The Local Turn in Integration Policies: Why French Cities Differ

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how three major French cities designed their immigrant incorporation policies in the early 21st century. While political and administrative structures are similar in these cities, the favored approaches – integration, equality, diversity – and the importance assigned to the issue of migration differed. Four factors explain the local shape of immigrant incorporation policies: the relationship with national authorities, the mobilization of European opportunities, the capacities of civil society, and the career paths of policy officers. This qualitative research provides insights on the “local turn” of migration policy in practice. It further illustrates how French cities may overcome a national model, although their fight against ethno-racial inequalities remains weak and inconsequent.

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Some contemporary western cities are characterized by ethnic diversity or, sometimes, “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007). New movements of migration and, above all, the plurality of migrants’ life experiences have prompted new forms of action on the part of cities. Several publications highlight the “local turn” of immigrant incorporation policy in Europe, stressing that cities actively intervene in migration issues as they are primarily affected by this phenomenon (Penninx et al. 2004; Alexander 2006; Caponio and Borkert 2010; Caponio, Scholten, and Zapata-Barrero 2018). This “local turn” scholarship insists on the necessity to widen perspectives and acknowledge that the governance of migration is a multi-level

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process, in which European institutions and cities play an important part (Scholten 2013; Schiller 2016; Scholten and Penninx 2016; Caponio, Scholten and Zapata-Barrero 2017). Many researchers also argue that local policies are often incongruent with national models of integration (Jorgensen 2012; Dekker et al. 2015; Caponio et al. 2018). Localist theses rely on two arguments. First, they highlight the capacity of cities to accommodate ethnic diversity and respond to problems with pragmatic measures (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008; Caponio and Borkert 2010). Secondly, they point to the disintegration of national models and the fact that local policies towards migrants are shaped by different policy settings and political perceptions (Alexander 2003; Garbaye 2005). Schiller (2015) even evokes a “paradigmatic pragmatism” to define how officials combine measures and refer to various paradigms without taking part in any political debate. However, scholarship so far is mainly based on official documents and policies and compares different major European cities. We know too little about why cities in the same country, confronted with ethnic diversity, adopt different rhetoric and tools. French cities in particular have received little attention as the assumption prevails that, here, a centralized state implements a strong assimilationist national model (Brubaker 1992). However, the French governance of immigrants has, since the end of the 1980s, also included urban programs tackling “integration” or “welcoming new migrants” (Flamant 2014). Furthermore, some French cities define their own policies towards immigrants, mobilizing several approaches such as “integration”, “citizenship” or “non-discrimination”.

The macro and quantitative research of Martinez-Ariño et al. (2018) on German and French cities reveals how the political orientation of municipalities influences the development of equality policies in French cities. My perspective differs in that, through a micro and qualitative analysis, I outline how and why the “local turn” of immigrant incorporation policy and the development of equality policies evolves in city-specific forms and I further specify the factors affecting that. First, I outline similar dynamics in French cities regarding the local governance of migration. The creation of new administrative units illustrates the development of equality discourses at the beginning of the 2000s. However, the policies and tools adopted differed. Second, I identify four factors that account for similarities and differences of city's immigrant incorporation policies: –relations with national governments, the capacity to seize European opportunities, the ability of civil society to influence the local agenda, and the career paths of local civil servants. Finally, I

argue that local policies towards immigrants are fragile and tend to be diluted in an abstract and generic approach to equality that pays little attention to ethno-racial inequalities.

Local immigrant incorporation policies: Theoretical approaches and discussions

Comparing three French cities, this article focuses on municipal policies regarding immigrants¹. The existence of these policies cannot be understood solely as the result of pragmatic adjustments at the local level. Neither should we assume that cities necessarily respond in similar ways. On the contrary, I argue that four factors account for similarities and differences in the governance of immigrants.

Over the past two decades, the study of integration policies has undergone major changes. Researchers show a growing interest in understanding how local authorities are key actors in defining and designing immigrant policy (e.g. Caponio and Borkert 2010). Early publications focused on the way in which local authorities, and cities in particular, reinterpreted different national models – assimilationist, multicultural, intercultural –, and as a consequence produced new policies labelled as “equality” or “diversity” policies (Penninx et al. 2004; Entzinger 2005; Schiller 2015). Many scholars identify a “local turn” in immigrant incorporation policy (Scholten 2013) and point at the “pragmatism” displayed by local authorities who are more in touch with their constituents. To understand local policies, researchers insist on the necessity to go beyond national models and consider the multi-level governance of migration, especially the relations between cities, national authorities and European institutions (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008; Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero 2014; Caponio et al. 2018). At the same time, as e. g. Lacroix and Desille (2018) remind us, we should not naively see cities as the “welcoming” actors in conflict with more restrictive national authorities, but acknowledge the influence a neo-liberal doctrine.

While scholarship has rightly emphasized the growing interest of cities in migration issues, it has too narrowly focused on official discourses of cities and European institutions. We still insufficiently understand why cities in the same national universe adopt different perspectives on and instruments for immigrant incorporation. In order to achieve that, it is necessary to adopt a micro perspective. Fourot (2013), in her stimulating study about Quebec, identifies four elements explaining local configurations: the relationship with the national and provincial government, the politico-administrative structure, the dynamism of civil society, and the discourses on “integration”. Following her study, I aim to identify the

major factors accounting for the varying immigrant incorporation policies in different cities. I argue that center-left French cities increasingly engage in immigrant policies as these cities concurrently develop a similar administrative structure. However, they differ in the measures adopted and in how they consider ethno-racial inequalities. Like Martinez-Ariño et al. (2018) on French and German municipal diversity policies, I recognize that the left-leaning position of French municipalities plays an undeniable role in bringing about diversity-policy measures. However, their quantitative research approach does not capture the actual development of these diversity policies, their focus (gender, immigrants or disabled people) and the specific approach (non-discrimination, integration or diversity). Investigation of these questions is all the more interesting as it contributes to the analysis of the renegotiation of the French “republican model of integration”² since the adoption of a broader anti-discrimination framework in accordance with EU directives (Calves, 2016; Chappe, Eberhard, and Guillemin 2016) and since positive action has been taken on gender and disabilities (Bereni 2009). However, the color blindness of the French “republican model of integration” (Sabbagh and Peer, 2008 ; Simon, 2008) makes positive action for ethno-racial minorities illegal. This article contributes to understanding how French local actors deal with the persistent national low concern of ethno-racial inequalities (Fassin and Fassin 2006) given the reality of immigration.

I identify four factors that explain similarities and differences between three French cities. The first factor is the nature of the relationship with national government and its measures towards immigrants. The second factor are the resources offered by the European institutions and city networks that contribute to defining and developing a municipal immigrant incorporation policy. Third, I underline the role of civil society as partner of municipal actors and, fourth, of the career paths of local civil servants implementing policies towards immigrants.

Data and Methodology

This article is based on a doctoral thesis completed in 2014 on municipal policies towards immigrants in three French cities: Lyon, Nantes and Strasbourg (Flamant 2017). The study uses in-depth interviews with people involved in the implementation of immigrant incorporation policies. Interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2014 with elected officials of the municipalities (seven in total), local civil servants responsible for equality and integration policies (all eight were interviewed), and representatives of associations

defending immigrants' rights (fourteen in total). Interviews focused on the relationship of municipal actors with national authorities and with other French and European cities, their understanding of integration policies and the kind of policies they implemented. Additionally, interviews dealt with the biographies of interview partners and the history of their municipal department. Interviews were supplemented by an analysis of municipal documents, including those kept in the municipal archives. Using a grounded theory approach, interviews and written documents were coded with PhpMyAdmin software. Lastly, participant observation in the meetings of the Council of Foreign Residents in Nantes and Strasbourg between 2010 and 2012 (four sessions in total), enabled me to study the relations between the city and local associations representing migrants.

Lyon, Nantes, and Strasbourg share several characteristics. First, all have a similar political history and forms of mayoral management. Marked by the arrival of new young mayors in 1989, these cities invested in urban marketing policies at the end of the nineties. Over the period 2001-2008, only Strasbourg was governed by a Conservative municipal majority, replaced in 2008 by Socialists, while Lyon and Nantes had Socialist mayors throughout. The cities are of regional importance and therefore able to challenge the primacy of the central state. Lyon is France's second largest city, while Strasbourg is the capital of the Alsace region. Nantes is the largest city in western France. Lastly, the comparison undertaken is all the more relevant as the cities in question are "most similar cases" (Seawright and Gerring 2008) considering migration. None of them can be described as "refuge", "transit", or "gateway" city (Babels 2018) even if all have seen growth in their immigrant populations over the last two decades and a rising geographical diversity, mainly with people coming from sub-Saharan countries. Strasbourg has a larger "*immigré*" or foreign-born population³ (21 per cent in 2015), than Lyon (13 per cent) and Nantes (9.5 per cent), as it houses the headquarters of several European and international institutions. As the three cities share a similar political governance, I argue that their political orientation is not sufficient for understanding different outcomes in municipal policies.

Immigrant incorporation policies in Lyon, Nantes and Strasbourg (2001-2012)

Between 2001 and 2012, the cities of Lyon, Nantes, and Strasbourg developed initiatives to support immigrant populations. Local governance took a similar form: all three cities appointed deputy mayors for this purpose who slowly developed immigrant

incorporation policies – like training for municipal staff in welcoming non-French speakers, new recruitment processes to make the municipal administration reflect the diversity of the territory, or councils of foreign residents. While local discourses generally moved from integration toward equality and combating discrimination, the challenges and objectives tied to the various measures demonstrate the ability of cities to combine different approaches to migration. I outline the social backgrounds and the political weight of deputy mayors in the municipal majority to understand in what political context cities framed their immigrant incorporation policy. It contributes to understanding how they consider ethno-racial inequalities. Lyon adopted an equality-based model and did little to address the specific issue of immigrants. Nantes was characterized by a policy connecting the concepts of integration, citizenship, and non-discrimination to build its specific policy towards immigrants. Lastly, Strasbourg considered migration issues mainly through measures promoting their political integration and without a clear statement on ethno-racial inequalities.

The progressive institutionalization of the governance of immigrants

In 2001, the cities of Lyon and Nantes were governed by teams mainly composed of elected representatives of the Socialist Party and left-wing minority groups. Lyon had been experiencing a political shift toward the center-left, after having been governed by coalitions representing the right and center-right from the early 1950s. In Nantes, the same mayor had been re-elected since 1989 with a municipal assembly dominated by socialist members and minority left-wing representatives. In 2001, new municipal councilors were elected, including the *adjointe* in charge of the integration of immigrants. The case of Strasbourg is different as the municipal assembly shifted to the center-right in 2001 and back to the left in 2008. In all French cities, elected mayors are supported by deputy mayors, the *adjoints*, belonging to the same political coalition and in charge of particular issues defined by the municipal assembly. The deputy mayors also run administrative departments, along with top civil servants.

In all three cities, the election of new municipal councilors in 2001 led to the creation of new municipal "*délégations*"⁴ focusing on immigrants. These decisions prove the cities' interest in migration issues as it is not a mandatory competence of French municipalities. The *adjoints* nominated as the heads of these *délégations* were all not powerful politically

and had to struggle to avoid being perceived as the one embodying the “diversity” i.e. the nomination of people from minority groups as a guarantee to do politics in new ways (Avanza 2010). Neither of them could benefit from strong support from their political party as they either belonged to minority parties in the municipal coalition (Communist Party in Lyon and Nantes) or no political party at all (Strasbourg). Moreover, they were all young women (under forty) with little political experience. Two of them had migration backgrounds corresponding to what Avanza (2010) qualified as the “French typical ideal diversity”: coming from the Maghreb and achieving high educational credentials with lower-class background. Finally, they had little administrative capacity at their disposal as no administrative department was dedicated to immigrant incorporation policy.

In Lyon, the municipal *délégation* was named “Integration and rights of citizens”, in Nantes, “Integration and citizenship”, and in Strasbourg “Integration”. All municipal *délégations* referred to “integration” and none to “discrimination” illustrating the strong commitment to universalism and a reluctance to recognize ethnic groups (Amiraux and Simon 2006; Safi 2017) in spite of the national non-discrimination policy (Fassin 2002). In the case of Strasbourg, the *adjointe* assumed mainly a political role by receiving immigrants facing administrative difficulties while no concrete policy was implemented. In Lyon and in Nantes, the *adjointes* commanded more political capacities. They adopted the traditional rhetoric of the French Republic according to which the “integration” of individuals is produced by their political capacity. In that perspective, they considered voting rights as the major challenge for non-EU immigrants. As a consequence, they set up councils of foreign residents to facilitate the local political participation of immigrants. They also worked on the creation of specific administrative units dealing with inequalities immigrants faced (see below).

In 2008, after municipal elections, the three municipal *délégations* remained in place but with significant changes to their designations reflecting new approaches to immigrant incorporation policies. The notion of “integration” was replaced or complemented by the concepts of “citizenship”, “fight against discrimination” or “equality”. In Lyon, the *adjoint* was now in charge of “new ways of life and rights of citizens”, in Nantes, it was “Integration, Equality, Citizenship” and in Strasbourg, one *adjointe* was in charge of “Citizenship, electoral affairs, and nationality affairs” and another of “urban development, fight against discrimination”. Those changes signaled opposition to the national approach. The

222 presidential campaign preceding the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 had been
223 characterised by a discourse and policies in which the “integration” of immigrants was
224 defined through the capacities of immigrants to respect French values such as secularity
225 (Simon 2013). Contesting a perception of “integration” solely as an effort made by
226 immigrants, all three municipal majorities insisted on the importance to also promote
227 “citizenship” or to develop “non-discrimination” approaches in the governance of migration.

228 In Lyon, the *délégation* for “Culture, heritage and citizens' rights” went to a man in his
229 sixties, of Armenian immigrant background, who held a central position in the city executive.
230 Nevertheless, the political commitment to the governance of immigrants was weakened by
231 the way in which the responsibilities of the *adjoint* were combined. Attaching the issue of
232 “citizens’ rights” to the portfolio of the deputy mayor in charge of “culture”, a mainstay in
233 city marketing policy, led to reduced investment in inhabitants' rights. Moreover, as
234 immigrants' issues were included in “citizens’ rights” a specific political commitment towards
235 them was weakened.

236 In Strasbourg, two *adjoints* were in charge of immigrants and ethno-racial inequalities,
237 one dealing with “citizenship”, the other with “*politique de la ville*, discrimination, and youth
238 policy”. While they were relatively young (under forty), they had been strongly involved in
239 the Socialist Party’s youth organizations and held other local political mandates which gave
240 them more power in the municipal majority. They adopted two kinds of discourses to
241 promote immigrants’ incorporation. The *adjointe* in charge of citizenship favored a
242 separation of “citizenship” and “nationality”, the typical French integration model, that
243 according to her “*has run its course*”. As she argued “*immigrants must be given the right to*
244 *vote [locally]*”⁵. For her, this right was the main instrument for a political integration of
245 immigrants, perceived as the major discrimination provoking social exclusion. The *adjoint* in
246 charge of “*politique de la ville*, discrimination and youth policy” emphasized that the
247 municipality had to address urban inequalities to facilitate the integration of excluded
248 persons, including first and second generation of immigrants.⁶ This municipal *délégation*
249 linked spatial segregation and discrimination but without adopting a clear position on
250 specific measures benefitting immigrants.

251 Lastly, in Nantes, the *adjointe* was reappointed and continued to emphasize “Equality”
252 and “Citizenship”. She also insisted that local citizenship should be encouraged. As in
253 Strasbourg, she considered the right to vote in local elections, disconnected from French

nationality, a crucial change needed to make immigrants feel members of the society. She also emphasized the necessity to fight ethno-racial discrimination, which threatened “equality” and thus the integration of immigrants⁷. However, with the arrival of a new city councilor in charge of equal treatment for city employees, she faced competition. The new policy frame proposed an equality policy targeting different groups (disabled people, women, seniors, ethnic minorities) mainly with municipal human resources measures. Whereas the appointment of two *adjoints* could have signaled a stronger engagement for immigrants, the split into two *délégations* lead to weaken a strong and generic policy on equality.

At first sight, the local political governance of immigrant issues was similar in all three cities. However, they adopted somewhat different perspectives on the mechanisms assumed to favor immigrants’ incorporation. These different perspectives are embodied in the creation of new administrative units, *missions*, to deal with the governance of migration and to a larger extent with equality.

Municipal missions as instruments for different equality policies

The three *adjointes* created new administrative units, “*missions*”, to support and implement their political programs. As Bezes (2009) demonstrates, this kind of administrative unit has spread in French administrations with the promotion of new public management. These administrative units are supposed to exist for a limited period and for a cross-sectorial issue with a strong political management ensured by the *adjoints*. In French cities, the “*missions*” mostly deal with environmental issues, urban policy (*politique de la ville*)⁸ and immigrant incorporation policies. The creation of these *missions* also reflects the desire of the *adjoints* to be supported by a dedicated administrative unit.

Again, these similarities in the administrative local governance should not obscure the differences of the approaches towards immigrants – integration, equality, non-discrimination –reflected in the names given to the administrative units. In Lyon, the “Equality Mission” was created in 2005, whereas in Nantes, an “Integration mission” was formed in 2003 and renamed “Equality, Integration and Citizenship” mission in 2008. In Strasbourg, when the Left returned to power, two municipal *missions* were dedicated to “Local Democracy” (with a local civil servant dealing with the Council of Foreign Residents) and to “Preventing and Combating discrimination”.

The city of Lyon chose to promote “equality” to honor the Republican promise of the equality of all individuals. In that context, the Equality Mission mainly promoted a non-discrimination policy in the recruitment process arguing that the urban administration should represent the “diversity” of the society and be a model for any other local actor⁹. Concretely, during two years, the Equality Mission proposed specific preparation-measures for public service examinations for minorities (women, people living in urban poor areas) and revised all recruitment processes to track possible discriminatory elements in the course of its candidature for the “*Label diversité*” (see Bereni, Epstein, Torres in this issue).¹⁰ As Bereni and Epstein (2015) stress, this process eventually led to a reduced focus on ethno-racial discrimination in favour of other minority groups. More generally, while ethno-racial discrimination is mentioned in Lyon's framework documents¹¹, it is not a top priority for the civil servants of the Equality Mission. First, a focus on ethno-racial issues in their view contradicts the French principle of colorblindness.¹² Secondly, civil servants of the Equality Mission preferred to leave migration issues to the Mission for Cultural Cooperation whose main objective is to encourage the opening of cultural facilities to inhabitants living in deprived areas, often immigrants¹³. They continue a French tradition to deal with ethnic minorities only through positive action in some urban areas. Finally, ethno-racial discrimination was not central in discourses on “equality” or in measures promoting access to the local civil service for disadvantaged groups.

In contrast, in Nantes, the mission focused on immigrants, while weaving different approaches together. Some of the actions of the municipal mission were in line with the national measures for “integration” as they strongly supported French language courses, perceived as a major indicator of being “well integrated”. Other measures reflected different perspectives on immigrant incorporation. The creation of the Council of Foreign residents pursued two objectives: disconnecting nationality from citizenship at the local level and training immigrants to participate to municipal consultative bodies where they were often underrepresented. The mission developed measures to combat discrimination, such as training civil servants to adopt non-discrimination attitudes when providing services. The coexistence of several frames – “integration”, “equality”, and “non-discrimination” – is characteristic of the political discourse and the tools adopted towards immigrants in Nantes. The head of the Mission considered it necessary for conducting an ambitious policy towards immigrants.

318 *“Perhaps in the next term, [the new Equality Mission] will deal with fighting against*
319 *discrimination, with diversity, and with equality, and it would be a mistake to drop the matter*
320 *of integration. [...] Some cities have put everything into the fight against discrimination. It*
321 *makes no sense; we are not going to explain the difference in the five-fold unemployment rate*
322 *among non-EU foreigners solely by discrimination. There are many other factors as well.”¹⁴*

323 In Strasbourg, the division into two missions, one dedicated to citizenship and the other
324 to combatting discrimination, reflected the perception that “integration” is possible through
325 the promotion of a local citizenship whereas ethno-racial inequalities could be addressed
326 through non-discrimination measures. However, as one community activist pointed out, the
327 immigrant incorporation policy mainly relies on the Council of Foreign Residents, a narrow
328 way to address the challenges faced by immigrants¹⁵. In fact, while the chief of the
329 Preventing and Combating Discrimination Mission declared ethno-racial discrimination as
330 equally important as gender or age, she admitted that no major action had been
331 implemented other than supporting a working group dedicated to that thematic in the
332 Council of Foreign Residents. She explained this choice by pointing out that the *politique de*
333 *la ville* already dealt with ethno-racial inequalities,¹⁶ albeit without saying so.

334 All three French cities investigated here introduced political and administrative
335 responsibilities for the governance of immigrants. Political factors, in particular the left-wing
336 orientations of the governing majorities are important to understand the investment in that
337 topic but do not fully explain the divergent discourses and measures adopted by the
338 municipal *délégations* and *missions*. The following section will turn to the factors explaining
339 similarities and differences of the city’s approaches.

341 **Factors determining immigrant incorporation policies**

342 As I argue below, similarity is mainly noticeable with regard to organizational aspects
343 (municipal *délégations*, *missions*), and it is due to two principal external factors: the
344 relationship with national authorities and the increasing opportunities offered by European
345 Union authorities and European city networks. At the same time, the differences in the
346 municipal policies can mainly be explained with reference to two factors: the capacities
347 associations have to influence the city agenda and the career paths of local civil servants. In
348 consequence, the attention to immigrant interests varied between the three cities and
349 policies sometimes addressed ethno-racial inequalities, and sometimes did not.

European metropolis in opposition to their national governments

The creation of municipal *délégations* on “integration” and/or “equality” in Lyon and Nantes and the subsequent establishment of two city missions took place at a time when the central state, embodied by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the later President, adopted an increasingly repressive migration policy (Carvalho and Geddes 2012). The discourse on “national identity” was marked by a focus on knowledge of and commitment to French Republican values (mainly secularity, equality between men and women) by newcomers or applicants for French nationality and on the fight against illegal migration. The turn to hardening migration policies and to presenting immigrants as threatening “national identity” led elected officials in some cities to adopting discourses and policies insisting on the recognition of immigrants as part and parcel of the society and on the existence of socio-economic inequalities that immigrants suffered from.

The *adjointe* in Nantes emphasized the need to support immigrants’ rights given the “Le Pen-ization of minds”.¹⁷ Her opposition to national choices motivated the political leadership in Nantes to promote political equality and a local citizenship to incorporate immigrants. The discourse on national identity served as an adversary and to justify the development of new tools. The council of foreign residents emphasized the legal discrimination immigrants faced and which they perceived as one major element of their social exclusion. In that perspective, it is not immigrants who have to make an effort to become incorporated, but the welcoming society.

In Lyon, elected representatives reunited members of local NGOs in 2002 in a working group to make recommendations for a better “social integration” in the city.¹⁸ The members stressed the deficiencies of national policies in promoting equality for all and combating discrimination.¹⁹ Above all, political leaders wanted to ensure a leadership role for Lyon at the national level on equality issues and to become one of the most active European cities on that topic.²⁰ The city was the first to apply for the national label “Diversity”, a visible indicator of its commitment. Promoting equality and distinguishing oneself from the national rhetoric contributed to a global ambition of Lyon as a major innovative European metropolis.

In Strasbourg, the creation of the city mission was the combined result of a new majority opposing both the national government and the former right-wing municipal majority. The civil servant in charge of the Preventing and Combating Discrimination Mission stressed the political desire of the mayor to emphasize differences with the former political majority

especially on minorities. In that context, the mayor re-established a Council for Foreign Residents²¹ in order to stress that, as in Nantes, the exclusion of immigrant from the right to vote was a major problem and not only the efforts made by immigrants to adopt French values. Equally, the *adjointe* in charge of citizenship argued that the ending of the Council of Foreign Residents reflected their unwillingness to work on ethno-racial inequalities and to promote the political integration of immigrants²².

The commitment of local politicians to equality and the creation of the municipal missions was part of a strategy of opposition to the national authorities in a context of restrictive migration policies and a “national identity” rhetoric. Cities affirmed, in similar ways, their independence from the national frame on immigrants’ incorporation. These similar processes point to the politicization of the migration issue at the local level in left-wing cities when a conservative party governs at the national level. However, as outlined before, opposition was not always translated into concrete measures in favour of immigrants.

The role of European Union resources for the development of equality policies

The progressive institutionalization of urban immigrant policies was also the result of a “bottom-up Europeanization” of French municipalities. European funding opportunities and European city networks supported the measures of Lyon and Nantes in favour of immigrants and supported, to some extent and with a different timing, the institutionalization of relevant municipal policies.

In Lyon, the European level played a role in the early design of the local equality policy as the creation of the Equality mission was inspired by a European city exchange project, “Multicultural cities and racial discrimination” (2001-2003), during which local politicians and members of the working group on integration met the Equality Mission team in Birmingham.²³ Moreover, the mobilization of the European Social Fund conditioned the recruitment of a civil servant dedicated to equality. Consequently, Europe was a dominant factor in the development of a policy, with a dedicated administrative unit, on equality in Lyon. Besides, the head of the Equality Mission was member of the working group “Migration & Integration” of the city network *Eurocities* between 2006 and 2010 and participated in a peer review project on the governance of migration. European involvement

gave him resources to ensure political leaders that working on equality policy was a major topic of any European metropolis.

In Nantes, European discourse and funding was not at the beginning of the policy towards immigrants. However, both local politicians and civil servants consider the European investment in city networks as a major element in legitimizing their policies within the municipal administration (Flamant 2014). In Nantes, the *adjointe* in charge of integration took time to investigate other European cities before proposing a Mission dedicated to immigrants.²⁴ Participation in the working group “Migration & Integration” of *Eurocities* has also been a regular activity for the chief of the Equality and Integration Mission since 2007. With that participation, he said that he becomes familiar with European funding. Nantes managed to obtain funding from the European Fund of Integration in 2012 to produce a movie on the living conditions of elderly immigrants and to publish a leaflet on the services dedicated to immigrants in Nantes in four languages.

In Strasbourg, in spite the geographical closeness of European institutions, the European scene was initially not considered by the new *adjointe*. She joined a network of cities and experts in 2010, the CLIP (*Cities for Local Integration Policies*) network, in order to better develop local policy towards immigrants, but at first remained uncommitted.

While Europe was an external factor that supported the discourse and implementation of their immigrant incorporation policies, the timing of the three cities' European involvement differed. As Downing (2015) stressed for culture policies, the major difficulty for French cities at the European level is to work in a universe in which the policy frame is based on the recognition of ethnic minorities. In fact, the chief of the Equality Mission in Lyon ended his participation in the working group “Migration & Integration” because “the British approach to equality”²⁵ was too dominant in the exchanges between cities and incompatible with French universalism. As the municipality of Lyon progressively affirmed an equality policy characterized by ignoring ethno-racial discrimination, the civil servant faced difficulties in interacting with his European peers. In Nantes, the strong commitment of the Equality and Integration Mission to work on the migration issue facilitated their membership in the working group. Moreover, while recognizing the difference to the French approach to migration, the chief of the *mission* ensured that investing in the European level gives access to resources for designing and funding policies towards migrants that are not strongly supported at national level.²⁶ In the case of Strasbourg, the investment in the European

scene is mainly the result of personal initiatives of the *adjointe* in charge of citizenship. She participated to European events to grasp some information on other municipal experience and bring back some new ideas.

For all three cities, the European level was a factor in defining and encouraging the development of their policies towards immigrants.

The ability of local associations to influence the municipal agenda

In all three places studied, a large number of immigrants' rights and community associations exist, mainly established since the 1980s (Flamant 2017, 62-64). However, their relations with the city administration differ, leading to different weight to their claims to consider immigrants as a specific target group. If they had little weight in municipal politics in Lyon because of internal conflict, they managed to be heard in Nantes and in Strasbourg and to participate in the implementation of municipal tools.

In Lyon, associations defending the rights of immigrants dominate as interlocutors of the city, while community associations enjoy little recognition. The associations representing immigrants have been in strong conflict with each other since the late 1990s about the approach to undocumented immigrants. These tensions restrict their ability to speak to city authorities with a united voice and to demand an active policy in favour of immigrants. Given this history and a focus on the recruitment process, the Equality Mission preferred to seek advice from academics specialized in law and human resources and to nominate them as members of its working groups on equality. The absence of activist familiar with the difficulties faced by immigrants in the municipal councils dedicated to equality contributed to the minimization of ethno-racial inequalities in the measures adopted. Thus, the Equality Mission does not consider this thematic a priority, and it is dealt with just within the *politique de la ville*.

The cooperation between associations and city governments in Nantes and Strasbourg was stronger as the capacity of civil society to be united enabled them to adopt a common discourse and to participate in developing municipal policy. In Nantes, the associations representing immigrants created umbrella organizations to combat at the local level the national migration policy and to campaign for local policies in favour of immigrants. The *adjointe* considered these activists as partners to contest national migration policies and hopes that, as a consequence, they will not contest the municipal measures.²⁷ The local

administration sought the advice of these associations in designing the municipal integration policy. They insisted upon the necessity to go beyond criticizing the national agenda and to implement concrete measures at the municipal level. They supported the idea of a dedicated *mission* in the municipal administration and asked to be members of the Council for Foreign Residents. As actors in that Council, they were a driving force in extending the local policy to the welcoming of all documented and undocumented immigrants. Thus, the Council produced a leaflet containing the contacts of all associations dealing with immigrants in Nantes. Plus, they were committed to changing the representation of immigrants and helped with the organization of an exhibition on migration in Nantes. This recognition enabled them to demand municipal subsidies to recruit a coordinator of all the associations involved in the defense of immigrants. The associations positioned themselves as the most qualified actors to assess the needs of immigrants and to design some tools to welcome immigrants.

Relations between immigrants' defense associations and the Strasbourg city administration were characterized by considerable conflict between 2001 and 2008 after the dissolution of the Council for Foreign Residents. When the Socialists returned to lead the city government in 2008, CARES²⁸ was asked by the deputy mayor in charge of citizenship to develop a new version of the Strasbourg Council of Foreign Residents. Cooperation with that umbrella association was at the heart of the policy towards immigrants. During the meetings of the Council, activists claimed to go beyond political integration and to consider discrimination first and second generation immigrants suffered from. Finally, they inquired on housing and urban equality and managed to get one activist appointed as member of the municipal commission that distributes social housing to ensure that immigrants are not discriminated against.²⁹ The involvement of these associations lead to greater prominence of the fight against discrimination in the municipality and contributed to the creation of the Preventing and Fighting Mission in 2012.

If the associations were able to speak collectively, as in Nantes and in Strasbourg, they had the capacities to demand policies not only on the political integration of immigrants but on a welcoming policy and on the fight against discrimination. They managed to be actors of the municipal policies created, especially the councils of foreign residents, and sometimes to initiate local measures furthering immigrants' incorporation. They sided with local civil servants who saw immigrants as a core target of equality policies.

510

511 ***The career paths of local civil servants***

512 The last factor impacting on urban policies are the local civil servants in charge of them.
513 While they are officially implementing measures promoted by *adjoints*, these civil servants
514 have the opportunity to shape the agenda and to resist specific political constraints and
515 orientations (Biland 2012). These political capacities of the local civil servants are all the
516 more important in the case of migration as they had specific knowledge while their deputy
517 mayor and the heads of the *missions* were new to the issue. In fact, the very small *mission*
518 teams (3 members in Nantes, 6 in Lyon, 2 in Strasbourg) were headed by people who had
519 dealt with the migration issue in their previous functions. In Nantes and in Strasbourg, the
520 two mission heads had their first professional experience in the *politique de la ville*, in which
521 several national policies dealing with the “integration of immigrants” were implemented.
522 Furthermore, they had participated in the first national programs at the end of the nineties
523 that slightly shifted from “integration” to “non-discrimination” These experiences were
524 major factors leading these civil servants to connect discourses on integration, citizenship
525 and non-discrimination and develop appropriate local measures such as the support for the
526 Councils of Foreign residents or training on non-discrimination processes. This mixed
527 approach is perceived as a way of dealing with all the challenges faced by immigrants. The
528 local civil servant in Strasbourg and one of the Nantes civil servants were also activists in
529 local associations defending immigrants. Against that background, they were reluctant to
530 promote “diversity” or any measure tackling equality without focusing on immigrants as
531 they perceived that as abandoning the issue of ethno-racial inequalities.

532 In contrast, the career paths of the local civil servants in Lyon are characterized by
533 experiences in human resources more than in *politique de la ville*, by discourses on the
534 recognition of diversity of individuals and not on structural ethno-racial inequalities and lack
535 of experience in associations defending immigrants. For instance, the head of the Equality
536 Mission led several projects for private companies in which he advocated the recognition of
537 “diversity” and the promotion of all individual capacities. With this background, he
538 promoted a generic approach to equality over a non-discrimination policy and relied on
539 consultants specialized in the management of “diversity” in the working groups of the
540 Equality Mission. He believes that the socio-economic disadvantages of immigrants should
541 be dealt with by neighborhood or cultural policies, while issues related to the reception and

living conditions of immigrants are referred to the city's social services. Ethno-racial inequalities are thus minimalized in Lyon's equality policy.

In all the three cases, local civil servants with their specific experiences influenced the choice of measures and the extent to which immigrants were considered a relevant target group.

Discussion and conclusion

This article demonstrates that while in all three French cities, immigrants were a target group of local policy, the shape of immigrant incorporation policy was not uniform. The issue of immigrant rights could be diluted, or even abandoned, in a generic and unspecific approach to equality policy that did not include specific measures for immigrants. By illustrating such different paths, this article enriches the literatures on the “local turn” of immigrant incorporation policies and provides insights into the treatment of ethno-racial inequalities in a color blind country.

First of all, my research confirms that in the beginning of the 2000s some French cities, as in other European countries, developed a growing interest in dealing with integration issues and producing local answers to the challenge of ethno-racial diversity (Penninx and al. 2004). Moreover, this “local turn” was politicized in France as the development of a municipal policy towards immigrants mainly occurred in center-left cities, confirming the research of Martinez-Ariño and al (2018). However, dominant political orientations do not sufficiently explain how immigrants are governed locally. A comparison of similar cities in terms of political background in the same national context can demonstrate how similarities in the political and administrative structures to govern immigrants can be accompanied by strong divergence in the concepts favored and in the consideration of the migration issue in their equality policy.

My investigation demonstrated the benefits of going beyond the discourses on “integration”, “equality” or “non-discrimination” by analyzing the way migration is dealt with in actual policies. I argue that four factors influence the design of the governance of migration: the relationship with the national governments, the European level through its funding and its peer exchanges, the capacities of civil society to bring and to keep migration on the municipal agenda and the career paths of local civil servants in charge of the municipal equality policy. The “local turn” in the governance of immigrants is neither an

automatic nor a uniform process. Further research may want to clarify whether the same four factors are equally influential in other national contexts.

Third, my comparison underlines that the specific French unwillingness to recognize ethno-racial inequalities is an additional element that contributes to weakening any equality policy targeting immigrants. Nonetheless, the European level, especially transnational exchanges between cities, offers resources for local civil servants and local politicians to step outside their national constraints and to be an actor in international urban competition.

Finally, this article invites researchers to continue the investigation of the local governance of migration by considering especially local civil servants in charge of equality policies. New knowledge will be gained by considering the multi-level governance of immigrants together with the role of this specific group of civil servants in municipal policies. It will enable us to understand the fragile institutionalization of city policies that tackle ethno-racial inequalities.

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Notes

¹ I use the term "immigrants" throughout to refer to first-generation immigrants. French cities use the terms "immigré", "foreigner", "with a migrant background" for the first and sometimes second generation, which illustrates the difficulties in acknowledging ethnic minorities in the French Republic. I will specify when policies and tools focus on both generations of immigrants.

² This model is supposed to be equal because of the officially proclaimed formal equality between individuals, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or disabilities.

³ I refer to "foreign born" or *immigré* as defined in the national census. An *immigré* is a person who was born in a foreign country as a foreigner and who is living in France, with or without French citizenship.

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- ⁴ A "*délégation*" in French cities is the topics an *adjoint* is responsible for during his or her political mandate.
- ⁵ Interview 1, deputy mayor for citizenship, Strasbourg, 2010.
- ⁶ Observation of the meeting of the Council of Foreign Residents, 2012.
- ⁷ Interview 2, deputy mayor for integration, equality, citizenship, Nantes, 2011.
- ⁸ The *politique de la ville* is the policy dedicated to the renewal of deprived urban areas. This positive action is a method to target ethnic minorities who are major inhabitants of these neighborhoods without naming them (Tissot, 2007).
- ⁹ Lyon Municipal Archives, 2253 WP 11, Final report on the non-discrimination policy, 2008.
- ¹⁰ The label « Diversity » is a national label public and private companies can apply for to gain recognition for their efforts to promote diversity.
- ¹¹ Equality Mission, Annual report on discrimination, 2013.
- ¹² Idem.
- ¹³ Interview 3, Head of the Equality Mission, Lyon, 2010.
- ¹⁴ Interview 4, Head of the Equality and Integration Mission, Nantes, 2011.
- ¹⁵ Interview 5, member of the council, Strasbourg, 2012.
- ¹⁶ Interview 6, Head of the Mission for Preventing and Combating discrimination, 2012.
- ¹⁷ Interview 2.
- ¹⁸ Lyon Municipal Archives, 2084 WP 1, Working document, Initiative Group for Integration in the City, 2002.
- ¹⁹ Report on housing, Initiative Group for Integration in the City, 2004.
- ²⁰ Interview 7, member of the working group, July 2010.
- ²¹ Interview 6.
- ²² Interview 1.
- ²³ Lyon Municipal Archives, 2084 WP 1, Working document, Initiative Group for Integration in the City, 2002.
- ²⁴ Interview 2.
- ²⁵ Interview 3.
- ²⁶ Interview 4.
- ²⁷ Interview 2.
- ²⁸ La Coordination des Associations de Résidents Étrangers Strasbourgeois [Coordination of Associations of Foreign Strasbourg Residents] was created in 1989 to campaign for local voting rights for immigrants.
- ²⁹ Interview 8, member of the council, Strasbourg, 2013.