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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

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19 Integration policies, immigrant incorporation policies, local turn, French cities, equality and  
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 immigrants<sup>1</sup>. 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”<sup>2</sup> 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 population<sup>3</sup> (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*"<sup>4</sup> 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]”<sup>5</sup>. 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 immigrants<sup>7</sup>. 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*)<sup>8</sup> 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 actor<sup>9</sup>.  
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).<sup>10</sup> 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 documents<sup>11</sup>, 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 immigrants<sup>13</sup>. 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.”<sup>14</sup>

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 immigrants<sup>15</sup>. 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,<sup>16</sup> 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”.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> The members  
373 stressed the deficiencies of national policies in promoting equality for all and combating  
374 discrimination.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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 Residents<sup>21</sup> 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 immigrants<sup>22</sup>.

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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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”<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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, CARES<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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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696 Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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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- <sup>4</sup> A "*délégation*" in French cities is the topics an *adjoint* is responsible for during his or her political mandate.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview 1, deputy mayor for citizenship, Strasbourg, 2010.
- <sup>6</sup> Observation of the meeting of the Council of Foreign Residents, 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview 2, deputy mayor for integration, equality, citizenship, Nantes, 2011.
- <sup>8</sup> 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).
- <sup>9</sup> Lyon Municipal Archives, 2253 WP 11, Final report on the non-discrimination policy, 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> The label « Diversity » is a national label public and private companies can apply for to gain recognition for their efforts to promote diversity.
- <sup>11</sup> Equality Mission, Annual report on discrimination, 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> Idem.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview 3, Head of the Equality Mission, Lyon, 2010.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview 4, Head of the Equality and Integration Mission, Nantes, 2011.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview 5, member of the council, Strasbourg, 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview 6, Head of the Mission for Preventing and Combating discrimination, 2012.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Lyon Municipal Archives, 2084 WP 1, Working document, Initiative Group for Integration in the City, 2002.
- <sup>19</sup> Report on housing, Initiative Group for Integration in the City, 2004.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview 7, member of the working group, July 2010.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview 6.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview 1.
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- <sup>24</sup> Interview 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview 3.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview 4.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview 2.
- <sup>28</sup> 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.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview 8, member of the council, Strasbourg, 2013.