Urban Multiculturalism beyond the 'Backlash': New Discourses and Different Practices in Immigrant Policies across European Cities

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All across European receiving societies, the mainstream political discourse is displaying increasing disaffection with multiculturalism. It is primarily at the level of local policies, though, that the social inclusion of immigrants and the governance of ethno-cultural diversity are negotiated. Building on a comparative study of the urban 'adaptations' of multiculturalism in eight European cities, this article addresses three questions: (1) the changing relations between national and (relatively autonomous) local immigrant policies; (2) the ways in which such policies are locally reframed and reshaped along the continuum between multiculturalism and assimilation; (3) the involvement of civil society organizations in urban governance processes. Altogether, local policies seem to have been less affected by the backlash against multiculturalism than a common sense understanding would entail. Yet, they are increasingly constrained by anti-immigrant positions and budgetary restrictions, as well by the search for new political idioms vis-àvis the de-legitimization of the multiculturalist lexicon and agenda.

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In recent years there has been growing disaffection with multiculturalism, at least as a discourse, in the European political debate (Grillo 2005). Several national leaders, including Blair, Cameron, Merkel and Sarkozy, have openly criticized the political idea of multiculturalism that we define, following Modood, as 'the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity' (2007: 2). At the same time, the policies of most immigrant-receiving states have been aimed at reaffirming both the control of external borders and the values of identity and national belonging, especially since 2001 (Balibar 2012). For recently settled immigrants these new guidelines have produced regulatory actions and public rhetoric of a 'neo-assimilationist' kind (Brubaker 2001). Learning the local language, displaying political loyalty and adapting to national values are generally required of migrants. In an increasing number of cases, this includes the formal signing of special 'integration agreements' (Joppke 2007; Goodman 2010).

As much research has shown in all European countries, however, immigrant integration primarily occurs at the local level (Penninx and Martiniello 2007), as does the recognition and management of cultural diversity. Urban policies have assumed growing importance for the social inclusion of immigrants and their families. It is at the local level, and most notably in metropolitan areas, that cultural and religious diversity is critically negotiated vis-à-vis the assimilative pressures and expectations of receiving societies (Foner 2007). Yet in the predominant climate of the 'multiculturalism backlash' (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009) in which there is a prevalence of political visions that reaffirm the primacy of national allegiances, local immigrant policies are forced to define new frames and discourses.

Against this background, comparing immigrant policies at a city level is an increasingly necessary, if relatively undeveloped, exercise.[1] In this perspective, our article elaborates on the findings of a comparative case study on immigrant and

ethnic diversity policies in five European cities (Brussels, Frankfurt, Marseille, Madrid and Manchester) and in three Italian ones (Florence, Genoa and Verona; Ambrosini 2012). While the original case study was descriptive and policy-oriented, here we expand on its theoretical implications by engaging in a dialogue with the burgeoning literature on the fall of multiculturalism and the emergence of civic integration in Europe. Our article aims to address three questions that deal with broader policy and political interests: (1) How far do national integration policies (and discourses) affect local policy provision at a city level? Put differently, how autonomous are urban policies for immigrant incorporation, relative to the institutional and historical configuration of national policies in the field? (2) How is it that immigrant policies are locally reframed and enacted, ('multiculturally' or not), given the political discourse they build upon? (3) What stock can be taken of the increasing involvement of civil society organizations in the urban governance of immigrant and minority settlement, whether as a side effect of harsher regulation policies, as a way of filling the gaps in public policy provision, or as a buffer vis-à-vis (native) public opinion?

In all of these respects, remarkable commonalities emerge across otherwise very different local contexts of immigrant reception. While language categories and declared policies have undergone major changes, the assimilationist trend has involved local policies to varying extents, but overall it has been more rhetorical than effective. At the urban level, interestingly, a variety of context- (and path-) dependent practices can still be appreciated, in which one can detect several aspects of what can be termed as a multiculturalist approach (Modood 2007; Faist 2009): namely, the public recognition of cultural differences. What these findings entail for the faceted debate on immigrant integration will be discussed in the final section of the article.

From National to Local Immigrant Policies: Shifting the Burden of Inclusion/Exclusion?

On the Local Management of Immigration as a Political Emergency

Politically speaking, the regulation and management of immigration has grown in importance over the years, becoming one of the priorities on the political agenda of governments in receiving countries. As a political question, migration coalesces issues related to international relations, economic advantages, social inclusion and the redefinition of the boundaries of the political community, thereby creating a complicated topic and unpopular high risks for governments. Amid globalization and the increasing circulation of capital, goods, information and cultural products, the mainstream response to greater human mobility has moved towards the reaffirmation of borders and national sovereignty (Wihtol de Wenden 2009). Governments, increasingly less able to control other global phenomena, are trying to regain legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens-voters by reaffirming their role as defenders of the borders against outsiders from poorer countries represented and perceived as threatening (for the European Union, see Schain 2009; and for Australia, see Opeskin 2012). Legally and symbolically, there is evidence of the 're-ethnicization of citizenship' (Bauböck et al. 2006). This is another way to give salience to the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, even when the latter are long-term residents. Outsiders, though, are in many ways necessary for labour markets and exhausted family economies (Ambrosini 2013a). Under particular circumstances they may not be rejected on grounds of humanitarian protection, while others cannot be stopped without compromising other interests, such as tourism and international trade. As a result, the rhetoric of closure is often contradicted by the facts (Rea 2010; Ambrosini 2013a). Nor is it easy to define precisely who the outsiders and the insiders are. Since the populations of metropolitan areas are becoming increasingly diverse and mixed, a civic stratification can be highlighted among foreign residents in terms of legal status and entitlements (Morris 2002; Kraler and Bonizzoni 2010). By contrast, the myth of border defence and the reaffirmation of homogeneous communities have become the banner of populist and xenophobic movements across Europe, infiltrating the language and programmes of more moderate and institutionalized political forces (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Ruzza and Fella

2009; Cento Bull 2010).

At the institutional level, the difficulties of migration management within the framework of national sovereignty have engendered two concurrent developments, which are in some respects alternative and in others complementary. On the one hand, demands and projects towards a transfer of powers to supranational levels are on the increase, especially in the case of the European Union. For example, the Schengen agreements the European Community made the unprecedented move of abolishing internal borders, allowing the free movement of citizens and workers, while recognizing various rights of citizenship, including political rights, for expatriate Europeans. This has given rise to a novel form of 'nested citizenship' (Kivisto and Faist 2007). On the other hand, local policies are increasingly configured as partially autonomous spaces within the framework of immigration policies where new concepts and practices of citizenship are being developed. The multi-level governance of intractable policy issues (Schön and Rein 1994) such as migrant integration has become a widespread feature of the European political landscape (Scholten 2012; Geddes 2014). Such an institutional configuration has been a source not only of contradictions, conflicts and diverging results, but also of remarkable innovations.

This trend implies a divergence between the so-called 'national models' of integration (for example assimilation in France or multiculturalism in the UK), and the effective policies (Bertossi 2011), among which local policies are often crucial. This is well known in the case of France, where Martiniello (1997), among others, has shown the wide gap that separates official positions at the national level from local practices. In the former, the myth of cultural homogeneity moulded by French Jacobinism and an emphasis on the rhetoric of secularism still persist. At the local level however, not only do public authorities implement segments of multiculturalist policies, but also policy-makers resort to a twofold language and practice. On a national scale, they strongly defend the Republican 'model' but, in their work as mayors, they do not hesitate to negotiate with representatives of ethnic and religious communities on, for example, places of worship – just as they do in Britain, a country long considered a leader of European multiculturalism. Comparatively speaking, Alexander (2003), in a study of 25 European urban contexts, has built on the idea of 'national models' of reference, while highlighting that local policies often deviate from these; because, among other reasons, they must cope with the failures of national policies. For example, several federal states in Germany have in the past established services for the integration of immigrants, in contrast to the traditional model of guest workers. In France, many local and regional administrations have introduced mediation services and multicultural initiatives, in spite of the republican ideology of neutrality vis-à-vis ethnic and cultural diversity. Against this background, one may wonder if similar divergences still occur today, amid increasingly rigid approaches to diversity issues and an open mistrust of multiculturalist stances. Large urban areas provide a laboratory for studying the key problems and possibilities stemming from so-called 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007): contradictions and openings, unprecedented mixes and identity-related claims and conflicts. Nowadays, possibly even more than in the past, metropolitan areas are emblematic of the tensions and conflicts around the long-term settlement of immigrant minorities.

In parallel, the policies adopted by local authorities have proved exemplary in dealing with everyday multiethnic pressures and tensions in the towns. Also emerging at local level is a faceted field for political mobilization in which civil society and migrant initiatives have gained public salience and influence policy choices – just as nativist and 'anti-immigrant' movements have done on the opposite side.

Local Policies to Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in European Cities: A Case Study

Empirically speaking, this article elaborates on the findings of a comparative case study across eight European cities: two European capitals (Madrid and Brussels),

other medium-large cities (namely Marseilles, Manchester and Frankfurt), as well as three Italian cities (Verona, Genoa and Florence; Ambrosini 2012).[2] These cities were chosen as each offers a promising observatory on broader national models of ethnocultural diversity management – at least as ideal-typical (if still influential) frames: Manchester for the British multicultural model; Frankfurt for the traditional German guest-worker model; Brussels for the mixed Belgian model, which mirrors both the country's bilingualism and the influence of the political models of the neighbouring states. Within the Italian context we chose a city with a left-wing political tradition and an attractive labour market (Florence); and another city with a less distinct political leaning but with a recent centre-left background, an old industrial tradition and a less dynamic labour market (Genoa); and finally Verona, where the Northern League has ascended to power but the local economy has shown, at least until the 2008 recession and even afterwards, a substantial need for immigrant labour. [3] Leaving the Italian case aside, we found that in practice the correspondence between each city and their respective national model is increasingly more dubious and less relevant. This is due, first, to the irremediable internal differentiation of each national model (and of course, to the gap between discursive representations and actual policies in each of them); second, to the significant room de manoeuvre which emerges at a local level as far as integration policies are concerned. The latter issue, along with other cross-cutting commonalities, lie at the core of our comparative analysis.

From National Rhetoric to Local Policies: A Comparative Assessment

The first issue to be explored here is the relation between national and local political philosophies of immigrant integration. Consistently with a large body of literature, our empirical research confirms the existence of a wide range of approaches to the governance of multiethnic societies (see Alexander 2003; Penninx et al. 2004). The broad prevalence of a trend towards civic integration has not substantively questioned this ideological and factual diversity – even more so when the governance of immigration is unpacked on a local scale. How the national formulation of these approaches interacts with their local expression at urban level, however, is a matter for empirical analysis. What can be inferred from our case study, then, about the transition from – and possibly the tension between – national and local frames underlying immigrant integration policies?

Among the cities we studied, the most conscious and explicit divergence between the two scales of governance is probably that of Frankfurt. For several years the local government has been at the forefront of finding new approaches to dealing with immigrant populations (De Luca and Trotto 2012). At the national level, it was only with the reform of 2000 that Germany officially acknowledged that it had become a country of immigration and partially superseded the rigid criterion of jus sanguinis in its citizenship code. Since the 1980s though, the city of Frankfurt has adopted a more open approach, one sensitive to the issues of discrimination, recognition and the appreciation of cultural diversity, including the promotion of some multiculturalist practices. This forerunner role became a concrete reality through the creation of a special office, AMKA (Office for Multicultural Affairs), which has emerged as a reference model for other German towns and for towns beyond German borders (Heckmann 2010). The main 'problem' here stems from the incongruity between voluntary innovations conceived at an urban level and institutional frameworks determined at higher levels, which restrict the scope of local activities. Emblematic of this is the high rate of education failures among minority students – an issue on which local policies can only exert a minor influence, given the complex overall architecture of the German education system.

Elsewhere across the cities we studied, political divergence between the national and the local level is less explicit and visible, but still significant. Marseille is a case in point. Here local policies do not openly distance themselves from the national rhetoric of avoidance of ethnic issues in the public arena, nor from the secularist ideology underlying the relations between public authorities and religious denominations. Even so, in ways that are little visible and typically unreported, local

authorities deviate from the nationally proclaimed directives. As our case study documents (De Luca 2012; see also, AA.VV 2007), they tend to pragmatically recognize the distinctive social issues which concern relations with ethnic minorities; they seek to involve mediating figures from minority groups; and they engage in extensive negotiations with representatives of different versions of Islam on controversial matters such as the construction of a large mosque. The French national model of integration is then renegotiated at the peripheral level, by emphasizing local identity and practicing a kind of de facto multiculturalism. If anything, the Marseille case suggests that a practical shift has occurred in the role of the national government. The latter has moved away from the declared principles of separation between state and religion, and actively involves itself in the internal affairs of Muslim religious organizations, attempting to favour those considered the closest to the interests of the French state and the most malleable.

A significantly pragmatic, although not discursive divergence between the national and the local can also be documented in the case of Manchester. In this large and 'superdiverse' urban area, local authorities have apparently followed the national government in formally abandoning the multiculturalist language (Boccagni 2012a).

Testifying to this is the emphasis placed on social and community cohesion (Kalra and Kapoor 2009) as well as the reduced visibility given to social policies aimed at immigrant populations. It is however mainly at local level that the fundamentally rhetoric nature of these changes is apparent. What actually occurs is largely a restatement of the multiculturalist policies of the past using other labels and a different conceptual framework. Following Levey (2009: 92), a case could be made for the persisting importance of 'multiculturalism without culturalism'. In Manchester as elsewhere in the UK, the policies for the integration of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities (largely British citizens) seem threatened less by the decline of multiculturalism than by the prospect of increasing budgetary cuts.

In the case of Brussels (De Bernardis 2012) the interaction between national and local pressures underlying immigrant policies is made more complex by the unusual status of the Belgian capital: an officially bilingual metropolis and an inherently internationalized one thanks to its role as the EU capital. Establishing a 'national' culture to be offered to new residents is therefore a particularly difficult task. That said, neo-assimilationist trends emerge in this case as well, such as the emphasis on social cohesion and the duty for new arrivals to learn one of the country's official languages. Nevertheless, the boundaries between 'immigrants' and 'expats' are not always easy to draw, especially when immigrants are EU citizens themselves. As a result, although the recent policies have been shaped along more assimilationist lines than in the past, a juxtaposition can be found between various approaches to, and lines of management of, interethnic relations. This is further complicated by the different emphases proposed by the two native linguistic communities. In any case, the celebration of cultural diversity through events involving the city is a prominent feature of the local political supply. This allows for a low cost, non-confrontational and widely appreciated form of multiethnic coexistence.

The dialectic between national and local stances about immigrant integration is underlined still differently – and in relatively less-politicized terms – in the case of Madrid (Boccagni 2012b). Here, interestingly, changes in the nation's political majority have not significantly affected the mainstream approaches towards immigrant integration. Compared with the other European cities, however, a greater volatility of local policies can be noted, together with voluntary initiatives undertaken by local political leaders and an unclear distribution of responsibilities between the city and regional governments. Both problems are connected with Spain's recent entry into the category of receiving countries, combined with an institutional intervention which is more direct and pronounced than in Italy (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011). In Madrid, more than in any other city that we analyzed, the current recession weighs simultaneously on integration processes and policies.

Overall, our comparative analysis of the national-local policy convergence recommends caution about the supposed 'death of multiculturalism' – whether at a discursive level or, even more, concerning policy implementation. While the

multicultural approach has been declared unsuccessful and to some extent discredited in the positions of national political leaders, it is still adopted in various
ways in the local urban contexts that we studied (see, for example, Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009). Yet, it tends to be revisited in a more modest guise. This typically entails recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity, support to immigrant associations, promotion of interfaith dialogue, along with the rejection of any explicitly (and cumbersomely) multiculturalist ideological frame. Policies aimed at encouraging immigrant integration are proposed again under less visible labels, including those of 'social cohesion' and of 'diversity'.

Rhetoric and Practices of Local Welfare Provision to Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities

Local integration policies should also be revisited in the light of the interface between the dominant political discourse which underlies them, and the policy provision being actually implemented – and in turn, between the intended and the actual effects of the latter. That a 'gap' of variable extent emerges in this (and possibly in any) political arena, at a level of discourse, implementation or efficacy (Czaika and de Haas 2011), is of course unsurprising: electoral campaign proposals need not match the options available, and viable, once the responsibility of government has been achieved. Any institutionalized political force must at some stage deal with contextual constraints and reach compromises with the variety of actors and interests at stake.
In the field of migration policies, however, the gap between declarations and accomplishments (Schön and Rein 1994) seems especially pronounced (Campomori 2007). In the past, this divergence exhibited more usual patterns: despite promises to combat discrimination and a commitment to the equal dignity of people and cultural identities, the actual accomplishments typically remained limited. In other words, the promises of egalitarian commitment were not nourished by adequate resources and regulatory schemes.
Nowadays, the structuration of these policy divergences is made more complex by additional issues. As mainstream political discourse has resumed its emphasis on assimilation, at least some symbolic aspects of local policies do reflect these predominant feelings. Notions such as community cohesion (Manchester), convivencia ('living together' – Madrid) or quartiers sensibles ('high need areas' – Marseille, Brussels) have much greater saliency and discursive legitimation than the recognition of culture-based identities, affiliations and stances. Following an undifferentiated 'deethnicized' approach, social policies tend to target the residents of the most deprived areas or client categories with remarkable need profiles (single mothers, long-term unemployed, pupils with learning difficulties, etc.), with no distinctive attention to immigrants or ethnic minorities as a relevant part of the latter. The Madrid experience, judging from our comparative study, is a good case in point (Boccagni 2012b).
Overall, the real policy provision in each of the cities that we studied has undergone various institutional adaptations but has maintained a basically multiculturalist subtext, as highlighted by features such as celebration of cultural
diversity in urban life, public recognition of cultural and religious pluralism, cooperation with immigrant associations and representatives. In all of these respects, however, urban multiculturalism results in a more or less extensive spectrum of culturally sensitive service provisions, rather than in any radical strategy towards group-differentiated social rights. In terms of ideal-typical differentiation, we could then distinguish between different emphases and methods of presentation of the solutions adopted: a more daring and voluntaristic approach in Frankfurt; an inclusive but variable approach in Madrid; a more cautious and careful orientation to prevent ethnic conflicts in Marseille; a pragmatic withdrawal that opts for a low profile in Manchester; a recoding in neo-assimilationist language of the investments for the integration of immigrants in Brussels.
A gap between political rhetoric and provision can also be observed, in different ways, in the three Italian cities we studied. More specifically, in Genoa and Florence, whose public authorities for long had a relatively favourable and inclusive vision of

immigrant integration, real achievements have typically lagged behind declared intentions. Local opportunities for immigrant political participation have met with limited success and many were in fact later abandoned. The major issues of integration into the urban context, in skilled jobs, in the school system, have been largely left to spontaneous dynamics. Immigrants' lack of local voting rights, and their limited and difficult access to Italian citizenship, have in turn discouraged adequate political investment (Zincone 2011; Campomori and Caponio 2012). More exclusionary changes have instead marked the case of Verona. In this city, traditionally a Christian-democrat stronghold, the recent advent of a Northern League majority has resulted in a political discourse remarkably hostile towards foreign-born residents. Unsurprisingly, some dedicated offices and services have changed their names and the declared that policy priorities are different from the past, with greater emphasis on the security and defence of the city's cultural identity. Yet, most of the social welfare schemes that involve immigrants have continued their course, albeit with less visibility and political support.

As the three Italian cities suggest, a selective use of public communication is also part of the gap between rhetoric and practice. All these local authorities are keen to emphasize the issues most likely to raise interest and gain consent in the overall population, including natives. This typically results in the over-visibility of 'ethnic' arts, food or music, and possibly of interreligious dialogue initiatives, as opposed to more expensive interventions which may trigger perceptions of competition, allegations of welfare shopping or contrasts between old and new residents (see Zucchetti 1999). Given this risk, pro-immigrant interventions are invariably justified on grounds of general interest which can meet broad consensus. Measures against early school leaving, for instance, are more emphasized than support for students of immigrant origin; housing improvements in certain neighbourhoods are discursively more salient, and legitimate, than specific initiatives aimed at overcoming immigrant segregation. These communication strategies are not new, but have been strengthened in the past decade (Zincone 2009). At a time of a worsening political

climate on the topic, in order to grant investments for the benefit of immigrants it has become even more necessary to present them as investments that meet general needs, and if possible as alternatives to the much-disliked multiculturalism.

Altogether, though, the primary issue at stake in all the cities that we studied has less to do with the changing approach of migrant-addressed provision than with its long-term impact and sustainability. As the resources for social policies diminish, and traditional equal opportunity measures have generally fallen short of the expected results, majorities and minorities appear to revert to the defence of their identities. An overreliance on market and individual resources as devices for the insertion and integration of weak populations also seems to have infiltrated social policies (Serrano Pascual and Crespo Suárez 2007; Dingeldey 2009). Broadly speaking, therefore, local policies across these European cities have become more inclined to celebrate diversity, or peaceful urban cohabitation, than to try and achieve higher social integration. Overtly reformist ambitions, with a view to contrasting immigrants' long-term disadvantage, are less widespread and legitimated.

After all, this should come as no surprise. The political discourse on the inclusion of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities has become increasingly restrictive and politically profitable for populist and xenophobic political subjects, even in countries with long traditions of liberalism and openness such as the Netherlands or Sweden. Restrictive policies towards immigrants, above all irregular residents, have also been introduced in several local governments in the USA (Hagan et al. 2011). The construction of mosques is often a cause of political and cultural conflict (Maussen 2009). In Catalonia, several local governments have taken positions similar to those of the Italian cities governed by coalitions of the centre-right and where the Northern League has a strong influence (Burchianti and Zapata Barrero 2012): policies aimed at excluding immigrants from social provisions delivered at the local level, or targeting them as a threat to the city's security and cultural identity (Ambrosini 2013c). To date, these local policies of exclusion have in many ways been announced and rhetorically established. Yet, they have proved difficult to implement (Çetin 2012), besides being often contrasted by pro-immigrant associations, bureaucratic

rules and court decisions (Guiraudon 2002). Having said this, they are not innocuous in reinforcing barriers and conflicts between natives and ethnic minorities.

The Prospects for Urban Governance of Immigrant Diversity: The Emerging Role of Civil Society Organizations

Another key aspect of the relation between local and national policies, as far as immigrant integration is concerned, lies in the multifaceted contribution of civil society organizations to local welfare arrangements, as affected by the local structure of political opportunities. The civil society category includes a broad range of bodies, ranging from formal non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to religious institutions, trade unions, immigrant and ethnic organizations, anti-racist and radical social movements. Their role may be important at several levels: from policy consultation to service delivery, as well as in the protection and advocacy of migrant and minority rights (Ambrosini 2013b). So, it is true that neoliberal policies foster the outsourcing of social services to NGOs and other private providers. It is also true that restrictive policies often need to be softened by practical arrangements, to avoid major human rights violations, and NGOs can fill this space (Castañeda 2007). But civil society actors, especially when they form advocacy coalitions on behalf of migrants, are also political actors which participate in the public policy arenas. With their mix of demonstrations, discourses and services, they interact with local authorities, helping to shape local responses to immigrants and ethnic minorities issues.

On sensitive issues such as irregular immigration and asylum-seeking, various groups that fight for openness and respect for human rights oppose mobilization in favour of border closures (for the USA, see Caminero-Santangelo 2009; Eastman 2012). Interestingly, local authorities can rely on these groups, or support their activities in various ways, in order to soften and to some extent circumvent the limitations created by national policies. Basic health services for irregular migrants are a case in point. While public opinions and the political discourse are influenced by a drive to tighten border controls, organized groups active in the social and communicative fields can in turn intervene in the public arena and affect the production of (local) policies. As the Italian case has shown, their lobbying may offset the weak political citizenship of immigrants and combat restrictive policies (Zincone 1999, 2011; Ambrosini 2013c).

In almost all the cities we studied, local authorities have adopted a wider approach to governance based on interaction and negotiation between decision makers and organized civil society – for purposes of service delivery and sometimes, less obviously, in an urban planning perspective. In Germany, for instance, the large religious and union organizations are firmly embedded in the welfare system as providers of social services, and they are especially involved in the supply of many kinds of support to immigrants and refugees. Frankfurt is a clear example. We may cite the Frauenrecht Ist Menschenrecht (FIM; Social Consultancy for Foreign Women) centre of the Diakonie network, which provides services to immigrant women in difficulties, among them ones without a residency permit, asylum seekers and victims of sexual exploitation. Another interesting case, as a mechanism of participatory urban governance, is Manchester's Agenda 2010. This is a 10-year programme covering four areas (crime and public order; education; health and social care; and employment and vocational training). The most remarkable aspect of the programme lies indeed in the participation of civil society organizations – including associations representing immigrants and ethnic minorities – in the working groups set up for each area and guided by the relevant public authority.

Equally systematic forms of collaboration among public authorities, local NGOs and ethnic minorities' associations have been documented in Brussels and Madrid, or, at a different level, in the Marseille Esperance initiative, promoted by the local government and involving different religious communities. Among the Italian towns we studied, an important case is that of Verona (Mauri 2012), where the local government, ruled by the Lega Nord party, has developed a strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. In parallel with this, over 50 local NGOs have promoted, since 1995, the 'In my town nobody is a stranger' coalition. This coalition fosters a series of actions to

affirm citizenship rights and promote equal opportunities for all, combating every form of discrimination. The Associazione di Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione (ASGI) association has also undertaken judicial action against the discriminatory measures introduced by the city administration. Likewise, the Catholic Church has echoed this awareness with a publication entitled 'In the Church of Verona nobody is a stranger' (Diocesi di Verona 2011). The Catholic organization Caritas has notably emerged as the hub of a number of networks and projects aimed at the social inclusion of immigrants.

For some aspects of local policies, the contribution of immigrant associations and NGOs has proved particularly important. The unpopular issue of the acceptance and protection of asylum seekers and irregular immigrants, for instance, is typically handed over to them. We found this to be especially true in the three Italian cities analyzed, but the literature illustrates that it also happens in other countries (for the Dutch case, see Engbersen and Broeders 2009; for Germany, Lutz 2011; for the USA, in relation to health care, Fernández-Kelly 2012). Importantly, moreover, civil society organizations do not confine themselves to easing tensions between state sovereignty and the affirmation of universal human rights: the controversial issue of protecting irregular immigrants has in some cases given rise to forms of protest and advocacy movements which emerge, especially in large cities, where numbers and concentration make it a more visible phenomenon. In our research, the case of Brussels is the most conspicuous one, but other studies have reported similar protests in other European cities, such as Paris and London (Chimienti 2011).

To recap, the main local activities developed by civil society organizations can be grouped into five headings. The first covers the representation of immigrants' interests in local bodies, consultations or other arenas where urban governments treat issues related to the settlement of ethnic minorities (Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2005). Here not only immigrant associations are involved, but also pro-immigrant NGOs and trade unions. This is possibly the most politically contentious of their functions, as the potential for NGOs (including the ethnic ones) to embody political representation, and their institutional legitimacy in doing so, are highly debated and context-dependent. In the second place, civil society organizations have been involved in several forms of political pressure in defence of immigrants' rights and social demands. This is of particular salience in countries, such as Italy, where immigrants do not enjoy voting rights, so that their weight in the political game is negligible. Local civil society – as a scattered set of native and ethnic-based organizations – has been remarkably active in advocacy, most notably against forms of discrimination introduced by local authorities, or vis-à-vis the diffusion of demeaning language in the public sphere. Likewise, NGOs have generally played an important role in the fields of communication, education and public awareness-raising. Last, NGOs should be factored in local policies to immigrants as key

providers of services on behalf of public authorities or as independent providers, particularly in the case of irregular immigrants. Importantly, the relative significance of each of these functions is variable across the cities we studied, as a reflex of their different historical and political trajectories of immigrant incorporation. In all of these respects, however, both the local governance of ethnic diversity and the development of new ideas, projects and initiatives in the field need to be appreciated in the light of the growing involvement of civil society organizations.

Discussion and Conclusion: Urban Multiculturalism in Search for New Political Languages

After revisiting the findings of our comparative case study, against the literature on migrants' local integration policies, we can return to the questions we introduced to map the changing field of urban multiculturalism. In a nutshell, we have found grounds to emphasize, first, the relative autonomy of the local level of policy-making; second, the systematic persistence of multicultural-style practices in integration and welfare service provision to immigrants; third, the growing (if variable) importance of networks and civil society actors as part and parcel of the urban governance of immigration.

To start with, across the different urban settings we analyzed a strong case can be

made for the relative autonomy of the local policy-making level, as opposed to the national one. Whatever the national trajectories and configurations of immigrant incorporation policies, the urban-level needs to be appreciated as a policy-making field in itself; one which is in many ways independent of the declared national philosophies of integration. On a local level, public policy is necessarily more sensitive to the problems and social dynamics which result from the settlement of foreign-born populations, rather than to principled statements. Of course, urbanlevel immigrant policies also pay tribute to the neo-assimilationist emphasis which pervades the current public discourse in Europe: while much of the last century's multiculturalist language is abandoned, emphasis is put on objectives of social cohesion and civic integration in receiving societies. At the same time, the real changes made to welfare services provision are generally more limited. A case can even be made for retrenchment being a result of the economic and financial crisis more than of any effective 'backlash' against multiculturalism. If anything, a more remarkable development lies in the discursive emphasis on mainstreaming, as part of an apparently de-ethnicized welfare provision: at least at a communicative level, local authorities across the cities we studied tend to emphasize the need to improve the welfare of the local society as a whole, while watering down any special measure for immigrants and ethnic minorities. Importantly, the partial and variable decoupling between national-level policies and urban-level ones makes immigrants' condition still more unequal – subject to more or less favourable structures of opportunities – on a territorial basis. Their position in civic stratification regimes, and their prevalent status as 'denizens', should also be revisited bearing in mind the distinctive orientations of local policies, besides national policy regimes.

Second, despite the declining political fortunes of multiculturalism as a political idiom and agenda, some local variant of it can still be documented at an urban level under changing contours. This can be appreciated, as far as our case study is concerned, as an inclusive and explicit multiculturalism in Frankfurt; a deemphasized and pragmatic one in Manchester; a composite, integrationist and celebratory one in Brussels; a de facto and tacit one in Marseille; a voluntary and fluctuating one in Madrid. Interestingly, diversity has often taken the place of multiculturalism as a label for projects and initiatives concerning ethnic and cultural minorities (Faist 2009; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009; Boccagni 2015). At the same time, 'aesthetics of diversity' celebrating the musical, artistic and gastronomic contributions of minorities are often used in local policies. This point requires further discussion.

As in the past, and perhaps more so, local policies are generally unable to attack major structural issues such as labour market discrimination, residential segregation or the educational failure of ethnic minorities (Mahnig 2004). Decreasing investments in welfare and the decline of political consensus on these objectives complicate the search for new answers, which in any case would require large-scale reforms at national level. Locally, however, many projects and innovative measures tend to pursue specific improvements in the conditions of disadvantaged minorities and of ethnically segregated neighbourhoods, or to highlight their contribution to the enrichment and diversification of the city's cultural supply. Initiatives to celebrate the multicultural face of cities are particularly popular, even at the cost of encroaching on folklore. Making diversity an element of attraction – or at least a 'commonplace' one (Wessendorf 2011) –has even become an objective of urban marketing campaigns. While ethnic neighbourhoods are often seen as icons of degradation and segregation, in certain circumstances – and once properly gentrified – they can become tourist attractions, leisure-time destinations and cultural experiences which are close to home while reproducing the charm of distant worlds (Rath 2007).[4]

Third, across the cities we studied urban immigration policy-makers are increasingly oriented to alliance-building as a way of mediating between restrictive national policies, decreasing budget provision and local phenomena seen only as intractable issues of security and public order. The connection with social forces and organized civil society actors is a recurrent feature of both policy-building and service provision. Particularly thorny issues, such as the needs of asylum seekers or unauthorized immigrants, require the formation of relational networks and strategic

alliances among different actors. Moreover, the political role of movements that demand respect for human rights and the widening of reception policies should not go unnoticed. The leading role of the third sector is not an exclusively Italian or Southern European feature, even though the Italian case has gained particular visibility in that respect.

Altogether, a focus on the urban level of immigrant policies points to a variable, if generally significant persistence of multiculturalism in Europe – at least as a pragmatic recognition of cultural differences, as an involvement of immigrant representatives and associations in public arenas and as an adaptation of welfare service provision, given the persisting over-vulnerabilities and inequalities of immigrant minorities. Much more dubious are, instead, the prospects of multiculturalism as a public idiom. At a discursive level, multiculturally oriented claims are arguably in need of an innovative language and of new ways to achieve relegitimation, in a political and social context which is far less favourable than in the past, but where ongoing social processes enhance local diversities and the need to govern them. The emerging contribution of the civil society, in this respect, is still in need of further investigation.

To recap: national policies to immigrants, across Europe, have been converging towards a civic integration agenda with a basically neo-assimilationist subtext. Compared to the recent past, immigrant integration tends to be framed no longer as an interactive process which involves both majority society and immigrant minorities; no longer as a societally desirable aim which benefits majority and minorities alike; but, rather, as a 'property' migrants should have even before leaving home – or at the very least, as a preventive requirement for them to gain any meaningful right, and as a condition which structures their pathways towards full citizenship. At a local level, nonetheless, more flexible understandings of integration – whether explicit or not – can still be appreciated. In a number of domains (e.g. education, health, associational life), more room for ethnic diversity is found than an abstract reading of national policies would suggest. While multiculturalism has been rejected in national (declared) policies, it still finds its practical ways through local integration policies. This is also thanks to the mediation of different conceptual (or at least rhetorical) frames, such as diversity. Several multicultural-like stances have been reframed, at an urban level, exactly under the banner of diversity. How far an emphasis on it can reach, without addressing more deep-rooted issues of ethnicized inequality, is of course a different matter.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Interestingly, much work along these lines was done in the early 2000s (see Alexander 2003; Penninx et al. 2004), while more recent research has apparently lagged behind (see, among the exceptions, however, Caponio and Borkert 2010).

[2] The research took place between 2010 and 2011. As a comparative study, it followed a common pattern to be adapted in the light of the specificities of each local context. Besides an extended literature review on the evolution of urban integration policies, the empirical analysis was based on field visits, meetings and in-depth interviews with civil servants, managers of local services, academics and representatives of associations. Overall, about 60 in-depth interviews were conducted.

[3] The choice of these Italian cities was driven less by their conformity to a national model (itself very fuzzy and inconsistent, see Ambrosini 2012), than by the opportunity to compare significantly different local policy arrangements.

[4] This may entail, as pointed out by Zukin (1998), a 'commodification of diversity' which, while fictitious and instrumental, treats minority cultures and ethnicized neighbourhoods as economic resources for the city.

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