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The Role of Multiple Local Actors in Shaping Immigrants' Civic and Political Participation in Cities: Lesson from Italy and Spain

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how multiple actors promote civic and political participation of immigrants locally. The dominant approach in scholarship on political participation of immigrants —the political opportunity structure—focuses mostly on the role of local institutional actors to examine the constraints and opportunities for immigrants’ civic and political participation. We argue that this main focus on top-down actors and processes does not allow for understanding the complexity of actors and dynamics involved in the promotion of immigrants’ participation in cities. For this reason, we propose to expand our conceptualization of the city and to combine both top-down and bottom-up dynamics to investigate how local contexts shape immigrants’ civic and political participation. Drawing on empirical research in Italy and Spain, we map the multiplicity of actors involved in the promotion of participation of immigrants in seven cities, identify the channels they offer and assess how their interactions explain variations.

Keywords

Local actors, Immigrants, Civic and Political Channels, Italy, Spain

Author’s biographical note

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Introduction¹

This paper examines how multiple actors promote civic and political participation of immigrants in cities. The dominant approach in scholarship on political participation of immigrants—the political opportunity structure (from now on POS)—focuses mostly on the role of local institutional actors, especially local administrations (i.e. Caponio 2005; Morales and Giugni 2011) and political parties (i.e. Garbaya 2005) to examine the constraints and opportunities for immigrants’ civic and political participation. We argue that this main focus on top-down processes does not allow us to understand the complexity of actors and dynamics involved in the promotion of immigrants’ participation. For this reason, we propose to expand our conceptualization of the city and to combine both top-down and bottom-up dynamics to investigate how local context shape immigrants’ civic and political participation. Hence, we propose to enlarge our analysis of the political context. Drawing on Cappiali’s (2016a) definition of the city as a ‘realm,’ we conceptualize the city as *dynamic contexts* shaped by a multiplicity of actors with different powers and pursuing different interests and goals (c.f. Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011a). We argue that understanding cities as a realm allows us to see the interaction among actors in dynamic ways and to grasp how participation by immigrants is negotiated in an uneven power relation.

Drawing on our empirical research on Italian and Spanish cities (c.f. Cappiali 2015; 2016; 2017; Triviño-Salazar 2016; 2018; forthcoming 2019), we map the multiple actors—including local administrations, political parties, the Catholic Church, church- and lay-based organizations, and immigrant groups—involved in the promotion of participation, identify the channels they offer and assess how their interactions explain variations the ways they promote civic and political participation of immigrants. Although our paper takes a descriptive stance to the empirical material presented; our intention is to show the feasibility of bridging top-down and bottom-up dynamics in the study of the civic and political participations of immigrants locally. We contend that our conceptualization of the city allows us to analyze the role of multiple

¹ We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for their comments, as well as, the

actors and thus to offer a better account of local dynamics than studies that focus mostly on top-down processes.

We start with a critique of the POS approach in the migration field and with a presentation of our approach to the city, by introducing the concept of ‘realm’ of migration and by arguing that this conceptualization allows us to better grasp the role of local dynamics in explaining participation of immigrants and the resulting alliances. We continue with a brief presentation of our case selections and methodology. Subsequently, building on our definition of city as a ‘realm’, we map the actors in the cities and we present a preliminary overview of the *relational dynamics* that shape participation and alliances. We conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of our findings for the study of civic and political participation of immigrants.

1. Beyond a Top-Down Approach

For a very long time, migration scholars in North America and Europe have tended to give little attention to the role of political incorporation and participation of immigrants, focusing instead on economic, social and cultural forms of inclusion (Martiniello 2009; Però and Solomos 2010). Nonetheless, in recent years, the study of immigrants’ political participation has increased exponentially in both sides of the Atlantic giving life to a new rich and expanding scholarship in the field of migration (Hochschild et. al. 2013: 2; see also Bird, Saalfeld and Wust 2011; Morales and Giugni 2011). In part, this shift is associated with a progressive acknowledgment by scholars of the role of immigrants’ participation for receiving society, especially in fostering democratic values (Jones-Correa 1998; Bird, Saalfeld and Wust 2011).

The literature on political participation of immigrants comes from different fields of research, but it is shaped by a dominant approach in the field of migration, the POS approach. This approach accords a great value to the state and institutional actors in offering opportunities and constraints for participation (Ireland 1994; Soysal 1994; Bloemraad 2006; Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009; Hochschild et. al. 2013). Dieder Ruedin (2012: 4) explains that the POS is helpful “for understanding a number of social phenomena, in particular the success and mobilization of different political actors.” In particular, the POS literature offers significant insights into the role of the state and state institutions in shaping opportunities for and constraints on the political participation of immigrants in the receiving society, including policies and discursive opportunities. A

central contribution to this strand is the work by Koopmans and Statham (2000) where they applied the approach to the field of citizenship and integration to the study of protests in German, Dutch and British cities. According to the authors, citizenship and integration regimes played a crucial role in shaping immigrant identities as well as their patterns of political mobilization and participation. Similarly, Odmalm (2004) contends that national level characteristics shape the political opportunities immigrants had at the local level. In his case, he studied the individual participation of immigrants and their inclusion in political parties by comparing Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Malmo (Sweden).

Moreover, in recent years, the POS approach has been complemented by the literature on the “local turn” in the field of migration, especially in Europe, which emphasizes the role of local institutional actors such as administrations and political parties in shaping immigrants’ participation beyond, and sometimes in conflict with, the national context (Penninx and al. 2004; Alexander, 2004; Fennema and Tillie 2004; Borkert and Caponio 2010; Garbaye 2005; Caponio 2005; Cappiali 2016a; 2017; Morales and Giugni 2011; Triviño-Salazar 2016; 2017). Representative of this line of research is the work by Garbaye (2005) on the representation of ethnic minorities in local councils in Lille (France) and Birmingham (the UK). He revealed that the centre-periphery relation and local politics were determinant in the chances immigrant communities had to elect representatives in the local council. Relevant as well is the comparative work between 10 European cities by Morales and Giugni (2011). In their edited book, the different authors examined the political mobilization of immigrants locally according to their individual attributes and resources, their social capital and the political opportunities on their political integration. Taking an institutional approach to mobilization, Triviño-Salazar (2018) studied alliances between political parties and immigrant associations in political conflict over immigration in two mid-sized Spanish cities. In this context, he asserts that the mobilization of immigrant associations greatly depends on the channels offered by institutional actors such as the local government and political parties to immigrant leaders.

Understanding the political participation of immigrants from the POS approach implies acknowledging the role of receiving societies in shaping participation and how immigrants respond the channels offered to them. Nonetheless, this approach remains too entangled in a top-down perspective as it sees in institutional actors, the main actors who shape opportunities for immigrants’ participation (c.f. Morales and Giugni 2011)

and often overlooks the role of *interactions* among a multiplicity of actors involved in the promotion of participation (Cappiali 2016; 2017). As a matter of fact, we argue that its focus on top-down processes does not allow us to understand the complexity of actors involved in the promotion of immigrants' participation. For this reason, we propose to expand our conceptualization of the city and to combine both top-down and bottom-up dynamics to investigate how local contexts shape immigrants' civic and political participation. Below we present three main limitations of the POS approach and how we intend to overcome them by expanding our conceptualization of the city.

1.1. Three limitations of the POS approach

We have identified three main limitations of the POS that we intend to address in our study of cities. *First*, POS scholars assume that the state is the main (if not the only) source of power, and that its allocation of resources makes it the main actor in shaping opportunities for participation. However, institutional actors are only some of the actors that account for different forms of civic and political participation by immigrants. For this reason, we need to enlarge the political field if we want to understand how local actors (both institutional and non-institutional) are involved in the processes of inclusion and exclusion and how they shape participation.

Second, the POS approach suffers from an *overly deterministic* understanding of the opportunities and constraints available to immigrants in the receiving society. Però (2008), for instance, points out that POS scholars tacitly endorse the idea that individuals' options are determined by the activities of other social and political actors rather than themselves, and thus reinforces the idea that immigrants are mainly *objects* of specific policies rather than *subjects* of their own integration (Però 2008). In line with Però's criticism, Bousetta (2000: 232-233) notes that in the POS approach: "Everything happens as if a straightforward causal link could always be established between immigrants' political mobilization and institutions". This approach, he adds, tends to portray immigrants "as passive agents whose actions are structurally determined by institutional factors" (Bousetta (2000: 235). He suggests, therefore, "a cautious interpretation of the role of institutions and policies "in order to avoid misrepresenting immigrants' true role" (*Ibid.*). Following this line of thoughts, Però (2008: 122) suggests that the POS needs to be conceived as a "non-deterministic concept" and that scholars should rethink the framework "in more [...] *actors-oriented* and *interactive*

terms so as to avoid mono-causal institutional determinism.” Building on this insight, we argue that an *actors-oriented* and *interactive* approach is needed to grasp local dynamics and show how local actors shape political participation of immigrants.

Finally, certain scholars applying the POS approach assume a *too narrow a definition of political participation* (c.f. Soysal 1994; Bloemraad 2006). These scholars mostly concentrate on conventional (or formal) channels of civic participation (such as participation in migrant associations) and political participation (such as voting rates, political representation and standing for elections). On the other hand, they disregard participation through non-conventional (or informal) channels, such as strikes, protests, as well as involvement in trade unions, pressure groups, environmental movements, neighborhood committees (c.f. Martiniello 2009: 39) as well as social movements, and autonomous political organizations created outside mainstream channels (c.f. Cappiali 2017; forthcoming 2018). For this reason, it is important that scholars enlarge their understanding of participation to include both formal and informal forms of participation in our analysis.

1.2. Combining top-down and bottom-up dynamics: The city as a ‘realm’

Building on the three critiques of the POS approach described above, we argue that a conceptualization of the political arena as shaped by a multiplicity of actors is necessary to examine how political actors mobilize around the issue of immigration and shape the space of political participation of immigrants. The literature on migration borrowed the concept of political opportunity structure from the social movement literature (Bousetta 2000). However, while the literature on social movements has updated this approach by showing that political opportunities should not be considered as static and fixed, but as dynamic and changeable also thanks to agential factors, most of the migration literature’s conceptualizations of cities remains still anchored in a quite structuralist view (Cappiali 2015). Immigrants and a plethora of institutional and non-institutional actors interact in an uneven conflicting field (Cappiali 2016a; forthcoming 2018) and these interactions need to be taken into account to explain how participation is encouraged in cities. Moreover, in this view immigrants (as individuals or groups) interact in the city and become part of this interaction. Immigrants are not assumed to be outsiders, but like every other local actor take part in the negotiations of the city (see Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011a). If we want to contextualize dominant approaches to

the study of civic and political participation of immigrants; we need to look at new strands in the literature that combine migration studies with social movement research taking as focus the local level (De Graauw, 2016; Mayer 2017; Nicholls and Uitemark 2017; Cappiali 2016a; forthcoming 2018). By looking at the political mobilization of immigrants, these studies can offer us elements such as the focus on structural, agential and contextual factors that inform the interaction between different actors. For instance, in their comparison on immigrants' rights movements in Los Angeles, Paris and Amsterdam, Nicholls and Uitemark (2017) present the city as spaces of exclusion and injustice, as well as contextual "incubators" of opportunities for the emergence of activism and social movements around immigrants. Mayer (2017) also illustrates this strand by focusing on municipalities, volunteer initiatives and protest movements formed by refugees during the 2015 'summer of welcome' in Germany. In her study, she deems the city as a relational arena that has become "...a networked and contested space of immigration policy" (1). Although these studies have not explicitly referred to the shortcomings we have identified in the literature or the need to bridge the gap we address in this paper; their work illustrate the city as spaces of institutional dynamics, but also as a complex networks of actors as well as spaces of conflicts, resistance, opposition and solidarity.

As mentioned earlier, we conceptualize cities as *dynamic contexts* shaped by a multiplicity of actors with different powers and interests (c.f. Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011a). Moreover, we draw on Cappiali's (2016a: 136-137) conceptualization of the city as a 'realm.' As she explains:

The concept of 'realm' refers to a structured space of relations created by the interaction of local actors around the issue of immigration. This concept makes it possible to get past the idea that the context is a given, and to identify which actors matter, and how, in different local arenas. For this reason, it does not focus on the configurations of power and local actors in general, but rather at how actors in specific local contexts mobilize around the issue of immigration and interact with each other. Beyond simply identifying actors, it offers a particular way of thinking about their role in structuring opportunities for participation through their discourses and practices. Additionally, the concept allows us to place immigrant activists as part of this interaction, and as the main contributors to the structuration of this space, through their involvement in the sphere of immigration and alliances. Overall, this concept allows us to consider the role of

agency from a dynamic, actor-oriented perspective and is compatible with [my] attempt to overcome an overly structural approach to the role of contextual factors.

Drawing from the definition above, we understand the city as a *relational field* where actors interact and where the balance of power matters in shaping local dynamics. This approach allows us to overcome the three main limitations of the POS. *First*, it allows us look at how multiple actors interact in the political arena and examine how migrants themselves perceive, engage with and appropriate the discourses and practices of other actors involved in the processes of inclusion. *Second*, it allows us to adopt an *actor-oriented* and *interactive* approach and to examine how actors shape the city by mobilizing around the issue of immigration, and specifically the political participation of immigrants. *Finally*, we suggest enlarging our analysis of civic and political participation to include both conventional and non-conventional politics. Martiniello (2005: 3) defines political participation as “the active dimension of citizenship. It refers to various ways in which individuals take in the management of the collective affairs of a given political community.” Following Martiniello, we define civic and political participation in an inclusive sense, to refer to both conventional and non- conventional channels. We use the term “civic channels” to refer to both individual and collective avenues for participating in civil society activities and “political channels” to refer to the opening of opportunities for the exercise of political rights by immigrants (especially through alternative channels in the absence of formal political rights). Channels of political participation here are intended broadly, and refer to three dimensions: (1) Conventional or formal participation (i.e. voting and standing for election, volunteering for political campaigns, signing petitions, belonging to activist groups, and serving in public office); (2) Non-conventional or informal participation (i.e. strikes, supporting boycotts, and protests); and (3) Illegal participation (i.e. activities that break the law, such as the illegal occupation of a public space). Below we present our methodology and our preliminary findings.

2. Case selection and methodology

For our analysis we relied on two studies conducted separately in Italy and Spain that have commonalities that allow us to justify the comparability of our data (for details on our methodology, see: Cappiali 2015; Triviño-Salazar 2016). National and regional

similarities between the two countries offer a common ground to take a comparative approach in our studies. As for case selection, we chose seven mid-sized cities: four Italian cities (Reggio Emilia, Bologna, Brescia and Bergamo) in two key regions of migration (Emilia Romagna and Lombardy) and three Spanish ones (Badalona, Lleida and Vic) in one key region (Autonomous Community of Catalonia). Most of the empirical studies developed so far in Europe, mainly focus on ‘old’ host countries of immigration (i.e. Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK), neglecting the so-called ‘new’ ones (e.g. Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain). Nonetheless, as Marques and Santos (2004) point out, we can learn a great deal by consistently using cases from Southern European to study the role of cities in promoting immigrants’ civic and political participation in receiving societies. Moreover, as Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011a) explain, while much research tends to focus on large and gate-way cities, there is a greater need for studies on mid-sized cities. Finally, while scholars tend to focus on cities within specific national contexts (c.f. Koopmans and Statham 2000), focusing on the national framework as point of reference (a vertical dimension), in our study we shifted our attention to the horizontal dimension, as we focus on similarities and differences across cities within two national contexts. As Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) pinpoint, there is a need to have more research on comparative studies of localities, as this approach allows us to identify specific local dynamics, keeping the national context constant. In this respect, Italy and Spain are two important cases because their high degree of decentralization leaves to the sub-national level ample attributions on the reception and accommodation of immigrants and several divergences with respect to national context (Caponio 2006; Moreno and Bruquetas, 2011).

In addition to the relatively small size of the cities, we considered demographic characteristics, and particularly the percentage of immigrants, which was fairly high in all cities in 2012 (between 13% to 25%; c.f. Table 1), especially compared to the percentage at the national level: In Italy, the national percentage of immigrants was 8.3% and in Spain it was 11.2%. We also considered the rapid demographic changes in the last two decades. While both countries experienced exponential growth of immigrants and a rapid transformation of demographic composition since the early 2000s, the arrival of international migrants was felt especially in the regions considered. Finally, the table shows the diversity of groups represented in each city, an aspect we took into account during our research, as we made sure to control for the participation

of these communities. The selection of the seven cities was based on other factors as well: before the financial crisis that started in 2009-2010, they all had very strong economic performances and their capacities to integrate immigrants at the socioeconomic level was among the highest in both countries (c.f. CNEL 2009; IdesCat 2018). The increase of the immigrant population, combined with the economic performance of the regions and cities considered, was accompanied by important efforts of local actors to developed policies and activities aimed at the socio-economic and cultural integration of the different communities. In this specific context, we examined how actors promoted civic and political channels, controlling for similar socio-economic factors.

Table 1. Main characteristics of the immigrant population in 2012

Country	Cities	Total population	Immigrant population	10 largest immigrant communities
IT	Reggio Emilia	164,000	25,687 (15.7%)	China (3,437); Albania (3,149); Morocco (2,626); Ghana (1,984); Ukraine (1,795); Romania (1,531); Moldavia (1,512); Nigeria (1,108); Egypt (927); Sri Lanka (801)
IT	Bologna	380,635	51,771 (13.6%)	Romania (6,856); Philippines (5,133); Bangladesh (4,935); Moldavia (4,558); Morocco (3,792); Ukraine (3,163); China (3,032); Pakistan (2,803); Albania (2,509); Sri Lanka (1,355)
IT	Brescia	188,520	31,888 (16.9%)	Pakistan (3,296); Moldavia (2,923); Ukraine (2,633); Romania (2,626); Albania (2,146); India (2,027); China (2,016); Egypt (1,803); Bangladesh (1,753); Philippines (1,390)
IT	Bergamo	115,072	15,833 (13.8%)	Bolivia (3,001); Morocco (1,440); Ukraine (1,390); Romania (1,360); Albania (1,060); China (919); Bangladesh (866); Senegal (462); Ecuador (418); Philippines (398)
ES	Badalona	220,997	33,253 (15%)	Pakistan (7,222); Morocco (5,818);

				China (3,768); Ecuador (1,999); Bolivia (1,662); Romania (1,508); India (1,329); Colombia (653); Peru (548); Dominican Republic (502)
ES	Lleida	139,834	29,887 (21.37%)	Romania (7,223); Morocco (5,008); Algeria (1,509), Colombia (1162); China (1,088); Senegal (1,040); Nigeria (924); Brazil (814); Bolivia (803); Bulgaria (772)
ES	Vic	41,191	10,232 (24.84%)	Morocco (3,744); Ghana (1,267); India (762); China (621); Ecuador (535); Poland (344); Romania (284); Senegal (216); Bolivia (137); Peru (133)

Sources: ISTAT 2013; IdesCat 2012

As Table 2 shows, our selection of cities was also based on political variables, especially on political culture (left-wing vs. right-wing) and on the orientation of administrations (left-wing vs. right-wing) in the period analyzed (2011-2013), as both are relevant in explaining the role of institutional actors in determining integration policies. In Italy, Cappiali selected two traditional left-wing cities—Reggio-Emilia and Bologna—and two right-wing cities—Brescia and Bergamo—and, in Spain, Triviño-Salazar selected two left-wing cities—Badalona and Lleida—and one right-wing city—Vic. The literature on Italian cities, for instance, explains that the political culture affects the administrative style of municipalities and their interaction with the third sector (Campomori 2008; c.f. Mantovan 2007). Thus, while we can expect that traditionally left-wing cities will develop an *interventionist or cooperative model* and coordinate third-sector organizations, cities in the right-wing tradition tend to favor a *laissez-faire or non-cooperative model* and devolve policies of integration almost entirely to the third sector, in particular to the Catholic Church. In Spain, research on the three selected cities allows seeing similar patterns as the ones the literature identifies in Italy. . Moreover, the role of political actors and various civil society organizations changes, especially in Italy, depending on the political culture. Notably in the case of Italy, cities with left-wing traditions tend to have a strong presence of left-wing organizations, such as left-wing parties and lay organizations; cities with right-wing traditions tend to have a stronger presence of right-wing parties, the Catholic Church and the church-based organizations. However, it is necessary to clarify two elements

when applying the political variables to the Spanish cities. The first is the existence of what Zapata-Barrero (2010: 398) identifies as a ‘practical philosophy’ in the management of diversity brought by immigrants. Accordingly, policy-makers respond with a problem-solving logic not based on preconceived ideas such as French republicanism or British multiculturalism. Although Zapata-Barrero initially found this logic at work on the national level, it is possible to see a similar approach at the regional and local levels which leads cities with contrasting political cultural traditions to pursue similar approaches to integration. The second element to consider is the centre-periphery cleavage that exists between the historical minority nations (i.e. Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia) and the central government (Zapata-Barrero, 2010). Thus, identity politics plays a central role, in which autonomous communities and cities traditionally governed by Stateless Nationalist and Regionalist Parties (SNRP) to left or right of the political spectrum take a positive stance towards the political participation of immigrants (Climent-Ferrando and Triviño-Salazar 2015; Franco-Guillén 2015). Finally, as the last column in Table 2 shows, we can also observe an important variation in the presence of radical left organizations, a variation that does not depend on the political tradition of the city. The role of these actors is mostly overlooked in the literature on cities, and yet recent research shows their crucial role in defining local dynamics and alliances with immigrants (Cappiali 2016b).

As for the political orientations of the administrations, the literature shows that left-wing cities are more likely to promote immigrants’ inclusion and to open channels for participation, while right-wing administrations are less willing to do so (c.f. Garbaye 2005; Caponio 2006). Some authors show that left-wing actors are associated with more liberal socio-cultural values and an acceptance of social egalitarianism (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Pérez and Albertos, 2009), while right-wing actors may have a more critical view of immigration and the way it should be managed (Ivarshafaten 2005; Alonso and da Fonseca 2012). Therefore, we consider the ideological element to be an important factor that conditions how actors interact and frame the issue of immigration, and also how immigrants interact with and create alliances with multiple actors with different ideological views.

Table 2. Main characteristics of the cities

Country	Cities	Political tradition	Main political parties in power between 2011-2013	Main actors of the civil society	Significant presence of radical left actors
IT	Reggio Emilia	Left	Left	Lay organizations	No
IT	Bologna	Left	Left	Lay organizations	Yes
IT	Brescia	Right	Right	Catholic Church and church-based organizations	Yes
IT	Bergamo	Right	Right	Catholic Church and church-based organizations	No
ES	Badalona	Left	Right	Lay organizations	No
ES	Lleida	Left	Left	Church-based organization and lay organizations	No
ES	Vic	Right	Coalition of Right and Left	Church-based organizations and lay organizations	Yes

As for **methodology**, we each conducted around two months of fieldwork in each city between 2013 and 2014 and collected several kinds of qualitative data, including archival research (such as national and local newspapers, official documents), participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with local actors, including, for instance, members of administrations, political parties, civil society organizations, and immigrant associations. Through the use of an inductive approach, our qualitative analyses allowed us to reconstruct the local context and to map the main actors (individuals and organizations) involved in the realm of immigration and assess their interactions. We were able to identify the relational dimensions of the selected cities and the relevance of combining top-down and bottom-up dynamics to account for the range of factors and dynamics at work. Finally, even though our analyses focused on the

period right after the financial crisis in Europe in 2009-2010, namely between 2011 and 2013, we also considered a longer time-span, including the earlier 2000s in our analysis to account for the role of ‘old’ actors and the emergence of ‘new’ ones in the local sphere. In the two sections below, we present a preliminary summary of the channels offered by local actors to promote the civic and political participation of immigrant groups. Subsequently, we identify how key local top-down and bottom-up dynamics shape immigrants’ participation and the alliances immigrants create with local actors.

3. Preliminary findings

3.1. Multiple actors and channels to promote civic and political participation

Table 3 maps the local actors and the types of channels they have promoted to encourage participation in the seven cities we studied. In addition to actors that promote participation from above (namely, the local administrations and the political parties), it indicates actors that are usually not considered in the POS literature (i.e. the Catholic Church, church- and lay-based organizations, and social movements of the radical left).² In line with Martiniello’s (2005; 2009) definition of channels of participation, we mapped the multiplicity of civic and political channels opened for immigrants by local actors.

Table 3. Actors and main channels to promote civic and political participation

Top-down and bottom-up channels	Actors	Channels directed specifically to participation of immigrants (individual and collective)	Main trajectory of participation promoted
Top-down	Local administrations (especially of the Left)	-Consultative bodies (i.e. elective or by appointment) -Fora for immigrants’ participation (individuals or associations)	Inclusion of immigrant associations in decision-making processes

² Some exceptions in the POS literature exists, such as the work by Caponio (2006) on Italian cities, which included several civil society groups. However, this author’s work mainly focused on top-down dynamics and left out some organizations especially important for our study-the radical left groups.

	Political parties (especially of the Left)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fora for immigrants' associations -Special fora to discuss immigration issues (for individuals or associations) -Special positions for immigrants in political parties (i.e. committees to support immigrants' claims) -Support for immigrants' elections 	Promotion of participation through immigrant associations
Bottom-up	Catholic Church (i.e. Caritas) and church-based organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support of immigrants' associations -Positions for immigrants in its organization 	Promotion of participation of immigrant associations, mainly for service-delivery
	Lay-organizations (including immigrant associations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support of immigrants' organizations - Platforms to discuss pro-immigrant mobilizations 	Promotion of participation of immigrant associations and individuals in civil society's initiatives
	Non-institutional actors (i.e. radical left groups and grassroots trade unions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support of immigrants' activism (mostly workers and undocumented immigrants) - Platforms to discuss pro-immigrant mobilizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-racism/xenophobic actions - Protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, etc.

Table 3 lists the channels we found in the seven cities, but it is important to note that not all of them were present in each city. Most channels depended by the political orientation of actors (as, not surprisingly, left-wing actors were more prone to open these channels) and by the role of local actors. While most actors were focused on promoting participation through immigrant-based associations, radical left groups were more focused on the promotion of immigrant activism based on their status and labor conditions. As will be shown below, immigrant participation was largely shaped by the interactions of actors.

3.2. Local dynamics and outcomes

Table 4 shows the local dynamics we have identified in the seven cities, with a focus on the main actors who shaped immigrant participation. The table indicates that top-down and bottom-up dynamics are distributed unevenly in the cities and that the different actors played a role in explaining alliances and participation. We have identified three main patterns in the cities: (1) Mainly top-down, in which bottom-up dynamics are

coordinated from above; (2) Mixed dynamics, in which one can observe weak top-down dynamics with little coordination from above and strong bottom-up initiatives; and, (3) solely bottom-up dynamics, in which the absence of institutional intervention triggered a more significant role of civil society organizations. In all the cities where radical left groups were present (Bologna, Vic and Brescia), variations in the patterns could be observed. Below we explain briefly our three main patterns.

Table 4. Local dynamics, main actors, trajectories of participation of immigrants and alliances with local actors

Top-down and bottom-up dynamics	Cities	Main actors who offered channels	Alliances and trajectories of participation of immigrants
Mainly top-down, but also bottom-up coordinated from above	Reggio Emilia (L)	Left-wing administration, left-wing political parties, and lay organizations	Involvement of immigrant associations from above Alliances with local authorities
	Badalona (L)	Left and right-wing political parties	Involvement of immigrant associations from above Alliances with political parties
	Lleida (L)	Left-wing local administration, left-wing political parties and lay organizations	Involvement of immigrant associations from above Alliances with local authorities and political parties
Top-down, with weak or no coordination from above, and strong bottom-up	Bologna (L)	Left-wing political parties and lay organizations Relevant presence of the radical left	Multiple channels (civic and political, conventional and non-conventional), also beyond immigrant associations Several mixed associations

initiatives			(composed of immigrants and Italians) Multiple alliances with left-wing actors of different political orientations
	Vic (R)	Left and Right-wing political parties, Catholic Church Relevant presence of the radical left	Multiple channels Mixed alliances with political parties and radical-left actors
Only bottom-up	Brescia (R)	Catholic Church and church-based organizations Relevant presence of the radical left	Radicalization of marginalized groups (mostly undocumented immigrants) and participation in non-conventional channels Alliances with radical left actors
	Bergamo (R)	Catholic Church and church-based organizations	Weak involvement of immigrant association in service-delivery No significant alliances, but few collaborations with immigrant groups of Catholic faith

Mainly top-down, but also bottom-up coordinated from above: In our study, we identified three cities, Reggio Emilia in Italy and Badalona and Lleida in Spain, that followed a top-down logic. All of them were left-wing cities, suggesting the important role of the left in promoting channels from above. In these cities main institutional actors (local administrations and/or political parties) offered various channels to promote the civic and political participation of immigrants. While the public administration and/or political parties were central to opening spaces of participation from above, the other actors, such as lay organizations, became subsidiaries to the channels offered by the former. Moreover, the influence institutional actors exerted on the interaction with immigrants not only affected the direct relationships they had with immigrants, but also the relationships that immigrants developed with lay-organizations.

In this scenario, lay organizations assumed the institutional logic imposed by the administration and the political parties. Local administration encouraged participation mainly through the creation of consultative bodies or by opening space for immigrant leaders in general bodies to consult on sectional interests (e.g. housing, security). Immigrant organizations acted as intermediaries to reach the different immigrant communities. We also found that bottom-up logic is very much dependent on the predominant top-down actors.

As for immigrants' political participation, we identified alliances between local administrations and/or mainstream political parties and more established immigrant associations. However, more peripheral immigrant actors or informal immigrant associations were quite marginal and were not involved in the initiatives promoted by institutional actors (administrations and political parties alike). Our study also shows that this situation was not static. In fact, the change of color in the Badalona administration to a right-wing, anti-immigrant, government in 2011 or different conflicts over the management of Islam in Lleida between 2007 and 2011 (e.g. opposition to the opening of mosques and the regulation of the burka by the Socialist government in 2010), acted as triggers that led to a reconfiguration of allies for immigrants. In the case of Badalona, immigrant associations did not longer have an ally in the local administration as it had traditionally been. In this scenario, breaking the alliances with the local administration led associations to search for political parties and social actors outside the city who could offer them the material and symbolic support they had previously found locally. In Lleida, the different conflicts over the management of Islam produced an important reconfiguration within those communities to which most the Muslim residents belonged. From these alliances in Lleida, we identified a high dependence on the material resources offered by local administrations. Thus, immigrant leaders and organizations were disempowered by an approach that officially granted them spaces for participation which did not translate into a substantive role in the policy-making of immigration locally.

Top-down, with weak or no coordination from above, and strong bottom-up initiatives: In the cities identified here, institutional actors were active in promoting participation of immigrants; however, a lack of coordination of the third sector from above could also be observed. This fact resulted in the emergence of competing bottom-up actors offering channels, often separately from, or even in conflict with institutional

actors. In our sample, two cities with different political orientations (left-wing Bologna in Italy and the right-wing Vic in Spain) were representative of this logic. We found that channels offered by top-down actors mobilized well-established leaders representing immigrant organizations (similar to top-down cities), however, channels offered by bottom-up actors were various and rich in nature. Moreover, in both cities the radical left played a key role in promoting participation and creating alliances with immigrant activists. Thus, we identified multiple channels that catered to different immigrant leaderships. These conventional and non-conventional channels of civic and political participation made evident the existence of multiple alliances with top-down and bottom-up actors. This result, in particular, suggests that a complexity of actors, even if they are in competition with each other, are able to promote a great range of opportunity.

Only bottom-up: In the two cities identified in this group, institutional actors did not promote participation of immigrants and mostly devolution processes were at work. These dynamics were present in two right-wing cities in Italy: Brescia and Bergamo, where the Catholic Church and church-based organizations were very strong. These actors promoted some channels for immigrant associations, mainly to include them in their efforts to offer services to immigrant communities. Thus, the result was the involvement of immigrant associations in service-delivery, but weak participation beyond this role. As for Catholic actors, no significant alliances could be observed, only a few collaborations with immigrant groups, mostly of Catholic faith. However, an interesting dynamic emerged in Brescia, where together with the Church the radical left groups were particularly strong, and very much invested in the promotion of immigrants' participation (especially vulnerable groups) through protests and demonstrations. Moreover, just as in the case of Badalona and Lleida, in 2010, when a right-wing government with a strong presence of the anti-immigrant party was in power, a protest took place that created important conflicts in the city, not only between immigrants' allies with the radical left and the administration, but also with the Catholic Church. These conflicts, and the absence of other channels for participation, reinforced alliances between the radical left and immigrant activists, and led to their radicalization (for a detailed description of this event see also Cappiali 2016b). The example of the two cities with bottom-up-only dynamics in place suggests that a lack of intervention from institutional actors and the predominance of just a few actors creates problematic

dynamics for immigrant participation as very few channels are available for them. This situation does not necessarily prevent immigrants from participating or creating alliances with other actors, but their options are limited.

4. Final discussion and concluding remarks

Moving away from an institutional perspective, which is understood as the allocation of institutional power among institutional actors (Triviño-Salazar, 2016: 145), in this study we conceptualize the city as a ‘realm’ to investigate the presence of multiple actors and to look at how they contribute to shaping the participation of immigrants. Comparing mid-sized cities in Italy and Spain and focusing on the role of local dynamics in shaping civic and political participation case by case, we aim to add new knowledge to the field of migration and to show what we can learn by looking at cities through a Southern European lens. Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009: 188) argue that the way immigrants integrate locally is linked to the “differential positioning of cities determined by the articulation of political, cultural and economic power, within regions, states and the globe.” Not only in relation to global or large cities, but also in relation to smaller ones. Hence, our study problematizes mid-sized cities as heterogeneous spaces that offer various levels of complexity to the civic and political participation of immigrants and makes it clear that cities offer different scenarios where immigrants negotiate their civic and political presence by getting involved in the channels opened for them while following different participation trajectories. From our findings, cities emerge as differentiated spaces externally (in comparison to other cities and towns) and internally (different actors being more predominant than others). In particular, our analysis suggests a great variety of local dynamics that are defined by the actors in place in each city and their interactions. Top-down and bottom-up dynamics do not function as separate worlds where actors offer different channels of participation independent of one another. It is possible, instead, to identify a continuum between the two perspectives, where certain actors may be more central than others, but their interactions affect how they promote participation and create alliances with immigrant groups. In particular, depending on their roles in the city and their investment in promoting participation, local actors may reinforce the position immigrants have by offering channels that favor top-down and/or bottom-up dynamics.

Our study shows that context does matter: immigrants, as a collective actor, can gain leverage in the political process depending on the openness or closedness of institutional contexts as well as the presence of actors who support their activism and their claims. These elements matter in shaping the civic and political engagement of immigrants; however, they also partly explain the agency they have. Our findings clearly show that the more actors there are promoting their participation, the more likely immigrants are to participate and to create multiple relationships and networks. Institutional actors are important players, but they are not the only ones. Immigrant activists as part of non-institutional actors also emerge as central ones to the civic and political engagement of immigrants in our cities. We agree with Però and Solomos (2010: 10) that the capacity immigrants have to mobilize with their own voices reflect the agency they have. We acknowledge that alliances are expressions of the agency immigrants have to develop ties with different actors. In this sense, their agency is pretty much connected to the ability of immigrants to seize opportunities of participation offered by local actors (see also Cappiali 2015). This ability is connected to external but also internal resources immigrants as organizations or movements may generate locally.

Our study also reveals a complex picture where the civic and political participation of immigrants is not intrinsically beneficial for all. The fact that immigrant leaders are protagonists in the different channels offered by different actors in the cities does not guarantee that immigrant residents are equally represented. As our empirical research reveals, leaders can be subject to cooptation and powerlessness not only through the role of the local administration, but also through non-state actors such as Church-based or lay organizations. From here, our comparison in Italy and Spain shows that immigrants are not equally heard and their claims are not always taken into account by those supposed to represent them. In this sense, the mapping exercise in the seven cities serves to demystify the role of left-wing actors who are expected to assume a positive role towards immigrants. As previous studies (Però 2007; Cappiali 2017) show left-wing actors may create disempowering mechanisms for immigrants' claims. Our findings confirm this reality as the different cities show. Moreover, having left-wing allies do not always have empowering effects on the immigrants' side as the case of Lleida shows. However, the findings also show that certain left-wing actors, such as

radical ones, can offer channels of participation who may in turn contribute to the organization and mobilization of immigrants.

Based on our findings, we invite scholars to pay greater attention to multiple local actors, and particularly the complex dynamics and processes that shape cities and the opportunities of immigrants to participate. This aspect, identified in this paper, should be used not only by ethnographers and scholars who use qualitative research, but also by students focusing on quantitative comparative research seeking to study patterns of participation in cities in Southern Europe and beyond. Finally, more research is needed on how local actors may have a disempowering effect on the civic and political participation of immigrants (see also Cappiali 2017; Triviño-Salazar 2018) as well as the role of politicization in redefining local dynamics (Cappiali 2016; Triviño-Salazar, 2016).

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