12. Migrants' social trust

The degree to which migrants exhibit generalized social trust tells us something important about assimilation. To be specific, we are talking about generalized social trust in unknown others as opposed to particularized trust in known others (Delhey, Newton, & Welzel, 2011). Trust is particularly relevant in the Danish context characterized by very high levels of generalized social trust in international comparison (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Larsen, 2013). Social trust plays an important functional role for the main object of study in this book, namely welfare attitudes and support for the welfare state. Generalized social trust towards fellow compatriots is conducive to support for the welfare state (Larsen, 2013; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Redistribution and risk alleviation on a large scale requires abstract, generalized solidarity reaching far beyond a limited circle of personal relations.

To what extent do migrant nationalities from very diverse backgrounds and origins then manage to adapt to these high levels of trust? And to what extent are differences across migrant groups and native Danes explained by, for instance, individual socio-economic resources, or do patterns rather point to the institutional and macro-oriented mechanisms discussed in the first chapters of the book? Theoretical perspectives on trust will be discussed further below, but there is certainly support for the role of institutions in the literature.

Research agrees that high trust levels in Denmark have come about as a benevolent cocktail of just political institutions free of corruption, public education, relatively universal welfare provision, and economic equality (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Larsen, 2013; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2014). If social trust is a dynamic phenomenon that can change over the life-course, and if migrants experience the benefits associated with well-functioning institutions, we might expect a high degree of adaption to high trust levels. This will include migrants in the “virtuous cycle” of trust that we arguably see in Denmark, since social trust as mentioned at the beginning of this book also by itself furthers support for welfare institutions (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005).

If, on the other hand, migrants do not gain these positive experiences or impressions of their new destination country, or if social trust is a phenomenon rooted much more in culture and identity, trust is much more of a challenge for assimilation. In this respect, it is an open question whether social trust is part of the socio-cultural “hardcore” or “periphery” taken up in Chapter 2.

Social trust is an interesting object of study not only as a test of socio-cultural integration in a high-trust context. It is well established that social trust is conducive to other aspects of social cohesion and individual welfare. Individuals with high levels of trust exhibit high well-being and happiness (Helliwell, Wang, & Xu, 2016). They tend to engage in voluntary work or political participation and generally exhibit pro-social behaviour (Sønderskov, 2011; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). At the macro-level, social trust is associated with economic equality, well-functioning and non-corrupt political institutions, and economic growth (Fukuyama, 1996; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). In short, there are good reasons why social trust is the most widespread indicator of social cohesion par excellence. Trust binds people together, improves social relations, and furthers social exchange.

In the remainder of this chapter, we begin by digging deeper into various sources of trust from a theoretical perspective with a special focus on socialization, public institutions, interethnic contact, and national identification. Then we will proceed with a descriptive look at trust levels among native Danes, migrants in Denmark, and in the countries of origin. Finally, regression models will allow us to gauge various drivers of trust as well as some interesting statistical interactions between them.

SOCIALIZATION, PERCEPTIONS, AND EXPERIENCES

Theoretically, some favour socialization as the primary explanation of trust. The theoretical axiom is that parents and other agents of early life socialization shape our basic faith (or lack thereof) in unknown others. This then becomes a lifelong blueprint for the extent to which we trust others. This perspective is underpinned empirically by studies that show how different trust levels to some extent are passed on by parents to their children, or that they are relatively similar, and that trust is often quite stable over the life course and longer periods of time (Abdelzadeh & Lundberg, 2017; Dawson, 2019; Uslaner, 2008). Besides socialization, there is even some degree of genetic heritability (Weinschenk & Dawes, 2019).

Socialization is at the core of the “cultural” perspective in which trust is a “sticky” phenomenon that does not change easily over the life course. There are a number of studies discussing “socialization” or “culture” versus “experiences” in the new country context (Dinesen, 2013; Dinesen & Hooghe, 2010; Helliwell, Wang, & Xu, 2016; Koopmans & Veit, 2014; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2010; Uslaner, 2008), but see also the review by Dinesen and Sønderskov (2018). Studies from the Danish context specifically have found high adaptability to Danish trust levels when comparing with trust levels in the countries of origin (Nannestad, Svendsen, Dinesen, & Sønderskov, 2014), and that this adaptability is even stronger for descendants (Dinesen, 2012). On

the other hand, even if we find adaptability and higher trust compared to the origin countries, this assimilation may still be less than perfect. Migrants from Middle Eastern countries have previously been found to exhibit trust levels substantially lower than native Danes (Ministry of Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, 2011). Studies from the US context have tended to point more towards persistence of social trust for migrants (as in Uslander, 2008), whereas studies from the European context generally find a high degree of adaptability to trust levels in the different destination countries (as in Dinesen & Hooghe, 2010). As a tentative explanation for this pattern, Dinesen and Sønderskov (2018) discuss the particularities of American migration history, which is also different from other Western countries with high levels of migration-induced diversity like Australia or Canada.

This means that social trust can be a more dynamic than “sticky” phenomenon, and that it may be continuously adapted according to changing circumstances throughout the life course. Theoretically, it can be conceived as a more rational or strategic phenomenon as described by James S. Coleman (1990). Coleman conceived trust as a conscious choice, based on expectations towards the reciprocity of the trustee. In addition, perceived risk and information (and information asymmetries) become important. The theoretical explanation of trust favoured here is often described under the label of the *experiential* perspective. However, the sources of trust discussed under this umbrella oftentimes concern perceptions and expectations that may not always be rooted in distinctly personal experiences, but could also stem from various forms of mediated information (Kongshøj, 2018; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2010; Nannestad, Svendsen, Dinesen, & Sønderskov, 2014). The literature within the experiential perspective has stressed the role of political institutions. Well-performing, just, and non-corrupt institutions enforce rules that reward trustworthy behaviour, and more generally convey impressions or perceptions of prevailing standards in society vis-à-vis behaviour and trustworthiness. Again, this may be a result of both personal experiences and more general perceptions and expectations due to information received in other ways. There is ample room for discussion about the direction of causality between trust in political institutions and generalized social trust, but Sønderskov and Dinesen (2016) utilized Danish panel data to conclude that trust in political institutions affects generalized trust, and not the other way around.

Personal contact across ethnic or majority–minority divides constitute another form of “experience”. The so-called “contact hypothesis” emphasizes how interpersonal contact with people of another ethnic background reduces negative perceptions or prejudices towards unknown ethnic others (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). On the other hand, the “conflict hypothesis” stresses that encounters with ethnic others only increases the awareness of risks or uncertainties associated with placing trust in unknown others who are very different

from ourselves (Gijssberts, Van Der Meer, & Dagevos, 2012; Putnam, 2007). Robert Putnam (2007) preferred the label of “constrict” rather than “conflict”, emphasizing instead how ethnic diversity in residential areas via the same mechanisms lead people to retreat from social life or participation in associations.

The differences between “contact”, “conflict”, and “constrict” are easier to understand and resolve once we consider different kinds of interpersonal relations (Kongshøj, 2018). Perceived status differences between people matter regardless of ethnicity, and interpersonal contact marred by asymmetries in status or power may be harmful to perceived trustworthiness. Consequently, if interethnic contact is to be conducive to social trust, it may be a necessary condition that it is characterized by some degree of equal status and a minimum of intimacy (Marschall & Stolle, 2004; Thomsen & Rafiqi, 2016; Uslander, 2010). Conversely, the “conflict hypothesis” may be more easily confirmed if we examine forms of ethnic contact that are characterized by inequality, status differences, or discrimination. Finally, “constrict” is not necessarily so much about interethnic contact per se, but about exposure to ethnic diversity in the form of more superficial encounters in contexts such as neighbourhoods and workplaces (Dinesen & Sønderskov, 2015; Koopmans & Veit, 2014; Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008). Studies have tended to find that interethnic contact is positively associated with trust for ethnic majorities, while they are weaker or non-significant for migrants (Kongshøj, 2018; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). In tandem with the discussion above, a typical interpretation has been that interethnic contact for migrants too often is characterized by status inequality or outright discrimination, but findings and measures have generally not allowed for valid conclusions about specific negative personal experiences (Bauer, 2014; Thomsen & Rafiqi, 2016). In addition, there may be endogeneity issues or reverse causality in this area as well. In other words, we might to some extent expect that more trusting people are also more likely to engage in various kinds of interethnic contact. Then there are the contextual effects of exposure rather than personal contact, as discussed above. A range of studies point to mixed or non-significant correlations, often on the basis of subjective neighbourhood diversity, but Dinesen and Sønderskov (2015) find a negative relationship in the Danish context. They utilized register data on diversity in the micro-context (within a radius of 80 meters) coupled with survey data on trust.

Naturally, there is room for varying degrees of both socialization and experience in the vast majority of findings in the field. There is neither perfect adaptability to new trust levels in the destination countries, nor perfect transmission of trust from parents or origin countries. For instance, Helliwell, Wang, and Xu (2016) investigate migrants in 132 destination countries and

find that the adaptability to trust levels in the new destination countries is much stronger than the imprint from trust levels in the countries of origin.

This leads us back to the need for a theoretical framework in which we can accommodate these different perspectives on social trust. One such is a sociological framework inspired by Pierre Bordieu as elaborated by Frederiksen (2019). The concept of disposition helps us elaborate how our inclinations to trust or not is shaped both by socialization and personal biography over the life course. Society and its social structures may also be internalized in our personal *habitus*. Importantly, the results of Frederiksen (2019) substantiate how these sources of trust and dispositions may vary between individuals. One disposition is fundamentally individualist and it is close to the more rational or experience-based perspective, while other individuals express a disposition in which a social trust is founded in norms and morals.

A FIRST LOOK AT LEVELS OF SOCIAL TRUST

The measures of generalized trust differ across the two surveys. Among the five nationalities in the Comcon survey, respondents have answered the question: *“To what extent do you generally trust people you meet for the first time?”* (four response categories from “Trust completely” to “Not at all”). This measure has entered some international surveys, including the World Values Survey, and has been corroborated as a valid measure of generalized trust, at least in Western countries (Delhey, Newton, & Welzel, 2011; Torpe & Lolle, 2011). In the Mifare survey, the measure available to us is the statement *“There are only few people in Denmark that I trust completely”* (standard Likert-scale with five responses from “Fully agree” to “Fully disagree”). While the question inquires about an abstract group of generalized others, it is specified as “... people in Denmark”, which for migrants may highlight the issue of Danes as a potential out-group. Furthermore, the phrasing is negative (“There are only few people ...”).

With these caveats in mind, Figures 12.1 and 12.2 proceed to compare our nationalities within Denmark and their countrymen in the countries of origin. The question in the Mifare survey is directly comparable to a question from the 2006 module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), whereas the measure from Comcon is the same as in the World Values Survey (WVS). There is a considerable time lag when comparing a 2006 survey with the Mifare survey from 2014, but in most country contexts, aggregate levels of generalized social trust changes little and only slowly (Larsen, 2014). This contrasts with what we often see for migrants at the individual level. As mentioned, previous studies looking into migration as a “natural experiment” generally do find that migrants to some extent seem to adapt to trust levels in their new destination countries, at least for migrants into Europe and also

Denmark. The first results presented below cannot establish anything new in this respect, and only serve as a descriptive glance at trust levels. Still, it does allow for some interesting observations.

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Comcon survey) and residents in the countries of origin (WVS 2010–2014 survey). Scale ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “Trust completely” (100).

Source: Data collected from the World Value Survey 2010–2014 (2016).

Figure 12.1 Generalized social trust in strangers met for the first time (0–100 scale)

First, among the nationalities in Comcon, the pattern does not provide unequivocal support for the expectation that migrants in high-trust contexts exhibit higher trust levels than their countrymen in the countries of origin. The differences between migrants and their countrymen are modest and even insignificant for the Lebanese (but we should remember that significance levels are affected by the small survey populations in Denmark in the Comcon survey).

Second, trust levels among these five non-Western nationalities are markedly and significantly lower than those reported by Danish respondents. Whereas 66 per cent of Danish respondents to some extent trust people they meet for the first time, the share is only around half of that among the five migrant nationalities (but differences are not quite as stark on the 0–100 scale presented above).

Third, among the more diverse set of nationalities in Mifare, the picture is more mixed. Most migrant nationalities exhibit trust levels close to that of Danish respondents. A few exhibit trust levels markedly higher than those of

Note: Migrants and natives living in Denmark (Mifare survey) and residents in countries of origin (ISSP 2006 survey). Scale ranging from “Fully agree” (0) that “... there are only few people I trust”, to “Fully disagree” (100).

Source: Data collected from ISSP 2006 (ISSP Research Group, 2008).

Figure 12.2 Social trust towards people in general (0–100 scale)

Danish respondents. American and British migrants score 10 points higher on the 0–100 scale. At the other end of the continuum, only Polish and Romanian migrants exhibit trust levels below Danish respondents. Still, even for the Polish migrants, who exhibit the lowest trust levels, it is only six points lower than Danes on the 0–100 scale.

Fourth, it is interesting to note that when we look at the origin countries, all Mifare nationalities in the countries of origin exhibit trust levels well below that of Danes. This observation indicates that it might be easier for migrants from most Mifare countries to adapt to Danish trust levels relative to migrants from the non-Western, mostly Middle-Eastern origin countries in the Comcon survey.

INTERETHNIC CONTACT, POLITICAL TRUST, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL TRUST

In the following analyses, the main objective is to explain differences in trust levels in relation to native Danes and to establish the associations between interethnic contact, perceived institutional fairness, and national identification

on the one hand, and generalized trust on the other (following the theoretical discussions above).

However, all three of our three main independent variables of theoretical interest differ substantially. In the Mifare survey, interethnic contact is based on a question regarding personal friendships. The indicator is a composite index of two questions on the prevalence of friendships from EU or non-EU countries, respectively. For migrants, the variable indicates friendships with Danes. In the other survey, the questionnaire enquires into the frequency of contact within personal homes. For Danes, we tap into frequency of contact with people of “... *an ethnic background different from your own*”, whereas it is contact with people of Danish backgrounds for migrants. While both variables arguably try to get at conditions for contact that are free of status inequality or power asymmetries, per the previous discussion, there is of course a substantial difference between personal friendships and contact with unspecified relations in personal homes. As regards trust in institutions or the perceived fairness of public institutions in Denmark, the Comcon survey offers us a question specifically on this perception. In the Mifare survey, however, the closest related variable instead taps into perceived corruption among Danish politicians. While it is well-established that political corruption is corrosive for social trust, the perceived behaviour of Danish politicians is not necessarily synonymous with the more fundamental quality or perceived fairness of the public administration in Denmark. Finally, while the two measures of national identification are different, they both tap into the same dimension of national identification vis-à-vis Denmark and the country of origin.

Besides these survey-based variables, our other independent variables are register-based and they are the same as throughout the book. This includes gender, age, wage income, benefit income, employment status, civil/marital status, Danish citizenship, number of years spent in Denmark, education, religiosity, and language skills. The latter three variables are survey-based, while the others are based on Danish register data.

In Figure 12.3, we see how the dummy coefficients for each migrant nationality change across three regression models with the native Danes as the reference category. The first model essentially provides the same overview as in Figure 12.2 – relative differences in trust levels across nationalities but shown here as unstandardized correlation coefficients on a 0–100 trust scale.

We see that Spanish, Chinese, British, and American respondents appear to be significantly more trusting, whereas Polish respondents are significantly less trusting than Danish respondents. This pattern is surprising, given that we know that trust levels in all of the countries of origin are lower than they are in Denmark. We should be mindful that the dependent variable is different from standard measures of generalized trust, and that trust in “... people in Denmark ...” might be more particular, especially for migrants in Denmark. However,

Note: Mifare survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=2,652.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 12.3 Generalized social trust (0–100 scale)

there are also meaningful interpretations to be made. If social trust to some extent is based on rational expectations, and the impression or perception that people reciprocate and that social norms are strong in the new country context, then migrants might quickly adjust their trust levels upwards relative to the standards they were used to. In research into trust in political institutions, this has been a standard interpretation of the finding that political trust is very high, at least for recent migrants (Adman & Strömblad, 2015). In research into social trust, only few studies have paid much attention to the role of time, with more inconclusive or insignificant findings (Kongshøj, 2018).

In the subsequent regression models, we see how we gradually manage to explain differences in trust levels vis-à-vis native Danes for those nationalities who initially seemed to have higher trust levels than native Danes. For these nationalities, their higher trust levels are explained by the fact that they in general are even better positioned than native Danes in terms of socio-economic resources as well as interethnic friendships and their perceptions of corruption, as discussed more at length below. In the full regression model, we find that no nationalities have significantly higher trust levels. In

the case of the US, Great Britain, China, and very nearly Spain too, it turns out that just one variable renders these dummies insignificant (not shown). This is the control for friendships with Danes. It appears that particularly for these nationalities, the number and quality of Danish friendships pushes their trust towards "... other people in Denmark" towards relatively high levels.

Otherwise, we find in the full model that women in general are more trusting than men, that older respondents are somewhat more trusting, that wage income is modestly positively related to trust, and that respondents with tertiary education are more trusting than people with low or short education (not shown). Social benefits are negatively associated with trust. Depending on outlook, incomes and education represent socio-economic resources that affect individual experiences and autonomy, or they represent positions in social space that are interwoven with more basic dispositions to trust (or not) (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Frederiksen, 2019).

Furthermore, we find that both personal friendships and marriage/cohabitation between Danes and migrants correlate positively with social trust. The standardized correlations also indicate that these two variables are among the strongest correlates. This would support the aforementioned "contact" hypothesis. However, we should be mindful that the design of the data does not allow us to determine causality. It is possible that trusting individuals would be more likely to engage in interethnic contact to begin with, and particularly to engage in interethnic relationships. However, as mentioned before, the literature has continued to find support for the "contact" hypothesis, at least for ethnic majorities. The findings are more inconsistent for migrants (Thomsen & Rafiqi, 2016). We will return to this, since the picture is different for the nationalities in the Comcon survey.

Finally, we find the expected result that perceived corruption among politicians is negatively associated with social trust. It is the strongest predictor of trust in the model. The vast majority of respondents regardless of nationality (70–75 per cent) believe that "none" or "just a few" of Danish politicians are involved in corruption. There is some variation across nationalities between these two responses, however. For instance, only 24–25 per cent of Polish or Turkish respondents reply "none", while the figure is 35–45 per cent for most other nationalities, including the Danes themselves.

Let us proceed to regressions for migrant nationalities only (not shown). This allows us to gauge the importance of national identification and time spent in Denmark for migrants. The model also allows us to check whether we can confirm our previous results when we only look at migrants and when we include these additional independent variables. In this model, age and education ceases to be significant for social trust. Otherwise, other findings essentially remain the same.

Importantly, we find that national identification is a highly significant and strong predictor of generalized social trust among migrants. There is a difference of about 23 points on the 0–100 trust scale between those who identify the least and those who identify the most with Denmark. Acculturation in the form of national identification clearly matters for social trust.

Let us proceed to the five migrant nationalities in the Comcon survey. Like Figure 12.3, Figure 12.4 illustrates the dummy coefficients for each origin country with Danish origin as the reference country. As before, we finish off with separate regression models for migrants only, which allows us to address citizenship status, time spent in Denmark, perceived language skills, and national identification.

Note: Comcon survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=1,162.

Source: Data collected from the Comcon survey (2015).

Figure 12.4 Generalized social trust (0–100 scale)

What we find this time, as opposed to the Mifare survey, is that all migrant nationalities exhibit trust levels that are clearly well below that of native Danes. Furthermore, our various independent variables do not change this picture very much. As in the Mifare survey, we find positive correlations with age and education, and this time they remain significant and pronounced for

migrants specifically. We also find a positive correlation from wage income and negative correlations from benefit income. Religiosity is the primary reason (not shown) why the trust gap between Danes and migrants declines somewhat when we introduce the independent variables. As opposed to the other survey, we find that religious culture does play a small role for these nationalities. Furthermore, here the number of years spent in Denmark correlates negatively with social trust. The correlation is sizeable. These migrants adjust their trust levels downwards over time, but it is an open question whether it reflects increasing expectations as the origin country becomes more distant (as discussed in the literature on political trust), or whether it rather reflects negative experiences in Denmark.

The important finding here is that we cannot in any way “explain away” the markedly lower trust levels for our migrants in these models. Furthermore, it is striking that neither interethnic contact nor national identification matters for trust levels among migrants. We find a small positive effect from perceptions of institutional fairness. The fact that contact and institutions work as expected in the full Comcon sample is driven exclusively by the larger sample of native Danes. Danes engaged in interethnic contact and Danes who perceive the public administration to be fair are more trusting than those who do not. This general finding could support the interpretation that for these migrant groups characterized by low trust levels, social trust does not reflect experiences, perceptions, or dynamic acculturation – that is, social trust might appear to be much more “sticky” or rooted in deeper cultural circumstances. Considering the origin countries, it could support arguments and findings that particularly origins rooted in collectivist, in-group oriented, and more religious cultures lead to lower trust levels as opposed to more individualist societies (Uslaner, 2002; Van Hoorn, 2015). However, when we properly assess the interactions between ethnicity and these variables in Figure 12.5 we could arrive at a different interpretation.

In the visual presentation of these interactions we see what we found before – positive correlations between contact and social trust as well as institutional fairness and social trust for native Danes, while the story is different for the migrants. It is particularly striking that social trust even decreases with contact, but this negative correlation is not significant. The main story in these figures is that we clearly see that the difference in trust levels across ethnicity is very small and insignificant among Danes or migrants with little interethnic contact or low perceived fairness of the public administration. The trust gap grows larger with increasing interethnic contact or more positive evaluations of institutional fairness.

Particularly for interethnic contact, the interpretation is relatively straightforward: Interethnic contact for these particular migrant nationalities in Denmark might be marred by other barriers, noting the aforementioned discussions in

Note: Comcon survey. Correlations between social trust and institutional trust (left) or interethnic contact (right) by ethnicity (native Danes vs. immigrants). N=1,162.

Source: Data collected from the Comcon survey (2015).

Figure 12.5 Interactions with ethnicity

the literature on the inconsistent effects of contact among migrants. It could be that contact is affected by perceived inequalities in status or lack of recognition across the ethnic divide. This would entail that the friendships analysed for the Mifare migrants entail contact on a more equal footing than the contact experienced by the low-trust, non-Western Comcon migrants, or that the problems stem from other forms of contact not measured in the Comcon survey.

For perceived institutional fairness, straightforward interpretations are not offered to us by the literature in the same way. Naturally, we could still speculate that even when migrants perceive that public institutions are generally fair or effective in their new destination country, this does not preclude negative personal experiences with public institutions. It is at least interesting to note that the gap in trust levels between Danes and migrants is much lower for individuals with more negative evaluations of institutions.

Further pursuing the clear and important role of perceived institutional fairness generally found in the literature, Figure 12.6 reports some interesting interactions for the migrant groups in the Comcon survey. In these interactions, all five migrant nationalities are included in the same ethnicity dummy, considering the small size of the groups in Comcon and the fact that their trust levels are all low at similar levels.

In Figure 12.6 we see that if migrants perceive institutions to be fair, there are positive correlations between social trust on the one hand and contact and national identification on the other. It is particularly evident for the interaction with contact. The other interaction is not significant.

For non-Western migrants with positive evaluations of public institutions, we now find that the less they identify with the origin country, the more trusting they are. On the other hand, if they do not perceive the public administration in Denmark to be fair, they are less trusting with declining origin country identification. This latter circumstance is one of clear marginalization where unfair public institutions in the new country is combined with loss of identity vis-à-vis the origin country, which drives down social trust. On the other hand, if destination country institutions are evaluated positively, it further increases trust the less one identifies with the origin country. Migrants with relatively positive perceptions of the public administration and little identification with the origin country are much closer to the trust levels of native Danes.

The other interaction is weaker and not statistically significant, but nevertheless trust levels are higher if migrants both perceive fair institutions and engage in interethnic contact. On the other hand, if institutions are not perceived to be fair, trust declines with increasing levels of contact. This result makes sense on a very basic level.

More generally, these interactions support the view that fair public institutions is a necessary foundation for other building blocks to work on the way to social trust. It would seem that positive evaluation of institutions in the

Note: Common survey (migrants only). Correlations between social trust and national identification (left) or interethnic contact (right) by lowest and highest values of institutional trust. N=357.
Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 12.6 Interactions with institutional trust

destination country is very nearly a precondition for other experiences and acculturation dynamics to work positively for trust. This is one interpretation. As a minimum, these results emphasize that even among our low trust nationalities, some individuals manage to positively combine high social trust, interethnic contact, national identity, and perceptions of fair institutions.

SOCIAL TRUST: EASY ASSIMILATION FOR SOME, CHALLENGING ACCULTURATION FOR OTHERS

In our efforts to explain trust among migrants and the relative difference from trust levels among native Danes, we arrive at a diverse set of results across the two surveys. We should be mindful that the indicators of social trust are quite different variables, and this also applies to indicators of interethnic contact, public institutions/politicians, and national identity. However, we can draw conclusions on the dynamics of experiences, perceptions, and acculturation across different migrant backgrounds.

In all of the origin countries included here, trust levels are lower than in Denmark. It seems broadly easier to adopt to Danish trust levels for migrants coming voluntarily to work or study from mainly Western or industrialized economies. Trust levels were close to (and sometimes even above) that of native Danes among the migrant groups in the Mifare survey. The main explanatory variables also worked in the same way for both migrants and native Danes. Socio-economic background matters somewhat, and we could confirm the expectation that interethnic contact, trust in politicians, and national identification with Denmark furthers social trust among these migrants.

On the other hand, for our migrants in the Comcon survey of non-Western, mostly Middle-Eastern background, the vast majority of whom have come due to asylum or family reunification, the story was quite different. Their markedly lower trust levels remained low even when controlling for our independent variables, and interethnic contact, perceived institutional fairness, or national identification did not seem to work for social trust like we expected. Furthermore, trust levels decline somewhat with religiosity. This could support the interpretation that for these migrants from these low-trust countries, trust is a more sticky and fundamentally cultural phenomenon. Previous research has found that societies dominated by more collectivist, in-group oriented, and religious values also exhibit lower social trust compared to more individualist societies (Uslaner, 2002; Van Hoorn, 2015). To the extent that trust changes over time in Denmark, it actually seems to decline among these migrant nationalities. This could reflect both increasing expectations (as the origin country becomes less present or salient) or negative experiences in Denmark.

However, statistical interactions shed light on the potential for the assimilation of social trust. Statistical interactions with ethnicity revealed that the gap

in trust levels between native Danes and migrants from these five countries is low or insignificant among individuals with little interethnic contact or relative negative perceptions of institutional fairness. In addition, we found that migrants from these low-trust groups who perceive institutions to be fair exhibit positive correlations between contact or national identity on the one hand, and social trust on the other. The interaction between perceived institutional fairness and national identity makes it possible to identify migrants very close to Danish trust levels.

As a minimum, these latter interactions emphasize that even among migrant groups where social trust is low in general, some individuals combine perceptions of fair institutions with national identity or interethnic contact in ways that are also associated with high social trust. One interpretation would be that some individuals are able to overcome their background – both the low-trust origin favoured by the “cultural” perspective and the migration experiences associated with asylum or family reunification. It could be an indication of a form of “segmented assimilation” (as mentioned in Chapter 2) where only some individuals from particular origins manage to assimilate into Danish society in ways that are associated with social trust. Among other nationalities, successful assimilation in terms of social trust is more widespread.

However, a further interpretation building on the “experiential” perspective would be that such results also suggest a potential for further improvement with regard to the experiences migrants with low trust have had in Denmark. Interethnic contact may be affected by status inequalities or other negative experiences as opposed to the conditions of equality or even some forms of intimacy that are necessary in order for contact to work for trust. The statistical interactions support the view that the perception of fair institutions is an important foundation for other building blocks of social trust (such as contact or national identity) to work if we want to achieve higher trust levels among low-trust minorities.

In short, while it particularly is a challenge to explain social trust among migrant groups with low trust with a pronounced gap in trust levels vis-à-vis native Danes, it is after all possible to combine explanatory factors in a way that brings us much closer. This suggests that even among migrant nationalities with low and seemingly sticky trust levels, there is a potential for dynamic assimilation, even if it is more of a challenge compared to what we see among migrants who more easily adapt to the high trust levels of the Danish context.