Negotiating immigrants’ access to public services. Insights from local integration policies in the city of Marseille

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This paper discusses the empirical data of a research into immigrant policies\(^1\) policy-making processes at local level. It relies on a qualitative field survey carried out in the port city of Marseille, France’s second largest city, which has been marked by a long history of migration.

Recently, immigrants’ access to public services and welfare rights has been the subject a growing literature. However, on the one hand most of the existing research in the area still consists in “grey literature” and on the other hand, a substantial amount of these studies focus on the barriers to immigrants’ access to social services and care. In this paper, I intend to review immigrants’ access to public services from a different perspective by focusing on the public management of this issue. This paper thus asks: how and under what conditions immigrants’ access to public services arises (or do not arise) in public programs? How both institutional and informal actors with claims of different levels of competence take into account and frame this issue?

First, I point out the specificities of the French institutional context: despite the institutionalization of an integration paradigm at a national level, immigrants are not identified as a target group regarding access to public services and welfare rights. In this context, I argue for a sociological approach of policy-making processes focusing on the role played by local intermediaries from third-sector organisation between immigrant people on the one hand, and public services and local governments on the other. In this paper I will mainly focus on the activities of two specific services directed to immigrants: a local associative network providing a legal assistance to immigrants in administrative procedures and a social service dedicated to elderly immigrants’ global

\(^1\) Following T. Hammar’s work, I will use “immigrant policy” to refer to “the conditions provided to resident immigrants”. According to this view, immigration policy is composed of two parts: immigrant policy and regulation of immigration flows and alien control.(Hammar, 1985)
care. Relying on these two examples, I highlight how these intermediaries work towards the actual access of immigrants to public services and to their social rights through local adjustments and informal cooperation. Finally, I argue that the comparative study of these two local services' developments shows the current dynamics of immigration policies in France.

The city of Marseilles – General context

Marseille is the second largest city of France (851420 inhabitants) and a major port. As such, the city played a lead role in the French colonial system. Thus, Marseilles history is deeply linked to contemporary influxes of migrants (Temime, 1985). At the beginning of XXth century, these immigrants were mostly Italian. After decolonization, most of them were Sub-Saharan, or from Maghreb. Nowadays, Marseille’s migration landscape is dominated by Comorian. In spite of this, Marseilles cannot be reduced to this label of a city of immigrants. With 8% of foreign residents and 12, 7 % of migrants, Marseille’s demographic picture is quite similar to other French or European major cities. The specificity of Marseilles rather consists in a strong presence of foreign residents in central districts. As a result, their concentration in the city central areas contributes to the clear visibility of foreign residents and especially immigrants from Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa (Geisser Lorcerie, 2011).

In fact, the city is characterized by a strong polarization of its social and spatial structure, between a prosperous south on the one hand, and poorer northern and central neighbourhoods, on the other. Decades of liberal housing policies have led to a concentration of foreign populations (especially from North Africa and the Comoros) or foreign descents in those central districts (Sala Pala, 2005). The recent history of the city was also marked by a severe economic and demographic crisis. Between 1975 and 1990, some neighbourhoods like the 1st District have lost about 10 000 inhabitants. Meanwhile, unemployment rate reached 25% on average. At the beginning of XXIst century, Marseilles is still deeply marked by poverty and socio-economic disparities. Eventually, the ambivalent speeches and attitudes of local public leaders regarding immigration must be taken into account. On the one hand, residents of Maghrebi backgrounds have been targeted for decades by local political leaders. The break of far-right extremist parties on the local political scene in the 80’ contributed to an early politicization of immigration. These anti-immigrant speeches are particularly noticeable through the stigmatization of Arab neighbourhoods in the city centre and the promotion of a “reconquest” policy of these districts through urban development programs. On the other hand, at the same time, Marseilles migration history lay at the heart of a new rhetoric promoting the city cosmopolitanism.

A MISSING POLICY? IMMIGRANTS INVISIBILITY IN FRENCH PUBLIC POLICIES

The choice to focus on the activities of local intermediaries to understand immigrants’ access to public services partly proceeds from the first results of my research. In fact, one of the main results of my exploratory investigations was to highlight the specificities of French public management of migration that is, the invisibility of immigrants in the target categories defined by public institutions.

In order to account for local public management of migration, I chose at first to adopt a large and inductive approach. It aimed at identifying the categories adopted in different sectorial
programmes (basic skill learning, healthcare access, accommodation, training etc.) to take into account immigrants’ needs. I particularly looked into the categories associated to “integration” policies. In fact, since the early 1970’s, as in most European countries, a new discourse on immigrants’ integration has emerged in France and has imposed itself as a dominant framework to analyse migration issues (Favell 2001). The governmental decision to close the borders to economic entries in 1974 symbolises this new pattern of immigration policies: the objective of “integrating” immigrants serves as a justification to closed-door immigration policies. Several papers have been dealing with the emergence of “integration” in the political discourse and have questioned the political project on which it is based (Rodier and Terray, 2008). These works also highlighted the ambivalence of this discourse: while claiming to ease immigrants’ incorporation in the host society, integration discourse discredits immigrants and fosters a new division between “good” and “bad” immigrants (Lochak 2006). However, beyond the political discourse, what happens when we look into its concrete implementation? How is this integration discourse objectified in concrete measures and policy instruments?

In that respect, the survey I carried out in the city of Marseille shows that the integration discourse does not result in the emergence of specific policy instruments dedicated to immigrants’ incorporation or the emergence of a configuration of actors to deal with this issue. The study of the Regional Programmes for immigrant populations’ integration (PRIPI)2 of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d’Azur region reveals itself particularly instructive. In fact, these regional programmes are designed to organise the collaboration between state services, local authorities and private organisations to promote immigrants integration. However, in Marseille, the main local officials representing state services and local authorities show very little interest in this plan and prove to be reluctant to engage their services in the implementation of concrete measures. For example, the executive board for the writing of the 2010-2012 plan barely met a few times and without a regular attendance from high-rank officials3. In this context, most of the activities related to the plan implementation seem to take place within small workgroups and to

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2 Created in 1990, the Regional Programs of integration of immigrant populations are the main programmatic instrument designed to set the agendas for integration policy at a local level. The préfet is the legal referent for this program. The regional services of Youth, Sports and Social Cohesion are in charge of animating the network of partners, composed both of institutional and associative actors. The main purpose of these regional plans is to involve all the local actors including local authorities to foster a territorialized analysis of situations and needs. The first PRIPI of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes-d’Azur region dates from 2003 and was stopped in 2006. The new program was drawn up in October 2010 and includes four main themes: the knowledge of integration processes, newly arrived reception, learning the language, access to employment and housing, and two specific populations, women and ageing immigrants.

3 For example, between 2010 and 2012, the préfet has never actually participated to the executive board meetings that he is supposed to preside.
rely on the personal involvement of a few project managers from the regional social cohesion services (DRJSCS) and some social workers who share a common history of work.

« Generally, integration policies are not or are hardly carried by other state services. And the late reform made this even more visible. As a result it is harder and harder to mobilise these services on integration issues. In the Health care direction (ARS), for example, we have a spokesperson because health issues are obvious but if we don’t host a workgroup... when we invite them, they come but... there really isn’t any involvement! It is not considered as something important... They leave it to us, if I may say. »

It results from these elements that local implementation of integration policies in Marseille does not lead to the emergence of specific configuration of actors around this issue.

The second assessment that can be made regarding the categorization of immigrants’ presence is related to the very content of this notion of integration. Who is to be “integrated” and with what? What kind of specific problems does this notion refer to and through which concrete and operational categories? The analysis of the documents that frame local integration programmes like the Pripi does not give much precision in that respect. In these documents, integration is referred to as a global “process” or “path” composed of various steps. Integration policies are then supposed to set up various programmes likely to help immigrants to overcome potential obstacles. However, the specificity of these obstacles is not clearly defined. On the contrary, the definition of “integration” in terms of operational programs refers to various policies (employment, housing etc.) and more general categories such as “insertion”. The concrete objectives use target categories of more general nature, defined in reference to others fields of public intervention and in which immigrants are not specifically mentioned.

I thus share the conclusions made by A. Lendaro about immigrants’ categorization in public action at the national level. Studying the comparative uses of the notions of “insertion” and “integration” in the documents produced by national institutions such as the High Council for Integration (HCI) or the Plan commission (“Commissariat general au plan”), she underlines the close intertwining of these two notions. The author especially shows how in national programmes « the political project of integration is reflected by inclusion policies” (Lendaro 2011, p.104). In this perspective, the local implementation of integration policies seems to reproduce the same phenomenon. And yet, what is at stake here is the invisibility of immigrant publics. Public management of migration related issues, such as public services provision and access for immigrants, depends on a specific context characterized by the illegitimacy of migration categories. This appears to be specific to the French

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4 Interview with a project manager of the regional services for Social Cohesion (DRJSCS), in charge of one the PRIPI workgroup, may 2012
institutional context in which besides the introduction of decentralisation, national regulations and cognitive referents still represent a dominant framework. In fact, we mentioned above how much the city of Marseille is marked by a strong polarization of its social and spatial structure and a significant presence of foreign residents in central and northern districts. As a consequence, in some districts foreign people represent de facto a significant part of some local facilities (housing centres, legal and administrative aid services, healthcare centres, social facilities etc.). However, the over representation do not result in the set up of territorialized networks of actors to organise their response to these populations’ needs. On the contrary, foreign people needs are tackled through other target categories (homeless people, recipients of state health cover for people on low incomes etc.). In this perspective, immigrant publics are not a specific target for territorial policies and programmes.

This invisibility of immigrants is the result of a “normalization” process of immigrant policies in the early 1980’ which resulted in the adoption of the categories of fighting against exclusion policies. The late administrative shift of competencies among the different institutions dealing with migration issues which was initiated in 2003 can be seen as the logical development of this process with an additional restrictive perspective. These reforms deeply transform immigrant policies boundaries. First, they consist of a recentralisation of policies of immigrants’ reception and integration, which were formerly partially delegated to third-sector organizations and are now replaced by local platforms placed under the control of new French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII). However these reforms go well beyond the recentralization of immigrants’ reception. It operates the disjunction of immigrant policies into two distinct areas. One the one hand, a « new integration policy » is implemented, focusing on the civic and cultural dimensions of integration and targeting a small audience limited to newly arrived immigrants with a residence permit authorizing them to settle permanently on the territory. These policies are symbolized by the new “Contrat d’accueil et d’intégration” (contract of reception and integration) which must be endorsed by any newcomer, and is supposed to allow a better knowledge of French institutions and “republican principles”. On the other hand, territorialized programs of integration are officially preserved but with limited funding and integrated in the wider framework of social cohesion and equal opportunities policies. These transformations result in significant administrative re-

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5 In 2005, the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) was created on the basis of the former International Organization for Migration (IMO), and the Social Service for Assistance to Emigrants (SSAE), an association providing public service for the reception of foreigners, on the other. In the new institutional organization, the OFII is meant to be the only official contact for legal immigrants arriving in France.

6 This mutation is part of a global change in European countries promoting “civic” integration policies (Brubackers, 2001). This new paradigm has been interpreted by some authors as the emblem of a repressive liberalism (Joppke 2007).
organizations. In 2006, the Support Fund for Integration and the Struggle against Discrimination (FASILD), a historical actor of immigrant policies is successively merged into an Agency for Social Cohesion and Equality of Opportunities (ACSE) and then in 2009, in a new state regional office for youth and social cohesion while its “integration” competencies were transferred to the OFII services. These reorganizations mark the completion of the « normalization » process of immigrant policies redefined around general fight against exclusion on the one hand and limited reception policies.

This first part was meant to highlight one of the main characteristic of migration related issues management that is the invisibility of immigrants. This specific context thus encourages to focus on the activities undertaken by intermediaries’ actors from third sector organisation who work towards an effective access of immigrants to public services and the effectiveness of their rights.

«PUTTING THE PIECES BACK TOGETHER »: LOCAL ADJUSTMENTS AND COOPERATION IN IMMIGRANTS ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

In this second part, I will mainly rely on my investigations on two specific services: a local associative network providing a legal and administrative aid to immigrants in their various interactions with local administrations and a social service dedicated to elderly immigrants care.

Focusing on the concrete activities of these two services allows to highlight the political nature of their work: what is at stake here is the redefinition of public intervention boundaries. At a primary stage, this work consists in daily activities to patch up legal categories through the development of local informal collaborations. Secondly, beyond these temporary and unstable adjustments, the effectiveness of immigrants’ rights lies in the ability of these intermediaries to impose immigrant publics in public programmes. In a final part, I will thus examine if and to what extent the activities of these two services are incorporated within more stable public programmes, and what it tells us about the actual trends of immigration policies in France.

Before going into a more detailed analysis, I will present briefly the two services I examined. The Foreign People Network of Assistance was created in 1993 further to a ministerial circular which encouraged local officials to develop local programmes to facilitate immigrants’ reception and information. The Network of Assistance consists in legal aid clinics located in local facilities in various districts of the town in which professionals from different backgrounds (social workers, legal experts etc.) undertake to accompany immigrants with administrative procedures. In their daily work, these professionals receive individually, with or without appointment, immigrant people who wish to
obtain aid and information in procedures related mainly to residence permits, work permits, access to nationality, and more generally in all administrative procedures, as social rights became in the past decades more and more dependent on people administrative status. Besides these twenty experts who work in direct contact with immigrants, the Network of Assistance also includes since 2001 an agent dedicated to the coordination of the team.

The second example that will be discussed here is that of the EPAM, a social service created in 2007 to attend to elderly immigrants’ needs. Compared to the Foreign People Network of Assistance whose activities are based on a legal expertise in the domain of migration laws, the EPAM presents itself as a standard social service dedicated to elderly immigrants’ global care. A classical day in the EPAM begins at 7.30: a hot breakfast is served in the main room of the association to the most precarious ones. Most of them are immigrants living in the neighbourhood in furnished rooms, or housed in relief housing and dropped by every morning by the *Samu social* teams. After breakfast, some of them stay there for the day with a socio-cultural worker, some leave. Others register to the secretariat office to obtain an appointment with social workers. At 9, the appointments begin. They are meant to help the elderly immigrant in the various administrative procedures he is confronted to (housing applications, pensions and benefits files, administrative domiciliation, various social aids for impoverished people etc.) and follow his files in the event of difficulties. During these individual interviews, the social workers also inform the user of the leisure activities and medical consultation proposed by the association.

Social care on the one hand, legal expertise on the other. The Network of assistance and the EPAM differ in their activities and competencies. However, I assume these social workers and socio-legal experts are linked by a common goal. In their own way, their daily work consists in striving for immigrants’ rights and access to welfare system effectiveness. In fact, in an institutional context characterized by the invisibility of immigrants in public programmes, and consequently, by the lack of consideration for the potential obstacle immigrants could be confronted to, these organisations are the ones who intend to “fill the gap” between the legal categories and targets, and immigrant publics. Their daily work consists in adjusting these legal categories to publics whose complex social trajectories and administrative statuses are an obstacle to assert their rights, be it in respect of their right to stay on the national territory, or of pension’s benefits and social rights. In fact, a look into contemporary migrations indicates that both immigrants’ trajectories and their logics of admission and residence on the territory have become more complex in the past decades (Bribosia, Rea 2002). Administrative categorizations of migration (foreign student, asylum seeker, irregular immigrant etc.) are mixing up: during their life course, immigrants experienced various administrative statuses. Frontiers between regular situation and irregular situation are more and more fuzzy. It results from this situation a gap between standard-path designed by public policies and immigrants’ individual
experience. This gap is emphasised by the repressive trend of immigration and social welfare legislations, on the one hand, and the concrete - sometimes illegal – practices developed at different organizations’ front desks (welfare institutions, immigration service etc.) on the other hand. In this context, immigrants’ eligibility to different kind of resources is actually determined by a tedious pre-work of social and administrative carriers’ reconstruction and evidence collection. Both EPAM’s social workers and the Network of assistance advisors are confronted to the same challenges. They first have to analyse immigrants’ trajectories and translate them into adequate administrative categories in order to determine what their actual rights are. Then, it is to accompany immigrants in the adequate procedures, by gathering evidences needed to constitute admissible files.

In this perspective, in the recent years, a few academic works have underlined the key role played by middle-range actors like street-level bureaucrats and interpersonal exchanges in policy-making processes (Dubois 2010, Eberhard 2001). However, front desk interactions and other types of face-to-face relationships do not account for the whole process. On the contrary, the investigations into EPAM and the Network of assistance activities’ draw attention on other aspects of this work and especially the role played by local and informal collaborations between professionals to ensure immigrant publics effective access to public services and the following resources.

It first consists in informal practices in the daily treatment of individual cases which are meant to respond to the growing dispersion of the social question resulting from the new forms of poverty management that emerged in the 1980’ (Dubois 2013). In order to respond to the uncertainty caused by both the segmentation of benefits and institutions and the growing complexity of individual situations, the first step is to know and be known by the other social workers and public services working on the same area. Exchanging information or developing habits of mutual orientation with other social workers are in this perspective, a way to reduce the uncertainty around users’ fate. Local practices of cooperation may be reinforced by the situation of mutual interdependence of these actors. In fact, while I studied different organisations operating in a same district of Marseille, I could observe the strong mobility of immigrants from one organization to another. As a result people demands often turn out to be treated by different social workers at the same time. In the same way, EPAM and the Network of assistance experts try to take advantage of their daily exchanges with public services officers to identify intermediaries within these institutions and establish special relations that could be used in other circumstances to obtain more information on a case, clear an individual situation etc. For example, as EPAM social workers introduced more and more demands to the regional pension fund regarding elderly immigrants pension cuts, they get to know personally fraud agents of pension fund and were able to manage practical solutions to
avoid unjustified cuts in the future. These repeated exchanges resulted in habits of collaboration between the two services ahead of the case treatment and mutual learning.

These informal adjustments are sometimes encouraged by specific space configurations as for the few Network of Assistance consultations that take place in « public services platforms » (Plateforme de service public) i.e. communal facilities in which operate different public administrations (childcare services, social security services, etc.). This specific configuration enables special collaboration between the network of assistance expert and social security agent who became an actual informant to understand social security services functioning. The same phenomenon can be observed for example about Solidarity for immigrants, an association specialized among other things in AIDS prevention policies toward immigrants for which they organise every week prevention stands in social security centres. These stands represent an opportunity for Solidarity for immigrants’ social mediators to question directly social security agents standing alongside on individual situations they are confronted to. Beyond these individual adjustments to « put the pieces back together » 7, the work accomplished by the Network of assistance coordinator offers an example of the valuation of partnership and local collaborations as an actual course of action. In fact, since his appointment in 2001, the coordinator developed various organisational tools to encourage mutual exchanges of information and practices between the network socio-legal experts but also any local professional willing to obtain information on a specific case: training sessions, mailing lists dedicated to immigrants’ access to social rights and services issues etc.

In the end, I suggest that these informal collaborations are not simply an organisational issue related to contemporary trend for partnership. By sharing their knowledge and competencies, our intermediaries find in these informal collaborations a way to take grip on the complex social situations they are confronted to (Osty, Guillaume 2004). It is a mean to gain visibility on users’ fate, introduce a kind of consistency in their professional practices and overcome the common feeling of being helpless.

A NEW DEFINING OF PUBLIC SPHERE BOUNDARIES: LESSONS FROM TWO ASSOCIATIONS

TRAJECTORIES

However these adjustments remain occasional and unstable. A shift in the operational teams may challenge former habits of collaboration between the services. Immigrants’ effective rights and access to public services thus depend on whether or not these “patch-up activities” can be included

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in public programmes. To investigate this matter, I will briefly present EPAM and Network of assistance histories regarding their relations to public policies instruments and programmes. In the end, I assume that the comparison between the two services informs us on the current logics of immigration policies in France.

The transformations experienced by the Foreign People Network of Assistance, especially since 2004 seem emblematic of the contemporary redefinition of integration policies area, reduced to limited fractions of immigrant people. In fact, as mentioned above, the Network of assistance was created in 1993 and corresponds to a local agreement between local officials to entrust third-sector organisations with the implementation of reception and information services for immigrant people. The network’s experts had a state accreditation delivered by the Préfet which allowed them to be clearly identified by the different public services and to enjoy an easier access to various institutions. For example, the regional services of the International Organization for Migration (OMI), then in charge of migration flows management, had designated one of his agents to answer to the questions of the network of assistance experts. Of course, this situation was far from ideal: from the start, conflicts with the Foreign People Office (i.e. in charge of residence permits) continuously marked the relationships between the network of assistance and its partners\(^8\). This already precarious equilibrium was put into question by the recent reforms of integration and immigration policies which started in 2003. Indeed, with immigrants’ reception being officially ensured by state services, the main reason for the Foreign People Network of Assistance existence is questioned. In the process, the network of assistance also loses one its main support among public institutions: in fact, FASILD services are gradually merged into social cohesion departments and left aside from the concrete management of local immigrant policies. Thanks to the personal involvement of a few project managers and the Network of assistance experts’ lobbying, local adjustments were managed and allowed to limit the impact of the reform, in the first place\(^9\). Still, the network of assistance legitimacy is weakened by these transformations and the efficacy of their work put in question. Since 2007, the local plan for immigrants’ reception which was the legal frame for the network’s activities as well as the state agreement, have not been renewed. Since then, the executive board gathering all the institutional partners has also stopped organising regular meetings. As a result the Network of Assistance experts experience difficulties in contacting and collaborating with some institutions. The Network of Assistance experts clearly identify this lack of institutional recognition as the main obstacle to their daily work: “With the accreditation, we used to have a real institutional basis. How

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\(^8\) Excerpt from a meeting report, Support Network for foreign people executive committee meeting, private archives, 2002

\(^9\) Network of assistance meeting reports, private archives, 2003-2009
can we explain that we lost our legitimacy? The local reception plan failed and institutions withdrew their support, especially the Foreign people office. We got to get back to this.”

EPAM’s history, on the other hand, offers a quite different example characterized by its gradual progression from basic support activities in elderly immigrants’ daily life and entertainment activities to an actual medico-social service.

EPAM was created in 2007 as a specific service within an association specialised in disadvantaged people accommodation, the ALIP. EPAM’s story is closely linked to social activists’ initiatives which took place in the middle of the 1980’ in the context of massive urban renewal operations in Belsunce neighbourhood, one of Marseille’s central districts. In fact, at that time, the destruction work and re-housing programs helped to make visible former immigrant workers, now retired or unemployed, and experiencing extremely poor living conditions. In order to respond to the growing visibility of this population, district local facilities undertook to cooperate to accompany these immigrants in their everyday life. It mainly consisted in organising a system of social consultations within Belsunce centre social with the help of professionals from various third sector organisations with different competencies to take care of these immigrants’ perceived needs (re-housing applications, social rights access, pension’s calculation etc.). The association ALIP was part of this initiative and developed through the years various projects directed to these former immigrant workers living quite isolated in Belsunce neighbourhood. The association was at first appointed by the municipal services to serve as mediator in the urban renewal operations between owners and residents. ALIP then participated to the re-housing of some of these immigrants in its own social residencies. In 2006, when the Belsunce centre social closed its doors, ALIP logically took over its activities and created a specific service dedicated to elderly immigrants. At first, the EPAM service consisted of two parts: on the one hand, leisure and social space, the café-social, and on the other, a basic assistance service to help immigrants filling in administrative papers. EPAM was thus meant to receive elderly immigrants, deliver to them basic and general information and then re-orientate them towards the adequate institution. This project has not completely changed but EPAM activities gradually evolved to propose to elderly immigrants social and health care services. In addition to the administrative and legal assistance work, EPAM has developed its activities by extending the use of some prevention and heath care access policies standard instruments to elderly immigrants: experimentation of medico-social networks for precarious people (“réseaux santé-précarité”), implementation within the EPAM of basic healthcare provided by a nurse. In the future, the association even plan to monitor the implementation of specific social benefits for the elderly.

10 Support network expert, excerpt from support network meeting, fieldwork notes, 31/05/2012
EPAM’s development is also visible through the new regional federation of associations working with elderly immigrants created in 2011 and to which the service manager actively participated. The aim here is clearly political. The objective is to help creating a new social cause around elderly immigrants by undertaking awareness building activities. As for now, the activities mainly consist in conferences and exhibitions showing how elderly immigrants’ poor living conditions and the difficulties they experience to access to their social rights affect their human dignity.

In the end, EPAM’s evolution is emblematic of two main transformations. First, these transformations highlight the gradual institutionalisation of elderly immigrants as a specific vulnerable group, who request as such public attention and the implementation of specific care programmes. Then, evolution of EPAM activities shows that the social handling of this specific public gradually became more and more characterised by a healthcare approach. In 2010, elderly immigrants are thus recognised as one the official targets in local prevention and healthcare access policies. These transformations cannot be reduced to a local phenomenon and refer to the emergence on the national scene of the issue of immigrants’ workers ageing. As soon as the beginning of the 1980’, immigrants’ ageing issue is at centre of an abundant specialised literature focusing on this population state of health but also the psychological pain associated to their exile (Fassin 2006). But it is in the 1990’, consequently to the difficulties encountered by the managers of immigrant workers’ hostels regarding the growing dependence of their residents, that this issue gain public attention (Bernardot 2001). Since the end of the 1990’, elderly immigrants have gradually become a specific target for both social action policies and immigration policies. In concrete terms, if we go back to the EPAM and its activities, the institutionalisation of this issue authorises specific fund releases to address elderly immigrants’ needs.

The comparison of these two associations reveals quite different trajectories: the gradual decline or the growing difficulties encountered by the Network of Assistance contrast with the formalisation of a global care service dedicated to elderly immigrants.

In the end, I would like to underline the political nature of the activities I observed, which can be described as a continuous work to re-negotiate ‘legitimate’ public sphere boundaries. This work is visible in the daily treatment of individual cases but also, in the effort made to define their work as being part of a public service and then to include their activities in public programmes. For example, regarding the Foreign People Network of Assistance, what is at stake here is the redefining of the legitimate figure of the user. The recentralisation and refocusing of immigration and integration policies on limited categories of migrants participate to the hardening of these boundaries. In this
perspective, the emergence of elderly immigrants as an object of public intervention as well as the contrast offered by the EPAM trajectory compared to the difficulties experienced by others forms of services directed to immigrants, are emblematic of the contemporary logics of immigration policies characterized by a “compassionate repression” (Fassin 2005) that makes humanitarian reasons such as physical and psychological pain a new and primary criteria to legitimate public intervention. The comparison between the Network of Assistance and the EPAM could thus be useful to interrogate the practical consequences of these “politics of humanitarianism” on immigrants’ access to their rights and local public services (Ticktin 2011).

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