

Integration and parallel societies

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The integration of foreign residents is a declared aim of Swiss and cantonal policy. The Foreign Nationals and Integration Act requires foreign residents to participate in economic life, to respect the constitution and the law and to learn a national language. The requirements for permits and naturalisation are tied to integration criteria, including language skills.¹ The canton of Zug implements these rules through its integration programme, which offers language courses, information and counselling.

English-speaking expatriates are in a particular position. They are usually well educated, employed and economically integrated. They rarely come into conflict with the law. Their integration deficit, if there is one, lies in language and social contact. Many do not learn German beyond a basic level because they do not need it at work and their social life takes place in English. Their stay in Zug is often limited to a few years, which reduces the incentive to invest in the local language and in local networks. The result can be a parallel society in the sense of a community that lives alongside the local society with little contact, without conflict but also without participation.

The phenomenon is not unique to Zug. It exists in all international business locations, from Geneva and Zurich to Singapore and Dubai. In Singapore and Hong Kong, where the author lived for fifteen years, expatriate communities have their own schools, clubs and neighbourhoods. Many expatriates there learn little of the local languages. The difference is that English is an official language in those cities, so the expatriates can participate in public life without learning another language. In Zug, the expatriate who does not learn German remains excluded from local politics, from most local associations and from much of local culture.

1 Notes

1. Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (AIG), Art. 58a para. 1, text on [droit-bilingue.ch](https://www.droit-bilingue.ch): integration is assessed by respect for public safety, security and order, respect for the values of the Federal Constitution, language skills, and participation in working life or efforts to acquire an education. ↩

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