

Governing or being governed? A scalar approach of the transformation of State power and authority through the case of immigration and integration policies of four frontier towns in Israel

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Immigrant integration, although it usually constitutes a minor policy domain for local governments (already struggling with many newly decentralised responsibilities), reveals sensitive issues of identity, belonging or citizenship. Analysing immigrant integration policies brings out the very meanings of what constitute the uniqueness of a city, and, at the same time, its permeability and openness to the outside. Thus this policy domain makes it possible to investigate the transformations of the State, and its administrative and political system, in a context of neoliberalisation and increased devolution of responsibilities. Moreover, as migrants are often marginalised, it is important to ask to what extent local governance may offer a better path for immigrant participation in democratic decision-making.

The main question I address is: do mid-sized cities located at the margin of capitalist economic networks *govern* the social life of the places they administer, or are they *being governed*? To this extent, I analyse the particular immigrant integration policy domain in four Israel frontier towns: Acre, Arad, Kiryat Gat and Kiryat Shmona. Although I assume these towns have little autonomy — in a context of overlapping, crosscutting, unbounded and fluid scales —, this work represents an important step to recognise the purposive agents who organise the social life of these cities. Through this research, I aim at challenging their autonomy and their capacity to address immigration. In fact, when making local policies, they reinterpret a national policy and adapt it to what they define as their local needs and interests.

The first part of the thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses mainly on the theoretical model adopted in this project. The concept of *scale* is crucial to analyse the transformations of the hierarchies of power and authority. It provides the methodological boundaries necessary for fieldwork — the local scale then corresponds to a town —; while giving the possibility to apprehend a fluid and unbounded multiscale space where actors located at various scales collide — the local governance. The second chapter elaborates on the concept of *place*. In fact, the transformations of statehood are not homogeneous and each place produces and reproduces the socio-political space of immigration integration in a unique way. Through the cases

of Israeli mid-sized cities (or towns) located out of the socioeconomic and political core networks, the project investigates at the margin, in order to reach a better understanding of rescaling processes in 'ordinary cities' (Robinson, 2006). Here, the production of an Israeli periphery, both geographically and socio-politically, through immigration settlement, is addressed in better detail. Lastly, the third chapter, focusing on the methodology implied from the conceptual framework, restores the *social agents* as the main producers of change. The micro-history of places is a fundamental element to understand the transformations of power. A large place is therefore given to in-depth encounters, participation in activities, field observations, as well as to the discourses produced by the towns themselves through the city museum, local newspapers, or official pages in social media.

The second part of the thesis explores the motives of immigration integration policymaking. When I tried to understand the reason why certain municipalities engage with immigration integration, while some others refuse, two sets of motives were found. The first chapter of this part unveils a discourse emphasising the benefits of immigration in marginal places. In that context, local leaders who take proactive steps for the development of their communities consider immigration to be a potential factor of growth. However, the sources of this growth do not entirely fit the hypotheses I first formulated. Findings show that the presence of immigrants makes it possible to reach out to State funding; helps maintain demographic levels which justify public service delivery; and participates in an 'in-place economy', guaranteeing municipal incomes to the municipality. The second chapter of this part establishes the fundamental role of immigrant politicians in the making of a proactive local immigrant integration policy. Immigrants who are part of the deliberation processes and of political parties advance this issue in local agendas. Nevertheless, they promote a certain attitude towards immigration, understood as restricted to immigrants who are perceived as deserving, productive and participative. Those two chapters show that neoliberal reforms in Israel and political and administrative decentralisation, combined with the will from local leaders to include immigration in their agenda, lead to the production of local immigration policies. Local politicians want to control the population that settles in their cities: their interests create tensions with the national immigration policy.

The third part of the thesis focuses on the outcomes of immigration and integration policymaking. I analyse here the integration outcomes desired by the actors involved in immigrant integration on one hand; and with whom those actors engage on the other hand. The first chapter provides an analysis of the narratives collected during fieldwork, and the resulting grounded theory of

integration. The participants to this research define integration as a process in time, where new immigrants gradually access the main institutions of the Israeli state, namely religion, education, the armed forces, employment and politics. The role of State agencies, and particularly, the municipality, is seen as fundamental to facilitate this access. The last chapter therefore looks at the socio-political space created around this public and collective goal of immigrant integration. Through the distinct morphology of the institutional landscape of immigrant integration in the four cities, I show that each town has a unique way of apprehending its role towards newcomers. However, the four cases also converge: they illustrate the transformations of power, and the resulting multiscale governance induced by Israel's neoliberal politics. I argue that the particular position of peripheral towns, with their specific actors and programmes, contributes to maintaining those spaces of difference outside the centre.

The contribution of this doctoral research lies in bringing back social agents to the production of the rapid and deep changes of contemporary nation-states' political system. The triptych 'scale, place and people' makes it possible to address the transformations of power hierarchies from the many interests and skills of agents involved with a specific policy domain, in places that are made up of multiple layers of social, political, historical and economic relations. The re-establishment of 'ordinary cities', usually seen as forced to play a "punitive game of catching-up" (Robinson, 2006, p. 6), into relevant objects of study, is part of a larger school of thought that has advocated for their recognition in urban studies. Lastly, this work also contributes to a debate on immigration in small and mid-sized cities, at a moment where their role in immigrant settlement is getting more substantial.