of conflicting sentiments in the children. It is possible these children of immigrant mothers, who may also experience language barriers with their mothers, will turn their frustrations against the surrounding society (Phinney et al. 2002).

Mehra (1997) and Yuval-Davis (1993) discussed the empowerment of women in their respective papers. However, no literature was found on immigrant women as agents who facilitate the process of integration between their families in the host society. Although not entirely relevant to Liverpool, interesting discussions have been found in relation to Iranian immigrant women in Canada (Sedeghi 2008).

## **Liverpool and Migration**

Liverpool is a centre for immigration and emigration because of its port. During the 18th and 19th centuries Liverpool was one of the world's most important trading centres. Although its controversial role in slavery trade was brought to a halt in 1807, for the rest of the 19th century the general trade continued to grow to the East as well as the West. About 40% of the world's trade passed through Liverpool's docks which contributed to Liverpool's continued reputation as a major port city with a colourful cultural mix. Because of its links to the rest of the world, the movement of people into and out of the city had occurred even before the great period of migration in the middle of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. People have been coming to Liverpool not just from different regions of the U.K. (the Irish<sup>2</sup>, the Scottish, the Welsh), but also from far away countries such as China, the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean (Belchem 2000; Haggerty et al. 2008). As a result community relations in Liverpool are multi-layered and complex (Kennedy et al. 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> The 1851 census confirms that the Irish community (85,000) accounted for almost one fifth of Liverpool's population.

## Terms Used in this Study

### *Perception*

The term stands for a mental process of how an individual sees his internal and external world. The perception of the external world begins with an individual's senses which leads him or her to generate empirical symbols and concepts of the surrounding world.

A major issue in the philosophy of perception is the possibility that the individual's impression is different from the real external world. Descartes optimistically finds a positive answer to the question 'do I exist?' by stating 'cogito ergo sum', However, Freudian philosophy suggests that self-perception is an illusion of the ego and therefore cannot be used to decide what the reality is (Smith 1989).

Mead, who may be considered the father of symbolic interaction, defines objective and subjective as follows: "...perspectives have objective existence. The obverse of this proposition is that the perspective is not subjective. In other words, there is always a perceptual world that is itself perspective, within which the subjective arises" (Mead 1938, 114).

The logical distinction between the subjective and objective lies within the perspective/perception. The subjective is that experience in the individual which takes the place of the object when the reality of the object, at least in some respects, lies in an uncertain future (Singelmann 1972). What belongs to the individual has the same objective reality as that which belongs to his world.

The relationship, then, between the individual and his/her world is a condition for the appearance of the relationship between the objective and subjective, but it is not coincident with it. The first question that suggests itself with reference to the perspective is how perception appears as such in experience. Perspective is the world in its relationship to the individual and the individual in his/her relationship to the world (Singelmann 1972).

The perception of the external world begins with the human senses, which lead an individual to generate empirical symbols and concepts of the surrounding world (Aronowitz 1992). This fact is a major concern, in the field of the philosophy of perception, as there is a possibility that the perceiver's impression is different from the real external world.

In his seminal work<sup>3</sup> Locke described consciousness as the perception of what passes in a man's own mind. Locke further described the self-perception theory as the analysis of own behaviour in the same way as an outsider who makes judgments based on own observations. The expression *self-perception* was termed by Locke *subjective perception*. This distinction is made in this study so as to avoid the confusion that could be brought about by the overlapping of labels for the various concepts involved.

The main purpose of this research was to identify to what extent personal perception of integration, as seen by individual respondents, corresponds to objective outcome (see methodology section) of their integration established by examining their answers to questions of general behaviour. In order to better detect the differences between the two types of integration a mathematical tool was devised to define the objective integration.

### *Integration*

Integration is the observation of norms and acceptance of values respected by the majority of a particular society. This may relate to secular customs (brides wearing white dresses on their wedding day) as well as religious observances whether material or immaterial (wearing a turban or making the sign of a cross in a particular way). Integration is a cultural phenomenon and can be perceived as aiding cohesion within a given society (Saunders 1986).

A dominant group in any society strives to impose its culture and its way of life on all other groups. The dominant group sees the other groups either as a potential threat or as inferior.

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<sup>3</sup> Original work published 1690 in London, 21st edition, 1959, New York.

Cultural integration is thus used by the dominant group as a tool to impose its values, beliefs and technology which fosters inequality on the 'minorities'. By so doing they force assimilation; (Favell 2001) states that assimilation could lead to conflicts in the community

As with other terms and concepts, there are different interpretations and labels for integration, such as assimilation, incorporation and acculturation. Massey (1981) uses integration and assimilation synonymously. Favell (2001, 314) considers the terms fashionable and he uses them interchangeably. Trevor Phillips, the former Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality in the United Kingdom, views integration as a two-way process and he believes that, as people have to live together in the same space, there is a need to have rules that can be understood and abided by everybody. Although an immigrant, Phillips agrees with the British approach to integration that is based on "our comfort with diversity" and a tradition that values "our individuality and our nation over and above our ethnicity" (Phillips 2004). By "our" he means all the people living in the country which needs to be seen as "our country" by everybody: both the natives and immigrants. To think in this way, people need to be willing to mix with the host society and accept its rules without rejecting their identity, values and culture because then it would be assimilation and not integration. On the other hand, Crowley et al. (2008, 1236) believe integration is not based on "change of attitude" among the local inhabitants but a "change of behaviour and values" among migrants, implying that the new comers are the ones who must change. Phillips' attitude seems to appear much fairer as he suggests a two-way process. In other words both parties in the society need to work together towards the creation of a cohesive society. This will make the host group see 'them' (the out-group) as 'us' (the new interrelated society made of the natives and new comers). The willingness to participate in the host society and follow its rules will help in the transition because as Ogbu (1998) states immigrant groups can be classified into voluntary and involuntary. This classification reflects the circumstances behind the migration; whoever was forced to migrate will not want to integrate.

## **Key Factors Influencing Integration**

When researching the level of integration of immigrants, scholars use a range of common variables. Several fundamental factors contribute to the full integration in the host country. The length of residence, immigration policies, the level of education and proficiency in the host country's language are usually present in studies of integration.

Immigrants need to go through the long process of understanding the culture of the new country, which include: job finding, schooling, relations with neighbours, dealing with health matters, etc. before they may feel integrated. Therefore the length of residence plays a very important role in the process of integration (Garcia 1987; Home Office 2010; Zimmermann et al. 2009). The length of residence is expected to be instrumental in the reaching of fluency in the host country language, that over time is expected to emerge naturally (Kahane 1986).

However, there are other contributing factors that should be taken into consideration, for example the introduction of appropriate integration policies by the host country (Koopmans 2010; Musterd 2005; Lazear 1999). If, as some argue, multicultural policies grant immigrants easy access to equal rights, without seriously supporting or imposing the acquisition of the local language, then interethnic contacts cannot be established. When these elements are combined with a generous welfare state, the outcome is a low level of labour market participation and high levels of segregation (Koopmans 2010). However, this aspect has not been part of the remit addressed in this (or the original) study; the main issue of which was the difference between subjective and objective integration.

The level of education is also important because it is believed that people with greater education would be more open to new habits and cultural changes and therefore education could be a leading factor to full integration. In time, if allowed to exercise their right to vote which is an important right of any citizen's, educated people will also be able to evaluate the host society's political and administrative systems. Education will also give immigrants better chances of accessing the labour world (Garcia 1987). Learning the language of the host country

is considered to be one of the most important instruments in the process of integration (Chiswick et al.1995; Norton 1997; Dustmann 1996). However, where there is a large concentration of minority language speakers, the language of origin is predominant, therefore the learning of the host country's language becomes less attractive and more difficult (Chiswick et al. 1996).

## Conceptual Frame

Following the knowledge claims indicated above, the design process of the study was structured as follows:

1. The research was driven by, and grounded in, extant multi-disciplinary literature and captured the differences in approaches to integration of immigrant women in Liverpool.
2. A questionnaire was prepared to record respondents' perceptions and attitudes.
3. Key variables were defined along with 3 different sets of the target population: 'English', 'UK', 'not English'.
4. The tools used for the analysis were: cross-tabulation and correlation tests, map profiles correspondence testing profile association.
5. Evaluation table scores were used for analysis and discussion.

## Methodology

A post-positivist<sup>4</sup> mixed method has been applied to this research as a pragmatic way of using the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Trochim 2001). The quantitative approach helped to quantify the women's responses, while a qualitative approach was utilised to understand the reasons for the outcome. The principal aim was not to measure the level of perception but to identify whether the respondents' subjective opinions on integration would be confirmed when submitted to a process of objective evaluation

Purposive sampling, defined as a non-probability sampling procedure was used for the composition of the sample (Saunders et al, 2007). Data were collected by means of questionnaires, which included factual and opinion questions. For each closed question a variety of possible options were listed. This was important on two counts: it limited the number of possible answers but it also allowed for a meaningful comparison. Closed questions were chosen because the "question presents a recognition, as opposed to a recall" (Foddy 1993, 128). No face-to-face interviews were conducted to retain anonymity of the respondents. Of the 510 questionnaires that were distributed to women in Liverpool, 223 completed questionnaires were returned.

Most of the questionnaires were distributed through a third party such as persons running various associations, churches, educational establishments, etc. Foreign women frequently seek places where their native language and customs are used and practiced, participating in events organised for them by these associations and groups. Additionally, questionnaires were taken to schools with large numbers of immigrant pupils with the hope of reaching the children's mothers. Finally, data were collected from university tutors of different nationalities, and Irish nurses who were reached through National Health Service's officers.

It was decided to use the Multiple Correspondence Analysis to present the significant aspects of the extensive investigation. The Joint Plot of Category Points, is well suited to allow the identification of correspondences among several variables, it clusters them in association with each other. These clusters reveal thematic areas and consistencies in the data set.

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<sup>4</sup> Post-positivism emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations as well as the need to use triangulation across these multiple sources to get a better understanding of what the reality is (Popper 1959).

## ***Sampling***

Participating women came from a variety of background and this was reflected in the method used for the composition of the sample. Purposive sampling was employed. This is defined as a non-probability sampling procedure in which the judgment of the researcher is used to select the cases that make up the sample, by following the technique in which the chance or probability of each case being selected is not known (Saunders et al. 2007) . The participants were divided into three groups, which were: 'English' (women born and bred in England), 'UK (Irish, Scottish and Welsh)' and 'not English' (immigrants from all over the world). The answers from these groups of respondents were compared in order to seek similarities and differences that eventually revealed their level of integration

The 'English' group was composed of 100 women, 23 women were in the group 'UK (Irish, Scottish and Welsh)' and there were 100 in the 'not English' group. They all had been in Liverpool since at least 2001. The 'English' were the control group because they were expected to be fully integrated.

## ***Measuring Tool***

A measuring tool was created to assess objectively the level of integration of the immigrant women and to eliminate any possible influence of the researcher in this evaluation. Before describing the tool it is important to briefly analyse Section 2 of the questionnaire, named 'integration'; it consisted of 21 questions of which 8 were multiple choices and 12 were close questions. The first question 'how do you consider yourself: fully integrated, partially integrated, not integrated?' was the key question to cross-tabulate, using 'SPSS Statistics'(Statistical Analysis in Social Science) with all the other 20 questions in order to identify factors showing any statistical relevance in the analysis of subjective integration.

The attribution of a variable to all the options offered by the multiple choices questions increased the number of the variables to 38. The preference expressed by the respondents for a particular choice was interpreted as 'yes' while the lack of interest as 'no'. To establish an objective classification of full, partial or no integration of the foreign women it was necessary to define a mathematical approach comparing their answers with those of the control group.

The following procedure was devised and purely for calculation purposes, a value of '5' was assigned to the 'yes' code and a value of '0' to the 'no'. The value of '5' and '0' were not the result of any mathematical calculation but only numbers used to show a meaningful visible numerical difference; in fact any other number, but not both the same, would have been acceptable. After the completion of the conversion, a calculated score of all these new data for each respondent (English included) was obtained and later weighted with SPSS Statistics.

A frequency analysis of the new weighted data was applied and a mean value was obtained for each group. The 'English' and the 'UK (Irish, Scottish and Welsh)' were combined in consideration of the similarity of the mean score of the two independent groups, so the final calculation gave a mean of '73'. The same procedure was followed for the group 'not English' that revealed a mean of '44'. Therefore women showing a score of '73' and above were considered as 'fully integrated', those showing '44' and below were considered 'not integrated' and those who scored between '43' and '72' were considered 'partially integrated'.

A new objective variable was then created with SPSS's values 'fully integrated, partially integrated and not integrated' according to the scores shown above. It was then cross-tabulated with the variable related to the subjective perception: 'fully integrated, partially integrated and not integrated' to compare statistically the subjective perception of integration and the objective results obtained by analysing the answers.

## Findings

Considerable differences between the subjective and the objective integration<sup>5</sup> were found and details are indicated in Chart 1 below.

The most unexpected outcome in this section was the finding concerning the English group. A large number (39%) of the English respondents who had perceived themselves to be fully integrated in 94% of the cases were found, when objectively analysed, to be only partially integrated. This confirms the fact that the majority of the English respondents were objectively ‘integrated’, but at the same time shows that when feelings are objectively analysed through a mathematical approach, it reveals that even among the dominant group there is not total behaviour homogeneity or knowledge of the environment. English women were asked the same questions as the immigrant women and the mathematical process was applied to their answers in the same format. The use of the measurement tool has also enabled the researcher to draw conclusions in an objective way, not through perceptual biases that are based on the views of the observer (Starbruck et al. 1996).

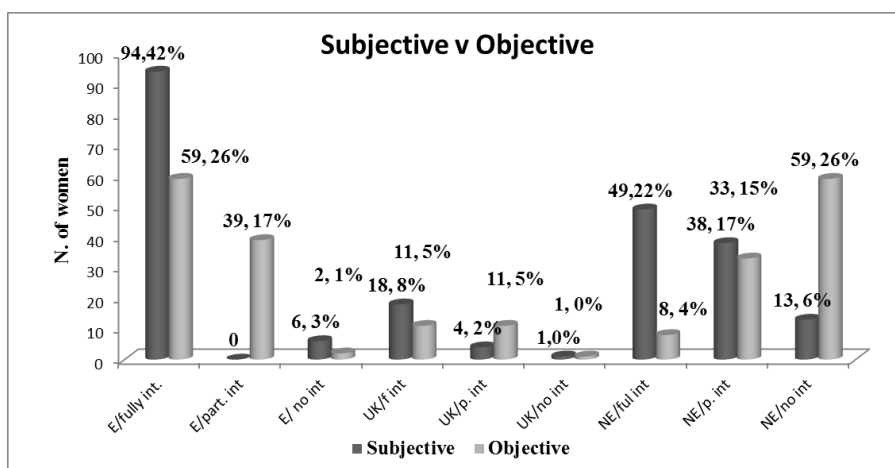


Chart 1: comparison of objective v subjective level of integration of the entire sample

Source: Di Cristo Bertali (2011)

### *Brief Analysis of the Main Factors of Integration.*

#### **Length of Residence**

Chart 2 shows the entire sample of foreign women, by assigned group and length of residence (see horizontal axis) in Liverpool.

Only two respondents had been living in Liverpool for over 60 years. These respondents believed they were ‘fully integrated’ but they were objectively found ‘partially integrated’. This contradicts what the present and other studies had found. The reasons for this finding could be attributed to the age of these women<sup>6</sup> because the questions asked were mainly related to active participation in the community. It is possible that these women were no longer socially engaged and consequently their answers showed partial integration. The majority of the respondents have been living in Liverpool for a period of 10 to 25 years.

<sup>5</sup> See section on ‘Terms used in this study’

<sup>6</sup> The constrain on the number of words has precluded the insertion of a number of details (e.g. country of origin, age, race, ethnicity, identity, etc.) that were the starting point of the wider research (see Di Cristo Bertali 2011).

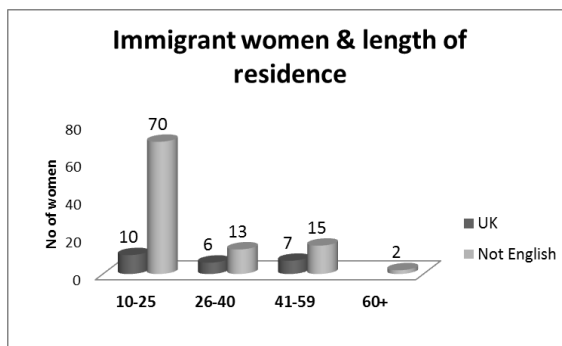


Chart 2: Foreign women and length of residence

Source: Di Cristo Bertali (2011)

The period of residence seems to be one of the strongest indicators of integration. The difference between the subjective and objective level of integration was greatest for women with the shortest period of residence as shown in Chart 3. This may suggest that the longer an individual lives in a city the more likely he/she is to become integrated. However, this research found that this is not the sole factor and other factors need to be taken into consideration before drawing conclusions about the difference between the subjective and the objective level of integration

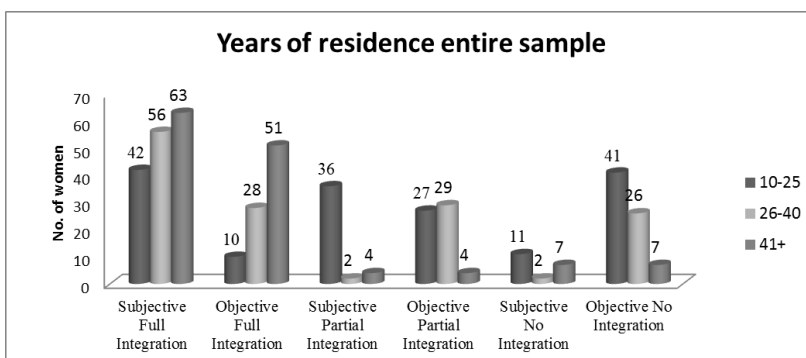


Chart 3: Subjective v objective according to length of residence of the entire sample.

Source: Di Cristo Bertali (2011)

In order to obtain British naturalization immigrants are required to have lived in the country for 5 years. They are also required to have a good command of the English language (level 2), and knowledge of English history and culture (for details see Naturalisation Home Office 2010). Therefore a period of 10 to 25 years was thought to be long enough to expect these respondents to have integrated into the new environment. The fact that only 17 of the immigrant women perceived themselves not to be integrated while in reality 50 of them were not, seems to imply that these women may have created their own environment within which they feel perfectly comfortable.

Many immigrants arrive in a new country with the intention to retain their own culture while becoming part of the new society. When pluralism is encouraged and ethnic communities are supported there is a tendency to create a sub-community within which the immigrants feel very

comfortable (Phinney et al. 2001). This is generally the case when individuals arrive in a host country where other members of their ethnic group are already residing.

...sometimes immigrants seek to live according to the standard and values of their ethnic group, engage with other members of their ethnic group for social and day-to-day living purposes, and obtain a sense of pride from membership of their ethnic group (Nesdale et al. 2000, 485).

On the other hand, Dustmann (1996) said that, if immigrants arrive in the new country on their own, they tend to make friends and to establish new social contacts and consequently become more integrated. However, the original research<sup>7</sup> has found that single women are less integrated than the married ones; possibly the situation may be different for men as Dustman did not indicate the gender of the immigrants.

## **Level of Education**

The experimental nature of the study resulted in a somewhat fragmented sample due to different nationalities: 70 Europeans (excl. English), 34 Asians, 16 Africans, 2 Americans and one from Oceania.

Chart 4 aims to present the profile of the influence of education to the subjective and objective integration.

Quadrant A shows that there is correspondence between women who received elementary education and those with advanced level qualification, they both do not perceive themselves and are not found integrated.

Quadrant B shows that women with an ordinary level (equivalent to lower secondary education) were found partially integrated, but it does not show any correspondence with the subjective perception of integration of these women.

Quadrant C illustrates that further and higher educated women, perceived themselves and were found fully integrated. This data reflects the finding among immigrant women in Germany by Constant (2007) and Zimmerman et al. (2009).

In Quadrant D analysis shows no correspondence among the variables.

It can be said that the level of education is important and may make the difference in the process of integration as stated by Garcia (1987) and Norton (1997).

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<sup>7</sup> Di Cristo Bertali (2011). The world in one city"; Subjective and objective perceptions evaluation of the integration of women immigrants in Liverpool, 2001 to 2009.



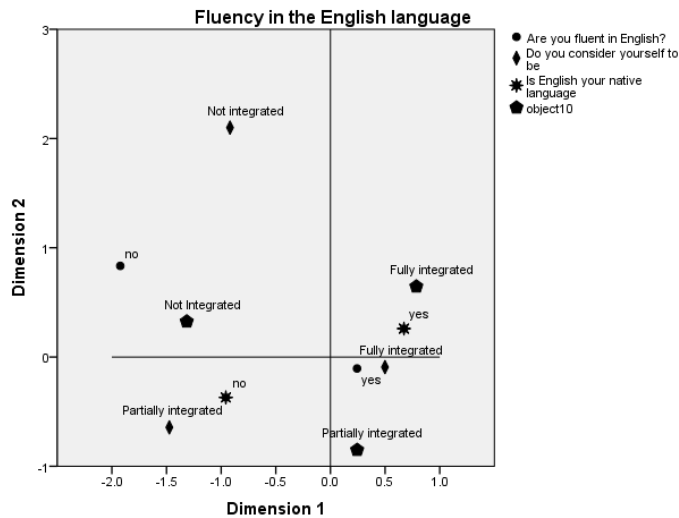


Chart 5: Native or fluent English language for subjective and objective integration

Source: Di Cristo Bertali 2011

## Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to identify the existence of a difference between the subjective and objective level of integration of immigrant women living in Liverpool. The research has demonstrated, through the use of the measurement tool prepared especially for this purpose, that there is such a difference. Of the various indicators the length of residence in the city, the level of education and the knowledge of English were found to play an important role in this process.

There are logical arguments in assuming that the length of residence in a place influences the process of integration, but as shown in this study on its own it cannot be identified as the main reason for the evident difference between the subjective and the objective level of integration.

The level of education and the level of fluency in English offered contradictory results; the level of education showed that the number of women who felt or were found 'fully integrated' increased according to their level of education in both immigrant women groups although at different rate. All the women who declared that they were not fluent in English were found not integrated. It is therefore possible to speculate that the lack of English may have been the cause for their non-integration.

Levels of integration depend on individual circumstances and for some people integration might seem more important than for others. For practical purposes the knowledge of English is important because it is through communication with the local population, by making friends outside their own identified group, and, learning about the host society that immigrant women could integrate in the host society.

The exploratory aspect of the study provides the initial platform for disseminating an awareness of the variety of factors that need to be taken into account when developing policies for integrating new comers. This study shows that a great number of immigrant women in Liverpool live in their *diaspora space*; these findings support Koopmans' (2010) conclusions about immigrant integration in the U.K. Therefore it can be said that Liverpool is *the world in one city* but the immigrant women as yet contribute little to the making of a cohesive society.

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