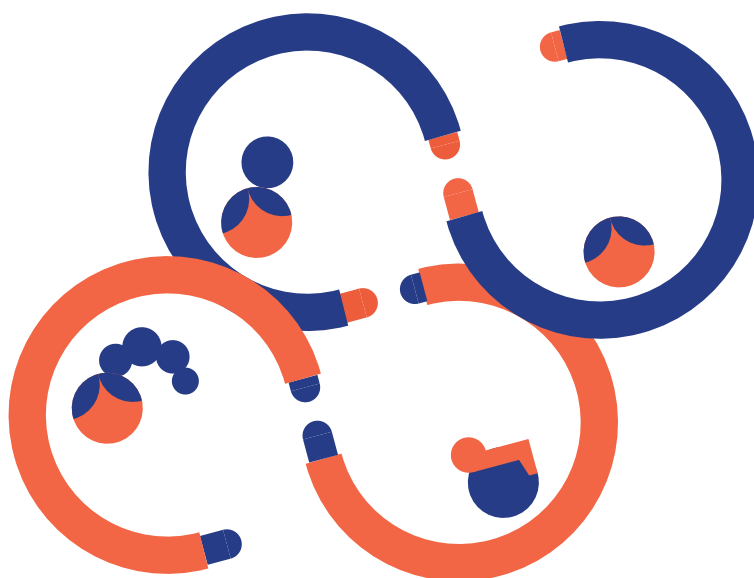


Experimenting Migrant Participation in Small and Medium-Sized Towns

White Paper of the PISTE Project

Edited by PISTE - Participation in Small
and Medium-Sized Towns: Experiences,
Experiments, Exchanges



PISTE has received funding from the
European Union's Asylum, Migration
and Integration Fund (AMIF) under
Grant Agreement No. 101038374.



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WHITE PAPER OF THE PISTE PROJECT

Migratowns vol.3

PISTE (Participation in Small- and Medium-Sized Towns: Experiences, Exchanges, Experiments)

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PB3 POLICY BRIEF. FOSTERING THE POLITICAL
AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE FROM A
MIGRATION BACKGROUND IN SMSTs

PB3 Preconditions for participation

PB6 Visibility and acknowledgement of migration and
cultural minorities

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List of acronyms

AMIF – Asylum Migration and Integration Fund

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

EPP – European Policy Platform

EU – European Union

LNPP – Local-National Policy Platform

MSO – Migrant self-organisation

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

PISTE – Participation in Small and Medium-Sized Towns: Experiences, Exchanges, Experiments

SMSTs – Small and Medium-sized Towns

UAMs – Unaccompanied Minors

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WP – Work Package

GLOSSARY

Local-National Policy Platform (LNPP): LNPPs are forums created via the PISTE project's networking actions in every partner. LNPPs have been periodically organised in the four partner municipalities, gathering partners with a set of civil society organisations and stakeholders selected according to the characteristics of local associative networks (among the others: immigrant self-organisations and advocacy associations, organisations dealing with immigration-related issues, social workers). The LNPP aimed to build a durable network among local stakeholders, to consult on the local migration context, and to assess policy experiments. LNPPs also assumed additional tasks during the course of the project.

European Policy Platform (EPP): The EPP is a transnational body defined within the PISTE project to support networking and the exchange of practices among partners and stakeholders in different countries. It included selected members of the four LNPPs, as well as representatives from the partners.

Participation: The PISTE project adopted a broad and flexible understanding of participation, including both civic and political dimensions. According to this concept, participation is thus expressed through all actions aimed at voicing the needs, demands and claims of people from a migration background, ranging from membership in civil society organisations or involvement in informal consultation up to active and passive electorate. Within our project, we considered key also dealing with preconditions of participation, i.e. constraining and enabling factors influencing civic and political participation.

People from a migration background: In this paper, this umbrella term is used to identify large groups and individuals that have in common a personal or a family experience of international migration. This can be either direct (e.g. people internationally migrating in first person) or indirect (e.g. people descending from a family who internationally migrated, despite being born and/or raised in the country they are living in). This formulation is also meant to include people in different positions within the civic stratification, including both citizens and non citizens. In short, this expression considers all experiences of migration that may occur in a super-diverse society.

Policy experiment: During the PISTE project, policy experiments were intended as measures designed via collaborative processes, aiming to promote, support, test and foster models and practices of civic and political participation in the four partner municipalities. The policy experiments targeted predominantly people from a migration background at the local level, based on priorities defined in the first phases of the project. Their main characteristics are to be project-funded, limited in time, providing innovation compared to the existing local policy frame. The ambition is that those policy experiments become structural interventions valorizing participation in the case municipalities, but also providing useful insights for other municipalities coping with similar issues and challenges (starting from the coordination among partner municipalities and their key stakeholders, which resulted in two stakeholders' assessment during the PISTE project).

Small- and Medium-Sized Towns (SMSTs): There are no universally accepted definitions of SMSTs to be used in research or policymaking. The towns involved in the PISTE project have been selected in line with the ESPON TOWN classification of population thresholds to identify small and medium towns (respectively <25.000 and <50.000 inhabitants).

Besides the dimension, in our project – in line with research in political and economic geography and urban sociology – the focus has not been on size per se, but on size as coupled with power relations and hierarchies in the multilevel governance structure of respective countries.

In this respect SMSTs are also municipalities that find it hard – for different reasons (e.g., budget constraints, spatial marginality, shrinking population, limited authority on migration issues...) – to have strategic vision on their future, and to implement policies and measures to achieve such vision in autonomy.

PISTE results are in line with those of other projects adopting different or broader definitions of SMSTs, suggesting that the solutions proposed in this White Paper are applicable to a variegated set of localities.

INSTITUTIONAL GREETINGS



Liebe Leserinnen und Leser des White Papers,

Migration, egal ob durch Kriege, Armut oder dem Klimawandel verursacht, ist eine der größten Herausforderungen des 21. Jahrhunderts, der wir uns stellen müssen. Bebra war – durch die Entwicklung als Eisenbahnknotenpunkt in Deutschland vor rund 175 Jahren – und ist auch heute noch eine Stadt, die von Migration geprägt wird.

Die Begegnung dieser Herausforderung fußt dabei auf zwei Säulen. Zum einen braucht es individuelle Entwicklungshilfen, Friedensmissionen oder Unterstützungen vor Ort, die den Menschen in den jeweiligen Ländern helfen ihr Heimatland nicht verlassen zu müssen. Zum anderen benötigen wir eine funktionierende Integration von Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund hier vor Ort.

Beide Säulen sollten gemeinsam und koordiniert von der europäischen Staatengemeinschaft gestärkt werden. Genau hier setzt das Projekt PISTE an, nämlich bei der Integration von Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund voneinander zu lernen.

Bebra konnte diesbezüglich stark von dem Projekt profitieren. Wir haben unser Profil in Sachen Integrationsarbeit weiter geschärft. Mit der politischen Verabschiedung des Leitbildes-Integration, welches im Rahmen des Projektes erarbeitet wurde, haben wir uns konkrete Ziele und Handlungsschritte gesetzt, wie wir als Stadt Bebra

1. sicher und frei von Rassismus und Diskriminierung werden;
2. Integrationshemmnisse abbauen;
3. den sozialen Zusammenhalt stärken;
4. Orte der Begegnung schaffen und den Dialog fördern;
5. Engagement und Partizipation intensivieren.

Einen ersten Aufschlag zur weiteren Konkretisierung bot die Durchführung der Zukunftskonferenz, bei der sich auch viele Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund beteiligten und gemeinsam an der Zukunft Bebras arbeiteten. Diesen Prozess werden wir fortführen.

Die Einblicke in die Integrationsarbeit der Projektkommunen aus Belgien, Italien und Griechenland haben uns zudem viele neue Impulse und Ideen mit auf den Weg gegeben, die wir in Zukunft bei der passenden Gelegenheit auch in Bebra umsetzen können.

Im Namen der Stadt Bebra, der politischen Gremien und der Menschen vor Ort bedanke ich mich herzlich für die Gelegenheit an diesem Projekt teilzunehmen!

Freundliche Grüße

Ihr Stefan Knoche

Bürgermeister der Stadt Bebra

Dear readers of the White Paper,

Migration, whether caused by wars, poverty, or climate change, is one of the most significant challenges of the 21st century that we have to deal with. Bebra grew as a railway hub in Germany around 175 years ago; even today, it is a town shaped by migration.

Addressing this challenge relies on two pillars. Firstly, there is a need for development aid, peace missions, and on-site support to help people in their respective countries avoid leaving their homeland. Secondly, we require effectively integrating of individuals with a migration background in destination areas.

Both pillars should be strengthened collectively and coordinated by the European Union. This is precisely where the PISTE project comes in, aiming to facilitate the integration of people with a migration background by learning from each other.

Bebra has greatly benefited from this project. We have refined our profile in terms of integration work. With the political adoption of the Integration Guidelines developed within the project, we have set concrete goals and action steps as the city of Bebra to:

1. become secure and free from racism and discrimination;
2. break down integration barriers;
3. strengthen social cohesion;
4. create places of encounter and promote dialogue;
5. intensify engagement and participation.

The Future Conference provided an initial basis for further concretisations, with the participation of many individuals with a migration background working together on the future of Bebra. We will continue this process.

Insights into the integration work of the project municipalities in Belgium, Italy, and Greece have provided us with many new impulses and ideas that we can implement in Bebra when the opportunity arises.

On behalf of the city of Bebra, its political bodies, and the local community, I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to participate in this project!

*Kind regards,
Stefan Knoche
Mayor of the city of Bebra, Germany*



Come Sindaco di Fermignano, sento la responsabilità nei confronti di tutti i cittadini che hanno scelto Fermignano come loro casa, indipendentemente dalla loro nazionalità di origine. Questo è principio cardine sancito dalla Costituzione italiana, che nel suo art. 3 afferma “tutti i cittadini sono uguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, razza, lingua, religione, opinioni politiche, condizioni personali e sociali”.

Fermignano ospita oltre il 10% di persone provenienti da circa 17 nazioni. Queste persone, con le loro diverse culture e tradizioni, contribuiscono a plasmare la ricchezza e la diversità della nostra comunità.

Attraverso il Progetto PISTE abbiamo avuto l'opportunità di condividere con gli altri paesi partecipanti le nostre buone pratiche nell'ambito dell'inclusione e dell'integrazione. Tra queste, ricordiamo la Carta dei Sindaci, Popoli in Festa e lo sportello immigrazione.

Il Progetto PISTE ha inoltre contribuito a creare sinergie a livello locale, grazie agli incontri che hanno portato alla formazione di una rete di associazioni. Questa rete ha messo a nudo le problematiche affrontate dalle persone di origine straniera, come ad esempio la difficoltà di accesso ai servizi pubblici, la discriminazione sul lavoro e la difficoltà di inserimento scolastico dei minori.

Tra le azioni chiave intraprese dal Comune di Fermignano, vi è l'ampliamento delle ore dello sportello immigrazione, con focus sul processo di naturalizzazione. Questa iniziativa manda due segnali: da un lato, un segnale concreto, offrendo aiuto amministrativo e cercando di colmare errori amministrativi che ritardano anche di anni l'ottenimento della cittadinanza; dall'altro, è un segnale politico che il Comune vuole inviare alle persone che fanno parte della comunità fermignanese da anni.

Comprendendo l'importanza della comunicazione, abbiamo compiuto un passo cruciale traducendo i principali documenti in quattro lingue. Ciò assicura che le informazioni essenziali siano accessibili a tutti, promuovendo la comprensione e la cooperazione nella nostra comunità multiculturale.

Inoltre, abbiamo implementato workshop di co-design rivolti a persone che più difficilmente riusciamo a coinvolgere attivamente, a causa di varie barriere. Questi workshop mirano a valorizzare coloro che, anche se residenti, non sono fluenti nella lingua locale, favorendo l'integrazione e la partecipazione in vari aspetti della vita comunitaria.

Il progetto PISTE è stato fondamentale nel plasmare Fermignano in un modello di inclusività e cooperazione. Esprimo il mio sentito ringraziamento al progetto e ai suoi collaboratori per il loro sostegno nel rendere Fermignano una comunità in cui la diversità è celebrata, e ogni residente ha l'opportunità di prosperare.

Emanuele Feduzi
Sindaco di Fermignano

As the Mayor of Fermignano, I feel a responsibility towards all citizens who have chosen Fermignano as their home, regardless of their country of origin. This is a fundamental principle enshrined in the Italian Constitution, which in Article 3 states that “All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.”

Fermignano hosts over 10% of people from approximately 17 nations. With their diverse cultures and traditions, they contribute to shaping the richness and diversity of our community. Through the PISTE Project, we have had the opportunity to share our best practices in the areas of inclusion and integration with other participating countries. Among these, we recall the Mayors’ Charter, the Festival of Peoples, and the immigration office.

The PISTE Project has also contributed to creating synergies at the local level through meetings that led to the formation of a network of associations. This network has exposed the challenges faced by people from a migration background, such as difficulties in accessing public services, workplace discrimination, and the challenges of school integration for children.

Among the key actions taken by the Municipality of Fermignano is the extension of the immigration office’s opening hours, with a focus on the naturalisation process. This initiative sends two messages: on the one hand, a practical message by offering administrative assistance and trying to rectify administrative errors that can delay the acquisition of citizenship for years; on the other hand, a political message that the Municipality wants to send to people who have been part of the local community for years.

Understanding the importance of communication, we have taken a crucial step by translating key documents into four languages. This ensures that essential information is accessible to everyone, promoting understanding and cooperation in our multicultural community. Additionally, we have implemented co-design workshops to engage those with more difficulties participating actively due to various barriers. These workshops aim to empower those who, even though residents, are not fluent in the national language, intending to foster integration and participation in multiple aspects of community life.

The PISTE project has been instrumental in shaping Fermignano into a model of inclusivity and cooperation. I express my heartfelt thanks to the project and its collaborators for their support in making Fermignano a community where diversity is celebrated and every resident has the opportunity to thrive.

Emanuele Feduzi

Mayor of the city of Fermignano, Italy



Onze stad werd niet toevallig gekozen voor het project. Alle gemeenten worden met migratie geconfronteerd, maar Ninove is een middelgrote stad waar migratie het snelst geëvolueerd is in de voorbije 10 jaar. In de Denderstreek is de polarisatie bovendien het grootst. De Denderstreek steekt er ook bovenuit omdat je hier het grootste percentage kiezers hebt die voor Vlaams Belang stemmen. Dat is een indicator dat het lastig loopt. Via het PISTE-project is er meer aandacht gekomen naar de Denderstreek vanuit diverse hoeken zoals onder meer de universiteiten maar ook schrijvers en de media.

Voor Ninove vinden we het belangrijk om verbindende projecten te realiseren waarbij mensen korter bij elkaar gebracht worden en dat kon ook met de middelen die wij voor het PISTE-project hebben ontvangen. De kwetsbare jongeren in onze stad hebben workshops gekregen rond (politieke) participatie en hoe zij hun stem kunnen laten horen in onze stad. Dat werd heel positief ontvangen door de jongeren zelf. Verder is het ook goed dat we informatie kunnen delen met anderen. Voor onze medewerkers van de sociale dienst was het een buitenkans om ook naar de andere landen te gaan om te kijken hoe ze daar omgaan met migratie. In Ninove hebben we al verschillende projecten op poten gezet waarbij we mensen korter bij elkaar brengen, inzetten op taalbeheersing, ervoor zorgen dat mensen participeren aan cultuur en sport,.. Ook wij als stad hebben de laatste vijf jaar al stappen gezet om de verschillen te overbruggen door te praten met elkaar. Ook taal en veiligheid zijn daarbij belangrijke factoren. Alleen hopen we in de toekomst wel op meer middelen van de hogere overheid om migratie structureel te kunnen aanpakken.

De medewerkers van de sociale dienst in Ninove kijken uit naar het rapport normaal in december, na twee jaar onderzoek, verschijnt. Het zal interessant zijn om te kijken welke conclusies de onderzoekers hebben getrokken. Het rapport kan beleidsmakers helpen bij het voeren van een wetenschappelijk onderbouwd integratiebeleid.

Een aantal conclusies die wij hebben kunnen meepakken tijdens het onderzoek:

- in kleine tot middelgrote steden gaat het om lokale dynamiek en het creëren van een gemeenschap voor migranten;
- het bevorderen van het strategisch denken in kleine gemeenten is belangrijk, door allianties te ontwikkelen;
- kleine steden staan meestal buitenspel; er is nu echter een verschuiving naar kleine en middelgrote steden, ook al is er geen universitaire aanwezigheid;
- er is een noodzaak om in te grijpen in kleine en middelgrote steden vanwege een gebrek aan capaciteit in de stad maar ook in de gemeenschap. Daarom moeten universiteiten ingrijpen en capaciteit opbouwen;
- in gepolariseerde steden en dorpen bestaat er sprake van “frame ambiguïteit” en hoewel er een visie moet zijn, kun je deze ook terzijde laten en gemeenschappen opbouwen;
- de grootte is minder belangrijk dan de centrale ligging van steden;

- het belang van superlokaal bestuur. Dit is duidelijker zichtbaar in zuidelijke steden dan in Noord-Europese steden, waar het centrale bestuur meer leidend is;
- politiek is belangrijk: kleine tot middelgrote steden zijn minder machtig; steden die al achterop zijn geraakt, voelen zich nog meer achtergesteld als er een toestroom van migranten is.

Tania De Jonge

Burgemeester van Ninove

Our city was not included in this project by chance. While all municipalities are confronted with migration, Ninove is a mid-sized city where migration has experienced a very fast growth over the past 10 years. Further, the Dender region experiences significant political polarisation, having the highest share of voters supporting Vlaams Belang. This is an indicator of the challenges ahead. The PISTE project brought increased attention to the Dender region from various perspectives, including universities, writers, and the media.

For Ninove, we think it is important to realize connecting projects that bring people together, and this was also possible with the resources we received for the PISTE project. The vulnerable young people in our city have received workshops on (political) participation and how they can make their voices heard in our city. This was received very positively by the young people themselves. It was also valuable to be able to share information with others. Furthermore, our social workers have had the great opportunity to travel in other countries and learn how others are coping with migration. In Ninove, we have set up several projects to bring people closer together, emphasising language proficiency, encouraging cultural and sports participation. As a city, we have taken steps to bridge differences through dialogue, but also focusing on language and safety. However, we hope for increased resources and support from higher authorities in the future to address migration structurally.

After two years of research, Ninove's social workers are looking forward to the report scheduled normally for December 2023. The conclusions drawn by researchers will aid policymakers in implementing a scientifically grounded integration policy.

Some conclusions gathered during the research include:

- in small to medium-sized cities, local dynamics determine community opportunities for migrants;

- promoting strategic thinking in small municipalities is important, structuring new alliances is crucial;
- despite their usual marginal position, there is a new focus on small and mid-sized cities, even if they do not host universities;
- it is necessary to support small and mid-sized towns; given their limited capacity – both in the administration and in the local community – universities can play a role in enhancing their capacity building;
- in polarised cities and towns, there can be “frame ambiguity” and while there should be a vision, you can build communities also by putting it aside;
- size is less important than the central location of cities;
- hyper-local governance is important, but this is more evident in Southern European cities than in Northern European ones, as central governance is more dominant in the latter;
- politics matter; small to mid-sized cities have less power, and those already fallen behind feel even more deprived when there is an influx of migrants.

Tania De Jonge

Mayor of the city of Ninove, Belgium



Ο Δήμος Βοΐου οφείλει να αντιμετωπίζει προκλήσεις και να βρίσκεται κοντά σε ευάλωτες κοινωνικά ομάδες με σκοπό τη βελτίωση της ποιότητας της ζωής τους, την ένταξή τους στην κοινωνική πραγματικότητα με τις αρχές και αξίες της ισοπολιτείας, του σεβασμού και της ισότητας. Έτσι ο Δήμος Βοΐου αποτελεί σημαντική συνιστώσα της Ευρωπαϊκής προσπάθειας που γίνεται στη διαχείριση των μεγάλων προσφυγικών ρευμάτων. Στηριζόμενοι στη φιλοσοφία της κοινωνικής αλληλεγγύης και της ισότιμης σχέσης, και της φιλοξενίας που παραδοσιακά διέπει τον τόπο μας, μεριμνούμε για την ουσιαστική στήριξη των ευάλωτων κοινωνικών ομάδων και καταφέρνουμε όλοι μαζί να ανταποκριθούμε στις απαιτήσεις της σύγχρονης κοινωνίας μας. Η ένταξη δη των ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων προσφύγων που καλείται να υποστηρίξει η Δομή Ασυνόδευτων Ανηλίκων Προσφύγων Πενταλόφου είναι μια σημαντική διαδικασία για το άτομο μιας και αλληλεπιδρά, συμβιώνει με άλλα μέλη της κοινότητας που φιλοξενείται. Γνωρίζοντας το δύσκολο, επικίνδυνο, πολύωρο, άγνωστο ταξίδι των ασυνόδευτων ανηλίκων κοριτσιών που φιλοξενούμε, η Δομή έχει επανδρωθεί από εξειδικευμένο Επιστημονικό, Διοικητικό, Τεχνικό και Λοιπό Προσωπικό με σκοπό τη φροντίδα, προστασία, εκπαίδευση και κοινωνική ένταξη των κοριτσιών. Η υλοποίηση του προγράμματος PISTE στη Δομή ανέδειξε τις ανάγκες των προσφύγων και πρόσφερε ενδυνάμωση, ένταξη, καθοδήγηση, υποστήριξη στα παιδιά που φιλοξενούνται.

Χρήστος Ζευκλής
Δήμαρχος Βοΐου

The Municipality of Voio must face challenges and stay close to vulnerable social groups to improve their quality of life and promote their inclusion in the social reality, according to the principles and values of civic egalitarianism (isopolity), the principle of respect and social equality. Hence, the Municipality of Voio represents a valuable component of the European effort to manage large refugee flows. Based on the philosophy of solidarity and reciprocity², and in line with the principle of hospitality that traditionally governs our country, we care to provide essential support to vulnerable social groups, and we manage all together to meet the demands of our modern society. The integration of the unaccompanied minor refugees that the Pentalofos Structure for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees is called upon to support, establishes an important process for each individual, given the interaction and coexistence with other members of the hosting community. Conscious of the difficult, dangerous, lengthy, unknown journey the unaccompanied minor girls we host have gone through, the Structure has been staffed with specialised Scientific, Administrative, Technical and Other Personnel committed to caring, protecting, educating and socialising the girls. Implementing the PISTE program in the Structure highlighted the needs of the refugees and offered empowerment, integration, guidance, and support to the hosted children.

Christos Zefklis

Mayor of the city of Voio, Greece



Il World Migration report 2022 ci testimonia come degli oltre 280 milioni di migranti internazionali, più di 100 milioni sono oggi migranti forzati a causa di persecuzioni, conflitti, violenze, violazioni di diritti umani.

In Italia il sistema di accoglienza e integrazione (SAI) è costituito dalla rete degli enti locali che realizzano progetti di accoglienza integrata accedendo al Fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell'asilo. A livello territoriale e con il supporto delle realtà del terzo settore, una più autentica inclusione è poi possibile grazie a percorsi di inserimento abitativo e, in modo complementare, a misure di informazione e formazione - specie linguistica, accompagnamento all'acquisizione di competenze e autonomia, assistenza e orientamento lavorativo per l'inserimento socio-economico.

Il carattere pubblico delle risorse messe a disposizione e degli enti politicamente responsabili dell'accoglienza - Ministero dell'Interno ed Enti locali, - secondo una logica di governance multilivello, così come la volontarietà degli enti locali nella partecipazione alla rete dei progetti di accoglienza e le sinergie avviate sul territorio per la riuscita delle misure di accoglienza, protezione, integrazione sono caratteristiche fondamentali per fare del SAI un sistema efficace.

I progetti territoriali del SAI sono, infatti, caratterizzati da un protagonismo attivo degli Enti Locali, siano essi grandi città o comuni di minore dimensione demografica. Per ogni persona sono individuate priorità di intervento specifico, in base alle esigenze rilevate, alle sue caratteristiche, alla propria condizione giuridica e al periodo dell'anno di accoglienza. Nel 2021 il 22% degli accolti ha partecipato a un percorso di formazione professionale, il 17% a tirocini formativi, il 30% a inserimenti lavorativi. Inoltre, circa il 60% dei beneficiari accolti nel SAI partecipa a iniziative di associazione, culturali, eventi ricreativi, gruppi sportivi, esperienze di volontariato e pubblica utilità. Guardando ai dati del 2021, degli 851 progetti avviati a vario titolo dalla Rete SAI su 1800 comuni, il 43% interessano comuni con meno di 5.000 abitanti, gli stessi che hanno ricevuto anche finanziamenti per ampliare o attivare progetti volti a fronteggiare la crisi afghana e ucraina.

In venti anni il SAI ha contribuito a delineare tra l'altro la figura professionale dell'operatore dell'accoglienza, rafforzando le competenze territoriali, supportando nella crescita professionale sia gli operatori in quanto tali sia le reti locali di riferimento. Una esperienza che l'Italia può, senza dubbio, testimoniare nelle sedi degli organismi europei affinché si possano individuare modelli di integrazione e inclusione in grado di assicurare coesione sociale e potenziare l'effetto controesodo che dobbiamo stimolare nelle aree più interne e periferiche del Paese, spesso per questo più svantaggiate, che si stanno drammaticamente spopolando.

Roberto Pella

Sindaco di Valdenago e Vicepresidente vicario ANCI

Presidente CTME (Confederazione dei Piccoli Comuni dell'Unione Europea)

The World Migration Report 2022 shows us that out of over 280 million international migrants, more than 100 million are currently forced migrants due to persecution, conflicts, violence, and human rights violations. In Italy, the Reception and Integration System (SAI) is constituted by a network of local administrations that implement integrated reception projects by accessing the National Fund for asylum policies and services. At the territorial level, and with the support of civil society organizations, a more authentic inclusion is possible through housing integration paths and, complementarily, through information and training measures – especially language learning, support for acquiring skills and autonomy, and career guidance and support for socio-economic integration.

In this reception system, resources and responsible bodies, that are both derived from public entities – i.e. the Ministry of the Interior and local authorities, – follow a multi-level governance logic. Together with local authorities' voluntary participation in the reception system, and the collaboration with local stakeholders, this is a fundamental feature to make SAI an effective system of reception, protection, and integration.

Local projects within SAI are, in fact, characterized by an active role of local authorities, whether they are large cities or smaller-sized municipalities. Specific intervention priorities are identified for each person based on their needs, characteristics, legal status, and the timing of reception. In 2021, 22% of recipients participated in a professional training program, 17% in training internships, and 30% in job placements. Additionally, about 60% of the beneficiaries received in SAI participate in association initiatives, cultural events, leisure activities, sports groups, volunteer experiences, and socially beneficial activities.

Looking at the data from 2021, out of the 851 projects implemented by the SAI network in 1800 municipalities, 43% take place in towns with fewer than 5000 inhabitants – the very same municipalities that also received funding to expand or activate projects aimed at addressing the Afghan and Ukrainian crises. In twenty years, SAI has contributed, among other things, to shaping the professional figure of the reception social worker, strengthening local capacity, and supporting the professional growth of both social workers and local stakeholders. An experience that Italy can undoubtedly showcase in European forums to identify models of integration and inclusion capable of ensuring social cohesion and promoting a counter-migration effect that we must stimulate in the inner and peripheral areas of the country, often more disadvantaged and undergoing a dramatic depopulation.

Roberto Pella

*Mayor of Valdengo and Vice-president of National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI)
President Confederation of Towns and Municipalities of Europe (CTME)*



Large cities such as Antwerp and Brussels still receive the largest inflow of immigrants today. However, we simultaneously observe how migration is not confined to large “gateway cities”, but smaller cities and municipalities – in particular those in the periphery of Brussels Capital Region – are confronted with rapid socio-demographic changes. This can lead to strong socio-political polarisation among the local population, while local governments have limited expertise and capacity to deal with these challenges.

Ninove is a textbook example of these challenges. This small city in the Dender region, located in the periphery of Brussels Capital Region, is struggling with de-industrialisation and widespread feelings of decline and resentment amongst the established population. Over the past decade, Ninove has experienced a rapid increase in newcomers and people with an immigrant background. In 2013, only 12.5% of the total population in Ninove had an immigrant background. In 2023, this number has already increased up to 22.8%. This change can be partly explained by lower housing prices compared to the Brussels, leading (mostly French speaking) Belgian citizens with immigrant background to move from the country’s capital to Ninove. This evolution has led to socio-political tensions within the local community, including the rise of the radical-right political party “Forza Ninove”.

These socio-political tensions around immigration has led to the development of a local integration policy in Ninove from 2015 onwards (on top of the Flemish regional integration policy, which imposes mandatory courses on newcomers from a non-EU background). The aim of creating space for new residents and bringing inhabitants together has unfortunately been difficult. In order to build bridges between communities, there is not only a need for capacity-building or further expertise to strengthen the existing integration policy, but these new inhabitants should also be included in conversations on how they have experienced their arrival in Ninove.

As the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), we believe that local governments, due to their proximity with inhabitants, play an important role to address this issue of polarisation. To support local governments in that difficult task, we want to follow up on innovative scientific research and disseminating new insights through our wide network of cities and municipalities. We have no doubt that the case study of Ninove will be informative for other local governments who struggle with migration related topics as well. Consequently, partnering with PISTE was a logical step. Not only did the project allow us to gain insight on the complexities of Ninove, we were also able to learn from other cases. Although these cases were very different, the exchanges with other European cities and municipalities proved to be inspiring to learn how different approaches are used to capture the voices of immigrant communities and allowing them to participate on the local level.

Recognising the pivotal role of local governments in addressing polarisation and integration policy VVSG emphasizes the necessity of capacity-building and expertise enhancement. To support these efforts, VVSG advocates for the dissemination of innovative scientific research and the exchange of insights among a wide network of cities and municipalities. The specific challenges faced by Ninove, documented through the partnership with PISTE, serve as an informative case study for other local governments grappling with migration-related issues. Through collaboration and shared experiences with European municipalities, valuable lessons have been gleaned on capturing the voices of immigrant communities and fostering their participation at the local level. This collaborative approach not only enriches the understanding of migration challenges but also empowers local governments to navigate and address the complexities inherent in diverse cities and municipalities.

Sabine Van Cauwenberge

Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities – VVSG



PISTE project had a crucial impact on the process of integration of unaccompanied girls living in the accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors of Voio, located in a small sized mountain town, Pentalofos Kozanis. The centre, situated in a remote area in Northern Greece, provided limited cultural and creative opportunities for the girls.

Therefore, the provision of multicultural activities about self-identity and socialisation, social skills, and career guidance through the project was of vital importance. At this point, one needs to highlight that the girls were not mere participants in the activities, but active agents in their co-creation as their needs, special characteristics and interests were taken into consideration. The European Commission's principle of meaningful child and youth participation was fulfilled in the projects' actions as the girls took part in decision making which resulted in their ownership and committed participation.

PISTE project, also, embraced the European added value through successful cooperation and synergies between public and private key stakeholders, namely the local Municipality, civil society actors and the Intercultural school of the town.

An additional impactful element of the project was the organisation of the online workshops series and the Local National Policy Platforms, where national competent authorities, like in the case of the Unit for Integration and Support of UAMs, of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, had the opportunity to take part. During these events we were not only informed on the project outputs and outcomes but more importantly we were able to share our different perspectives, promoting mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

For us, in the Ministry, these were highly significant events as listening to challenges but also to existing good practices we can contribute in promoting and facilitating replications to improve the integration process for UAMs in Greece and particularly in small-medium sized cities which host accommodation facilities.

Γκέλη Αρώνη / Gelly Aroni, PhD

Head of the Unit for Integration and Support of UAMs

General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection

Hellenic Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Greece



In contemporary Europe, marginalisation of small- and medium-sized municipalities is a trend that is likely to increase in the future. On the continent, population growth is occurring in the largest or capital cities at the expense of second- and third-tier cities: municipalities that are not among the largest six to ten in their country are recording particularly poor performances, lower than the national average, and are struggling to retain population and talent (Greg et al., 2018). Moreover, according to UN estimates, Italy, Germany, Poland, France, Spain, and Romania are among the 30 countries worldwide where the rural population is projected to decline the most by 2050 (UN DESA, 2019).

Against this backdrop, migrants are often regarded as natural allies of European small- and medium-sized municipalities in contrasting the demographic and economic decline of the latter. However, this is more easily said than done. First, migrants seldom stay in localities abandoned by natives, especially if we consider that their links to those places are likely weaker and their mobility is higher. Second, focusing on the instrumental contribution of newcomers as the key argument to foster their acceptance by the local population may be rather ineffective.

The sharp increase of forced migrants in 2015 and 2016 constitutes a sort of natural experiment in this regard. Whereas productive people essential to local economies, like foreign workers employed in agriculture or hospitality, were largely ignored if not reluctantly tolerated over decades, the arrival of substantial numbers of refugees, hosted in newly established reception facilities, triggered a lively debate in many small- and medium-sized municipalities, where residents often felt more concerned by this development than in large cities. This inflow generated opposite outcomes, from strong rejection to warm support. Still, almost everywhere, the everyday experience led to overcoming initial fears. In many localities, the challenge of integrating refugees opened the way to a refreshed engagement of the local citizens and even to social innovation. Inactive older people suddenly mobilised, associations popped up, refugees engaged as volunteers in community activities, local traditions were revived, and cross-continental cultural exchange was promoted.

Yet, after less than a decade, the demographically declining localities have hardly been able to retain those newcomers. When the latter stopped being “relocated refugees” and became young adults, they often behaved like their native peers and left. Nevertheless, part of that activism has remained, along with the lessons that acceptance of newcomers is nurtured through engagement rather than by economic calculations and that migrants could be powerful allies in counteracting the localism and languishing participation which can push small- and medium-sized municipalities

to the margins of a world of bustling cosmopolitan metropolises, but less so in the fight against demographic and economic decline¹.

Hence, the starting points for developing an alliance between small- and medium-sized localities and migrants should probably be public debates and active participation rather than labour market assessments or demographic forecasts.

Irene Ponzo

FIERI, Italy

¹ For facing the demographic and economic challenges, different policies are needed, such as diversifying the local economy, improving environmental sustainability and ensuring access to basic services and infrastructure in order to improve livability and the quality of life. See, for instance, *Policy Brief: Shrinking rural regions in Europe*, Espon Policy Brief, October 2017, <https://www.espon.eu/rural-shrinking>; and Gruber, M., Pocher J. and Zupan, K. (eds.), Booklet with MATILDE Policy Recommendations, 17 October, 2022, <https://matilde-migration.eu/press-releases/matilde-policy-recommendations-for-10-countries/>



BUNDESNETZWERKE VON
MIGRANTINNENORGANISATIONEN
BV-NEMO.DE



Germany is a nation shaped by migration, with individuals seeking improved lives and new opportunities contributing to the nation's diversity. These migrants bring with them a wealth of cultures and experiences that enhance our local communities. Within this context, the significance of civic and political participation at the local level is crucial, as it is integral to fostering stable communities and stable local governance.

As someone with a migrant background, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative influence of diverse voices in shaping policies and fostering community cohesion at all levels. Reflecting on my experiences, I emphasize the need for policies that surpass mere representation. True empowerment requires a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers, promoting cultural competence, and cultivating environments where every individual, regardless of their background, not only feels heard but also plays a vital role in the decision-making processes that shape their lives.

The right to vote holds immense importance for political participation. Political inclusion goes beyond providing immigrants the opportunity to partake in political processes; it also involves having a tangible presence through elections, involvement in political parties, and unique forms of minority representation. Political inclusion ensures that migrants are active participants in political decision-making processes, allowing them to actively influence decisions.

The narratives presented in this "White Paper" vividly illustrate the resilience and contributions of individuals with immigrant backgrounds who have successfully navigated the complexities of settling in a new country. These stories should guide policymakers toward creating environments that foster a sense of belonging, promote civic education, and establish pathways to political participation that are accessible and inviting.

At its core, this "White Paper" serves as a clarion call to policymakers, urging them to recognize the untapped potential within Germany's migrant population. In conclusion, the journey toward a more inclusive and participatory society demands a collective commitment from policymakers, communities, and individuals. It is through such concerted efforts that we can build a society where diversity is not only celebrated but actively embraced in the democratic fabric of our local communities.

Elizabeth Beloe

Vorsitzende Bundesverband NeMO e.V

Chairperson of the Federal Association of Migrant Association in Germany (BV-NeMO e.V)

INTRODUCTION

The evidence of an increasing significance of the local level in the governance of migration-related issues is today quite clear, both in social research and in policy practice (Penninx & Martiniello, 2004; Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015; Barberis and Angelucci, 2022). In Europe, decades of explicit or implicit transformations of multilevel relations have been empowering local actors to operate with a certain degree of autonomy – within or beyond national and regional directives. On the one hand, local actors operate within discretionary spaces left by higher legal frameworks, influencing the implementation of laws at the local level (Oomen et al., 2021; Shultz, 2020). On the other, they are offered the opportunity to formulate and execute distinct local policies that may complement, transcend, or even challenge national and regional priorities (Scholten, 2013; Peace & Meer, 2019).

This status allows them to influence and even shape processes of participation and incorporation at the local level, with ambivalent outcomes. They can certainly respond to local societal needs swiftly and smoothly – but this may happen with risks of spatial fragmentation and discrimination in accessing social rights – especially for populations from a migration background. Such dynamics can further exacerbate dichotomies between the national and local levels

(Angelucci et al., 2019), hindering the establishment of a comprehensive framework that could serve as a model—or at least, a mode—of integration (Barberis, 2018), and define common trajectories for the participation of people from a migration background.

In this frame, the public, policy and academic attention for the local level has been mostly focused on larger localities, including metropolises and migration hubs (Caponio, Scholten & Zapata-Barrero, 2019; Marconi & Cancellieri, 2022). Nevertheless, the awareness of a diversification of migration and settlement patterns has been growing in the last decade or so (Barberis and Pavolini, 2015). This trend encompasses several types of localities, extending to peripheral, and even marginal contexts.

Within this trend, many European Small and Medium-sized Towns (SMSTs) have witnessed a considerable (and sometimes sudden) increase of immigration rates and inflows, including different flows: primary migration of newcomers, and secondary migration of settled (ex-)migrants; labour, managed and amenity-seeking migrations...

Hence, SMSTs across Europe are experiencing the same transformations in the multilevel governance of migration policy mentioned above with some specific concerns: limited resources and strategic visions compared to the

social and policy challenges which are increasing with the renewed diversification of the local societies; a multilevel governance in which they are weaker and less voiced compared to larger cities and upper levels – making them “expendable”, less prioritised and endowed to cope with new social phenomena.

Frequently, this process is not taking place in a vacuum, but it takes place in a frame of increasing spatial inequalities, where many SMSTs are losing population, public services, and economic opportunities. They become more “fragile”, meaning that they loose the condition to define and steer their own future due to endogenous and exogenous reasons.

In this scenario, SMSTs are tasked with additional roles and responsibilities without a corresponding allocation of resources. Coupled with their relatively recent history of in-migration, often implying limited experience dealing with groups from a migration background and employing multilevel governance tools, this situation presents additional obstacles and difficulties in the

formulation of incorporation policies at the local level.

Simultaneously, this absence of established policy traditions and consolidated tools to address migration challenges may turn up to be a fertile ground for the emergence of innovative initiatives, free from path dependency and preconceived solutions. SMSTs, indeed, present a unique opportunity for developing and experimenting with new locally-based actions and methodologies for approaching immigrants’ participation, which can then be successfully scaled up to broader levels.

To realise this potential, fostering knowledge-based and innovative local policy-making becomes essential, taking into account the specific integration challenges and potentialities of SMSTs. When addressing this issue at the European level, the opportunity to share and compare specific experiences comes to light, creating a European network of practices and experiments. This approach allows for leveraging increased innovative potential through the exchange and comparison of specificities and their related solutions.

PISTE – Participation in small-and medium-sized towns: Experiences, Exchanges, Experiments

The actions undertaken within the PISTE project align precisely with this vision. *PISTE – Participation in small-and medium-sized towns: Experiences,*

Exchanges, Experiments, is a project funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. It combines action-research and policy implementation

through a partnership consisting of three academic institutions, one NGO and four municipalities in different European countries. Specifically, project's partners are: University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy (lead partner); University of Antwerp, Belgium; University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Germany; HumanRights360, Greece; and the Municipalities of Fermignano (IT), Ninove (BE), Bebra (DE), Voio (GR).

The overarching goal of PISTE is to promote and enhance the participation of migrants in the design, implementation, and evaluation of incorporation policies in Small and Medium-sized Towns (SMSTs). The focus on SMSTs (and on our four case towns in particular) is due to the recognition of their increasingly pivotal role in migration management. They may face challenges due to limited policy expertise and experience in dealing with emerging migration issues; due to specific forms of spatial fragility, connected with their position in the urban and rural fabric of their Countries. However, they also show a relevant allure for migrants, and an activism in migration-related policy-making.

The project takes a local-level approach and aims to scale up these efforts through networks and ripple effects at the national and European levels.

Therefore, PISTE adopts a multilevel perspective to bolster the quality of welfare and civic integration policies in SMSTs. It also seeks to create and consolidate a European community framework for migrants' participation in

integration policy practices in SMSTs. The project aimed to achieve this goal through the sharing and assessment of different policy traditions and initiatives among stakeholders in the above-mentioned local cases, at both the local, national and European levels.

Building up also on already existing networks, these activities fostered the creation of new networks able to help partners to exchange experiences fruitfully.

The involvement in European networks enabled PISTE partners to adjust their policy focus and methods, starting from participatory and co-design tools for sharing and experimenting policy innovations.

Finally, analyses and discussion on such practices were aimed to suggest conditions and opportunities to produce spillover effects throughout Europe. In particular, this Paper is designed to provide useful suggestions for decision-makers, policy-makers, policy analysts, activists and civil society organisations interested in improving SMSTs' capacity to incorporate minorities from a migration background in their policy process.

PISTE considered two policy areas: immigrants' acknowledgment, advocacy, and civic participation; and immigrants' participation in planning, implementing and evaluating local welfare integration policies. PISTE specifically addressed marginalised groups, including asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors (kick-off case: Voio, Greece), women and religious minorities (kick-off case:

Fermignano, Italy), as well as newcomers and old migrants (kick-off cases: Bebra, Germany and Ninove, Belgium). The project focused on implementing targeted and general measures that impact these groups' local participation, both in the broader society and in the policy process, trying to enhance their involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of local policy measures.

In doing so, the PISTE project has planned a range of activities structured in different Work Packages.

In particular, *WP2 – Support evidence-based policy-making* served to define the regulatory framework for each local case, with a focus on national, regional, and local levels. It also outlined the structure and composition of each local network. The results of this WP are comprehensively documented in an open access volume (Schenkel et al, 2023), shedding light on the unique aspects of each local case in terms of multilevel governance structures and existing integration practices.

Other WPs are dedicated to implementing activities aimed at enhancing the availability of tools, methods, and models tailored to involve immigrants in SMSTs. These activities also aimed to increase the participation of different groups from a migration background in the policy process. For this reason, these work packages involve a great deal of efforts from various stakeholders, which have been simplified and encouraged through the application of participatory methods.

Within *WP3 – Stakeholder assessment* and *WP4 – Promotion of active civic and political participation*, efforts were made to create spaces for interaction where diverse stakeholders—including migrants, civil society actors, and policymakers—could meet to discuss participation and integration measures. These spaces of encounter vary in structure, working principles, and objectives. In the case of WP3, the project established a Local National Policy Platform (LNPP) within each local case and, at the international level, a European Policy Platform (EPP). These platforms acted as dedicated spaces for stakeholders to assess practices, interventions, experiments, and policy actions related to participation and inclusion in SMSTs.

In sum, stakeholders from the local networks, including people from a migration background and their representatives, were convened a minimum of four times over the two years of the project to discuss current and future policies regarding the participation and incorporation of migrants.

Selected actors from the four local cases participated in the EPP, which convened twice during the project. The EPP was intended to conduct a stakeholder assessment of practices and interventions and facilitate the exchange of experiences regarding ongoing or future experiments. Each EPP meeting was followed by the production of a stakeholder assessment report. The establishment, organisation and supervision of the local and European platforms were conducted by trained

researchers, who played a crucial role in fostering dialogue without unduly influencing the debate, allowing the identification of potentialities and criticalities.

In the framework of WP4, meetings were organised within each local case, in order to foster active participation in participatory co-design writing workshops. These workshops served as dynamic forums where actors from local networks engaged in discussions on local participation and incorporation policies. Critical aspects and potential opportunities within the specific local contexts were identified, and a comprehensive report outlining the outcomes of the workshops was generated for each local case. These reports feed the planning, implementation and assessment of policy experiments (see *infra*). WP4 took the participatory approach a step further by actively involving participants in generating guidelines and suggestions for the policymaking process regarding the participation and inclusion of migrants, through the co-design workshops, based on design thinking methodology.

The content of the two stakeholder assessment reports and of the participatory co-writing workshops'

reports has been further elaborated and compiled in the section of this White Paper titled "Participation in SMSTs: issues at stake".

Meanwhile, *WP5 – Implementation of integration policy experiments* focused on supporting the implementation of policy experiments geared towards enhancing the participation and inclusion of migrants in each local case. The outcomes of this WP are detailed in the section of this White Paper, titled "Experimenting practices of participation," which will provide general conclusions from the experiments, shedding light on obstacles and opportunities for their potential implementation in the context of other SMSTs.

Finally, the project's results have been thoroughly analysed and summarised to formulate a set of concise and specific policy recommendations. These recommendations are collected in the last section of this work, with the ambition of being a guiding framework for addressing challenges related to the participation and inclusion of migrants in European SMSTs.

A glance to the context: our partner towns

The PISTE project focuses on four European SMSTs, and specifically: **Ninove**, Flemish region, East Flanders, Belgium; **Bebra**, Hersfeld-Rotenburg, Hesse, Germany; **Voio**, Kozani, Western Macedonia, Greece; **Fermignano**, Pesaro-Urbino, Marche, Italy.



Ninove is a Flemish town (ca. 40,000 inhabitants) some 30 km far from Brussels. The city consists of the main town “Ninove” surrounded by several smaller, more rural villages. Several social challenges have risen over the last decade with the doubling of residents of foreign origin (19.5% in 2020). Ninove is characterised by an old industrial background and it is well-known for its match industry. Although Ninove has a number of advisory councils (some of which are mandatory for Flemish municipalities), it has none for ethnic and cultural minorities or for equal opportunities.

Bebra is a small German town in Hesse (ca. 14,000 inhabitants), with immigrants from over 80 countries.

Since the mid-19th century Bebra has developed as a railway industry town and for this reason its in-migration has definitely evolved as settled labour migration. Therefore, the city has a long history of immigration and defines itself as a “model of integration”. To improve immigrants’ political participation, the city has established its first integration commission.

Voio is a mountain town in Northern Greece (ca. 18.000 inhabitants). More specifically, Voio is situated in the Regional Unit of Kozani, which administratively belongs to the Region of Western Macedonia. Like other towns in the area, it is home to asylum seekers and minorities from a migration background due to its proximity to the state’s land borders. Voio operates a shelter with 34 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, where also an intercultural school for children of the migrant community in the region is located.

Fermignano is a municipality in Central Italy (ca. 8,000 inhabitants). 10,6% of the population consists of foreign citizens. The municipality is setting up many integration policies, also in collaboration with other towns and bodies. Fermignano promoted the “Charter of Mayors on social-inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean area”, that sets up a Council of Mayors, aimed at drafting and gathering good practices of social inclusion, and encourages actions of general interest to facilitate

Geographical and demigraphic information

	Country	Region/State	Province	Population	Population density	Population trend
Bebra	Germany	Hesse	Hersfeld-Rotenburg	13.855	148/km2	Previously declining, now stable
Fermignano	Italy	Marche	Pesaro-Urbino	8.243	190/km2	Declining
Ninove	Belgium	East Flanders (Flanders)	Aalst	39.251	538/km2	Growing
Voio	Greece	Kozani (Western Macedonia)	Kastoria	18.836*	18/ km2	Declining

Table 1. Basic information about PISTE municipalities

	Country	Region/State	Province	Population	Population density	Population trend
Bebra	13,3%	Slightly growing	No	-	60	Lasting immigration destination
Fermignano	10,3%	Declining	No	Morocco	45	Former immigration destination
Ninove	6,7%	Growing	No	-	-	New immigration destination
Voio	3,6%*	Growing	Yes (unaccompanied minors)	Albania*	22*	New immigration destination

Table 2. Main immigration data about PISTE municipalities

* Data referred to 2011 Greek census

** This classification is based on Rossi (2023)

social inclusion through the provision of essential services.

The following tables summarise the main characteristics of the four local cases, useful for the aims of the present work and for attempting a rough typification of the four localities.

Our partner municipalities are different in size and characteristics of their population, including those from

a migration background. This allowed us to encompass a range of SMSTs experiencing varied challenges related to the participation and incorporation of migrants, stemming from different starting conditions. This approach allows for an exploration of the diverse constraints and opportunities that SMSTs may encounter, considering their unique specificities.

What does participation mean?

Before delving into the details of the White Paper, it is essential to address another preliminary aspect that requires clarification. Indeed, we must consider how the PISTE project and the White Paper interpret the concept of (migrants') "participation".

According to various strands of literature, we have chosen to adopt a broad understanding of the concept of participation, encompassing both the political and civic dimensions of social action for social change. The emphasis on either the political or civic dimension of participation has been determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the relevant aspects characterising participation in each of the towns analysed. Specifically, in Bebra and Ninove, the implemented actions primarily addressed the political dimension of participation, whereas in Fermignano and Voio, the activities were predominantly aimed at enhancing civic

participation. Regardless of the focus, all cases paid careful attention to the involvement of migrants and migrants' representatives in the policymaking process, actively engaging them in every step of the project.

With regard to the political dimension of participation, PISTE examined both its formal aspects (participation in elections and systems of representation, or alternative arrangements established by local governments, such as dedicated advisory councils) and informal configurations (involvement in demonstrations, signing petitions, being a member of trade unions, advocacy groups, or self-organisations, etc.) (Martiniello, 2005).

As for the civic dimension, and in particular for the involvement in the policymaking process, PISTE has intended participation both in terms of direct engagement (also through the intermediation of representatives) and in

terms of capability to be acknowledged and listened to in different local contexts, including urban public spaces, able to indirectly influence the policymaking process (Verba Schlozman & Brady, 1995). This approach emphasises the roles of both institutional actors and the agency of migrants, in both formal and informal settings.

In essence, the concept of participation was identified through various nuances assessing whether, how, and to what extent migrants can engage, be recognised, and be included within each of the considered local contexts.

Aim and scope of the White Paper

That said, the aim of this paper is to return debates, reflections and results from the AMIF project PISTE to a wider public beyond its international partnership.

It is addressed to decision-makers, policy-makers, civil servants, activists, members of civil society organisations that operate in SMSTs throughout Europe, or in larger scale administrations and organisations at regional, national and continental level, that work with SMSTs.

The concern to expand our results and to make them useful for other SMSTs throughout Europe has been at the core of our project since the beginning.

First of all, we have intended the practices experimented in our partner towns as a living lab prototype of challenges and opportunities that other towns may face and cope with.

Then, we have discussed with an advisory board of experts from academia and civil society; we have involved stakeholders outside our case studies in policy platform and co-design workshops; we have debated with the scientific community and community of practices in our mid-term event in Thessaloniki; we have drawn reflection in European policy platforms, policy briefs, stakeholders' assessments – and eventually in this final output of our project.

One measure fits all?

Collecting good practices and giving policy suggestions for an issue bigger than life – and overwhelmingly larger and more global than the locales here in focus – is often a risky business. Overgeneralise and overstating is just around the corner. In this respect, we praise to pay a significant attention to contextual dimensions. Our project focussed on very different locales in terms of geographical location (peripherality and marginality in the national urban fabric) and types of migration (labour and refuge migrations; long- and short-staying migrants...). Since migration is a hot, divisive topic in many national and local political agendas, we would like to stress that our partner municipalities, during the life of the project, were governed by quite varied political majorities – with different policy priorities in reference to migration and integration.

In this respect, our aim is to provide suggestions that perhaps do not match with every vision within the varied European political spectrum, but in which different political stances can anyway find useful inspiration.

While we were guided by the idea that hearing the voices and stances of inhabitants – not excepting those from a migrant background and not legally entitled to full civic participation – including them in political and policy-making arenas is positive; we have not been assuming that multicultural, assimilationist, intercultural or whatever

else label was the best fit in every municipality.

In the life of the project, we have invested more in expliciting assumptions and strategic consequences coming from (sometimes implicit) ideological choices on migrants' incorporation.

Local policy-making is a challenge per se for many SMSTs around Europe. If we consider “smallness” not only as a matter of dimensions (population, land area...), but also and foremostly in terms of power, not rarely SMSTs are also ridden by specific “fragilities”, that we can summarise, in policy terms, as a difficulty to imagine, affect and enact their own idea of future.

Some SMSTs are shrinking towns with downsizing economies, and find it hard to define a strategic way out from decline; some are isolated in marginal areas, others are marginal in their conurbation; some have limited autonomy, or limited chance to enact their autonomy due to the lack of human and/or financial resources; for many their dimension and position in institutional hierarchies is a source of problematic governance relations.

Obviously this does not apply to every single SMST, since this label includes a variety of localities. Nevertheless, at least one of the above-mentioned list of problems was a concern in the policy-making arenas of every partner town in PISTE.

When it comes to immigration-related policy-making, these issues are relevant again, and urgently pertain to the future of local communities: who will be a local citizen? Within which legal frame? With what kind of opportunities? What contribution (international) migrants and their offspring give to the local economy, society – and political – arenas? How much say do local authorities have in governing migration flows? Which strategy – if any – they have to incorporate migration-related minorities? Which agents – from public actors to civil society organisations – can

local authorities rely on? Which support do they have from other institutions – from neighbouring towns to regional authorities, from chief towns to national governments?

In the answers to these questions, many constraints lie – but also a number of opportunities. In so many respects, our partner towns – in reference to specific key challenges relevant to them to different extents – proved that marginalisation is not a destiny and that there is a leeway for local authorities to actively manage immigration-related concerns.

PARTICIPATION

IN SMSTs:

ISSUES AT STAKE



VOICING IMMIGRANTS' NEEDS AND CLAIMS IN SMSTs: FROM BRIDGING FIGURES TO INSTITUTIONALISED ACTORS

Short description

People from a migrant background face many barriers to political participation, hindered by legal restrictions and competing material needs. This leads to a lack of awareness and limited political participation, persisting across generations. Ultimately, due to these barriers, immigrants' voices do not reach local decision-makers, making it challenging to translate their needs into political claims and actual policy measures. Such problems have been widely noted during the PISTE project's work, and – consequently – the focus was placed on how to voice local immigrant groups in SMSTs.

Moreover, the project also showed that - in some SMSTs - migrants cannot or will not automatically stand up for their rights just because they are migrants and the importance of advocacy for migrant issues became clear. This advocacy for migrant-related issues was

important for 1) framing migration and integration-related issues, 2) providing both bridge builders and those needing empowerment and 3) translating issues raised by migrants into specific political demands.

In the case of PISTE partner municipalities, the acknowledgement of immigrant needs is more common when local administrations employ special bridging figures. Unlike larger cities, SMSTs present a context that allows such figures to be particularly effective, since they can reach and connect various groups from a migrant background and local decision-makers with a certain ease. These figures, often from a migrant background, act as intermediaries, effectively connecting minority voices with decision-makers. As for the profile of these actors, three main types of bridging figures emerge during our project.

Firstly, bridging figures may affirm themselves through their position in one or more immigrant self-organisations or groups, without having any official connections with the municipality. They can be persons with a leadership role within local immigrant associations or religious communities, but they may also be persons working on immigration-related issues, such as social workers. Although the first case allows to hear first-hand voices from groups from a migrant background and often provide strongly legitimised intermediaries with closed connections with their reference group, the latter represent an equally valid option in contexts of more recent immigration or where immigrants' life paths are very uncertain, as it often happens with asylum seekers' reception. However, both cases face problems of limited sustainability due to their reliance on a single person or a few of them, and they still need to be acknowledged by the local government as valid spokespersons to become an actual bridging figure.

Then, there are intermediaries who have an official position within the municipality and, despite not explicitly having an intermediation role, become bridging figures between the population from a migrant background and decision-makers. These have a stronger connection with the municipality and the potential to later become institutionalised, for instance through the assignment of policy competences on immigration to a councillor from a migration background or officially including a bridging role among the tasks of persons working at

immigration-related offices. However, despite presenting similar problems of sustainability as in the first case, their demi-formal role may still represent an advantage in contexts where a strong political polarisation of migration issues makes it more difficult for municipalities to adopt explicit policies to voice migrants.

Finally, there are institutional figures with the explicit task to connect migrant groups to the local government, by voicing their claims so as to inform local policymaking. These intermediaries can have an administrative or a political role. On the one hand, a group of social workers may assume the task of bringing the voices and claims of groups from a migrant background to local decision-makers, as it is the case of outreach social workers. They may be people from a migrant background, who work for the municipality with the aim of bridging the gap between local services and minorities, ensuring that their needs are actually taken into account.

On the other hand, there are political actors, such as the immigrant deputy councillor or immigrant advisory councils and committees. The first is a person elected by the non-citizen population for the purpose of representing them in the local council. The latter are collective bodies dealing with immigration issues that can be directly elected by the immigrant population or appointed by the local government. Such bodies have the function of politically representing immigrants in the local government and many localities have adopted this

Types	Origin	Pros	Cons	Examples
Civic bridging figures	Immigrant self-organisation or civil society	High legitimisation.	Reliance on single individuals. Need to be recognised by municipalities.	Leader of religious communities or immigrant associations; Immigration-related civil society actors; Social workers.
Demi-institutional bridging figures	Municipal bodies or administration	Connection with the municipality. Potential for institutionalisation. Lower visibility in polarised contexts. Potential for institutionalisation. Lower visibility in polarised contexts.	Reliance on single individuals. Need pre-existing structures.	Persons working at immigration offices; Councillor from a migrant background.
Institutional bridging figures	Municipal bodies or administration	Connection with the municipality. Training (social workers and offices). Openly political role (councillors and councils).	Need the recognition of actual competences. Problems with hard-to-reach groups. High visibility and potential conflict.	Municipal outreach social workers; Immigration offices with specific bridging tasks; Immigrant deputy councillor; Immigrant advisory boards or committees.

Table 3. Different examples of bridging figures in SMSTs

solution. Still, all these tools have not proved to be effective in all contexts. Indeed, problems may arise when the capacity to involve in the electorate

the immigrant population – or specific groups within them – is limited or when these figures lack actual influence on policymaking. Nonetheless, they can still

be relevant – especially at the first stage – as an arena from which different types of bridging figures can emerge.

As shown above, bridging figures can thus be crucial actors in voicing immigrant groups in SMSTs, but the effectiveness of their role heavily depends on the willingness and actions of local government to acknowledge their role, either through informal recognition or institutionalisation. Municipalities can have a role in creating the conditions for

these figures to affirm themselves, for instance through the creation of political opportunities for non-citizens, enabling their formation or including people from a migrant background within electoral lists. Against these premises, the following sections will briefly describe how the issue of voicing immigrants' claims and needs has emerged in the PISTE project and how local governments can shape targeted actions and policies.

Models, practices and needs assessment

PISTE partner municipalities present different situations. In Bebra (Germany), political participation of people from a migrant background was initially pursued through an immigrant advisory council directly elected by the non-citizen

population. Such an approach was later considered ineffective, as participation in council's election declined and the body was perceived as not having an influence on the local policymaking. Moreover, representativity issues emerged, since



the largest groups from a migrant background almost monopolised the council, that it was no longer perceived as representing the whole target population.

To deal with these problems, the town has replaced the council with an Integration Committee, which maintains similar tasks but is formed by members appointed by the local government. These people are selected to grant a certain degree of representation of different groups and gender balance. However, despite mitigating the representativity issue, the Committee still appeared as lacking actual decision-making powers and having a limited connection with some local groups from a migrant background left outside the network of involved actors. The situation changed when it started building connections with other key actors. This is the point where PISTE project's initiatives contributed with policy experiments: Policy Platforms, participatory workshops on participation and the Bebra's Future Search Conference.

Such activities created spaces for encounters between Committee members, organised groups and other individuals from a migrant background, allowing their voices to be heard and translated into a strategic document, the Integration Mission Statement for Bebra. Moreover, these forums also allow the identification of bridging figures or the reinforcement of their positions. Three of them occupy a prominent position: a councillor who is both member of the Integration Committee and the local council and thus ensures continuity

between the two bodies; the first councillor from a migrant background, who also represents a role model to encourage the political participation of other citizens from a migrant background; and a social worker from a migrant background, who was among the main promoters of some of the above-mentioned activities to ensure the continuity of networking created among key actors.

The Italian partner municipality of Fermignano shares with Bebra the long history of international immigration, which is a primary aspect of how groups from a migrant background conceive voicing needs. Within this context, the connection between the population from a migrant background and the local government has been primarily ensured by a key bridging figure, represented by a councillor from a migrant background who became the reference actor to present claims on behalf of minorities. The strict relations this councillor has with the more established self-organisation of groups from a migrant background contribute to increase their role and visibility in the local policy-making arena, by involving them in a set of activities and bringing their needs and requests within the local council.

However, during the PISTE project, limitations of this approach have emerged. For instance, during the Policy Platform, some representatives of groups from a migrant background and associations dealing with immigration-related issues pointed out the fragility of a voicing path linked to a single individual

and that not all persons from a migrant background are part of the network around this councillor. The latter situation is especially true for newcomers (e.g. asylum seekers) with needs different from more established groups. Therefore, the Policy Platform became a place where a plurality of voices emerged, including those of less represented and visible groups, also constituting itself into a Permanent Observatory on Immigration at the local level.

This evidence brought the municipality to experimenting a more structural approach, rethinking the existing immigration office with the aim to transform it into a bridging actor between the population from a migrant background and the local government and other institutional actors. The immigration office has become a place where immigrants can present claims to the municipality and where meetings with institutions that are hard to reach for people from a migrant background are organised. Moreover, the office has also increased the support for the procedure to obtain Italian citizenship, which is seen as the basis for the full political participation of people from a migrant background in the municipality.

Due to its more recent migration, the Belgian Flemish partner municipality of Ninove could not count on many established immigrant self-organisations and bridging figures did not emerge from them. At first, the municipality considered creating an immigrant advisory council, but the option was later discarded because of the perceived separatist nature

of this tool, which would have confined participation of people from a migrant background to a separate body. The local government thus took a different and innovative approach by moving first-hand to nurture institutional bridging figures using outreach social workers.

These are usually persons from a migrant background who are trained to become a connecting actor between migrants – especially newcomers – and local services, but sometimes they also assume a more advocating role by bringing claims and needs of individual persons to the attention of local institutions. This is particularly relevant in the context of Ninove, in which language barriers and the conflicting political visions on migration issues in the local political arenas make it difficult for immigrants' voices to find space. The institutionalisation of such figures was also seen as a solution to the frequent temporariness of non-institutionalised bridging actors, although these are still potentially affected by changes in the local government's political orientation.

Concurrently, through the activities of the PISTE project, two policy experiments have also been implemented in Ninove to voice a particular target, i.e. young people from a migration background. Firstly, interventions have been adopted to foster their participation in an existing program to connect secondary school students with local policy-makers to bring their claims to the local council. Secondly, an initiative targeting youngsters from a migrant background was organised in

collaboration with a local youth centre to relate with youth with less positive attitudes towards school. The project consisted of eight discussion sessions to better understand the local context and formulate personal opinions about local issues, followed by an event in which participants met local institutions and civil society actors to present their results.

Finally, in the case of the Greek partner Voio, the issues linked to the voicing for the local immigrant population emerge in a very peculiar way, due to the local immigration context primarily characterised by a reception centre for female unaccompanied minors. The temporariness of migrants' life paths and the sparse nature of the municipality revealed to be barriers to a comprehensive social and political participation of the received persons. Moreover, during the project's meetings, it emerged that the traditional tools used in the Greek context do not seem fitting to address the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors. For instance, migration councils were seen as

lacking representativeness, being mostly made up of Greek citizens with little connection with groups from a migrant background.

In Voio, a first bridging role is assumed by reception social workers, who present the claims of unaccompanied minors outside the shelter on various occasions, including platforms and workshops organised by the PISTE project. Indeed, they represent crucial actors to ensure a certain degree of continuity in the relation with other local actors, which would not be possible for the recipient unaccompanied minors, due to the limited duration of their stay and the pressing nature of their material needs. Nonetheless, in Voio their voices have been directly considered in many activities linked to the PISTE project. For instance, unaccompanied minors in the reception centre have been at the core of the policy experiment organised within it, by taking part in different activities based on the needs expressed by them, that started exactly with a listening phase.

Challenges

The variety of practices presented above brings some relevant challenges and barriers to the participation of persons from a migrant background, that can severely hinder the role of bridging figures and other voicing tools in the context of SMSTs.

The main ones are:

- *Sustainability in time.* Bridging figures – especially non-institutionalised ones – usually correspond to a single person or a few of them, making them dependent on the willingness and possibility of individuals to maintain that role. In the case of institutionalised bridging actors and voicing tools, this issue is more limited, but political changes may still affect their sustainability in contexts where they are not long established.
- *Representativeness and legitimisation.* To be effective, bridging figures should represent a more or less specific group and be recognised by that group as a formal or informal representative. They can thus present limitations in contexts with a highly diverse immigrant population, in which some groups may remain outside of bridging figures' network. Collective bodies contribute to mitigate this problem, but issues of legitimisation can still emerge, for instance when there is a group that is much larger than others and end up monopolising these tools. Top-down tools may allow to bypass this kind of problems, but they also depend on the willingness and capacity to involve different actors of the local governments and are not legitimised by the immigrant population itself.
- *Contextual barriers.* Despite proving to be effective in SMSTs, bridging figures may present a limited capacity to involve in their network and voice hard-to-reach groups, especially within new immigration destinations. Moreover, it is worth considering that basing immigrant participation solely on these actors may have exclusionary effects, by relegating possibilities of political participation for these groups to a fragile path separated from that of the rest of the population. Finally, the unfulfillment of material needs or racist and xenophobic attitudes among the local population and civil society or institutional actors heavily affect the possibility for immigrants' voices to be heard at the local level, systematically eliminating their claims from the local public debate.

Lessons learned

Conclusion 1: Bridging figures are crucial in giving voice to immigrants in SMSTs. Their effectiveness strictly depends on the acknowledgement of their role by both local institutions and groups from a migrant background.

Policy recommendation 1a: Local policymakers should recognise bridging figures as valuable intermediaries, looking for them in immigrant self-organisations, religious communities or other civil society actors. These actors may be involved through informal consultation or more formal ones, such as boards or platforms of civil society associations that meet periodically and inform local policymakers about immigration-related issues (or even non-immigration-related ones).

This option fits best: Localities with a relatively long immigration history, with established immigrant self-organisations.

Policy recommendation 1b: Municipalities should foster the formation of bridging figures, incentivising the participation of people from a migrant background in consultative bodies that are not necessarily focused on immigration-related issues. In this sense, (multi-lingual) information campaigns – especially those aimed at specific targets, such as people in school – are crucial to raise awareness on possible participation paths.

This option fits best: Contexts of mixed immigration where there is a relatively long-term settlement immigration, but there is a lack of immigrant self-organisations.

Policy recommendation 1c: Municipalities should create bridging actors to connect immigrant groups and individuals to the local government. Outreach social workers, who usually are people from a migration background hired and trained by the municipality to act as bridging figures, can make claims of hard-to-reach groups in the immigrant population considered in the policymaking. Institutionalised immigration offices may also work when assuming a specific connecting role in addition to the usual tasks of bureaucratic support. In all these cases, it is crucial that the immigrant population is informed about these figures, possibly involving them in their design through public consultation, so that these are sufficiently legitimised as bridging figures.

This option fits best: Localities of recent or secondary immigration flows or where the immigrant population does not spend much time in the locality (e.g. commuting localities).

Policy recommendation 1d: Social workers dealing with immigration issues may act as bridging figures and municipalities should maintain a contact with them as directly as possible, taking advantage of the tight network of SMSTs. However, this should not replace other attempts to involve the immigrant population in a more direct way, for instance organising consultations with people from a migrant background in particular locations, such as reception centres.

This option fits best: Contexts of very recent and transitory immigration flows, such as asylum seekers' receiving localities, in which people from a migrant background are characterised by very precarious situations.

Conclusion 2: Relying on bridging figures cannot be the only solution due to their low sustainability in the long term. Thus, more systematic attempts to foster political participation of people from a migration background should be also pursued.

Policy recommendation 2a: Local policymakers should take direct action to foster political participation of people from a migration background. This can be done for instance by political parties through the inclusion of citizens from a migration background in electoral lists, who may also act as role models for the whole population from a migrant background, other than becoming effective bridging figures.

This option fits best: Localities with a long history of immigration and many citizens from a migrant background.

Policy recommendation 2b: An investment in information campaigns and bureaucratic support for the acquisition of the arrival country's citizenship is also crucial to ensure people from a migrant background can reach a full participation in the long term. Finally, when possible, municipalities should also allow people from a migrant background to participate in local elections even if they do not have the arrival country's citizenship, for instance correctly informing EU citizens about their right to vote at the local level.

This option fits best: Localities with established immigrant groups and where there are people from a migrant background who could obtain the arrival country's citizenship – or at least some political rights – in a relatively short time.

Policy recommendation 2c: Despite their limitations, immigrant advisory boards or committees and immigrant deputy councillors still prove to be useful in some contexts, by allowing people from a migrant background to politically participate at the local level even when they do not have the citizenship of the arrival country. However, these actors must be entitled of actual competencies and be considered by the local government in the policymaking, so as to keep a certain degree of legitimation from

the local population from a migrant background. Adequate information campaigns to inform the target population about these tools should also be carried out.

This option fits best: Contexts of mixed settlement immigration, in which there are no prominent groups.

Policy recommendation 2d: Municipalities should create local forums or platforms in which various stakeholders of immigration-related issues, immigrant self-organisations and individuals from a migrant background can gather together to discuss on the same level about immigrant population's needs and claims. These should be created with a mix of top-down and bottom-up involvement and being considered as valid intermediaries by local policymakers. In this sense, PISTE Policy Platforms may provide a valid example of this kind of tool.

This option fits best: Being a flexible tool, which can be tailored to various contexts of immigration and involve different actors, these platforms seem suitable for all localities that are immigration destinations.



CONNECTING PLACES TO PEOPLE AND EMPOWERING PLACES

Short description

In the partner countries of the PISTE Project, migration-related issues (such as the release of residence permits, evaluation of asylum requests, etc.) are often managed at a centralised level. At the same time, social and economic integration-related aspects of people from a migrant background are addressed at the local level since migration is much more visible in the local context.

Visibility in public spaces is an essential indicator of participation in local life because participation is possible only with and through visibility. This becomes especially true in the case of SMSTs: 1) due to the limited public spaces available to inhabitants compared to large cities, 2) due to the scarcity of accessible public transportation, as in many cases, it is the only way to be mobile and visible. This section analyses migrant participation in local life in the partner countries through their visibility in public spaces since they may be transformed into publicly shared places to promote cultural and religious inclusion and counter segregation-racism or sites where no encounter between

cultures occurs. Visibility in public spaces and interaction with natives is an essential condition of participation, also in light of the stereotyping of the representation of migrants in the (local) media and the (local) political debate, as well as their hypervisibility in some specific places such as railway stations (Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2015).. Here again, the particularity of SMSTs emerges due to the limited geographical dispersion and “compulsory” sharing of common public spaces. In a context of institutional racism and adverse mediatic discourses, visibility can be hindered by the fear of being seen, especially in locales where violent racist episodes already occurred. Another important aspect is that SMSTs often have poor availability of funds, which is often mirrored by the lack of physical spaces provided to civil society actors to enhance the opportunity to create networks at the local level. In many cases, there is also a need for more expertise or explicit vision on involving newcomers despite the lack of material resources.

On the other hand, apart from being places of inclusion and exclusion, public spaces where people from migration background and natives meet and see each other may become places where local identity and local culture are reinforced through new and different forms of belonging. Considering differences between the participation of first and second-generation in public spaces and their visibilities, this report conceptualises publicly shared spaces as

places to build and transmit social capital through migrant visibility.

Given this introduction, four partner countries' profiles regarding promoting visibility in public spaces will be analysed in depth in the following lines. We are also going to scrutinise obstacles to the promotion of places-spaces for connection. The lessons learned from experiences and policy recommendations will be presented after a comparative analysis.

Comparing institutional understandings of participation

Institutional recognition of participation makes visibility easier, and this is the case with Ninove. The direct integration policy in Flanders establishes an “incorporation trajectory” implemented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Here, integration is the intended result of the incorporation process. From 2022 onwards, the incorporation process consists of four pillars instead of three: Dutch lessons, social orientation, career development, and a fourth pillar: social networking and participation, according to which a migrant who is not active in the labour market or not enrolled in education at the time of signing the integration contract, takes part in a “social networking and participation” program of 40-hours. Such a program can consist of a buddy project, an introductory internship at a company, or voluntary work. This fourth pillar aims to achieve more participation

of migrants and to establish a network. The incorporation program's social networking and participation component reflects an intercultural approach, focusing on micro-level interaction and dialogue between immigrant and established citizens. Local authorities coordinate this fourth pillar. Against this backdrop, Ninove is pursuing an active language policy by investing in Dutch language education. In fact, “Babelonië” has been set up since 2015 – a partnership between AGII, The Social House, the library, and Avansa – where immigrants can practise Dutch by talking with residents of Ninove about everyday topics.

Another example was implemented in Greece at the local level. Some forms of locally based integration actors are the Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) and the Migrant and Refugee Integration

Councils (MRICs), both foreseen by law but not mandatory, meaning that their establishment relies on the initiative of the municipalities. The services offered include, among many other service-based provisions, networking, and awareness-raising activities (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2020c). The municipality of Ioannina has created an integration centre with the support of private foundations. It supports the social participation of migrant and refugee communities in the area (UNHCR, 2021b). In 2021, 11 MICs operated in 10 municipalities nationwide, mainly in big Greek cities.

Political visibility is another aspect to be analysed. In the German context, the National Action Plan on Integration defines five stages of integration: (1) “Before migration”, (2) “Initial Migration”, (3) “Integration,” (4) “Growing together,” and (5) “Cohesion.” Political participation is considered part of cohesion and is defined as political education and participation in parties and committees. The integration processes can be steered by legal regulations and support measures such as language and qualification programs, cooperation with civil society actors, and symbolic political procedures such as naturalisation campaigns. The state also promotes

migrant engagement by supporting MSOs. Foreigners’ Advisory Boards (FABs) exist in most German cities. In the case of the state of Hesse, however, establishing FABs and Integration Committee is mandatory, as they are considered crucial for migrant participation. By and large, both have only an advisory function for the municipal council and the right to bring in suggestions for municipal decisions. However, they differ in terms of legitimacy and composition.

Participation and integration are not included in a systematised national policy strategy in Italy. At a general level, measures usually allow local authorities to establish advisory bodies, and they have paved the way for some experiments to represent immigrants’ needs and voices at the local level. In particular, the instruments that have been introduced more frequently are (1) the Advisory Boards and Immigrant Councils, which are composed of representatives of the different nationalities present in the territory, elected directly by resident foreign citizens or appointed by migrants’ associations and communities; (2) the figure of the Deputy Councillor, who is allowed to participate in the municipal council and present petitions concerning resident immigrants, although he does not have the right to vote.

Models, practices, and needs assessment at the local level

As well as national, regional, and local strategies regulating the participation of migrants, especially in terms of political participation, the case studies show many ways of being visible in the public space and difficulties related to implementing these practices.

The Greek case study, Pentalofos, where the Municipality of Voio has been operating a shelter for female UAMs, is a specific case among others. The specificity is due not only to the characteristics of the migrant profile but also to the location. The geographical position does not encourage the participation of asylum seekers in public life as Pentalofos is located far away from the city of Kozani, the most vibrant urban centre of the area, where a minor may enjoy extracurricular activities. Kozani is over an hour's drive away across mountain roads, which makes it extremely difficult for minors to participate in public life. The Cultural Center of Pentalofos is organising local events, which are all attended by the girls; still, they expressed their wish to visit places offering more activities.

The other three cases analysed in the PISTE project are more similar in dimension and the presence of populations with a migration background.

Fermignano provides different opportunities for migrants to become visible. Popoli in Festa, an intercultural event promoted by the Municipality, through which each migrant community shares their country-of-origin culture,

seems to be particularly appreciated by migrant communities, as these initiatives provide an opportunity for visibility, engagement with local institutions, and participation in civic and social life at the local level. On the other hand, despite the lack of formal interaction channels, migrant groups acknowledge the growing efforts of the municipal administration to promote dialogue, inclusion, and participation in recent years. In particular, the presence of a foreign-born councillor in the city council since 2016 seems to have benefited the various migrant groups in the area, not only improving their political representation but also encouraging them to put forward some of their needs and demands to the municipality and even to the regional authority. In line with this, the other two practices are related to the official recognition of the Mosque (the first at the provincial level and the fifth nationwide) and establishing a non-Christian cemetery through cooperation with the Islamic community. Data showed that people with immigrant backgrounds who hold key positions, such as city councillor, immigration desk operator, etc., seem essential for immigrant participation at the local level, making them more visible and improving the accessibility of services for the immigrant population.

Bebra presents a visible urban segregation between (1) the high share of inhabitants from a migration background, (2) the local districts with a high rate

of natives and mainly owner-occupied houses, and (3) a neighbourhood mainly inhabited by socially deprived migrants and asylum seekers. Since 1985, two phases of intensive urban renewal have attempted to qualify the city. However, urban renewal has increased the attractiveness and demand for inner-city housing. This fosters residential segregation and separates spatially less privileged migrants (and Germans) from well-established migrants. For Bebra, migrant society is already a reality, given the large variety of migrants in town. However, despite the most extended network of migrant self-organisations and religious organisations among all PISTE partners, and although many interviewees in Bebra have a migration background and feel “integrated” in many areas, only a few people with a migration background are represented in local politics.

Specific to Ninove is that most immigrants are French-speaking families arriving from the Brussels Capital Region searching for cheap(er) housing. Ninove is, hence, a second (or subsequent) step

in their migration trajectory in Belgium. According to local policy actors in Ninove, where Dutch is the official language, immigration from Brussels causes language-related tensions within the community, and many locals reproach migrants for not participating in Ninove’s community life. Work and leisure time of people with an immigrant background is not spent locally but in the Brussels Capital Region. Ninove has at least three religious and social-based-migrant self-organisations. Besides giving Muslims a place to practise their religion, one of these organisations organises iftars, neighbourhood gatherings, exhibitions, homework support for children, and Dutch language courses. This organisation has collaborated with the Department of Welfare in Ninove on annual intercultural dialogue evenings (where Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Muslim communities come together to discuss various topics) and on the intercultural festival NinoMundo.



Challenges

- *Lack of interaction in public spaces.* Except for the Greek case, all other partner cities organised intercultural events, promoting the visibility of people from migration background in public spaces. While the primary purpose of the events, such as the NinoMundo festival, Kermez, and Popoli in Festa, was valorizing the visibility of groups from a migrant background in public spaces and reducing polarisation within the town, their positive effects are not well defined. Indeed, these events risk emphasising cultural differences rather than contributing to more openness or tolerance. In Bebra, the intercultural festival Kermez is not organised by the town of Bebra but by the Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association. With the event, the organisation wants to build bridges between cultures. However, it is mostly popular only among groups from a migrant background and is not attended as much by native Germans as hoped for.
- *Person-dependency and representativeness.* Another challenge is the person-dependent nature of bridging figures. Even though these agencies can build bridges, helping to promote visibility in public spaces, they may depend highly on a single person representing one specific migrant group and leaving other groups unrepresented. On the other hand, SMSTs usually lack groups and associations formally organised by persons from a migrant background that can contribute to the integration procedure of UAMs. “Migration councils” are deemed ineffective for such targets, and the lack of organised communities and associations and their coordination leaves room for hardly sustainable and coordinated support.
- *Context-based obstacles.* Regarding the specific case of UAMs reception, plenty of shelters are based in SMSTs around Greece apart from urban areas. On the positive side, the relatively small size of these cities provides children with a safer environment. Nevertheless, when these shelters do not provide easy access to cultural and educational activities, their isolation can become an obstacle to the integration of minors and the development of their personalities. Local agencies’ geographical location and scattered nature make transport essential to access various collaborative inclusion initiatives. Small towns often do not offer cultural and sports activities which can facilitate integration and visibility. If cultural or sports facilities are located in neighbouring towns, accessible means of transportation are not always available.

Lessons learned

Conclusion 1: Frequentation of public places such as the central city square, parks, and all other places shared with local people is an essential indicator of integration.

Policy recommendation

Policy recommendation 1: Local authorities may formulate some “visibility and participation paths” in collaboration with universities with diversity and migration expertise, such as intercultural field visits or participation in important national and religious holidays of the country of settlement. Second/third-generation members can have active roles in implementing these activities. Activities such as field visits can be implemented within the intercultural events promoting the country of origin culture, and in doing so, these events may become interaction channels with native people.

This option fits best: SMSTs with nearby universities or research centres to create cooperation paths. The presence of active NGOs also is essential.

Conclusion 2: Urban segregation may create a class and ethnic-based division of public space, producing differentiated visibilities among people from migration backgrounds and natives.

Policy recommendation 2: Public authorities may allocate some resources to the improvement of ethnic (food) shops and help them become attractive not only to migrants but also to natives. In this way, these spaces may become encounter points. Local authorities could promote competitions to decide the best ethnic shop following different indicators, encouraging the participation of natives and accompanying other ethnic shops to improve the conditions of shops, following the selected best practice.

This option fits best: SMSTs with strong urban segregation and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods.

Conclusion 3: Regarding asylum seekers and refugees, the geographical distribution of the shelters is a deterrent factor since there is no proper information about the benefits of living in small and medium-sized municipalities and how to be socially active in public spaces.

Policy recommendation 3: Networking for SMSTs, having limited resources, is crucial. In making movement and participation in local life accessible, local authorities could promote collaboration with neighbouring towns or cities, especially when sharing services and experiences. SMSTs may lack expertise on EU funding in refugee

integration-related issues. Local authorities may identify some representatives for training in EU funding. Initially, this can also include a (young) volunteer securing funding for her/his own work.

This option fits best: the locations, which are very small and difficult to reach, with limited human resources.

Conclusion 4: In addition to the limitations, SMSTs also have advantages. Limited public space available for all can bring different groups together easily.

Policy recommendation 4: Local authorities could promote dialogue, hosted in public spaces accessible to all, around common topics to everyone, regardless of status. These can include birth, death, bread, traditional crafts, etc. Collaboration with NGOs and schools is crucial here. Common problems and challenges for native and migrant youth may also foster a dialogue.

This option fits best: SMSTs having active (migrant) associations representing and promoting diversity on the territory.

LOCAL POLICYMAKING: NEEDS ANALYSIS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Short description

Having staff with skills and expertise on migration and integration issues is fundamental in local policymaking in SMSTs. Indeed, many SMSTs are understaffed, and this particularly applies when considering expert staff in our areas of concern. This is further exacerbated in new immigration

destinations, economically disadvantaged areas and/or areas impacted by crises, where – due to limited capacity to hire new staff – local government employees often find themselves juggling a variety of tasks and activities across multiple policy areas. This situation may have some advantages, for instance triggering

Strategy	Pros	Cons	Point of attention
Invest in qualification/ training of employed staff	New key skills are internalised in the administration	Challenges to adapt training opportunities to SMSTs’ specificities; management of staff turnover	Potential ripple effect of skills in the whole administration (who is being trained?)
Hiring external experts	Ready expertise and fast effectiveness	Sustainability of costs, especially in the long run	Availability of experts in the vicinity and expertise on specific local challenges (what kind of experts?)
Relying on civil society organisations	Promotion of a societal collective effort	Local availability of adequate organisations; direct administrative control in question	Precondition is having networking arenas and capacity of network management

Table 4. Strategies to deal with staff constraints



intersectoral management and inter-office communication. Nevertheless, it also implies with relevant challenges, since local government employees often have limited time and expertise to work in immigration-related fields. To comprehensively address migration-related issues, many specialised figures are required – such as social workers, teachers, mediators or community organisers. They may not be part of the local staff and hiring them directly or through procurement may result quite challenging, as SMSTs may have to respect budget constraints and –

especially in the case of remote areas – or have to cope with the lack of candidates (or with a high turn-over of temporary staff). The Table below shows an overview of main pros and cons of most common strategies to overcome such problems.

Within this framework, a set of key choices must be taken, beginning with how and who to recruit. First, depending on the local available resources, municipalities can choose to directly hire expert staff or to outsource the task to private actors. These options can be carried out either by the municipality alone or in cooperation with others

and have relevant consequences on policymaking: on the one hand, recruiting directly and/or autonomously means higher cost but also more control; on the other hand, outsourcing and/or sharing the task may be less expensive but also present issues of coordination and time management.

Second, municipalities can choose to recruit dedicated professionals or to provide migration-related skills to wide-scope professionals. This is not just a practical choice, but it mirrors the local understanding of diversity, also determining whether they will create separate services for people with a migrant background or if they will access the general ones. Indeed, a uniform approach may be positive in some fields (e.g., youth services), but in some cases dedicated services can lower the accessibility threshold, for example by enabling to overcome language and information gaps. Finally, it must also be pointed out that, as noted by representative bureaucracy theorists, including people from minority backgrounds in public positions – either elective or administrative ones – increases the effectiveness and the social justice of public action.

Close cooperation with civil society actors may also be a valuable alternative option in some cases. However, SMSTs can often rely on a limited number of immigrant self-organisations or other associations dealing with migration issues, therefore it is important to understand if and how the role of minorities may be enhanced in such

contexts. In case of lack of civil society actors, municipalities may involve individuals in participatory arenas and events, providing that tools are adopted to avoid the exclusion of vulnerable groups (e.g. people with limited language proficiency, information or time) or supporting the empowerment and organisation of civil society through leadership programmes and acknowledgement of informal groups. Alternatively, when civil society actors are available but not inclusive of local minorities, buddying and bridging actions aimed to favour intergroup contacts may be an additional solution to those presented above. However, in the long run, the ideal situation remains including minorities in intergroup civil society associations or at least having minorities' self-organisations, which can be involved in policymaking as supporting actors in the field of immigration.

All the strategies presented above may also be affected by a few transversal challenges that are worth considering. First, resources for local policymaking in immigration fields often rely on supra-local funds for projects (e.g., AMIF, national programmes, regional earmarked programmes), meaning that local actors should be able to adapt to these opportunities and take up the related challenges (e.g. unpredictability of success chances or funding discontinuity). Second, SMSTs may have budget and legal constraints in targeted spending, especially when some spending areas appear oversized for the specific local context, and this makes it of uttermost

importance to take advantage of economies of scale, cooperating with other actors.

Third, considering the previous points, coordination and networking capacities become crucial, both horizontally with other public and private actors at the local level and vertically with supra-local institutions or private organisations dealing with migration that can support SMSTs in their actions or lobbying at higher levels. Finally, every investment in immigration-related fields should

be framed with an explicit integration strategy in mind, since when the desired integration outcome – whether multicultural or assimilationist or else – is not clear, it is hard to define tools coherently. However, this may be very conflictual, especially in small political arenas, leading some policymakers to opt for implicit and indirect policies targeting people from a migrant background, a strategy that may be effective in mitigating social conflict but inevitably limits the scope of action.

Models, practices and needs assessment

The above-described issues have been extensively analysed when observing our partner municipalities. A transversal element emerging in all of them is the crucial contribution given by the cooperation of supra-local actors involved in the PISTE project itself. Indeed, universities and NGOs provided partner SMSTs with highly skilled staff performing needs analysis and supporting the design of participatory arenas and policies to involve local immigrant groups and civil society actors in a broader way. In this sense, the networking potential of the AMIF framework and the involvement of research-oriented actors is an option to deal with potential problems of cooperation between SMSTs and large supra-local actors, such as national NGO or other public institutions, which are

usually based in larger municipalities and may have in mind unsuitable solutions for small contexts.

In addition to this, each town presents its own specificities in this respect. In Bebra, the impulse of the Hesse State has allowed for a long local experience on policymaking in the field of immigration, also pushing for the creation of advisory bodies and providing some project-related funds for related policy areas. Currently, the municipality can count on a key skilled figure on immigration, the head of the Department for Social Affairs, complemented by the local Integration Committee, which has the explicit task of supporting policymaking in the field of immigration and integration. However, the municipality also seized the opportunity of the PISTE project trying to involve the local population

in a more comprehensive way. Through the workshops and platforms organised in cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, they thus managed to produce a Mission Statement for integration in Bebra, a document that has been adopted by the Integration Committee and then by the local council as a guiding tool for policymaking. The culmination of this process was then the Future Search Conference, organised as the PISTE policy experiment, which ultimately crystallises and confirms through participatory tools Bebra's local integration strategy.

In Fermignano, the policymaking capacity in the field of immigration was originally placed on a key bridging figure in the municipal council and on the local immigration office (see also chapter 1 in this section), although the latter was more an implementing actor than a figure supporting policy design and strategy definition also due to its reduced time schedule and its outsourced nature. However, there are two other aspects that are worth considering. First, following a process similar to that of Bebra, the evolution of the PISTE LNPP into a Permanent Observatory on Immigration at the local level has introduced a new advisory body, which is formed by immigrant self-organisations and other civil society actors with experience in immigration-related issues. Despite emerging bottom-up, this new actor has been acknowledged by the municipality and is working on the elaboration of a policy document which should guide local policymaking in the field of immigration.

Second, Fermignano has been the promoter of the Charter of Mayors on Integration and Social Inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean Area, representing a policy statement on integration that is used as the basis for cooperation with other peer municipalities in this field.

Ninove represents a peculiar context for being a new immigration destination that can thus count on a limited set of civil society actors expert on the topic, and a polarised context from a political viewpoint. Therefore, the municipal strategy is mainly based on a specific office for the planning and design of immigration-related policies, also supported by the work of outreach social workers who guarantee the actual connection with the population's needs. This office is made up of four trained project managers who have tasks related to the screening and coordination of projects, research and tracking of regulations, budget management, and application for governmental funding. Their work is carried out through a transversal and inclusive approach, keeping together anti-poverty, integration and equal rights policies. Such an office allowed the municipality to elaborate comprehensive and coherent strategies in the field of immigration while avoiding the potentially conflictual nature of other political areas. Moreover, despite presenting a significant cost for the local budget, it has also succeeded in accessing supra-local funding tools, especially at European and Flemish Regional level, crucially supporting the policymaking capacity of Ninove.

The issue of supra-local funding tools is also a key aspect for Voio. Indeed, this municipality has been able to seize funds from various sources for the management of the reception centre for unaccompanied minors that the local government chose to open in its territory. This first led to hiring reception staff through the national reception fund and then relying on the trained and skilled personnel who started working in the centre to access broader and higher level tools, including EU AMIF. In this way, the municipality also took advantage of the work of an experienced national NGO, HumanRights360, for a deep assessment of the local context and needs and to strengthen the network between the reception centre, the municipality and other local and non-local actors. Then, also thanks to the capacity developed through the experience of this project and cooperation, the municipality eventually managed to obtain consistent funding from AMIF to guarantee the prosecution of the local reception centre in the upcoming years, also hiring new personnel.

Two are the crucial elements that seem to emerge from the analysis of our partner municipalities. On the one hand, a participatory approach directly involving the local population proved to be useful in improving the policy

capacity of SMSTs on immigration issues, compensating for the limited resources to hire new personnel. Such an approach appears particularly suitable in contexts of more established immigration flows, where some sort of skills or experiences have been grown up in civil society, and it also enables the elaboration of comprehensive, shared, and legitimised strategies in this field. This is a key point in preventing and mitigating migration-related conflicts and anxieties among the local population. On the other hand, an institutional perspective seems to work in new immigration destinations, allowing municipalities to internalise new skills and build the basis for the creation of a future network. Within the context of the tight budget of SMSTs, this can be done by relying on supra-local funding tools. Particularly, an initial investment in training or skilled personnel to access these tools appears to have a good return, and it potentially creates virtuous circles in which new networks and new competencies are acquired through funded projects and thus allows to capture new funding opportunities and elaborate broader actions. However, it should be noted that project-based policymaking remains a risky business due to the potential discontinuity of funding opportunities.

Challenges

As repeatedly noted in the previous sections, the policymaking capacity of SMSTs in the field of immigration and integration may be hindered by many obstacles that need to be taken into consideration to design an effective strategy. The main challenges emerging from the work of the PISTE project are:

- *Undersized staff.* Immigration is a complex issue, and, as such, it requires an array of political and administrative figures working on it. This is often hard to attain in SMSTs, which – due to budget and legal constraints, but also to the limited pool of persons they can draw upon locally – may have a reduced number of employees that can be dedicated full-time to migration-related agendas. Moreover, as noted by representative bureaucracy scholars, having a diverse staff is also an important element for the effectiveness of policies targeting minorities, but this option may be complex to implement due to hiring barriers in SMSTs – including the ones just listed above. Finally, civil society actors can sometimes bridge the gap left by understaffed SMSTs. However, finding local associations with expertise in migration-related issues cannot be taken for granted, especially in areas where migration is a relatively new concern.
- *Lack of experience and skills, or in updating.* The above-noted issues also connect with the limited chances SMSTs have to access skilled staff in immigration-related issues or in organising training on these topics. This problem is not only linked to budget constraints, but also to the difficulty of finding these figures in the local context or in the surrounding catching area, especially for towns located in remote areas.
- *Lack of actors' coordination.* Dealing with immigration at the local level also means coordinating vertically with supra-local institutions shaping immigration policies and horizontally with local actors dealing with related issues or other surrounding municipalities in similar situations. This is crucial but not always possible. Indeed, when acting alone, SMSTs are frequently neglected by upper level institutions due to their usually lower negotiating power, while coordinating with actors on a similar scale could be hindered by time constraints and shortage of personnel or by conflicting views.

- *Shortage of funding.* Budgets of SMSTs are usually small, and this can make it difficult to dedicate a part of it to targeted policies for people from a migrant background. Many supra-local funding tools exist to improve this capacity, but they often remain discontinuous solutions, and they still require a certain set of initial skills (e.g., how to write a project) to be accessed. As noted, an investment in acquiring these skills at the local level seems to have a good return, but it may still remain risky when the spending capacity is very low.

Lessons learned

Conclusion 1: Immigration is a complex and multifaceted issue, and SMSTs, being now at the centre of more and more diversified flows, need to improve their policy capacity in the field of immigration and integration so as to be able to elaborate effective and participative strategies.

Policy recommendation 1a: Municipalities should invest in training their own staff increase their awareness and expertise on immigration-related issues. In this way, the skills may be internalised within the administration and may involve/reach out to different sectors. The training should be tailored to the specific contexts of SMSTs; in this respect, local trainers or cooperation with universities may turn out more effective than relying on larger or national training actors. If possible, mechanisms for the transmission of this knowledge among offices and generations of workers should also be provided, for instance, through the organisation of moments of experience exchange or coaching between trained and untrained or new personnel.

This option fits best: SMSTs with limited possibilities to hire new staff and aiming to maintain a transversal approach, mostly acknowledging and considering the needs of people from a migrant background within pre-existing or general measures instead of designing dedicated tools. This is also particularly suitable in long-lasting immigration destinations, where there is less need for tailored policies and more diffused experience about immigration at the local level.

Policy recommendation 1b: Municipalities that can afford it may hire new experts in migration-related issues. This may also result in the creation of a new office that can assume transversal competencies on the needs of various types of minorities or vulnerable groups. In event the local socio-legal or economic context should not

allow direct hiring, the Municipalities may resort to external experts, which is a quickly applicable solution but also less sustainable in the long run. In both cases, municipalities should pay attention to the background of hired staff or experts to ensure that they are experienced in the peculiar context of SMSTs. Cooperating with other similar municipalities for the creation of a register of immigration experts or a shared office should thus be a valuable option to be considered.

This option fits best: SMSTs with some investment capacities and willing to design tailored solutions. This option is particularly suitable for new immigration destinations, where experienced actors and skills in immigration-related issues need to be cultivated at the local level.

Policy recommendation 1c: Where municipalities do not have the possibility to invest in new staff or to train existing staff, relying on civil society actors can be a good option. This can be done through the creation of a strong network between the local government and immigrant self-organisations and associations dealing with immigration issues in the locality so that such actors are able to interact with local policymaking arenas. Such informal networks may be institutionalised in advisory boards, integration committees or local observatories, in which local actors can directly contribute to the design of local immigrant policies. These newly formed collective actors may also be involved in participatory paths for the elaboration of a comprehensive local strategy on immigration and integration, designing guiding tools for local policymaking and complementing the role of municipal staff with new insights.

This option fits best: SMSTs with limited or no investment capacity, but that can rely on a certain number of civil society actors experienced on immigration-related issues. In this respect, this option is more suitable for long-lasting immigration destinations, but some actions in this sense may also be taken in other contexts, e.g. relying on non-local actors.

Policy recommendation 1d: As noted by the research on representative bureaucracy, municipalities should try to include more people from a migration background in their bodies and administration, allowing the acknowledgement and consideration of different sensitivities and experiences within the public action and informing policymaking in fields such as immigration. Representative bureaucracy principles can be achieved by prioritising the hiring of people from a minority background, especially – but not exclusively – in positions regarding topics such as immigration. When this is not possible, the inclusion of people from a minority background in electoral lists by local parties or in advisory bodies not necessarily regarding immigration-related issues may serve the same purposes. However, in any case, when pursuing these aims, municipalities should be careful not to fall into tokenism, which is an action seemingly supporting or helping a vulnerable or discriminated group but which is not actually

aimed at changing the situation for that group in a lasting way. Such a situation may occur, for instance, when people from a migration background are included on advisory boards for immigration without giving those boards actual power or political consideration.

This option fits best: All SMSTs, since it can be tailored to various contexts. For instance, when there is a consistent number of citizens from a migration background, local parties may include some of them in their lists. Similarly, representatives of refugees from a local reception centre may be included in local advisory boards of the municipality in places of new immigration.

Conclusion 2: SMSTs often have to deal with a very limited set of resources, which curbs their room of manoeuvre in fields such as immigration, which often requires them to adopt new measures and acquire new skills at the local level.

Policy recommendation 2a: Municipalities should consider the several supra-local funding tools that are available at the regional, national and EU level, both general and specific on immigration, as is the case of AMIF. Accessing these funds may require acquiring some skills at the local level as well as considering management challenges (e.g. expertise in drawing up a project application; skills in coordinating networks of partners; and resources to manage project practicalities, including accounting and financial statements), but the return on this investment is usually high, since SMSTs this way may have access to consistent funding to plan broad interventions in their local context. A frequent limitation of this strategy is that funds are tied to the project and consequently are limited in time, making it hard to elaborate long-term initiatives. However, the expertise and networks built during such projects may help to design new applications or plan different long-term measures starting from them.

This option fits best: All SMSTs should consider applying for supra-local projects. Nonetheless, these actions are easier to carry out for municipalities that can initially invest in acquiring the necessary skills or that can count on potential partners to fill this gap (e.g. through partnerships with key actors – from civil society actors to universities – active in the area).

Policy recommendation 2b: Municipalities should try to build networks of actors to compensate for their limited resources. This network may be vertical, built through partnerships with supra-local institutions (e.g. Regional or Provincial authorities, universities, etc.) or private actors, or horizontal, based on the relation with place-based civil society actors (see also Recommendation 3a) or other municipalities. The latter solution is often very effective since networks of similar municipalities can allow the exchange of practices and – when these localities are also close enough – the sharing of

services. Being part of a network of municipalities also improves the negotiation power when dealing with upper-level institutions on critical topics such as immigration.

This option fits best: Networks open to SMSTs are available at all levels at all levels in almost every EU Member State. When municipalities are included within institutional unions with neighbouring towns or are in the vicinity of localities dealing with similar challenges, building local networks is usually easier and more effective.

Conclusion 3. Municipalities acting on migration-related issues benefit from assuming a clear strategy on the topic and stating a final goal for the integration process, which makes their action more coherent and thus more effective.

Policy recommendation 3: Building a coherent local strategy on immigration is not easy for SMSTs with limited experience, skills, or resources. However, adopting a participatory approach proved to be effective in this respect: the organisation or local platforms and forums involving civil society actors, as well as the local population, not only develop a set of guiding principles for the local action but also make integration a shared concept which is legitimised by people who are actually living the locality.

This option fits best: There are no particular economic or social resources needed in this case, making this solution really accessible and suitable to all SMSTs.





PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS IN SMSTs. PRECONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Short description and key elements of civic-political participation in SMSTs

PISTE explored how people from a migration background can be active in decision-making and impact policymaking in SMSTs. Participation policies are an essential part of incorporation strategies in a circular relation: participation supports incorporation processes; participation requires incorporation to wield its potential fully.

Our project focused on “political and civic participation” to account for its multifaceted dimensions. Our focus was not only on “traditional” citizenship activities, as associated with and situated within the legal-political realm, such as voting, with an articulated landscape of forms of inclusion and exclusion at the national, regional, and local levels. We included broader, non-typified civic engagement and political actions and practices that may range from actively participating in local associations, volunteering, and advocating for the rights and interests of vulnerable groups

to organising campaigns and supervising the correct implementation of policies enhancing their impact. In the case of people with migrant backgrounds, non-typified civic-political engagement practices may manifest in various forms (i.e., proposing and engaging in social and intercultural activities) mostly framed within the designed integration processes, especially in areas where the (institutionalised) services may be lacking or appear insufficient (i.e., offering community-information and support services targeting co-nationals and migrant populations, organising interest groups to advocate for their needs). In the spectrum of activities, we include practices aimed at satisfying essential needs for integration (i.e., language knowledge or housing services for migrants, but also access and participation in social life) as pre-conditions or steps that nourish, mobilise and enact political participation.

Thus, participation is explored through formal and informal practices, manifesting in planning and implementing incorporation and political participation strategies. Formal practices regroup typified institutionalised political participation (voting, unionising, or indirectly participating through institutionalised group representation). Informal practices regroup civic-political participation expressed as steps of the incorporation processes. In this frame, the unique territorial features of SMSTs must be kept in consideration: i.e., the geographic location in terms of

distance from larger centres (centrality-remoteness), the quantity-quality of services provided locally, characteristics regarding features of the local community (cultural, political, historical elements) the migrant communities present in the territory and the local discourse on migration. Altogether, differentiations have been considered in terms of institutional, geographic-spatial, and target-group or community features to inductively and deductively capture the essence and the derivation of both the “formal” and the “informal” practices.

Needs assessment and challenges

There is a number of pre-conditions affecting participation in SMSTs. Sometimes, needs and claims are similar in different locations, but they may have a different salience and priority. These differences relate to place-specific institutional settings and political agendas, local community characteristics (including historical-cultural background), and spatial position. Hence, an ad hoc needs assessment is necessary. Focussing on the pre-conditions needed for participation, the following proved particularly relevant in our partner towns.

On the side of the people with migrant backgrounds, pre-conditions that enable participation are, first and foremost, material-existential needs: housing, work,

education, health, and proficiency in the language of the host context. Political participation conditions and socio-economic factors intersect; therefore, embarking initiatives oriented to participation may lead to failure when basic needs are not guaranteed. While the literature shows that relevant political participation action may take place even when many of these preconditions are missing (e.g. the mobilisation of undocumented groups in countries like the US and France or of severely exploited labourers in Italy and Spain), this is not the case in the contexts under scrutiny here. This may also be related to the difficulty of putting together a “critical mass” of activists in SMSTs.

Conditions that foster social awareness relate to the community, developing a local-national sense of belonging, and cultivating feelings of local pride and identity. Issues also point to the complexity of the social identity people with migrant backgrounds are carriers of, including sensitive characteristics related to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability, especially when confronted with stereotyped preconceptions that affect the institutions and/or the local community. Beyond the “social bonding”, the local communities of migrant backgrounds may also play a “bridging role” in addressing local vulnerabilities such as the demographic decline, renewal with labour force skills and strategies, re-socialising semi-abandoned commercial routes, and reviving border areas.

Proper political pre-conditions that materialise participation consist of the institutionalised access to decision-making processes (active and passive electorate), but also, indirectly, of the procedures for the formalisation of migrant’s representation hinged in political bodies or tailored in campaigns for raising civic-political awareness.

On the side of the local authorities and stakeholders, objective pre-conditions are needed. Called to satisfy the subjective pre-conditions, the primary responsibility is to invest in the “good governance” of public services for the entire community, with an eye for the migrant community. The quality and quantity of services qualify the needs’ priorities: Are access thresholds hindering people from a

migrant background from benefiting from services (e.g., have language barriers been considered)? Can services be reached easily and independently with public transport? Do public and private services complement and coordinate enough when and where relevant? Does the staff in key services have skills in cultural sensitivity and managing diversity? Good governance impacts participation by taking upon not only *essential services* that, once satisfied, open the path to participation but also “*secondary*” needs, such as time-making resources, that guarantee equality in the access to opportunities (pre-scholar and day-care facilities or sports-recreational facilities may extend possibilities for participation to full-time workers or mothers, neutralising practical barriers).

Socio-spatial features challenge the institutional side such as physical isolation/marginalisation of groups from a migrant background may be a relevant issue: spatial segregation, inter-group separation, and limited connection to key services and opportunities; on the other hand, social isolation may also occur without spatial segregation, with limited inter-group contact due to many factors (language, professional niches, place attachment related to life expectation – particularly relevant for those places that are considered a transit more than a final destination).

Local governance also requires the acknowledgement of *local capacities and resources* internally (e.g. number, skills, and expertise of civil servants, funding)

and externally, that is, to the network of actors in the local civil society that may be involved and coordinated to achieve better results, in particular, to trigger participation.

The need for *meeting spaces* also emerges as an issue in different contexts. Public spaces help settle some key issues. A welcoming meeting place can kick off dialogue among different local actors and offer a safe and protected context where opportunities to strengthen social cohesion generate opportunities for a better reciprocal understanding and conflict resolution, which ultimately

increases tolerance and counteracts discriminatory stereotypes and racism.

A *shared strategy* counterbalances political-ideological misalignments and motivates informal participation, installing, in time, a culture of cooperation in policy planning.

It is crucial to recall that the factors and barriers to participation are complex and often overlap. Therefore, the interaction between factors must be examined case by case. Connections between informal and formal expression structures can promote people's political participation.

Models, practices, and opportunities based on PISTE findings and impact assessment

The tables below sum up participation, distinguished in formal-informal practices, as these emerge in the four case studies of PISTE, offering an overview of the practices, benefits, and challenges.

	Bebra	Ninove	Voio-Pentalofos	Fermignano
Electoral participation	No	Yes (passive electorate, under conditions)	No	No
Institutionalised bodies with power of representation vis-à-vis the administration appointed by law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration Committee <i>Pros:</i> appointed by-laws, official recognition of participation in policy-making , political power through political motions <i>Cons:</i> risk of limited participation and comittment; lack of information on political processes; high social and cultural capital required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Participation Council: not yet established in Ninove 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) & Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs): not implemented everywhere • Cities Network for Integration <i>Pros:</i> institutional awareness and support <i>Cons:</i> limited impact; indirect representation; limited migrants' claims • Local Community Centres <i>Pros:</i> legal, psycho-social support; awareness raising <i>Cons:</i> limited resources; low efficacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Councils of Immigrants • Territorial Councils for Migrants • Councils for Immigration • Deputy councillors • District Councils <i>Pros:</i> institutional; co-decision <i>Cons:</i> limited impact and unclear scope; accessible to organised groups only; indirect representation • Migration Office <i>Pros:</i> recognised by recipients; practical information <i>Cons:</i> no participation / representatio; top-down

Table 5. Forms of representation of people from migrant background

	Bebra	Ninove	Voio-Pentalofos	Fermignano
Electoral participation	No	Yes (passive electorate, under conditions)	No	No
Coordinated groups from civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregated social organisations (churches, associations, trade unions, MSOs) and institutions (city administration) appointed locally <i>Pros:</i> offer political depth to the civic associations, potential for incisive participation <i>Cons:</i> merely consultative role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic self-organisations & umbrella organisations <i>Pros:</i> effective; institutionalised, bottom-up <i>Cons:</i> ethnic focus limits other self-organisations • Online Municipal participation platform <i>Pros:</i> low cost; continuity <i>Cons:</i> digital divide; top-down • “KRAS” Youth Parliament <i>Pros:</i> active citizenship; participation; advocacy <i>Cons:</i> voluntary • Interfaith & intercultural dialogue community meetings <i>Pros:</i> needs assessment; participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy Groups. <i>Pros:</i> the institutionalisation of advocacy as a method for acknowledging marginalised-vulnerable groups and their needs <i>Cons:</i> indirect representation; registered CSOs only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy groups, Trade unions <i>Pros:</i> needs assessment; intergroup contact <i>Cons:</i> limited impact; mostly advocacy, not participation; consultative liaison function only

Table 5 (continues). Forms of representation of people from migrant background

Participation in (local) elections is usually tied to citizenship status – or, in some cases, to denizenship status (e.g., being a legal resident with some characteristics, even without citizenship): many persons from a migrant background are excluded from local or supralocal elections. Even when voting is formally possible (for those who were naturalised or where some types of foreigners are allowed to vote), people from a migrant

background show low participation. This is related to several reasons, from disempowerment to distrust and the limited attractivity of the existing political offer. In some cases, there are formally recognised participation arenas with different organisational forms but a common aim: representation needs and claims of inhabitants from migrant backgrounds.

Bebra	<p>Migrant Self-Organisations (MSOs): acting as bridging figures in culture and religion issues; networked with local politics & administration through the Integration Commissions.</p> <p><i>Pros:</i> active participation and integration; contact point; addressing concerns, needs and interests</p> <p><i>Cons:</i> indirect participation; risk that some interests or some communities are left un-represented</p>
Ninove	<p>Buddy projects: oriented to market inclusion or within “social networking and participation”</p> <p><i>Pros:</i> promotion of integration; a supportive contact point to navigate integration goals and connect with local administrations’ strategies and planning; supporting labour integration addresses one of the main steps that ensure incorporation and pacify concerns of the local communities</p> <p><i>Cons:</i> operations that require funding; participation is indirect and guided, probably more keen on assimilation processes; lack of guarantees, of a frame of reference and of control over the ending point of the participation</p>
Voio-Pentalofos	<p>Migrant Self-Organisations (MSOs) and NGOs: operating independently from the public sector, provide social care services; on the supra-local level, there is an operating variety of NGO’s and organisations of active migrants.</p> <p><i>Pros:</i> integration services fill in institutional gaps; shaping a model for local-sublocal networking and multilevel governance with surrounding stakeholders; generate visibility and confidence to overcome systemic and structural limitations; civil society becomes co-protagonist for their future, needs & interests</p> <p><i>Cons:</i> local capacities may sometimes be limited in terms of specialised knowledge, experience, guidance, resources; risk that integration becomes dependent on volunteer services; limitations due to internal-external fragilities of the organisations (i.e. lack of funding or due to bureaucratic procedures)</p>
Fermignano	<p>Migrant Self-Organisations (MSOs): promote intercultural activities; act as bridging patterns; offer basic services (i.e., information, legal advice) or become intermediation actors with the institutions</p> <p><i>Pros:</i> civil society acquires a protagonist role; gaps in public services and policymaking processes; committing local authorities to undertaking durable collaborations; promotion of a participation culture</p> <p><i>Cons:</i> limited local capacities in terms of knowledge, experience, guidance, resources; overlapping services and dispersion; clear co-shaped integration strategy is needed; funding, bureaucratic obstacles and internal-external fragilities may hinder full capacity; a monitoring mechanism is necessary</p>

Table 6. Forms of informal representation of people from migrant background

Informal, non-institutionalised civic-political participation through local actors is crucial in promoting local interests and needs, offering supportive services and a point of reference when institutional capacities are limited. The shaping model requires strong networking with surrounding stakeholders to give visibility, faithfully reflect real needs and give voice to people. In this context, bridging figures and intermediation play a key role, as illustrated above and in the previous Art.3 (see infra). Frames for the participation of people with migrant backgrounds in the policymaking processes establish a potentially fruitful and continuous dialogue and establish durable collaborations, coherent to most strategies on “social cohesion”. Tools for enhancing this type of informal participation should be provided.

The following are crucial steps to influence through informal practices and progressively ensure legitimacy in municipal co-decision-making processes,

- strategic development of channels of permanent communication (needs assessment), and monitoring mechanisms to identify reasons for low representativity, fragilities or effectiveness flaws;
- criteria and practices must be established to ensure equal access, including and going beyond ethnic-religious characteristics, avoiding exclusive representation of people with migrant backgrounds from nationals (advocates for rights or national unions);
- having meeting places as permanent reference points, and for consultation and discussion, helps to forge local identities and enhancing belonging;
- local governance could consider simplifying and de-bureaucratising, where possible, the participation;
- provide tools with more penetrating actions in the decision-making processes (i.e., offering a vote in council meetings, offering cooperation and funding for projects that come from the civil society).

Barriers, limitations, and challenges

Municipalities represent the strategic level of implementation of the national strategies, yet the local policymaking highly depends on the political leaning of the electorate and the local political conditions related to the impact and efficiency of the policing.

What to do: to boost a pragmatic approach to participation, the local governance must increase reliability, solidity and community trust, which can be achieved through well-designed incorporation practices that take into account the local context. A shared vision of “social inclusion” strategies significantly reduces the space for the

rise of challenges, contradictions, and inconsistencies in the implementation phase and leads to more consequential policies; when this is not feasible, as it often happens, a less explicit strategy while maintaining commitments may prevent political polarisation.

Institutionalised-formal participation is normally provided by the regulatory frameworks for the access to citizenship. Such frameworks require the political majority in legislative reform proposals, making it difficult for SMSTs to intervene or change the regulatory barriers in the active/passive electorate.

What to do: Activate the regulatory-political autonomy of local authorities to overcome national shortcomings in this field locally (i.e., as in the case of Belgium), proposing forms of “local citizenship”. These models offer three-way benefits: ensure the promotion of social cohesion in the local community, ensure the enactment of social-political practices of inclusion, and enhance participatory democracy, considering that high participation rates also require tools for raising political awareness and gaining knowledge of the systemic structures (i.e., introducing permanent meetings for discussion and information campaigns).

Institutionalised local bodies for political participation such as Foreign Advisory Boards, Councils for Immigrants, Integration Committees, often do not unleash their full potential, including the empowerment of people from a migrant background and the boost of

participation in the decision-making processes.

What to do:

1. insist on transparency and outreach to people from migrant backgrounds as carriers of interests, needs, and opportunities, and employ the valuable insights to orient calibrated actions that are more attractive and successful for the benefit of the entire local community;
2. avoid representation of people with migrant backgrounds through nationals to cut the distance between the latter and institutions;
3. simplify the bureaucratisation of the definition of the electoral bodies and the election criteria;
4. amplify the competencies beyond simple consultation by assigning more incisive rights (such as the right to petition), allowing a protagonist role to exploit the potential of these bodies.

Self-organisations, “informal” structures, and instances of co-determination appear as key areas for the institutional level, seen as providers of services, skills, roles and functions that are not fully exploited nor developed, at least in some cases (Fermignano, Voio-Pentalofos).

What to do: Offer institutional validation as patterns, models, and places for indirect participation in policymaking, enhancing their potential role in genuinely promoting integration and actions of civic-political participation through their activities. Employ places and infrastructures to establish stable communication channels and counsel, offer guidance, project management

training and support with resource distribution criteria that ensure internal instability and capabilities development.

The geographical positioning plays a significant role in satisfying needs and defining long-term, durable strategies, given the difficulties of ensuring service providers and guaranteeing the continuation of the efforts.

What to do: identify, map and promote local-sub local and supralocal networking with stakeholders, advocates, non-profit

organisations and NGOs, valorising existing resources in terms of both human capital and services-structures collaborations. Networks cooperating with institutions can maximise practical benefits for the entire community, establish integrated services providers, while addressing structural deficiencies in satisfying basic needs (i.e. transport to hospitals or offices situated in big centres) and facilitate the steps to integration of people with migrant backgrounds.

Lessons learned

Conclusion 1: Formal participation frameworks: Citizenship is still the leading status that guarantees civic and political participation. However, its access is heavily dependent on and hindered by national laws and bureaucratic preconditions. The political Municipal role can be decisive in exercising its political-institutional power; however, with a few exceptions, efforts in that direction could be more substantial.

Policy recommendation 1a: Given the decentralisation trends throughout all EU countries, local administrations, with the help of court decisions and parliamentary petitioning, could take over the political task of proposing reforms for the bureaucratic simplification of citizenship application at the local levels, prioritising criteria of “active citizenship”.

This option fits best: Small and Medium-sized towns established as “places for long-term migration”, preferably (but not exclusively) with local authorities strongly oriented to social cohesion enhancement.

Policy recommendation 1b: Within the above-mentioned frame of action, efforts can be put forward to establish formal or informal models and practices of “local citizenship”. Local citizenship shows belonging through residence as an eligibility criterion while requiring “performances of citizenship” around public service delivery

through proactive policymaking and rights advocacy. Forms of local citizenship may be activated through a combination of institutional innovations, such as the normalisation of access to public services, public consultations and decision-making processes that regard the entire community. Granting access to the right to vote in local elections for long-term resident migrants is a crucial step in this direction.

This option fits best: Places where “active citizenship” practices are particularly needed (or already established) as a way to overcome structural-infrastructural shortcomings (i.e. caused by geographical remoteness, demographic decline, etc.).

Policy recommendation 1c: Formally recognised and institutionalised co-participation of people with migrant backgrounds in elective and non-elective bodies with political power should be promoted, reinforced and re-regulated by guaranteeing effective functions and competencies beyond the consultative ones and by facilitating a balanced composition of the existing councils-committees. To ensure a qualified representative rate of migrants, a more “universalistic”, gender-balanced, and inclusive approach defining the procedures, criteria, and election prerequisites is of fundamental importance. Political sensitisation and adequate information are key elements for raising awareness of the opportunities offered to communities with migrant backgrounds. Local mechanisms for protecting and promoting human rights with the power to intervene in policy shaping and instances where the needs of people with migrant backgrounds are heard are necessary. Local ombudspersons or offices/observatories for non-discrimination may frame the Municipal operations.

This option fits best: Places where such tools for institutionalised participation of people with migrant backgrounds are already provided by law but aren’t activated or their potential hasn’t been thoroughly explored (thus resulting ineffective).

Policy recommendation 1d: Local authorities should favour inclusion and participation through community political sensitisation and the establishment of education-training programs for the administration and the communities with migrant backgrounds (i.e. through language learning and networking). Informative campaigns should focus on the multiple beneficial impacts of the participation of people with migrant backgrounds in the decision-making process for the community as a whole.

This option fits best: Places with a mapped local network (NGOs, MSOs, or other types of local and sub-local associations) providing formal-informal services (so that costs are reduced and resources are valorised-maximised) that do not require building services and infrastructures from scratch.

Conclusion 2: Informal participation. Self-organisations and local networks. The role the informal participation of local organisations and networks of MSOs can play needs to be valued and re-estimated. Nevertheless, self-organisations are not expected

to lead automatically to political involvement effect. Even within well-established organisations, integration-related needs are often barely brought into the local political discourse. The reasons for this lie in a form of self-censorship or of the need to protect the self-image of long-time residents that might be distorted by standing up exclusively for migrant issues. Migrant self-organisations and associations, local actors and

bridging figures should collaborate closely with public entities and support institutional work, i.e., through schools, cultural centres, language training centres, etc.

Policy recommendation 2a: Civic awareness of people with migrant backgrounds and the efficacy of public action can be enhanced through cooperative governance practices, i.e., by attributing the role of special social services providers to the associations or inviting the organisations to attend public meetings. In the long run, these mechanisms may also bring the native community and the communities of people from migrant backgrounds closer together, fostering social cohesion.

This option fits best: Places where migrant self-organisations or other types of civic-cultural organisations are already active (i.e., by organising public events or promoting activities for various categories of the local community i.e. afterschool, sports activities) but their contribution and role haven't yet been valorised, officialised or properly identified within the context and frame of "local actors"

Policy recommendation 2b: Organise periodical "consultancy forums" with the organisations and establish or create meeting spaces for promoting the dialogue on city issues and policy planning involving migrants (employ design thinking methods, focus groups...), providing a practicable setting for participating in the local assemblies. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that informal participation formats are not per se more inclusive due to their high demands on the social and cultural capital of the participants and must be checked in advance for various dimensions of exclusion (i. e. language barriers, timing).

This option fits best: Localities with a clear prevalence of youth residents that can immediately and easily use digital tools (online platforms and forums) or in relatively small or well-organised societies where it is easier to identify bridging figures that can become connecting points of reference and motivational actors of the local community

Policy recommendation 2c: Investigate, register and publish the local networks of organisations to map and make available the territory's resources, offering facilitated procedures for their autonomous registration on the official portal of the Municipality. This will also valorise and encourage the voluntary work often entailed in the organisations and increase the visibility of their initiatives and areas of interest.

This option fits best: Anywhere where voluntary work and associations established operate but are not properly identified.

Conclusion 3: Visible and invisible barriers. The quality and consistency of the integration process are critical to the claim for social-civic or political awareness development. There has to be more than opportunities for participation and granted access to participation mechanisms. While the primary concern should be on the quality of the infrastructures and of the essential services, as the bare minimum precondition to satisfy basic needs to be able to develop community-social interests, the focus needs to go beyond the satisfaction of the bare access to services. Correct and comprehensive information about possibilities for participation is also crucial. The lack of protagonism of communities with migrant backgrounds within the local societies is at the root of a potentially low sense of belonging within receiving localities. Participation is subject to a strong socio-economic and socio-cultural bias and is characterised by individual identity. These factors vary greatly between different social groups and should also be taken into account in SMTs in the light of the high heterogeneity of people from migration backgrounds. Therefore political participation requires developing cognitive and social skills, such as communicating, and the empowerment of being critical towards policy or organisational decisions.

Policy recommendation 3a: Civic-political training instances and capillary information campaigns on systemic-structural issues of the local administration and the local society should be organised to reach associations and communities with migrant backgrounds, neutralise capacity-related barriers, raise awareness, and empower people to advocate for participation.

This option fits best: Places with mixed and long-term established migration that lack self-organisation and eventually suffer from segregation

Policy recommendation 3b: Time resources must be put in place to enable people who cannot otherwise invest in participation activities (i.e., children daycare and after-school activities)

This option fits best: Places characterised by long-term migration or places where labour integration measures are prevalently employed but provisions for incentives for civic-political participation or “affirmative actions” (i.e., sufficient services to support the needs of working families with maternity-paternity leaves, or haven’t provided facilitations for disabled or other “vulnerable” categories) have not been implemented.

Policy recommendation 3c: Address the problem of language policy adequately to ensure proper communication and reinforce and infuse the feeling of belonging.

This option fits best: Places with established migrant communities that do not have easy access to or sufficient funding for enrolling in language courses or places that because of their geographic positioning, are too distant from the centres providing such services

Conclusion 4: Resources. The lack of resources (economic and human) can be decisive for the planning and implementation of participatory activities and initiatives. Unequal distribution should be re-considered by launching programs that incentivise virtuosity in the integration-incorporation of people with migrant backgrounds, demonstrated by the active involvement of communities with migrant backgrounds in activities of collective interest.

Policy recommendation 4a: Support and “privileges”, such as introducing a citizen’s or public welfare allowance or more favourable taxation, could be granted in return for social and political voluntary work in rural areas and small towns.

This option fits best: Places with mixed and long-term established migration characterised by barriers to access resources or suffering from isolation and demanding a better organisation of local level actors and coordination in the multilevel governance frame

Policy recommendation 4b: Funding may also be re-regulated according to empirical results demonstrated by the SMTs which proved virtuous in integrating people from migrant background, further incentivising initiatives to benefit the entire community. Foreseeing participatory budgets for councils on local public affairs focused on the districts with migrant backgrounds may be a solution.

This option fits best: Places with established communities and residents from migrant backgrounds with poor access to social tools, networking and/or methods and places to gain visibility and promote activities, or whose public bodies have low communication skills.

Conclusion 5: Clarity and shared strategic vision. A shared interpretation and understanding of the ultimate goals of policies and processes related to integration-participation is crucial in organising political participation as a comprehensive, transversal and inclusive process.

Policy recommendation 5: Information campaigns, focus groups with local stakeholders, and community meetings must be organised periodically to ensure open dialogue and confrontation, disseminate policy ideas and initiatives with their stakeholders, receive feedback, and clarify and re-adapt to unidentified needs. This practice is expected to reach a high level of identification with the policymaking and

the entire political process, achieving a better reception of decisions and improving the collaboration between institutions and the population. Furthermore, it is an excellent method for counteracting racism and discrimination, fighting segregation and contrasting misconceptions. Finally, strategic visions should be underpinned with shared, concrete goals and measures, and made politically binding to ensure that they are implemented in the long term.

This option fits best: Places with established communities and residents with migrant backgrounds that lack channels of continuous communication, information and coordination with the local governance.



EXPERIMENTING PRACTICES OF PARTICIPATION



Policy experiment: Bebra

POST-MIGRATION FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE

Starting point

Bebra is a small town (approx. 14,000 inhabitants) in the state of Hesse and home to people from over 100 nationalities. The city has a long and ever-

changing history of migration. This leads to a great heterogeneity of the population with a migration background concerning their socio-economic status, social and

cultural integration, and different levels of place attachment and abilities to assert their own needs and opinions, especially when considering intersecting patterns of disadvantage. Due to ongoing immigration during the last few years, this heterogeneity of the local population in Bebra is expected to increase further.

After turbulent and conflictual phases in the social coexistence of people with and without a migration background, most residents now see the city as a successful example of integration. Not least, urban renewal processes, which have contributed to a new identification of the population with their town, the good structural integration (especially work, education and housing) of immigrants, and the development of local networks and organisations contribute to this image today.

Although some have German citizenship and are well established in the local society, PISTE activities and research confirmed that many persons from a migration background do not have the right to vote and are less visible in local politics and administration or less connected to self-organisations. Limits to social and political participation are

still an open issue. In addition, social facilities, childcare services and inclusive meeting spaces are also lacking and thus represent restraints on social and political participation.

The policy experiment in Bebra addressed the inherent challenges of places with high levels of social complexity, heterogeneous migration histories, and ever-transforming local identities. It aimed to find ways of involving people with and without migration histories and with different cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds in strategic thinking and acting concerning Bebra's present and future. The expected outcome of the experiment was the formulation of future visions shared by all residents, regardless of their migration history, to guide Bebra's strategic priorities in the next ten years.

The concept of a post-migrant society, in which immigration is accepted as normality, residents' personal migration history is seen as just one among many characteristics, and tensions and conflicts evolving from ongoing immigration are openly addressed and negotiated (Foroutan 2019), was used as starting point to analyse the experiment.

Design, participants, and actors involved

During the PISTE project, the assessment showed a general public "blindness" to structural disadvantage and discrimination, the need for negotiation

arenas, methods, and opportunities for participation and an overall lack of migrant representation in local politics and administration. Together with local



stakeholders and organisations, the activities (co-design Workshops and LNPP - Local National Policy Platform) within the PISTE project attempted to disentangle the reasons behind the under-representation of people from a migrant background and support their political participation. On the part of the people with a migration background involved in the activities, a great challenge was recognised in translating individual interests into general political ideas, a high degree of self-censorship was evident, and there was a great willingness to take responsibility for opinion-forming processes. In addition, the Integration Committee, as the local, formal political body for the representation of migrant's interests (forming the LNPP in the PISTE project), is still not used and understood as a powerful political tool, although there

were signs of political activity during the project.

To tackle these issues, an informal public participation process addressing all inhabitants of Bebra to develop common visions for the overall development of the town in the years to come was set in place. In contrast with election participation and other formal procedures, an informal policy instrument does not exclude people based on nationality but instead has a high level of accessibility and thematic openness.

The informal participation process used the methodology of "Future Search". The entire "Future search"-process took several months, consisting of a preparatory and follow-up phase and a large two-day group event. During the preparatory phase (six months before the



main event), a steering group composed of 18 local multipliers and networkers with and without migration backgrounds was formed. In a series of regularly scheduled meetings, this group identified relevant topics for discussion, and supported the organisation and invitation of participants for the main event.

The municipality of Bebra acted as the experiment's initiator, the moderators' commissioner, and the promoter, organiser and patron of the individual events and the process as a whole. As a practice partner of the PISTE project, it financed the experiment through its project budget. The role of FH Erfurt was to observe, document and evaluate the experiment. However, the FH Erfurt team played a crucial role in the choice of the experiment and in encouraging the partners to undertake what was a rather sizable and – within the local context – novel event. Professional moderators guided the entire process.

Creating long-term practices of participation

The policy experiment was a planning process that lasted several months. During the main future search event, visions for the city's future development were developed. In the next phase of the

process, there will be an open space event in which as many of Bebra's residents as possible will work in working groups to underpin these visions with concrete measures. Finally, the visions and measures will be adopted in a binding political process. With this in mind, further participation steps that go beyond the actual experiment within the PISTE project will be taken.

The evaluation of the entire future search process by the Research Team of FH Erfurt has also demonstrated a certain empowerment of people – with and without migration background - who have previously hardly participated in public discussions and political processes. The participants rated the future search event positively and expressed a desire for further (informal) participation formats. Numerous participants also emphasised that they could imagine becoming more involved in public discussions in the future.

This new format for Bebra could have provided a starting point for future informal participation in the city. In particular, the empowerment of the steering group members and the direct approach to political participation proved

to be very effective. Here, too, there is potential for future participation.

In addition to the participants, those responsible for politics and administration also expressed their satisfaction with the process and its outcome and were open to further participation processes that incorporate the different perspectives of the heterogeneous local population.

Combining academic research with reality

Based on previous findings and activities from the PISTE project, the research team of FH Erfurt accompanied the entire future search process from design and implementation to evaluation. The evaluation results were also made available to the moderation team to be considered for the next steps in the process. The research team also presented the evaluation results at an LNPP meeting and the EPP in Bebra. Due to the presence of local stakeholders from politics and

administration (including members of the Integration Commission) at these events, it can be assumed that the results will be incorporated into the political bodies and the municipal council.



The experiment

The experiment, which lasted several months, began in May 2023 with the first meeting with representatives of the city of Bebra, the research team of FH Erfurt and the moderation team, at which the 18 track group members were proposed and subsequently invited. During the three steering group meetings in June, September and October 2023, the participants developed key topics

for the future search event. The steering group members also actively supported the public relations work and were particularly responsible for inviting potential participants to the event.

The future search event took place over two days, from 10-11 November 2023. A total of 100 people took part in the event over these two days, 36 of whom were invited by the steering

group members. In total, 26 per cent of all participants had a migration background, and 42 per cent stated they were female. Most of the people present with a migration background were members of one of the larger migrant self-organisations. Nevertheless, the personal invitations by the steering group members also mobilised people with and without migration histories who would otherwise likely not participate in events like this. Bebra's mayor observed that he did not know around one-third of those present, which indicated that they were citizens who are not usually involved in participatory events and could therefore be counted as newcomers to the local political arena.

Throughout the two-day event, the following 11 topics for the future development of Bebra were identified in numerous changing working groups and as part of various activities using different methods: leisure and culture, integration, economy, volunteering, nature, mobility, health and care, energy, living, identification with Bebra, and networking. "Integration" was ranked the most important topic by the participants.

Positive results of the future search process

The process impacted in several beneficial ways:

1. The steering group meetings and the discussions in the working groups during the main event helped to make the interests of different groups visible, raising awareness on social integration

topics, defining common grounds, and helping to normalize the presence of people from a migrant background.

2. The future search method as a format for informal participation proved useful for discussing a wide range of topics and developing visions that can be translated into concrete measures and political demands in the future.

3. The great strength of the format was its potential to empower people who previously needed access to comparable forums for participation. In particular, by directly addressing potential participants through the steering group members, the format reveals opportunities for better participation of marginalised persons and groups.

4. The variety of methods used in the main event, the direct invitation to participate and the low-threshold access to the process have empowered people to participate in such a process for the first time. This represents an opportunity for future participation.

Critical reviewing of context and methods

At the same time, the future search event was also an opportunity to (re)examine the context and the method critically. In particular, the following issues emerged:

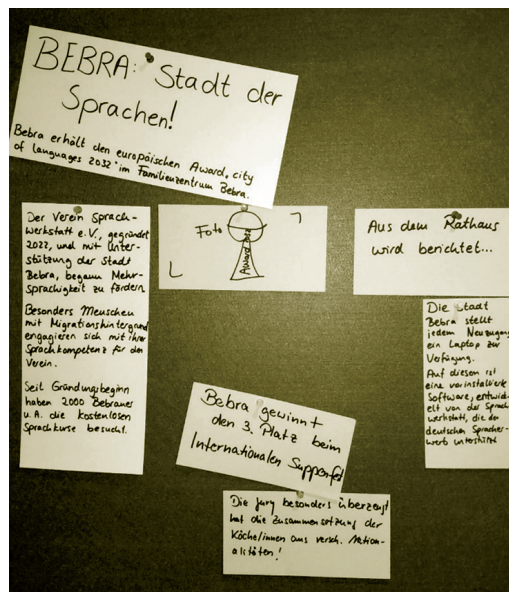
1. Even though the method helped to involve people who had not previously been reached, the method nevertheless revealed a high degree of exclusivity, as the format places high demands on the socio-cultural capital of the participants. These obstacles could only partly be overcome by the translation service offered at the event or the participants

present (especially professional and volunteer advocates for migrant-related topics).

2. Hot topics have been untold or remain invisible. The method helped to ensure that a wide range of topics were discussed. However, the topics repeatedly needed to be reduced to individual keywords in small group discussions, which made controversy and complexity hard to capture. These small groups were predominantly moderated by volunteering white males. As a result, opposing opinions were rarely expressed, and conflicts were difficult to address.

The ambivalence of a post-migrant society often disappeared behind vague and rather positive catchwords.

3. The presence of migrants alone was not enough to address migrant-related issues, even though it generated the necessary respect that enabled advocates to bring migration-related topics to the table. Professional and volunteer advocates for migrant-related issues – like social workers, even those of German descent – were therefore important for 1) framing migration and integration-



related issues, 2) empowering and acting as bridge builders, and 3) ‘translating’ issues raised by migrants into future visions or specific political demands.

4. With regard to the identity and participation of migrants in Bebra in general, strong ambivalences could be identified in the course of the process leading, for example, to a feeling of exclusion among migrants who are not perfectly adapted.

Results and replicability

The process evaluation showed residents’ (including people from a migration background) high satisfaction with the Future Search event. Many felt encouraged to participate more actively in (informal) public opinion-forming

activities in the future. The open format of the process was seen as remarkably positive and effective. The process helped to openly address migration-related topics that had previously been rather taboo, thus possibly contributing

to an open discourse on migration and integration in the future. The future search process also helped to enhance the strategic prioritization of migration-related issues in Bebra, especially because integration was the most voted vision topic. In this sense, the participants have sent a clear signal to local politicians to put the topic of integration on the agenda in the future. Last but not least, the call for an increase in the proportion of people with a migration background in local administration and politics, as stated in the preamble of the event's final documentation, is evidence of this. But also, the support of the process by the mayor and parts of the local

administration points to a commitment to integration issues.

The experiment shall be considered just the first step of an action that requires continuous commitment. The topics addressed in the Future Search event will be further elaborated in action groups in 2024 to suggest concrete measures and develop political resolutions.

With regard to the future search methodology, it has been shown that, in addition to the positive aspects mentioned above, general challenges of informal participation processes remain. This relates, in particular, to the social exclusivity of such formats.



To transfer the future search format to other contexts, it is, therefore, necessary to analyse the event's focus and content on different dimensions of exclusion, to adapt the methodology of the individual activities accordingly and to enable access and participation that is as non-discriminatory as possible.

Finally, the Future Search process has shown a potential to raise awareness of local populations' different needs and

perspectives and empower persons with and without migration backgrounds who have not been involved in political participation before. The method can also be transferred to other socio-spatial contexts and SMTs to foster political participation.





Policy experiment: Fermignano

VOICING OF LOCAL IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE LOCAL IMMIGRATION OFFICE

Starting point

Fermignano is a long-lasting immigration destination with a consistent share of population from a migration background that has lived in the municipality for

many years or was even born there. A part of this population could often have access to Italian citizenship, which would allow them to fully participate in the

political life of the municipality and the country they are living in, however this process is often hindered by the lack of information about paths to follow to obtain the citizenship status, the highly bureaucratised procedure and other indirect barriers. The municipal immigration office, which was already active in Fermignano, did not have the capacity – in terms of resources and procedures – to support in these situations. Moreover, due to its limited opening time, it could not directly involve

and voice beneficiaries in its daily work. Therefore, the municipality chose to start from the said office to implement new tools to support persons who wanted to obtain Italian citizenship and to voice claims of people from a migration background in front of the municipality and supra-local institutions. To do so, the municipality also chose to more systematically involve several civil society actors dealing with immigration issues at the local level, which were gathered within PISTE LNPP.



Design, participants and actors involved

The need to enhance the local immigration office was presented by immigrant self-organisations and other associations dealing with migration issues during a preliminary policy platform organised to support the design of the experiment. About 10 different civil society actors were involved in the platform with the University of Urbino Carlo Bo acting as moderator

and the support of the municipality of Fermignano. After the conception of the experiment, an experts' focus group was organised by researchers from the University of Urbino, involving 9 actors managing immigrant offices in SMSTs in the Marche and Emilia Romagna Regions with the purpose of collecting relevant experiences and good practices. Once the experiment was designed, its

implementation was carried out through the work of the immigration office's employees and a partnership with the Centro Famiglie (Centre for Families), an organisation which ran a similar office dedicated to families from a migration background. The initial results of the experiments were finally discussed within the policy platform, which took

the form of a Permanent Observatory on Local Immigrant Policies and assumed new roles. This policy involved and is continuing to involve several beneficiaries among people from a migration background, although the exact number cannot be provided since the main interventions are still ongoing.

The experiment(s)

The experiment in Fermignano started with a first presentation and discussion with the local population during the yearly multicultural event Popoli in Festa ("Festival of Peoples"), which is a key convivial moment for the town and especially for people from a migration background and immigrant self-organisations. This crucial occasion of dissemination was then followed by the increase of the opening time for the local immigration office with the addition of five hours per week to manage the growing amount of work linked to voicing initiatives and the handling of citizenship procedures. The migration office employees also took part in the experts' focus group, increasing their skills through the exchanges of good practices with other actors working in similar contexts. While the municipality elaborated new online resources, which acted as supporting materials during the daily work of office employees and as dissemination and information tools



for people from a migration background. These include information slides, FAQs and brochures focused on specific topics. All the materials were also developed in the languages of the main local immigrant groups and made available online on the municipality's website and in printed versions in the most frequented venues and in municipal offices.

Involving hard-to-reach groups

Specific actions were pursued to involve hard-to-reach immigrant groups. These initiatives especially targeted to linguistically isolated mothers, who usually are women arrived in Italy through family reunification procedures and with poor proficiency in Italian due to limited opportunities to interact outside of their homes. To this aim, a partnership with a specialised cooperative and the Centre for Families was established, making it easier to reach this target group and provide them with dedicated assistance and tailored opportunities for practising the Italian language. The language issue also emerged as particularly important to overcome indirect barriers on the path to obtaining Italian citizenship, such as the necessity to swear an oath in Italian during the rite for the recognition of citizen status. Moreover, the municipality integrated

with new information the letter that is usually sent to residents from a migration background who were born in Italy once they turn 18 years old to inform them about the possibility of being recognised as Italian citizens. In particular, additions to this letter included a more detailed overview of procedures with the link to the information materials on the municipality's website and a description of how to access the support from the local immigration office.

Including the local population with an active role

The direct involvement of the local population from a migration background in the office's activities and in the design of local immigrant policies was at the core of various events organised within the context of the experiment. A series of co-design events open to the participation of anyone interested was included in the experiment to ensure that claims of people with a migration background are considered during the process of the immigrant office reform. The presence of a cultural mediator was also envisioned in these initiatives, which were planned to be organised in parallel with social events to create gathering meeting opportunities. Moreover, the experiment involved the scheduling of an open



conference with usually hard-to-reach supra-local institutions upon the request of local immigrant self-organisations, so as to make their claims heard beyond the local level and create a closer relationship with key actors for immigration-related issues. These initiatives, running in parallel with the enhancement of the office, not only served the purpose of directly connecting the social workers to beneficiaries, but also included in the office's mission statement an advocacy role in front of other institutions.

The Permanent Observatory on Local Immigrant Policies

Finally, the participatory process of design and evaluation of the experiment, planned within the context of PISTE LNPP, brought additional results, leading to the creation of the Permanent Observatory on Local Immigrant

Policies. This body, which is committed to meeting four times a year, is made up of immigrant self-organisations and associations dealing with immigration-related issues that are active in the local context of Fermignano and surrounding areas. Its establishment was officially recognised during a final conference organised to disseminate the results of the PISTE project and experiment. Compared to the LNPP, the observatory expanded its tasks from the monitoring of local policies – and the Fermignano's experiment in particular – to a more proactive role, starting to work on a set of proposals to be discussed in the municipal council. This document will be subsequently proposed for the official adoption by the mayor of Fermignano in the Union of Municipalities, a supra-local institution gathering all towns of the same area.

Results and replicability

Since citizenship procedures usually require a long time to be completed, it is still too early to evaluate the impact of the experiment on the people applying for the status of Italian citizen. However, some preliminary results of the experiment are still worth pointing out. Firstly, the adopted measures increased the margin of manoeuvre and the immigrant office social workers' skills through the exchange of experiences among peers, tools for updating on the various

procedures, and direct connection with the claims and needs of beneficiaries. The more active role and direct connection of people from a migration background within policies regarding them may also act as an empowering tool, increasing awareness about political and civic participation at the local level. Moreover, a network of experienced actors dealing with immigration-related issues was successfully built during the experiment and it started to directly support and

stimulate local immigrant policymaking through a newly formed local body, the Permanent Observatory on Local Immigrant Policies. Finally, initiatives for the scaling up of these measures were adopted, creating connections with upper-level institutions and building the premises for the diffusion of this kind of policy among similar SMSTs in the surrounding area.

As for the limitations of the experiment, the first obstacle was represented by bureaucratic and planning issues that emerged during the implementation of the immigrant office working hours. These problems delayed the start of the experiment, despite social workers in the office initially voluntarily

extended their working schedule. A second critical aspect regarded the capacity to involve hard-to-reach groups, especially women with children. This required an adaptation of the experiment during its implementation, through the integration of tailored initiatives to reach such groups. Finally, the tightness of the municipality's budget and other bureaucratic constraints to its spending capacity made the planning of the experiment's prosecution beyond the duration of the project more challenging, although the municipality already allocated funds to cover the office's extra hours in 2024 and the observatory committed to continuing their work on a voluntary basis.



The latter issue represents the main obstacle to the replicability of the experiment, which requires a certain level of investment for its core intervention, i.e. the creation of an immigration office with a broad set of competencies. However, the experiment also confirmed the importance of the direct involvement of civil society and individual people from a migration background in local immigrant policymaking. The model of local policy platforms, as proposed in the PISTE project, proved to be particularly suitable to this aim, and the experience of Fermignano showed its potential for the creation of new participatory tools and policy actors when combined with

the political will of the municipality to acknowledge its role. Moreover, some minor initiatives may still be applied with a limited amount of resources, such as the creation of multi-language materials or the commitment of the municipality to act as an intermediary with upper-level institutions. Therefore, at least part of the experiment is certainly replicable even in localities where the creation of an immigrant office is not possible and, in particular, it seems suitable within the context of SMSTs with a long-established population from a migration background and/or a relatively wide range of civil society actors dealing with immigration-related issues.





Policy experiment: Ninove

IMMIGRANT YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL POLICY-MAKING

Starting point

The share of people from a migration background in Ninove has significantly grown in recent years, especially for what concerns the youngest cohorts. The majority are below 24 years old, and this dynamic is also reflected in secondary education, where their share is constantly

increasing. Thus, the municipality, with the support of the University of Antwerp, chose to focus its policy experiment on this group in order to foster the political participation of school-age youth from a migration background. Due to the highly polarised local debate on immigration



and the perceived isolationist nature of such actions, solutions exclusively targeting people from a migration background were discarded in favour of initiatives which encouraged their presence in participatory tools for the whole population. Moreover, the municipality chose to work with initiatives already present at the local

level, designing the experiment in parallel with the political participation project of the youth association Globelink, named KRAS. KRAS mostly attracted youth from general secondary schools and without migration background, which is the reason why partners decided to focus on people from a migration background and different educational backgrounds.

Design, participants, and actors involved

Two complementary policy experiments were organised in Ninove, involving a large set of different local and supra-local actors in its implementation. Besides the University of Antwerp and the municipality of Ninove, four civil society actors were involved in both experiments: the Belgian youth organisation Globelink, Ninove's catholic school Hartncollege, the youth centre Habbekrats and the organisation for vulnerable youth Uit De Marge. The first experiment carried out within Globelink's KRAS targeted 23 third-grade secondary school students

between 16 and 20 years old coming from various educational contexts, 13 of which had a migration background. The second experiment, named PISTE, involved beneficiaries from technical, art and vocational secondary education between 16 and 25 years old. On average, about 10 people participated in each session of the experiment, some 4/5 from a migration background. Both experiments were informed by the preliminary research conducted by the University of Antwerp in Ninove, which crucially contributed to the needs assessment.

The experiment(s)

The KRAS experiment

The first experiment took place in the context of KRAS, which is a yearly programme organised by the national youth organisation Globelink in various Flemish municipalities to have secondary school students directly confront local policymakers, presenting their claims, demands and needs. The initiative

consisted of seven 2-hours sessions focused on a particular topic each year (“identity” was the theme for 2022-2023 and “conflict” for 2023-2024) and a final event at the Flemish Parliament gathering all KRAS students from Flanders. The sessions included an introduction, three role-plays in which participants took up the role of political parties or civil





society actors, and two expert sessions, during which young people drafted recommendations to present in the final session at the local municipal council. This project allows participants to increase their knowledge about relevant political topics in their local context, to become aware of how local policymaking works and to enhance their debate and negotiation skills. Participation in KRAS usually costs 27€, but the fee was covered by AMIF funds in Ninove to foster the participation of more vulnerable groups. Moreover, the monitoring from researchers of the University of Antwerp allows to highlight other participation obstacles for improvement of the next editions, among such obstacles the main one identified is the necessity to master the Dutch language.

The PISTE experiment

The second experiment, named PISTE, took place at Habbekrats's youth centre "The Kidz", a choice that was driven by the aim to involve subjects/individuals in vocational and technical education who often have a less positive view about school and thus lower attendance to extra-curricular school activities. The initiative consisted of eight 2-hours sessions, including two introductory meetings, four sessions of role-plays, thematic games and debates focused on Ninove local context, and a final event with all partner organisations and municipality representatives to discuss participants' proposals and improvement options. The last meeting was an excursion to Ghent to visit Plein Patrons, a social project that involves young people acting as middle-persons in local conflicts among residents, the police and young people themselves in public spaces. Therefore, PISTE's objectives were the same as KRAS, but with a different approach, reaching beneficiaries in a safe space and removing all language barriers from the beginning (e.g., avoiding the use of a guidebook as in KRAS).

Addressing the local government

In both cases, participants directly formulated recommendations to the municipality, making their claims clear and heard at the local level. However, young people involved in the experiment focused on different aspects during KRAS and PISTE. On the one hand, KRAS participants stressed the need to organise meetings with local politicians explaining



their policies within schools, to inform in a more comprehensive way about social initiatives in Ninove, and to improve the representation of people from diverse backgrounds at the local level. On the other hand, PISTE beneficiaries identified the lack of places and activities for leisure time as the main issue, concerning especially young people above 18, issues of racism arising in particular in social

places when speaking French or in the ethnic profiling by the local police, and an overall negative attitude towards the town, fuelled by the fear of a radical right win in the upcoming 2024 local elections. The diversity of topics reflected the diversity of participants' backgrounds in the two experiments, which enabled local policymakers to consider various demands and concerns.

Results and replicability

These experiments successfully managed to improve beneficiaries' confidence to act in the local political arena and their knowledge about local policymaking, as well as their connections to key civil society actors and policymakers. In KRAS, teachers and Globelink social workers emerged as key actors to

actively approach participants and build a network between them and trusted persons, which are factors identified as crucial to involve people from a migrant background in these initiatives. Moreover, keeping the debate on local issues that were as close as possible to the daily needs and experiences of participants

made clear to all how politics affected their experiences and maintained their involvement in the discussion. Finally, the role-play proved to be a suitable tool to foster the involvement of more bashful groups, by creating a safe environment to express personal opinions and claims behind the cover of the role assumed during the discussion. On the less bright side, KRAS also presented some limitations, especially concerning the existence of language barriers due to the strong focus on Dutch materials and its initiatives outside school hours, which made it difficult for some potential beneficiaries to participate.

PISTE success factors were similar to KRAS, starting from the advantages of keeping the discussion on local topics and the central role of social workers of Globelink and Habbekrats, who easily built a trusted relationship with the participants and created a safe place for their needs and claims to emerge. PISTE also stood out for the importance of social media in maintaining continuous contact with participants and for the methods used during the various sessions, which overcame language and skill barriers by stimulating the debate through hands-on games, role-plays and other open and mostly oral discussion methods. Unlike KRAS, PISTE had to face issues linked to the wide variety and turnover of participants, which made it difficult to involve the same persons in every session. This kept open the door for new beneficiaries to come, but it also hindered the creation of a long-term relationship

with them, emphasising problems of time-limited funding from AMIF.

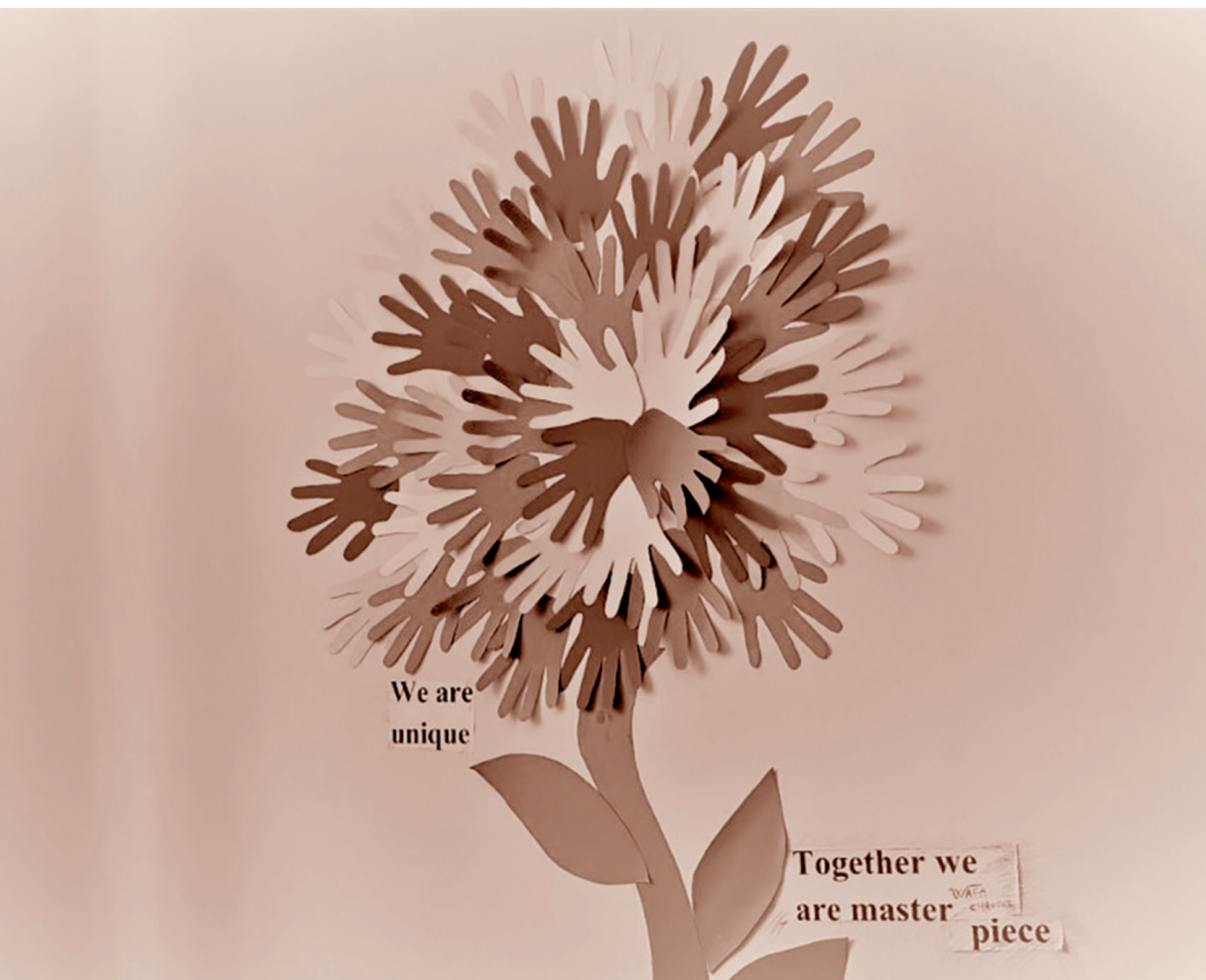
Despite this latter issue being a strong obstacle to the continuation of these experiments, the municipality chose to invest in their prosecution. The town of Ninove will use their own fund to maintain KRAS free of charge and offer support during the activities also in the period 2023-2024. Moreover, PISTE will continue in 2024 with a follow-up project named *Tis aan u* ("It's up to you"), organised by the Youth Department of Ninove, Habbekrats and the socio-cultural organisation De Ambrassade. This new project will be strictly linked to the upcoming 2024 European elections, in which many young people from 16 years old upwards will vote for the first time, and it will focus on providing information about the elections, raising political trust and awareness, and making sure that the election period is a positive experience for every young person from different ethnic and educational backgrounds. Finally, the local government decided to work on some of the recommendations that came out of KRAS and PISTE, in particular through the purchase of a location for the creation of a new youth centre.

To conclude, apart from some minor limitations, these experiments successfully involved young people from a migration background in new forms of political participation targeted to the youth. The method of not focusing only on people from a migration background but creating a safe environment and limit barriers for them to encourage participation in tools designed for the

general population also proved to be a valuable way of proceeding in this context. These initiatives are certainly replicable in contexts similar to Ninove, especially where people from a migration background represent a consistent share of the population. Indeed, this is a target group that may be hard to reach by institutions due to low levels of trust or interest in policymaking, but it is nonetheless crucial to foster integration and political participation of future generations. It is also worth

noting that these experiments require the involvement of experienced social workers, which can be accomplished either by counting on the local civil society or trying to involve supra-local actors. Moreover, the willingness and the possibility of the municipality to provide spaces for the organisation of the various sessions is a further key requirement, as well as its availability and open attitude to hear the ideas coming out from these initiatives.





We are
unique

Together we
are master
piece

Policy experiment: Voio-Pentalofos

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL

POLICY-MAKING

Starting point

Voio is a small Greek Municipality (some 18,000 inhabitants) in the regional unit of Kozani, Western Macedonia. It is the only local authority receiving direct funding from the Greek government to operate a shelter for UAMs. Since its opening (April 2019), the shelter – located in the small village of Pentalofos, part of the Voio municipality – accommodated some 150 unaccompanied female minors; around 30 among those hosted during the operations of the PISTE project took part in the policy experiment. The beneficiaries are aged 14-17 years old, mostly from Somalia and Congo, with limited or no proficiency in the Greek language and a low educational background.

Therefore, communication is one of the first problems the shelter has to manage, also considering the lack of interpreters. Resources are another key

issue – not only in terms of financial endowment but also in terms of human capital (available staff) and opportunities in the local context. In this case the shelter location is the issue: the shelter is in a mountainous, remote area (60 km from Siatista, the chief town of the Municipality of Voio, and 80 km from the regional chief town of Kozani).

While this type of location is usually considered an advantage for different reasons (e.g.: avoiding concentration of supervised migrants in a few large hotspots, keeping vulnerable minors away from the dangers of large cities, maintaining the vitality of small towns), a shelter in such place has to deal with specific complexities. Just to mention a couple: finding staff in the local labour market and accessing services and opportunities.

Considering UAM's future, *challenges for the transition to adulthood of Unaccompanied Minors* is a key issue. Two challenges are particularly relevant:

1. *Education.* The shelter in Pentalofos takes a cue from an existing Intercultural School, whose history of inclusive education is a support. Nevertheless, language barriers, (lack of) previous education, in some cases, mental and physical health issues contribute to making effective education an open question. UAMs may feel disempowered in the educational context, and ultimately affects their integration process negatively.
2. *Transition to adulthood.* Once they come of age, they are no longer entitled to support from the shelter. Considering that many arrive at the shelter just a few months before the coming of age, this means that UAMs are often

poorly equipped to deal with new social demands and unaware of the path waiting ahead of them.

These issues were raised by the UAMs themselves and key stakeholders involved in the PISTE Policy Platform in the needs assessment phase. Hence, the policy experiment was focused on empowering girls living in the shelter by trying out non-formal education strategies with plural goals:

1. endowing the staff of the shelter with new skills and expertise to support UAMs in their autonomy, with a specific focus on methods to acknowledge needs and give voice to migrant youth;
2. empowering UAMs, with opportunities to increase social participation and trust.

In general, the aim was to go beyond the mere administratively required integration measures, with the aim of filling in gaps and increasing the effectiveness of the activities done in the shelter.

Design, participants, and actors involved

The experiment targeted the female UAMs at Pentalofos shelter and involved the Municipality of Voio, the social workers of the shelter, and, in a supporting role, the NGO HumanRights360. The activities were tailored to answer different and intertwining needs that may hinder UAMs' social participation and voice. In this respect, the focus was mostly

on preconditions of participation via social and educational work to support education and rehabilitation.

As for the rehabilitation issue, the experiment was also aimed at addressing the capacity of the shelter's staff to support underage victims of abuse, which was an essential issue to finally empower many of the UAMs hosted in Pentalofos. As for informal education, the aim was



not only to provide knowledge and develop soft skills but also to gain self-knowledge and prompt creative ways of self-expression encompassing practices and methods for bringing into surface experiences and re-elaborating them as a step towards empowerment and voice.

Finally, the experiment was also meant to cope with context-related vulnerabilities in Pentalofos that risk reinforcing UAMs' individual vulnerabilities: as mentioned above, the reference is to financial and human resources and accessibility to key services.

Informal education as a multifunctional method, hence, practices in informal education are to be considered as an experiment aiming at multiple effects: providing knowledge and develop skills to foster integration, build self-confidence and trust, and deal with factors hindering social participation – in particular in

peer relations with classmates or other children living in Pentalofos, and with the rest of Pentalofos community. In this respect, the fact of living in a small and self-contained social environment can be an advantage, as it provides a controllable and safe experimental environment where vulnerable minors can build secure relations and attachment to the host environment.

To reach this goal, a network among UAM shelters has also been activated to share information, experiences, and experimental activities. The whole experiment was characterised by a strong attention for the shelter residents which was necessary in view of their high turnover, and to manage the ever-changing needs and tailored measures. In particular, focus-group discussions were conducted to recalibrate activities and match them with emerging needs.

The experiment

The experiment included activities about self-identity and socialisation, social skills, and career guidance. In particular:

- Activities on cultural awareness and intercultural relations – focussing on making cultural issues explicit in reference to origin and destination country.
- Creative writing and storytelling to improve skills in voicing their own experiences and traumas, to elaborate their experience, be empowered, and express their own needs and claims.
- Environmental education as a way to gain knowledge of the local context and its protection.
- Media and Digital Education, coupled with media content on sensitive issues (racism, violence against women...)
- Creative laboratories for self-expression and stress relief, and dance therapy to improve self-body image
- Self-care and self-awareness
- Group and individual career guidance to make skills and interests explicit and to set life goals.



Results and replicability

The experiment applied a multidisciplinary approach, mainly aimed at strengthening UAMs well-being in a tailored way. The goal was to empower participants in a safe context, improving

their social participation in the local environment.

Most of UAMs had never taken part in similar activities before. Shyness was overcome by building a climate of

trust and safeness, starting from the strengthening of UAMs' communication skills: this aspect was key to reinforcing self-expression and self-esteem, empowering their social participation, and ultimately improving their sense of belonging. Participants reported improved psychosocial well-being. The programme successfully fostered an active participatory role, promoting empowerment, self-confidence, and eagerness to take the initiative in activities. It also developed team-building and intercultural understanding and ultimately UAMs acquired soft skills useful for their future.

Informal education generates two-way benefits

The experimental activities filled a void in standard education targeting UAMs and offered inclusion and advocacy

opportunities inside and outside the accommodation facilities. The experiment proved to be beneficial in two ways: not only for the UAMs but also of the shelter's staff and for the local community. Benefits in terms of empowerment, inspiration and motivation, and consolidation of participation were reciprocal and came to the advantage of the local network as a whole. The actions taken helped visibility and intergroup contact. The experiment allowed the reframing of local resources, finding bridging figures, and promoting the involvement of the local community while enhancing the opportunities for incorporating migrant youth, who, in turn, gained confidence and improved trusting relationships.

Future activities will be aimed at strengthening cooperation with local organisations, the improvement of



sustainability is expected to strengthen the sustainability of the activities.

The experiment can be replicated in other, similar contexts. Not rarely in Europe, refugee, migrant and UAM shelters are located in SMSTs and/or in remote areas. Issues like accessing

services and resources are widespread: therefore, skill formation activities, and the method to involve migrant youth and the local community may serve as example, with necessary adaptations according to specific target groups.



FREEDOM

FOR TO BE FREE IS
CHAINS BUT TO
LIVE ENHANCE



POLICY BRIEF

FOSTERING THE POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE FROM A MIGRATION BACKGROUND IN SMSTs

This Policy Brief deals with challenges and policy suggestions for the civic and political participation of people from a migration background in European SMSTs, starting from the results of the PISTE project illustrated in the book “Experimenting migrant participation in Small and Medium-Sized Towns. White Paper of the PISTE Project”. Recommendations are divided into five subsections, identifying the main issues that emerged in the course of our project: a) preconditions for participation;

b) visibility and acknowledgement of migration and cultural minorities; c) building the capacity to voice people from a migration background; d) political participation of people from a migration background; and e) scaling up and sharing good practices. Each recommendation in this Policy Brief includes a brief description of the challenges that are addressed and a set of solutions that can be adopted, also specifying the contexts where such measures fit the best.

Preconditions for participation

The non-fulfilment of some preconditions can severely hinder the possibility of people from a migration background to participate in the civic and political life

of SMSTs. An account of the main issues to consider and how to deal with them is provided below.

Challenge: Civic and political participation strictly depends on to the achievement of adequate living standards and the fulfilment of basic material needs (i.e. house, income and basic services).

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should grant **access to welfare provisions on the basis of residence or domicile** and not citizenship. This allows all people from a migration background to fulfil or at least partly satisfy the demand for basic services, also increasing their sense of belonging to the locality.

This option fits best: All SMSTs for what concerns welfare provisions they directly manage.

2. Municipalities should comprehensively **inform about possibilities to access local and supra-local welfare**, using – when possible – multi-lingual materials. In many cases, the lack of information is among the primary causes of the non-take-up of social benefits even when people have the right to access them, exacerbating situations of vulnerability. The information task may be fulfilled through dedicated sections on the municipal website, printed brochures and similar materials, which should be directly provided to the target population (e.g. using mailboxes or making them available in municipal offices).

This option fits best: All SMSTs, which may choose different solutions according to available resources.

3. Municipalities should provide people from a migration background with **support for legal and bureaucratic**

procedures and for house and job

search and access. The creation of an immigration office with a broad set of tasks or counting on outreach social workers appear as particularly effective for this aim. The first is a dedicated office of the municipality, , which deals with issues of interest for the population from a migration background, helping them in procedures related to residence permits, as well as in overcoming other material barriers (e.g. bureaucratic procedures that are not accessible in various languages, remedies against discrimination in job or house search, etc.). As for the second, they are municipal social workers – usually from a migrant background – with the task of bridging the gap between local services and minorities, ensuring that their needs are actually taken into account and following them during various procedures. In some cases, these figures may also be people from a migration background payed by the municipality, who do not necessarily are professionals (e.g. “integration guides” in Germany).

This option fits best: SMSTs with some capacity to invest and possibility to hire new personnel. The immigration office is usually adopted in localities with long-settled immigrant populations, while outreach social workers are more often used in contexts of new immigration.

Challenge: Language is one of the most frequent barriers hindering access to basic services, socio-economic incorporation, and civic and political participation for people from a migration background. This is especially true for some groups (e.g. newcomers, linguistically isolated mothers, etc.).

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should provide **information materials in multiple languages**, focusing in particular on those that are most represented in their localities. This provision allows newcomers and isolated groups to access at least the basic information and orient themselves in the place they are living in. Among the most effective strategies, multi-lingual websites or the provision of a multi-lingual booklet for new residents informing about the locality and its services particularly stand out.

This option fits best: All SMSTs, which may choose different solutions according to available resources. This is especially suitable in new immigration destinations.

2. The presence of **linguistic and/or cultural mediators** in key offices and institutions effectively addresses language barriers, also laying the foundation for the acquisition of new linguistic skills for beneficiaries themselves. This solution is particularly effective in schools, where the presence of mediators may foster the social integration of young people from a migration background, who often are key bridging figures between their families and the locality.

This option fits best: SMSTs with some capacity to invest and the possibility to hire new personnel or SMSTs that can work closely with relevant local institutions (e.g. schools).

3. Municipalities may organise **classes, events or occasions to improve the linguistic skills and knowledge** of people from a migration background with low proficiency in the language of their destination country. In this sense, partnerships with schools or other civil society actors which may carry out teaching activities – also providing funds and spaces to them – are the most common tools when municipalities cannot provide this service by themselves. Another strategy that proved to be particularly effective entails the organisation of informal events for language learning, such as initiatives where people who are learning the local language can meet volunteer native speakers in public spaces and have conversations about daily issues, so as to practice the language while fostering reciprocal knowledge.

This option fits best: All SMSTs, which may choose different solutions according to available resources and civil society actors at the local level.

Visibility and acknowledgement of migration and cultural minorities

The civic and political participation of people from a migration background at the local level is strictly connected with the sense of belonging to the locality and

the acknowledgement of diversity as one of its integral parts. This entails various aspects that need to be considered.

Challenge: Encounters between native and immigrant populations are a key step towards an actual integration and acknowledgement of diversity at the local level. This is especially important in public spaces, which should be conceived as safe places for everyone to express themselves and their identities. Such an achievement not only fosters the inclusion of people from a migration background in the local society, but also creates the conditions for their participation in the civic and political life of the locality.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should adopt measures for **fostering intercultural encounters and recognition** through public meetings to raise awareness of opportunities inherent to diversity and to make people from different backgrounds meet and know each other. These events may assume different shapes, ranging from social dinners to intercultural field visits or participation in important national and religious holidays of both the country of settlement and that of origin. In some contexts, the organisation of cultural festivals directly involving immigrant self-organisations has proved to be useful to this aim. Similarly, offering support to groups teaching the origin languages of main immigrant groups may improve their sense of belonging and recognition within the locality. Targeting young cohorts with these initiatives – e.g. by involving them in the design and

organisation or involving schools – is also a good practice, due to the important bridging role of younger generations.

This option fits best: SMSTs with established immigrant groups or a consistent share of young population from a migration background. Some measures, such as the organisation of cultural festivals, may not be suitable in contexts with a strong negative perception towards multicultural approaches.

2. Municipalities should **assume a clear position in public and strategic documents** about immigration and integration, by acknowledging migration as part of the local history and society. One of the most effective way to carry out this task is the adoption of mission statements and local strategic document publicly addressing the needs of people from a migration background or particular issues, such as racism.

This option best fits: All SMSTs and especially those where immigration issues are not strongly politicised and polarising the local debate.

3. Municipalities should invest in **countering social and spatial segregation**, as it might affect - among other things - the political representation migrants as well as the image of certain urban areas and social groups. Various measures may be adopted to this aim. For instance, local governments may privilege the spread of public housing or diffused reception in the case of asylum seekers and refugees. Similarly, a set of incentives

can be implemented for ethnic (food) shops or other ethnically perceived places so as to make them also frequented by the native population.

This option best fits: SMSTs with a certain capacity of investment or the possibility to define their own spatial planning strategies. Solutions should be tailored according to the target group, e.g. focusing on public housing in the case of settlement migration or on reception structures when the main group is represented by asylum seekers and refugees.

Challenge: Civil society can crucially contribute to filling many gaps in local immigrant policymaking. This is especially true for what concerns immigrant self-organisations. Their recognition as valuable interlocutors by local policymakers fosters not only the acknowledgement of local diversity, but also the involvement of people from a migration background in the design and implementation of local policies.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should **involve immigrant self-organisations as active parts** in public events and social initiatives, as well as in the design and implementation of local immigrant policies. This objective can be realised either through informal consultations or with more formal tools. An example of the latter option is the creation of local platforms or councils made by civil society actors and immigrant self-organisations that may act as a consulting body for local policymaking. Municipalities should also directly support immigrant self-organisations in their action by providing funds, incentives, materials and/or spaces to

use, as well as bureaucratic support for the formal registration or application for supra-local funding tools.

This option fits best: SMSTs with at least some immigrant self-organisations, which is usually – but not exclusively – the case of localities with relatively long lasting immigration.

2. When immigrant self-organisations are not present, various alternative solutions should be considered. First, municipalities may **stimulate the inclusion of people from a migration background in existing local associations** not necessarily focusing on immigration-related issues. This aim can be pursued by informing about civil society actors that are present in the locality and promoting awareness

about civic participation in target places, such as schools. In parallel, it is useful to train local associations to be inclusive, either by directly organising training on these issues or by trying to connect them to similar initiatives organised by other actors. Second, **the creation of immigrant self-organisations can be fostered** by recognising informal ones, creating incentives for these kinds

of associations, or organising convivial events to make people meet and discuss specific topics of interest.

This option fits best: All SMSTs depending on the approach they adopt on immigration and integration. Towns favouring assimilationist or intercultural paradigms may tend towards the first option, while the second one may be more suitable for a multicultural approach.

Building the capacity to voice people from a migration background

SMSTs often have limited resources and experience for dealing with the challenges of new immigration and diversity and seizing the opportunities linked to them.

Various actors may be crucial in this sense for filling this gap. At the same time, actions should be taken to acquire the necessary skills at the local level.

Challenge: Bridging figures emerge as relevant actors to connect immigrant groups to local policymakers in SMSTs. However, they can assume different forms in different contexts, presenting various strengths and weaknesses that need to be considered when relying on these actors.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should **acknowledge as valuable intermediaries bridging figures** emerging within immigrant self-organisations, religious communities and other civil society actors or institutions. This can be done both through formal and informal consultation, as well as by financing and institutionalising these actors. However, local policymakers also need to consider that relying on one or a few bridging figures may not be enough, especially in places with high levels of diversity or where vulnerable groups are present. It is thus a good practice to

involve multiple bridging figures at once or to balance the role of these actors with other measures tailored to hard-to-reach groups or people from a migration background that are excluded from figures' network.

This option fits best: SMSTs where preconditions for the emergence of bridging figures are fulfilled (e.g. immigrant self-organisations or particular places of worship, etc.).

2. When bridging figures are missing and there are no preconditions to foster their creation, municipalities should consider the possibility of **creating institutional**

bridging figures or looking for them in different contexts. Outreach social workers or immigration offices are both examples of municipal actors who can assume this role. This possibility depends on the capacity of such figures to gain legitimisation in front of beneficiaries and an advocacy role for people from a migration background. Alternatively, similar positions may be assumed by less formalised figures. An example is that of social workers in reception centres, who can be formally involved and consulted by local policymakers in contexts where asylum seekers experience the locality as a transit place but have a strong trust relationship with these workers.

This option fits best: SMSTs with no bridging figures and new immigration destinations. Some of these solutions are also suitable for localities where immigration is primarily driven by the reception of asylum seekers and refugees.

3. Local parties and other political actors should consider the **inclusion of people from a migration background in electoral lists** or in eligible positions for other local bodies or institutions with political power, by also making them accessible beyond their usually close networks. Councillors from a migration background are often important bridging figures to voice the claims and needs of various immigrant groups in front of the local government. Moreover, they also act as role models and stimulate the political participation of people from a migration background by improving the representation of diversity within political institutions.

This option fits best: SMSTs with long-established immigrant groups and a number of people from a migration background who acquired the citizenship status or have access to the passive electorate.

Challenge: Immigration and integration are complex and multi-faceted issues to deal with at the local level, especially for SMSTs with undersized staff or a lack of experience on these issues. Nonetheless, maturing and acquiring skills in these fields remain a fundamental step for municipalities willing to foster a more comprehensive civic and political participation of people from a migration background.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should invest in **training their own staff** from different sectors on immigration-related issues and inclusiveness, so as to internalise the skills within the whole administration. It is important that this training is tailored to the specific context of SMSTs, e.g. relying on NGOs acting in these localities or universities. The organisation

of moments of internal exchange and coaching between municipal workers is also a viable way to transmit this knowledge across offices and generations.

This option fits best: SMSTs willing to invest in making their services inclusive rather than providing targeted services. Training is also a solution when hiring new personnel is not possible and it can be tailored to specific types of

immigration that are locally relevant (e.g. asylum seekers, youth immigration, settlement immigration, etc.).

2. When possible, municipalities should consider **hiring expert personnel**. This can be done either through the creation of new offices dedicated to immigration-related issues or by including specific experts (e.g. cultural and linguistic mediators, immigration lawyers, etc.) in general offices. An alternative solution entails the involvement of external experts, which is a rapid solution to apply in the short term but it usually involves higher costs.

This solution best fits: SMSTs with the capacity to hire new staff or external experts. This solution has proved to be particularly effective in new immigration destinations, where there is the need to acquire skills in immigration-related issues more quickly.

3. In line with the ideas of representative bureaucracy, the **inclusion of people from a migration background in local administrations** may increase the sensitivity of municipalities

towards the needs and claims of the immigrant population. In this sense, the elaboration of recruitment strategies that are attentive to local diversity is a widely recognised good practice that can be applied in various situations, such as job vacancies or formal and informal consultations. Increasing the representation of diversity in the town – e.g. when publicising new hirings – is also a useful strategy to implement to this aim. Ideally, municipalities should aim to have people from a migration background equally represented in local administration, comparing to their share on local population. However, municipalities should always pay attention not to fall into tokenism, which is the practice of seemingly supporting vulnerable or discriminated groups without actually elaborating strategies for changing the real situation of those groups.

This option fits best: SMSTs that have long-established immigration and capacity for pursuing independent recruitment strategies.

Political participation of people from a migration background

Despite citizenship remaining the key factor for full political participation, various tools can be adopted to foster the political participation of people from a migration background even when they

have not been recognised as citizens. However, these instruments have to be tailored to different situations of SMSTs to actually be effective.

Challenge: Representative bodies for the immigrant population have been adopted in many localities across Europe. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the type of body and the context where it is implemented.

Recommendations

1. The creation of **immigrant advisory boards** may certainly improve the political participation of non-citizen people from a migration background at the local level. These are bodies directly elected by the resident non-citizen population, which usually have the power to express recommendations and present proposals to the municipal council, as well as other consultative tasks. In order to properly function, these boards must be actually considered by local policymakers and have a real power on local policymaking. Moreover, their prerogatives should not be solely restricted to immigration-related issues so as to make them tools for the representation of the non-citizen population's claims in all local matters. Finally, it is of uttermost importance that the immigrant population is informed about the elections and mechanisms of the active and passive electorate.

This solution best fits: SMSTs characterised by settlement immigration and with high levels of diversity. The presence of a majoritarian and organised group in the non-citizen population may lead to a monopolisation of these bodies by that group, undermining their representative nature.

2. An alternative to advisory boards is represented by **integration committees**. Unlike the first, members of these bodies are nominated by the local government,

providing that various groups of people from a migration background and other stakeholders in immigration-related issues are evenly represented. In this sense, they can be a useful tool to include usually hard-to-reach or more vulnerable groups and – not being restricted to the non-citizen population – they can provide a more variegated representation of different interests. As in the case of advisory boards, these committees should have actual power in local policymaking.

This option fits best: SMSTs characterised by settlement immigration and with some immigrant groups that are prevalent among others or a consistent presence of vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups in the immigrant population.

3. A third option for formal participation is the **immigrant deputy councillor**, a figure that is directly elected by the non-citizen population and takes part in municipal councils with all the power of a councillor except for the vote. Again, competencies that allow an actual influence on policymaking must be assigned to this councillor to make this measure effective, including the power to present motions and agendas. This figure shares similar strengths and weaknesses of immigrant advisory boards, but it particularly stands out for two reasons: first, it provides a direct connection with the municipal council, in which the deputy councillor actually sits; second, being represented by a single person, it

creates a strongly legitimised bridging figure between the immigrant population and the local government.

This option fits best: SMSTs characterised by settlement immigration.

4. A less formalised tool for the political participation of people from a migration background is represented by the model of **local policy platforms** as designed by the PISTE project. Unlike other solutions, which include some access criteria (i.e. election or appointment), participation in these bodies is entirely voluntary. Local governments only intervene at the first stage to involve the main civil society actors and immigrant self-organisations with which they already have some connections. Then, the platform should expand itself through snowballing from initial components and the inclusion of new

actors – either representing associations and institutions or individuals – reached through information campaigns. As for the tasks, these bodies have initially been designed with consultative tasks, but their prerogatives have expanded to the formulation of recommendations and actual proposals. As in the case of integration committees, their areas of intervention are usually confined to immigration-related issues. However, when applying this strategy, municipalities should also ensure that not all activities are outsourced to the voluntary sector, since volunteering needs support from full-time staff to be effective and secure in the long term.

This option fits best: SMSTs that can rely on at least some civil society actors dealing with immigration-related issues.

Challenge: The political participation of people from a migration background should not be confined solely to immigration-focused bodies. However, their inclusion in other councils or local institutions meant for the whole population is often difficult in SMSTs.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should foster the **inclusion of people from a migration background in non-immigration-related bodies** at the local level.

Examples of these are youth councils or district councils, which should be made accessible and inclusive for people from a migration background. This can be done by using residence or domicile as an access criterion instead of citizenship and through tailored information and awareness campaigns. Moreover, including an internal moderation that

ensures the non-discrimination of diverse members is a good practice for creating an inclusive environment within these bodies.

This option fits best: SMSTs which do not want to rely on targeted measures for the immigrant population and can count on some locally recognised and active advisory bodies.

2. Fostering the political participation of people from a migration background is an aim that can also be pursued through **informal participation opportunities**. These entail facilitating meetings

between local policymakers and the local population, providing spaces of encounter and co-production or enable inclusive and bottom-up decision-making processes, such as co-planning, scenario workshops, future search conferences, and participatory budgeting. On these occasions, municipalities should ensure

the participation of people from a migration background through the removal of obstacles to their inclusion using the same precautions mentioned in the previous recommendation.

This option fits best: All SMSTs, regardless of their immigration contexts or available resources.

Scaling up and sharing good practices

SMSTs rarely have the resources to act alone on immigration-related issues. Cooperating with other actors and exchanging experiences are crucial to improve policymaking in this field, while

coordination with other institutions and actors in the same area may be particularly useful for designing more effective and shared solutions.

Challenge: SMSTs often share similar needs and characteristics of immigration. This situation creates precious opportunities for cooperation and exchange, both among neighbouring localities and across transregional or transnational spaces.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should foster the **creation of networks of neighbouring towns**, which can coordinate and act together in immigration-related fields. Such forms of cooperation may allow the sharing of services and improve their quality and effectiveness. Moreover, they also increase the negotiation power of municipalities when dealing with supra-local institutions. This aspect is particularly important for tricky issues such as immigration and for SMSTs, which are often neglected in policymaking processes at upper levels. Finally, the above-mentioned

solutions for the political participation of people from a migration background may be effectively applied also at the inter-municipal level, e.g. by including integration committees, immigrant advisory boards or the immigrant deputy councillor within bodies of unions of municipalities.

This option fits best: All SMSTs, but particularly those located in a territory where neighbouring towns have similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

2. Municipalities should participate in the **creation of transregional and transnational networks of SMSTs**.

Other than potentially increasing the negotiation power of these localities at the EU level, these mechanisms may allow the exchange of experiences and practices and the creation of advisory bodies for the transnational encounter of various stakeholders of immigration-related issues in SMSTs (e.g. immigrant self-organisations or NGOs). The model of the European Policy Platform proposed by the PISTE project represents good practice to this aim. Finally, acting in

coordination with other SMSTs at the national and supra-national levels may increase the capacity of municipalities to access supra-national funding tools, such as the national and EU Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

This option fits best: All SMSTs. The presence of local stakeholders who are able to communicate in different languages may particularly help the pursue of this aim at the transnational level.

Challenge: The lack of resources and skills in immigration-related issues that often characterises SMSTs may be partly compensated through the creation of networks involving civil society actors. Similarly, coordination with supra-local institutions is a key feature to increase the effectiveness of measures adopted at the local level.

Recommendations

1. Municipalities should take part and incentivise the creation of **local and supra-local networks of institutions and civil society actors dealing with immigration-related issues.**

The model of local policy platforms mentioned above may be a good practice to implement in this sense and it may be upscaled at the supra-local level. Cooperation on this level allows the sharing of the adopted measures in this field with all relevant stakeholders, which can also offer crucial support in their design and implementation. Moreover, a direct connection with supra-local institutions can lead to the scaling-up of good practices adopted at the local level, increasing their scope and effectiveness. Finally, counting on an established network of actors working in immigration-related fields consistently

improves the capacity of municipalities to intercept supra-local funding tools at the regional, national and EU levels.

This option fits best: SMSTs that can count on a relatively wide range of civil society actors or good connections with supra-local institutions.

2. As mentioned multiple times, **supra-local funding tools represent one of the best opportunities** for municipalities – and SMSTs in particular – to design and implement large-scope measures for the civic and political participation of people from a migration background. EU AMIF is certainly one of the main options, but other solutions also exist at the national and regional levels in many EU countries. Despite being project-based and thus limited in time, funds coming from these sources may allow the experimentation of practices that – if successful – can be prosecuted

with municipal or other resources. Moreover, when well-designed, project-based interventions enable localities to locally acquire skills and experiences in immigration-related issues and to build networks at various levels and with different actors. However, intercepting these funding tools usually requires specific capabilities that may not be present in SMSTs. To solve this issue, local governments should consider investing in the hiring or training of personnel for this task, either individually or in cooperation with other municipalities. Alternatively, they can rely on previously

built networks of civil society actors and institutions to collectively design effective project applications. Cooperation with universities may also be important in this sense, since they can provide skilled staff in the design and implementation of these projects with a low – or even null – investment from the municipality.

This option fits best: All SMSTs. It is especially suitable for those having some investment capacity or being included in networks with civil society actors, universities and/or other institutions dealing with immigration-related issues.

Where do you stand? A check-list for decision-makers

Cultural competence self-assessment is usually meant for street-level bureaucrats and grassroots activists to consider individual skills, knowledge, and awareness in interacting with others in diverse environments. Here, we have selected a few items that can be useful for organisations and administrations – and their representatives – to set a starting point for defining strategies and priorities in promoting minorities' participation at the local level.

Knowledge of the context

1. How detailed can I describe the immigrant and minority groups in my area of competence?
2. How well do I know the socio-demographic characteristics of the immigrant and minority groups in my area of competence (numbers, gender and age composition, areas of residence, income, unemployment, education levels, poverty levels, etc.)?
3. Do I know the internal differences between the different immigrant and minority groups in my home area?
4. Do I know the social needs of immigrant and minority groups in my area of competence?
5. Do I know the history of the countries of origin of the immigrant and minority groups in my home area?
6. Do I know the migration history of the immigrant and minority groups in my area of competence?

Specific competences

1. Am I developing ways of interacting respectfully and effectively with diverse individuals and groups?
2. Am I able to effectively intervene when I observe racist or discriminatory behaviour by others?
3. Can I communicate effectively with people with language skills and communication styles different from my own?
4. Can I understand other perspectives and consult with people with different skills to implement culturally respectful and appropriate interventions?

Available resources

1. Do I know and am I aware of informal resources that local communities can bring to bear on their social needs?
2. Do I or my organisation (in my workplace or local community) have relationships with people with diverse cultural competencies to whom I can ask for support?
3. Do I or my organisation have relationships with civil and human rights and intercultural relations groups that can provide accurate information about immigrants and minorities in my area of expertise?
4. Do I or my organisation have relationships with institutions that can provide accurate information on immigrants and minorities in my area of responsibility?
5. Do I or my institution cooperate with groups and institutions that can contribute to social measures for the well-being of immigrants and minorities in my area of responsibility?

PARTNERS
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BELGIUM



Ninove

www.ninove.be

Ninove (40,000 inhabitants) is a Flemish town, located in the Denderstreek within the province of East Flanders in the vicinity of Brussel. In the last 10 years, residents of foreign origin doubled, with emerging challenges that this town is willing to address through the creation of a participation platform in collaboration with the local schools which targets young citizens from a migration background in order to properly consider diversity in local policy making.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Tania De Jonge (mayor), Agnessa Solovieva, Jelle Moes.



University of Antwerp

www.uantwerpen.be

The University of Antwerp is a renowned Belgian university, situated in the city of Antwerp within the Flemish Region. Its team counts on researchers from the Centre for Research on Environmental and Social Change (CRESC), within the Department of Sociology, focusing, among other issues, on processes of social inclusion and exclusion and new forms of solidarity and citizenship in super-diversity.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Stijn Oosterlynck, Anke De Malsche, Elise Schillebeeckx, Ona Schyvens, Silke Peeters.

GERMANY



Bebra

www.bebra-stadt.de

Bebra (13,800 inhabitants) is a German town in the district of Hersfeld-Rotenburg in the state of Hesse. Its population comes from over 80 countries and the town has a long history of immigration, to the extent that it calls itself a “model of integration”. The town is primarily interested in defining the work of the integration commission in a “mission statement on integration”, which will be elaborated through innovative participatory strategies, and in sharing experiences with other small towns.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Stefan Knoche (mayor), Sarah Heller, Christina Kindler, Uli Rathmann.



University of Applied Sciences Erfurt

www.fh-erfurt.de

The University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, located in the capital city of the state of Thuringia, is a German university that combines an academic education with practice-oriented applications. Its team comes from the Faculty for Architecture and Urban Planning, including scholars working on urban studies and migration studies with a long-term expertise on small town societies, social cohesion and conflicts.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Katrin Grossmann, Johannes Gloeckner, Sven Messerschmidt, Kerstin Schenkel.

GREECE



Voio

www.voio.gr

Voio (18,000 inhabitants) is a mountain town in the Kozani regional unit in Northern Greece. Like other towns in the area, it is home to many asylum seekers and migrants, due to its proximity to the state's land borders. In Voio, there is shelter for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, where also an intercultural school for children of the migrant community in the region is located.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Christos Zefklis (mayor), Dimitris Fasoulas, Andomahi Bouna.



HumanRights360

www.humanrights360.org

HumanRights360 is a civil society organisation established in Greece, that aims to protect and empower the rights of all with no discrimination, but with special focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. It is part of the worldwide human rights movement that is struggling for a world where fundamental human rights are enjoyed by all. HumanRights360 aims to put together greater alliances in Greece and internationally to work in order to build vibrant and tolerant societies.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Alekos Anastasiou, Nikoletta Arvanitoudi, Sebene Eshete, Katerina Komita, Eleni Takou, Melina Spathari, Eleni Zacharopoulou.

ITALY



Fermignano

www.comune.fermignano.pu.it

Fermignano (8,200 inhabitants) is an Italian municipality, located in the Marche Region within the Province of Pesaro-Urbino. Since the early 2000s, Fermignano has received a significant number of immigrants and it has been a forerunner in the adoption of immigrant policies within the area, also cooperating with other towns and bodies. Fermignano promoted the “Charter of Mayors on social inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean area”.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Emanuele Feduzi (mayor), Ubaldo Ragnoni, Othmane Yassine, Ilaria Vichi.



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University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Lead partner)

www.uniurb.it

The University of Urbino Carlo Bo is an Italian university with a strong focus on interdisciplinarity. It is located in the Marche Region, in the Renaissance town of Urbino, in an area rich in vibrant small towns. Our team includes researchers within the Department of Economics, Society and Politics (DESP), who come from different disciplinary backgrounds, but have common interest in migration studies.

Team Members during the PISTE project: Eduardo Barberis (Project Coordinator), Athanasia Andriopoulou, Alba Angelucci, Fabio De Blasis, Gül Ince-Beqo, Silvia Pitzalis, Federico Rossi, Angela Tomassini, Giulia Sopranzi.

TO LEARN MORE

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Other useful resources and related projects:

- Cities of Refuge: <https://citiesofrefuge.eu/>
- EPIC – European Platform of Integrating Cities: <https://epicamif.eu/>
- Exploring sustainable strategies to counteract territorial inequalities from an intersectional approach. HorizonEurope: <https://www.exit-project.eu/>
- EU-Integration: https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/home_en
- Inclucities: <https://inclucities.eu/>
- INTEGRA – Integration of Third-Country Nationals through Urban Partnerships: <https://integra-eu.net/>
- Integrating Cities: <https://integratingcities.eu/>
- MapUrban: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/mapurban-eu/>
- MATILDE – Migration Impact Assessment to Enhance Integration and Local Development in European Rural and Mountain Regions: <https://matilde-migration.eu/>
- MiFriendly Cities: <https://mifriendlycities.co.uk/>
- OECD-Migration: <https://www.oecd.org/migration/>
- PRISMA – Participation and Integration of migrants in Small and Medium Towns: analysing access and accessibility of social and health services through structures, networks and narratives in a socio-political perspective
- REGIN – Regions for Migrants and Refugees Integration: <https://reginproject.eu/>
- Welcoming Spaces: <https://www.welcomingspaces.eu/>
- Whole-COMM – Exploring the Integration of post-2014 Migrants in Small and Medium-sized Towns and Rural Areas from a Whole of Community Perspective: <https://whole-comm.eu/>



The volume represents the final policy and research output of the AMIF-funded project PISTE, focused on the participation of people from a migration background in Small and Medium-Sized Towns (SMSTs). It addresses the main findings and experiences developed during the project, targeting an audience of both researchers and policymakers. To this aim, after a set of foreword contributions from policymakers and experts and an introduction of the issues at stake, the first part addresses four key aspects of migrant participation in SMSTs: bridging figures, spaces of visibility, local capacity building, and preconditions for participation. These central articles combine PISTE research results with “lessons learned”, that are easy to check and useful for policymakers. Then, PISTE policy experiments in the four partner municipalities are presented, highlighting strengths, weaknesses and potential for replicability. Finally, the volume includes a Policy Brief, collecting all relevant recommendations tailored for policymakers of SMSTs willing to foster the civic and political participation of people from a migration background.

More information about the project and other project outputs are available at PISTE official website: <https://piste.uniurb.it/>.

A special thanks to all partners of the PISTE project:



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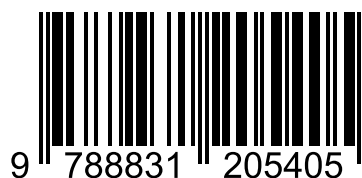


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