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1 **The Local Turn in Integration Policies: Why French Cities Differ**

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5 **ABSTRACT**

6 This article examines how three major French cities designed their immigrant incorporation
7 policies in the early 21st century. While political and administrative structures are similar in
8 these cities, the favored approaches – integration, equality, diversity – and the importance
9 assigned to the issue of migration differed. Four factors explain the local shape of immigrant
10 incorporation policies: the relationship with national authorities, the mobilization of
11 European opportunities, the capacities of civil society, and the career paths of policy officers.
12 This qualitative research provides insights on the “local turn” of migration policy in practice.
13 It further illustrates how French cities may overcome a national model, although their fight
14 against ethno-racial inequalities remains weak and inconsequent.
15

16 **ARTICLE HISTORY**

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20 diversity policies
21

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

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

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

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

64

65 **Local immigrant incorporation policies: Theoretical approaches and discussions**

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

71 Over the past two decades, the study of integration policies has undergone major
72 changes. Researchers show a growing interest in understanding how local authorities are key
73 actors in defining and designing immigrant policy (e.g. Caponio and Borkert 2010). Early
74 publications focused on the way in which local authorities, and cities in particular,
75 reinterpreted different national models – assimilationist, multicultural, intercultural –, and
76 as a consequence produced new policies labelled as “equality” or “diversity” policies
77 (Penninx et al. 2004; Entzinger 2005; Schiller 2015). Many scholars identify a “local turn” in
78 immigrant incorporation policy (Scholten 2013) and point at the “pragmatism” displayed by
79 local authorities who are more in touch with their constituents. To understand local policies,
80 researchers insist on the necessity to go beyond national models and consider the multi-
81 level governance of migration, especially the relations between cities, national authorities
82 and European institutions (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008; Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero
83 2014; Caponio et al. 2018). At the same time, as e. g. Lacroix and Desille (2018) remind us,
84 we should not naively see cities as the “welcoming” actors in conflict with more restrictive
85 national authorities, but acknowledge the influence a neo-liberal doctrine.

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

94 major factors accounting for the varying immigrant incorporation policies in different cities. I
95 argue that center-left French cities increasingly engage in immigrant policies as these cities
96 concurrently develop a similar administrative structure. However, they differ in the
97 measures adopted and in how they consider ethno-racial inequalities. Like Martinez-Ariño et
98 al. (2018) on French and German municipal diversity policies, I recognize that the left-leaning
99 position of French municipalities plays an undeniable role in bringing about diversity-policy
100 measures. However, their quantitative research approach does not capture the actual
101 development of these diversity policies, their focus (gender, immigrants or disabled people)
102 and the specific approach (non-discrimination, integration or diversity). Investigation of
103 these questions is all the more interesting as it contributes to the analysis of the
104 renegotiation of the French “republican model of integration”² since the adoption of a
105 broader anti-discrimination framework in accordance with EU directives (Calves, 2016;
106 Chappe, Eberhard, and Guillemin 2016) and since positive action has been taken on gender
107 and disabilities (Bereni 2009). However, the color blindness of the French “republican model
108 of integration” (Sabbagh and Peer, 2008 ; Simon, 2008) makes positive action for ethno-
109 racial minorities illegal. This article contributes to understanding how French local actors
110 deal with the persistent national low concern of ethno-racial inequalities (Fassin and Fassin
111 2006) given the reality of immigration.

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

119 **Data and Methodology**

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

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

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

153

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

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

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

172

173 ***The progressive institutionalization of the governance of immigrants***

174 In 2001, the cities of Lyon and Nantes were governed by teams mainly composed of
175 elected representatives of the Socialist Party and left-wing minority groups. Lyon had been
176 experiencing a political shift toward the center-left, after having been governed by coalitions
177 representing the right and center-right from the early 1950s. In Nantes, the same mayor had
178 been re-elected since 1989 with a municipal assembly dominated by socialist members and
179 minority left-wing representatives. In 2001, new municipal councilors were elected,
180 including the *adjointe* in charge of the integration of immigrants. The case of Strasbourg is
181 different as the municipal assembly shifted to the center-right in 2001 and back to the left in
182 2008. In all French cities, elected mayors are supported by deputy mayors, the *adjoints*,
183 belonging to the same political coalition and in charge of particular issues defined by the
184 municipal assembly. The deputy mayors also run administrative departments, along with top
185 civil servants.

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

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

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

214 In 2008, after municipal elections, the three municipal *délégations* remained in place but
215 with significant changes to their designations reflecting new approaches to immigrant
216 incorporation policies. The notion of “integration” was replaced or complemented by the
217 concepts of “citizenship”, “fight against discrimination” or “equality”. In Lyon, the *adjoint*
218 was now in charge of “new ways of life and rights of citizens”, in Nantes, it was “Integration,
219 Equality, Citizenship” and in Strasbourg, one *adjointe* was in charge of “Citizenship, electoral
220 affairs, and nationality affairs” and another of “urban development, fight against
221 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

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

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

268

269 ***Municipal missions as instruments for different equality policies***

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

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

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

305 In contrast, in Nantes, the mission focused on immigrants, while weaving different
306 approaches together. Some of the actions of the municipal mission were in line with the
307 national measures for “integration” as they strongly supported French language courses,
308 perceived as a major indicator of being “well integrated”. Other measures reflected different
309 perspectives on immigrant incorporation. The creation of the Council of Foreign residents
310 pursued two objectives: disconnecting nationality from citizenship at the local level and
311 training immigrants to participate to municipal consultative bodies where they were often
312 underrepresented. The mission developed measures to combat discrimination, such as
313 training civil servants to adopt non-discrimination attitudes when providing services. The
314 coexistence of several frames – “integration”, “equality”, and “non-discrimination” – is
315 characteristic of the political discourse and the tools adopted towards immigrants in Nantes.
316 The head of the Mission considered it necessary for conducting an ambitious policy towards
317 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.

340

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.

350

351 ***European metropolis in opposition to their national governments***

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

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

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

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

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

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

397

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

451

452 ***The ability of local associations to influence the municipal agenda***

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

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

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

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

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

504 If the associations were able to speak collectively, as in Nantes and in Strasbourg, they
505 had the capacities to demand policies not only on the political integration of immigrants but
506 on a welcoming policy and on the fight against discrimination. They managed to be actors of
507 the municipal policies created, especially the councils of foreign residents, and sometimes to
508 initiate local measures furthering immigrants' incorporation. They sided with local civil
509 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

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

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

547

548 **Discussion and conclusion**

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

556 First of all, my research confirms that in the beginning of the 2000s some French cities,
557 as in other European countries, developed a growing interest in dealing with integration
558 issues and producing local answers to the challenge of ethno-racial diversity (Penninx and al.
559 2004). Moreover, this "local turn" was politicized in France as the development of a
560 municipal policy towards immigrants mainly occurred in center-left cities, confirming the
561 research of Martinez-Ariño and al (2018). However, dominant political orientations do not
562 sufficiently explain how immigrants are governed locally. A comparison of similar cities in
563 terms of political background in the same national context can demonstrate how similarities
564 in the political and administrative structures to govern immigrants can be accompanied by
565 strong divergence in the concepts favored and in the consideration of the migration issue in
566 their equality policy.

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

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

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

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

587

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695

696 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.