IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE CITY
Mediation and Construction of Identities in a Multicultural Context

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[NOTE : this text will also be available in French at the workshop]
Introduction

As this ECPR workshop on identity politics demonstrates, the identity question is the object of a sustained attention and a thorough investigation from researchers coming from various parts of Europe and with several theoretical and methodological concerns. Political science is not outdone by this major tendency spreading through all the contemporary social sciences. Even if, for a number of reasons, it was a long time coming with identity as a legitimate and scientific object of study – notably if we compare with sociology and cultural studies -, political science now fully takes part in this vast enterprise centered on the understanding of the social realm and the relations of power through the identity of agents, groups and institutions.

The basic question is the following: What does it means to live together with our differences? How can we live together with our differences, free and equals, fulfilling ourselves as individuals while sharing some collective references? This question runs through most of the social conflicts dealing with cultural expressions which mark the postindustrial democracies. The subject which interests me more specifically is the one about identity politics in the local sphere, and notably the relations – on both the discursive and practical levels – between identity-based demands formulated by ethnic groups and the configurations of local public action. Two main questions direct my research: How do the cities fulfill a function of mediation of identity-based claims emerging from various groups? How do they produce themselves, and through this activity of mediation, a local urban identity? If the first question has been dealt with some extent in the scientific litterature, the second one has been, all too often, ignored.

The framework of my research is the city which, as an institutional agent, must interact with, on one side, networks of social agents structured around an identity question (ethnic minorities, various groups formed with people belonging to the ethnic majority, etc.) and, on the other side, other levels of government (region, department, national, Europe, international) which also produce identity referents as well as public actions and policies linked to the identity question. The main hypothesis which directs my research is that we cannot understand both the nature of ethnic demands and the configurations of local public actions without making reference to the major models of integration of immigrants and ethnic communities put forward discursively by the agents concerned.

I would like to examine in this paper these two questions which, as it seems to me, structure much contemporary social phenomenons and debates. I will tackle the operation of
mediation with the presentation of a research I have done with Thierry Berthet in 1998 and 1999. It is a comparative study between France and Quebec in which we have examined the local policies regarding integration as well as the social and political participation of immigrants and people from ethnic communities. We focused our attention on the Bordeaux and Montreal regions. I will then examine the operation of construction of identities and identity policies with the presentation of the broad lines of a research project which will soon be undertaken in the perspective of a comparison between Montreal and Toronto and, most probably, an European city to be determined. But first, I think it is important to take time to reflect on the very notion of identity and to present under which conceptual angle I intend to approach it. There is, in this respect, some kind of a conceptual vagueness (imprecision) in the general literature. And the ever growing proliferation of writings about identity in many academic fields does not necessarily helps to define and delimit this complex subject. But above all there is a risk, if the term is used in an undifferentiated way for all kinds of purposes, to reduce its potentialities to help us understand the social reality and to discredit it in face of other paradigms in the social sciences (rational choice, quantitative approaches, deconstructivist perspectives, etc.).

**From identity to identity politics, what are we talking about?**

Identity politics generally refers to two kinds of phenomenas: first, the identity-based claims of various social groups; second, the actions, programs and public policies implemented by public authorities in order to meet these demands. Those two elements are so closely linked that it is sometimes very hard to distinguish (in a linear manner) between a first and a second moment: it is rather a spiral movement which may present very diverse configurations (for example, some public policies will create, with their side effects, other demands from the groups, etc.). These two phenomenas may be considered from two different but complementary viewpoints: a practical one (actions of the groups and public authorities, policies implemented, etc.) and a discursive one (the representations and references of the social and political agents).

That being said, there still remains one basic question: What are we exactly talking about when we use the word « identity »? What are its content and its frontiers? The question is important because rarely a concept as this one has so much penetrated these social spheres sometimes very far away from each other that are the « ordinary » world and the scientific one. We have to deal with a notion used as well by the social agents who do the
action as by the researchers who try to understand these agents. We will see, about this, that the hermeneutical approach proposed here introduces some significant guide lines.

In order to carry out this travel into the identity constellation, I propose to follow the following path. After having brought to light the founding paradox of identity, that is the dialectic between similarity and difference, I will discuss the social dimension of identity and the importance of recognition. This will lead us to a conceptualization of identity in terms of identity strategies. I will then present the hermeneutical – or interpretative - approach which tries to integrate the aspects which will have been previously exposed.

Identity, between similarity and difference

It is important, from the outset, to underline the founding paradox which is at the heart of identity. This paradox structures in a determining manner the different ways by which individuals, groups and political institutions act and interact between each other in the discursive and practical public spheres.

The term « identity » first carries the idea of similarity, of « identical to ». But, at the same time, it is what is distinct and unique. Identity constantly oscillates between similarity and difference, between that which makes us identical to oneself\(^1\) and to the others and that which, at the same time, makes us a unique individual. Identity is built in this double movement of assimilation and differentiation, of identification to oneself and to the others and of distinction from oneself and from the others.

Individuals, groups and institutions build their identity with two kinds of processes. Processes of identification, that is the ones by which a social agent integrates itself in a broader community; and processes of « identisation » by which a social agent tends to differentiate itself, to become autonomous, to assert itself by separation\(^2\). The identity of a social agent is a temporary compromise between these two processes, a continuous work never completely finished\(^3\). Social agents are constantly searching a form of recognition of their integration to a culture or a group – and thus pursue the similarity with other agents – and, at the same time, they feel very strongly the need to claim a specific place in the groups and so to differentiate themselves.

\(^1\) To be identical to oneself (« être identique à soi-même ») carries the idea that, in spite of the moving (according to the situations) and changing (through time) aspects of identity, the individual always keeps a consciousness of its unity and its continuity. He is also recognized by other people as being him(her)self.

This paradox is in turn articulated with two dimensions – internal and external – linked intrinsically to the identity question. Identity is a compromise between two definitions. First, an internal definition: that which the individual has the feeling to be and to be doing, what he wants to be, the image he has of himself, all this according to its personal history and its values and according to the present situation and its projects for the future. Second, an external definition: that which he must be and must do, what society is awaiting of him – in the form of diverse collective identities – and the image the others send back to him. We reach here - with this second element - a central aspect of identity: its social dimension.

The social dimension of identity and the importance of recognition

By putting the accent on the social dimension of identity, I want to stress that the look that we direct towards ourselves is, in a large part, influenced by the others and their judgments. A group - and society as a whole - works as an important catalyst for personal identifications. The consciousness of the self (the feeling to be oneself) is not a pure individual production: it is the result of all the social interactions which the individual instigates or is subjected to. In other words, identity is a relationship and not only an individual qualification. The question at the core of identity is not only « Who am I? », but also « Who am I in relation with the others and what are the others to me? » Therefore, we can say that identity is characterized as much by the management of similarities as by the affirmation of differences. This is particularly evident when someone goes through an identity crisis. This crisis may come from a loss of the markers of continuity: the individual doesn’t know anymore where he is in life, how he evolves. This crisis may also come - and very often it comes with the preceding element - from a loss of the markers of similarities: the individual doesn’t know which groups he belongs to, which groups to refer to.

So identity is a representation that the subject elaborates about himself, its social environment, the groups to which he belongs and the groups to which he is opposed to. The construction of the self and the relations with otherness go together. Identity can therefore be conceived as a temporary – and always subject to redefinition – junction between, on the one

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3 I assume here a dynamic perspective.
hand, the discourses and practices which appeal to us as social agents and, on the other hand, the interpretative processes by which we build our relations to the groups.

Inside various interaction networks – family ones or social ones –, the look of the other reflects on us an image, a personality, various cultural models and specific social roles that we may accept or reject but that we cannot ignore. And this research of recognition can be expressed at many levels: the need to exist, the need to be included in a larger unit, the need to show a positive image of the self, the need to be recognized in its own identity, etc.

So the identity – of an individual or a group – is characterized by the appropriation and the management of collective identities. I can answer the question «Who am I?» by a set of definitions linked to my social roles, my activities and the situations I’m in. We enter here on the fertile grounds of the work of Erving Goffman, with its concept of auto-presentation of the self, that is the set of representations, activities, behaviours and objects that an individual uses in order to be positively judged by others. One of the essential stakes of human relations is the face that we try to display to others. A face which, we hope, will be recognized.

Therefore, in the course of its life, the individual must assume some roles related to its age (childhood, old age), its gender (motherhood, fatherhood), its occupation (teacher, politician), its leisures, etc. and all the roles related to the situations in which he interacts at one moment or another. So it may be useful to conceive identity in terms of strategies.

Identity and identity strategies

Identity strategies are procedures implemented by an agent (individual or group) in order to reach one or many ends. These procedures are elaborated in accordance with the situation of interaction. In other words, the situation of interaction «calls» a specific identity element (the father, the teacher; in a family situation, in a professional situation). This is why different components of identity may be complementary with each other in some aspects but

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contradictory in others. Of course, these strategies are not the pure product of the interactions. There can be, for similar situations, a production of different strategies since they are also elaborated according to the values of the agent, its past, etc. For example, in the case of stigmatizations and racial prejudices, some people will interiorize the negative image sent to them - they will feel and behave as a victim -, while others will ignore it and still others will contest it and react.

If identity has a multidimensional aspect, it is nevertheless structured. The various elements of identity are not only juxtaposed side by side; they are integrated in a structured whole more or less coherent and functional. In this regard, problems may emerge especially when the structure of identity is made rigid – for one reason or another – and therefore cannot adapt itself in front of different situations requiring other definitions of the self (or of the group). However, depending on the individuals, the societies and the historical period, some aspects of identity (religion, class consciousness, the nation, ethnic affiliation, gender, etc.) may play the role of organizing pole for the other identity referents.

These considerations about identity-based strategies express the idea that individuals and groups possess a room to manoeuvre in their own definition and in their choice to belong or be affiliated to one group or another. However, individuals and groups cannot assert their identity unilaterally. There is a constant negotiation between our « objective » identity, the identity we want to project and the prescribed identity (social roles, institutions)\(^\text{10}\).

To sum up, we can say that identity is the combination and the organization of various identity elements (gender, age, qualities, nationality, social roles, values, etc.). These elements are organized in a set of representations, memories and plans for the future, allowing the recognition of an individual or a group by other individuals and other groups. These representations are the result of a biological evolution, a psychological evolution and a social influence. Identity is therefore a subjective structure characterized by a representation of the self linked to the interactions between the individual, the others and the environment\(^\text{11}\). It is a rather stable structure over time (people generally have the feeling of a continuity of themselves and are recognized as such by others in spite of the passage of time) but is endowed with a flexibility allowing it to change a part of its elements or to integrate others.


according to the succession of the objective changes (to become an adult, to become a father), the subjective changes (personal evolution) and the different situations\textsuperscript{12}.

\textit{An hermeneutical approach}

These considerations about the constituent elements of identity clearly indicate that I adopt an approach of identity inspired by the interpretative tradition in social sciences, or hermeneutics. Hermeneutics studies the different ways and manners by which societies – its agents, groups, institutions - produce their own interpretation of themselves\textsuperscript{13}. Society is apprehended as a web of signifying practices. The scientific understanding of social life is only a second interpretation elaborated after a first interpretation done by the agents we study. Women and men are first and foremost self-interpreting animals, according to Charles Taylor\textsuperscript{14}. Hence we can try to understand how the collective references of the social agents are elaborated and how social and political structures (groups, institutions, relations of power, social interactions) influence this production of discursive references. To define itself – individually or collectively – is to define itself through signs, symbols and texts. And for identity to become a collective horizon for a person or a community, there needs to be the presence, in the public sphere, of a discourse which introduces what Quebec sociologist Fernand Dumont calls a « référence » (reference), and what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls an « identité narrative » (narrative identity).

For Dumont, action is meaningful in society – it has some meaning for the agent who acts and for those influenced by the action – because it refers to a past and a future, to memories and utopias which establish a reference. The reference is the sense of personal and collective identity through time, the transcription of the social indicators of historicity in personal marks in which the agent recognizes its own temporality\textsuperscript{15}. The past and the future then become the signs of a « durée », of a time which is mine. The identity-based discourse is therefore linked to the necessity, for a person or a group, to articulate an image of itself, it has a function of integration and perpetuation of the self through time.

This projection on the temporal axis takes the form of a narrative, uses the «récit»\(^\text{16}\). The consequence of this intertwining of a narrative and representations of time is, according to Ricoeur, the production of a narrative identity\(^\text{17}\). Narrative identity is the cohesion of the person or the group through the historical sequence of events\(^\text{18}\). This interpretation is modified according to the evolution of the agent (or the community) and to the new interpretations of its location in temporality. The narrative dimension of identity thus implies two major elements: the temporal continuity (representations of the past, the present and the future) and the capacity – ability – to create and relate its own story.

Identity is thus conceptualized here as a narrative (always under construction) in which a person or a group defines its major themes in various discursive horizons, builds a memorial sphere and elaborates future projects.

My approach implies that objects, people, structures and events do not have a pre-established or fixed meaning in them (which would be an approach centered on the «essence» or the «substance» of things). The production of meaning depends on the practice of interpretation. Discourses do not reflect reality or refers to the objects in an innocent way: they constitute them according to particular contexts and according to specific relations of power. For example, some agents will be legitimized more than others to define reality and to express the group. Identity is therefore a resource that social and political agents will try to use and activate in the context of power strategies\(^\text{19}\). Identities are plural, social and conflictual.

The theoretical background being exposed, we can now examine some configurations of identity at the local level, through two major processes: the mediation of identity-based claims and the production of identity by the cities.

**The mediation of identity-based claims by local public authorities**


\(^{18}\) Jocelyn Létourneau has a definition of identity very close to this one: « un récit dans lequel une communauté communicationnelle établit ses thématiques de rassemblement, évoque ses origines, rétablit la prééminence de son espace mémoriel et récite ses incantations ». Jocelyn Létourneau, « La production historiennne courante portant sur le Québec et ses rapports avec la construction des figures identitaires d’une communauté communicationnelle », *Recherches sociographiques*, XXXVI, n° 1, 1995, p. 13.

I will present here a research made in 1998 and 1999 about local public policies regarding the integration of immigrants and ethnic communities in France and Quebec\(^{20}\). This research was based, apart from the documentary analysis, on a set of interviews with mayors, elected representatives, local bureaucrats and technocrats, leaders of ethnic associations and other associations from the local community, representatives from various institutions (other levels of government, schools, health network, media, commerce, etc.) and people from ethnic communities (immigrants). The major motivation at the origin of this research is that, in France as in Quebec, the management of the interethnic cohabitation does not appear in any constitutional text as a municipal domain or competence. However, it is patently obvious that cities in France as in Quebec – and especially in Quebec since the immigrant factor is historically linked to the building of the nation – are preoccupied by the management of ethnic diversity and have implemented public policies and programs in order to improve the cohabitation.

With regard to the two cities I will talk about here, Bordeaux and Montreal, the motivation for the comparison is justified by the presence, at the same time, of very similar elements but also very different ones. Regarding the similarities, even if the two cities are really not comparable in size (the population of Montreal is 1 200 000 and that of Bordeaux is 220 000), they both have a substantial part of their population which comes from ethnic communities. It is especially the case in Montreal where 25 % of the total population is made of immigrants (people born outside Canada). If we take into account the ethnic communities (it includes the immigrants and their children born in Canada), we reach 40 % of the population. The numbers are smaller in Bordeaux but still very significant (contrary to the image people generally have from the outside). The immigrants compose 10 % of the total population and the ethnic communities constitute 20 % of this population. Also, we find in both cities a strong presence of ethnic associations and a very pacific ethnic cohabitation (there is not much tensions or violence). Then, there is a strong diversity on the economic level in both cities: a rather poor immigrant population (communities from the Maghreb in Bordeaux; immigrants from Eastern Europe and from Haiti in Montreal), is next to people from the middle class (Spanish and Portuguese ethnic minorities in Bordeaux; communities from the Maghreb in Montreal) and people from the upper social classes and even from the very wealthy category (many Europeans, and notably British and German people in Bordeaux; Asian communities in Montreal). Many factors explain this presence of

immigrants from the upper classes. In Bordeaux, three elements are noteworthy: the aerospace industry and the airport activities (Dassau, Ariane, etc.); a major university and technological pole; the wine activities. Montreal is also an important university and technological pole, with a major sector of multimedia and communication technologies. The Quebec government’s policy centered on the attraction of immigrants-investors also brings very wealthy people, notably from Hong Kong.

Therefore, the ethnic question is important in both cities but - and here we come onto the differences – openly in Montreal and indirectly (in a roundabout way) in Bordeaux. Their approach are in fact diametrically opposite, especially concerning the models of integration put forward: universalism and assimilationism in Bordeaux, interculturalism as a variant of multiculturalism in Montreal. On the one hand (Bordeaux), we have a local model inspired by the requirements of an assimilation policy (universal model of citizenship) implemented by a French State still quite centralized. On the other hand (Montreal), we have a local model fitting in the Quebec’s model of interculturalism, which puts forward elements from multiculturalism (emphasis on the preservation and development of each ethnic community) and from universalism. Three universal principles, forming the core of Quebec society, are made not negotiable – so immigrants must comply to them: Quebec is a democratic society (participation of the citizens, secular State, a charter of rights and freedoms for the person, resolution of conflicts by negotiation, etc.), pluralist (respect of differences, racism and discriminations are strictly forbidden as well as polygamy, violence against children and the excision of girls, etc.) whose public language is French. This model is articulated to a decentralized federal system of public management.

The main question which oriented our reflexion is the following: Which variables structure the local public policies regarding the integration of immigrants and their impact on ethnic communities? To answer this question, three levels have been explored: the genesis of the implication of municipalities in the integration of immigrants, the originality of the content of the local policies in comparison with the national models of integration, the impact of these local policies of ethnicity on the immigrant population.

The research demonstrates that the variations of the national models of integration – assimilationism, interculturalism, multiculturalism – influence the content of the local public policies.

*Genesis of the local integration policies in France and Quebec*
In France, two major principles emerge after the Second World War: non-discrimination and public management. The principle of non-discrimination reproves the emergence of policies of ethnicity as a sector in itself (in the sense of Pierre Muller) of the public policies. The principle of public management gives to the State, and more particularly to the central administration, the responsibility to manage the admission and the insertion of immigrants.

The progressive implication of French municipalities in the ethnic cohabitation is based on a two-steps dynamic which involves the representations as well as the practices of public action. A first step is characterized by the "stowing" of migratory policies in the field of social policies, a second one puts the local communities as first rank agents in this field.

Three factors have brought about the migratory questions in the sector of social policies: the changes which took place in the sociological composition of migration, the principles of the French model of integration and the extension of the field of social insertion.

The transformations of the sociological structures of migration are linked to the closing down of the frontiers for the labour immigration in 197422. This change of policy has open up the opportunity for family reunions and for the permanent establishment of the migrants in the French social fabric. In this way, the migratory question shifted from the economic sphere to the social realm by focusing the attention on the integration of ethnic communities and their interactions with French social groups23. Logically, interethnic relations and notably the integration of immigrants appear on the academic and political agendas24.

The principles of the French model of integration, and more particularly the non-discrimination one, have accompanied this shift. The direct consequence of this principle in the field of public actions rests on the rejection of programs directed specifically at immigrant populations. Since, after 1974, the management of interethnic relations and the social integration of immigrants have become a public necessity, the politics of « droit commun » (common law), that is politics for the whole of the national population, will be privileged. From then on, the inadequacies of the social integration of immigrants will be treated at the

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junction of sector-based actions (housing, health, youth, education and vocational training, criminality) and territorial actions (the various aspects of urban policies).

The common usage of the word « insertion » to designate both the struggle against social exclusions and the progressive installation of immigrants in French society, contributes to put the migratory policies in the social field, an area where local policies enjoy a significant development. For the past 15 years, social policies have faced a double dynamic of broadening and redeployment. This segment of the public policies is taking charge of a growing and diverse population. Today, insertion policies are directed to the youth, the poor, the handicapped persons, the homeless, the jobless, etc. and, via these categories but without naming them, the immigrants. This is also done with the help of an instrumentation of fields previously excluded from this social sector (culture, vocational training, sport, etc.). This redeployment of the insertion policies is done in the direction of an increased decentralization. The local in its various forms (towns, cities, departments, regions) have become - often for reasons of proximity with the problems - the most pertinent sphere of action about exclusions and, more generally, the preferred level for the implementation of insertion public policies. The institutional changes formalized in the decentralization laws of the beginning of the 1980’s, and then the implementation of European social programs, have opened up the way and have provided the opportunity for a legitimized action by the local communities.

Moreover, cities have become more and more involved in the implementation of national programs centered on the development of urban or peri-urban areas in great difficulties and where, often, large numbers of immigrants are settled (Contrats d’Agglomération, Développement Social des Quartiers, Développement Social Urbain, Zones d’Éducation Prioritaires, Zones Urbaines Prioritaires, Zones franches, etc.). Since the beginning of the 1980’s and under the influence, notably, of the work done by various commissions (Commission Dubedout on the city, Commission Schwartz on the social and professional insertion of the youth), the direction of the public policies regarding insertion has changed. Local actions are now legitimized and they rely on a dynamic which goes against the division into sectors in favour of a bringing together of people from various areas (social animation, education, justice, police, etc.). Social mediation therefore becomes a central aspect of the action of the cities. So, an articulation was created between the cities’s scope of activities and the local implementation of national programs.

In Quebec, ethnicity is a legitimized sector in itself among the whole of the local public policies. Four kinds of factors may explain this: pressures, as soon as 1971, from the federal government in favour of multiculturalism; pressures from the Canadian Federation of Municipalities to implement specific programs centered on interethnic relations; pressures from ethnic associations which have been, very soon, well structured and efficient; a will expressed first by the cities of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and then by other cities, to act preventively in order to avoid interethnic tensions. Above all, the models of integration favored by the governments (multiculturalism in Canada and interculturalism in Quebec) have strongly contributed to put the migratory questions on the agenda of local politics. These models give great importance – at various degrees – to several elements: a public recognition of differences; an institutionalization of differences in the municipal structures (administration, police, public transport, etc.); an active support for ethnic associations; specific policies directed to the needs of the ethnic communities (for example, the need to teach the language of the ethnic group to the youth).

Now I consider how, in concrete terms, these considerations about the genesis of the involvement of cities in migratory questions are translated in Bordeaux and Montreal.

Content of the local integration policies in Bordeaux and Montreal

Bordeaux’s local policies are completely in line with the logic and rhetoric of the national policies. There are no explicit policies with regard to immigrants or ethnic communities, the general philosophy being that of the equal treatment of the individuals. The transposition at the local level of the common law policy is explicit. The city does not have specific public policies for the immigrant population but it tries to open up the districts where there is a strong ethnic concentration (notably the Saint-Michel and Capucins districts). For this, the municipality uses some institutional tools, notably regarding the schools (to place some students in some schools) and housing (the attribution of social housings). The major goal is to avoid the gathering together of social problems and the stigmatization of some areas by a blend of social classes. For example, HLM (public sector housings or council flats) are built near housings belonging to the upper classes.

This concern for the ethnic question receives an institutional translation since a person in the municipal administration is in charge, among other things, of the interethnic relations. The vocabulary used to name this person is in line with the French model of universalism: it is a « médiateur social », a social mediator, attached to the Direction du développement social
urbain (urban social development), itself attached to the Direction générale de la vie sociale et de la citoyenneté (social life and citizenship).

Thus, the town council plays an active role regarding the relations between ethnic communities via social services, culture, sport and district animation. Ethnic problems are considered under the viewpoint of social and cultural policies dominated by the logic of common law. The denial of an « ethnicization » of the public policies can be found both at the national and local levels. In other words, even if some measures may « look » like measures associated with multiculturalism (there are festivals, a support for ethnic associations, etc.), there are no attempts to implement policies oriented towards multiculturalism, especially not in the official discourse.

The mediation of identity-based claims is very different in Montreal. These are the tools that the city uses in terms of programs and public policies, in order to improve the interethnic cohabitation.

• Actions to heighten public awareness of the question of interethnic relations (awareness campaigns, informations in the city’s newspaper, exhibitions in public libraries, rounds of the schools, television, etc.). An active policy of public relations.
• The creation of festivals and multicultural celebrations (music, dance, food, etc.).
• There is a service in the administration to inform and guide the immigrants.
• Many people in the administration are in charge of the relations with the ethnic communities.
• One elected representative is in charge of the interethnic question.
• Local political parties present, every election, candidates from various ethnic origins.
• Consultation of ethnic groups in order to adapt the municipal services.
• Discussion round table (Table municipale de concertation des communautés culturelles) between people: leaders of ethnic associations, leaders of other associations, local elected representatives, police, various local government officials (housing, town planning, sport, culture, etc.), schools, public transport, health services, experts on interethnic relations.
• There is a permanent consultative committee in the administration, made up of the people identified above: Comité aviseur sur les relations interculturelles de Montréal. Its role is triple: to advise the mayor on local policies to implement in order to improve the integration and the social and political participation of the ethnic communities in Montreal; to propose some strategies and actions to promote the
social cohabitation; to help the municipal services to improve the quality and efficiency of its interventions about interethnic relations.

- The local government provides a training which is centered on intercultural matters for the police and drivers of the public transport (special education on cultures and ethnic groups, management of conflicts, etc.).

- There is a « programme d’accès à l’égalité en emploi pour les communautés culturelles », that is a program to promote the hiring of people from ethnic communities in the administration, the police and public transport. This is what they also call positive discrimination: if two people are of equal skills, the municipality will hire preferentially the one from an ethnic community. It is also a quota system, which means that the municipality sets itself quantitative objectives (for example that 30% of the municipality's employees come from the ethnic communities).

- A support for ethnic associations is provided: premises, infrastructures, advices, etc.

- A linguistic support is provided (translation), in association with the schools.

- Sociocultural and sport activities are encouraged. The multicultural dimension is also included in the leisure activities offered to the youth.

- The municipality tries, like Bordeaux, to avoid institutional and geographical ethnic concentrations via two tools: schools and social housings.

- A declaration on intercultural relations and against racism was adopted by the town council.

The management of the heterogeneousness of the sociocultural and political spheres is thus a strong preoccupation translated in the structures, in the public policies as well as in the representations and the discursive referents. As a municipal brochure underlines: « The intercultural question is at the heart of the preoccupations of the city of Montreal »; « Montreal must be a city where life is good for all ».

This integration policy is in line with the orientations defined at the provincial level (Quebec). The people interviewed at the city hall express their preference for the mixed model of integration developed by the Quebec government, which combines elements from assimilationism (notably regarding the linguistic level and the social practices in the public sphere) and multiculturalism (development of the ethnic communities and their cultures, institutionalization of differences). Universal citizenship and respect of the differences are combined. The municipality does not differentiate from the provincial orientations while trying to create a discursive universe centered on itself. The city does a function of mediation
and coordination of the local resources, according to a principle of action that refers to Quebec’s policies.

Moreover, in the two cities of Bordeaux and Montreal, the interviews reveal that these referents are shared by the immigrants themselves: they ask for a specific treatment in Montreal; they ask to be treated as any other citizen in Bordeaux. However, in terms of political participation, immigrants in Montreal are much more satisfied and committed than the ones in Bordeaux. The short waiting period to gain Canadian citizenship (three years) also plays here a major role.

So this research underlines - beyond the greater quantitative presence of immigrants in Montreal than in Bordeaux - the significance of the models of integration to understand local public actions.

The construction of identity by local public authorities

This mediation of identity-based claims is combined with a production, by the cities themselves, of a specific urban identity and local referents. Here are the broad lines of a research project I will soon be undertaking. The goal of the study is to examine how cities produce a local identity and how they adjust this activity with, on the one hand, the integration of immigrants and the presence on the urban territory of many ethnic or cultural communities and, on the other hand, identity references produced at other levels of government or territoriality (regional, national, federal, European, international). I consider how this identity construction is translated and implemented in terms of images in public spaces, of discursive practices, of public policies (mainly cultural) and of interest organization and policy networks (associations, ethnic groups, local administration). The research will focus on Montreal and Toronto, with probably an European city to be determined. I will now take a closer look at the main elements sketched here.

When we tackle the question of the relations between city and identity, we discover an original and not much explored field of study as an object in itself, at least from the political science perspective. The great majority of the studies centered on urban questions take the city as a framework for the study of other objects (specific social agents, social classes, etc.). Conversely, researches about the questions of local government, governance (« gouvernance urbaine ») and the political and administrative transformations of the metropolis or the urban areas, leave aside the identity dimension in its double aspect of legitimization of the new institutional developments (to change the municipal structures in order to project a new
identity of the city on the national and international levels) and/or the consequences of these transformations (the structures have changed so there needs to be a new collective identity). More specifically, the study of the relations between ethnic minorities and the production of cultural public policies remains unexplored. If researches about the integration of immigrants in France, Quebec or Canada are numerous and varied, particularly on the sociological level (integration processes), a political study of the local integration of immigrants, under the viewpoint of the impact of ethnic groups on the content of cultural public policies and on the production of an identity articulated by the city, remains to be done.

Thus, this research is about identity politics at the local level, more specifically in the urban framework. The main question which guides the research is the following: How does a city produces identity? I think that four aspects must be explored in order to try to provide some answers to this question: what kinds of identity-based narratives are produced, by whom, how and for which audiences.

1. What are the narratives about identity produced by the cities?

The goal here is to examine the « mises en scène » (images and words presented) of identity, which can be spotted in the public areas, the documents and background papers that present the city, and in the public policies (and notably the cultural ones). In Montreal, for example, hoardings were installed by the municipality in the main streets of the city during the summer of 2000. We could see on them a Québécois surrounded by people from various ethnic groups, with the following sentence written in large characters: « Nous sommes tous Montréalais » (« We are all Montrealers », the « all » being underlined). The intercultural dimension is directly involved in the creation of identity references centered on Montreal. In Bordeaux, the images of the city put forward by the municipality are in line with the model of integration favoured, that is assimilationism. We can see a neutralization of the ethnic diversity at the benefit of a universal citizenship centered recently on the rehabilitation of the Garonne river as a source and referent of collective identity.

A major dimension of this research is about local cultural policies. This aspect is important since the construction and recognition of a local (urban) culture founds the legitimacy of a territorial community, whatever its form (nation, region, city…). Thus, local

25 The studies in France about this sector of the local public policies are more and more numerous. I will mention just a few examples: Jean-William Lapierre (« Contradictions et limites de la politique culturelle des pouvoirs locaux », in R. Ledrut (Ed.), Le pouvoir local, Paris, Editions Anthropos, 1979, p. 275-290) ; E. Friedberg and P. Urfalino (Le jeu du catalogue. Les contraintes de l’action culturelle dans les villes, Paris, La Documentation
cultural questions are a major vehicle to build a collective identity. We can see, in this way, a
day-to-day social engineering that activates and reactivates constantly the main characteristics
which founds the identity of the community. Municipal policies therefore try to provide the
defense, the development or the redefinition of the local identity via various institutional
forms. So the local level – and here we get back to our theoretical considerations – does not
exists in itself but is socially made up by all the symbolic investments of the social agents.
This process is realized with the help of performative discourses which have the capacity to
make real what they express. And this historical and day-to-day construction of the local
level puts forward symbolic signs of social unity and social otherness.

2. Which agents build these identity-based narratives?

Here, the focus will be on the social agents - individual or collective (social and ethnic
groups) – legitimized to express (« mettre en représentation et dire ») the city. Various agents
try to control or influence the ways by which identity symbols are formed in order to define
the city and its forms of belonging. We can speak about « identity experts » which can be
found in the local cultural forces (leaders of associations, intellectuals, cultural administrators,
local representatives, the mayor, etc.) and legitimized to express the city. They are specialists
that elaborate the referential matrix which guides the forms that the local cultural policies
about identity will take. In a context of a restructuring of the public authority at the local
level, ethnic associations, administrative agents and local technocrats also try to strengthen
their position and to objectivize their belonging to an identity-based territory. I will also look
at the formation of local identities via the investment of the local representatives, as well as


française, 1984) ; Vincent Dubois (« Les collectivités locales, la culture et l’international », L’Observatoire,
automne 1996, n° 12, p. 12-15 ; Institutions et politiques culturelles locales : éléments pour une recherche socio-
historique, Paris, Comité d’histoire du ministère de la Culture – La Documentation française, 1996) ; Guy Saez
(« Les politiques de la culture », in M. Grawitz et J. Leca (Ed.), Traité de science politique. 4. Les politiques
publiques, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1985, p. 387-422 ; with M. David and V. Dubois, Les
collectivités territoriales vers une politique de relations culturelles internationales, Grenoble, Observatoire des
politiques culturelles, 1996) ; Philippe Poirrier (« Changements de paradigmes dans les politiques culturelles des
villes : de la démocratisation culturelle à l’image des villes », Hermès, 20, 1996 ; « L’histoire des politiques
Garets (« Politiques culturelles municipales et image de la ville depuis 1945, à travers les cas de Bordeaux,
Marseille, Montpellier et Toulouse », in Villes en projet(s), Bordeaux, Maison des sciences de l’homme
d’Aquitaine, 1996, p. 149-158) ; P. Urfalino (L’invention de la politique culturelle, Paris, Comité d’histoire du
ministère de la Culture – La Documentation française, 1996) ; Reine Vogel (« Le projet urbain annexé par
l’image », Urbanisme, n° 276, septembre/octobre 1994, p. 31-35) ; Yves Pourcher (« La culture peut-elle former
un territoire ? L’exemple du Languedoc-Roussillon », Pouvoirs locaux, n° 24, mars 1995, p. 46-51). See also Les
the collective mobilizations emerging from the civil society and taking culture or identity as their main stake.

3. What processes are involved in these constructions of identities?

This is the level of the structuring of the networks of agents and their interests, the power stakes linked to the production of identity-based narratives and the areas of negotiation – and conflicts – linked to the diversity of the representations of the urban identity. I will pay attention to the networks forming an epistemological community and sharing common discursive horizons, that is, presenting a minimal agreement on a set of representations, notions and tools to be used. Present discussions about urban coalition regimes and the forms of local government are illustrated in this field of public action. Moreover, the cultural sector could very well be used as a research object in studies inspired by the theoretical perspectives linked to the policy networks (« réseaux de politique publique »). We are here at the level of the transformation of a social stake in a category of public action. In this process of institutionalization, identity experts are at the forefront, as well as the scientific and economic mediations which legitimize the public action: we hear talking about the economic effects of cultural or intercultural events, experts on globalization and marketing are called to help the city position itself at the international level (competing with other cities), twinning policies are put forward (Bordeaux and Quebec City, Lyon and Montreal), references are made about the impact of the cultural industries (television, cinema, multimedia, new technologies) on the local economy, etc.

4. Which audiences these identity-based policies are they destined to?

This question is very important since the purposes of public action regarding the cultural and identity matters are often very heterogeneous. Depending on the point of view chosen by the municipality, many audiences can be identified: does the city wants to create an urban unity which is not yet present, or project on the national and international levels an identity strongly structured and readily identifiable? The analysis will pay attention to the

29 See the works of William D. Coleman, Grace Skogstad, Michael M. Atkinson and others.
localization of the identity referents in the public spaces, public policies and background papers, as well as to the audiences targeted by the cultural equipments associated with the identity of the city.

These aspects will be examined through two levels of analysis, internal and external. On the internal level, I will examine how cities structure the production of identity-based narratives with the presence, on the urban territory, of a diversified ethnic population. On the external level, I will study how identity-based policies are expressed in relation with the identity referents produced at other levels of government or territoriality (regional, provincial, national, federal, international). Do they distance themselves from them, are they in symbiosis or neutral? Do the local cultural policies and national ones develop along distinct, complementary or identical forms and temporalities? There seems to be, with regard to this, a problematic balance – even tensions and conflicts, since power relations are involved – between the levels, regarding the agents’s representations as well as the processes and structures used or put in place.

As for the methodological aspects, the research will take place on three levels: 1) interpretative analysis of the «mises en scènes» of identity in public sites and in the urban fabric; 2) analysis of the discourses produced by the city via documents, background papers and public policies; 3) interviews (the four aspects identified above will constitute the main guide lines for the interviews) with elected representatives, people from the municipal administration, people from cultural institutions and leaders of cultural and ethnic associations.

The choice of the cities chosen for the study (Montreal, Toronto and probably an European city to be determined) is justified in the sight of the major variables adopted for the research. These variables can be found (and will have to be found in the European city) - at different degrees - in both metropolis: the need to elaborate identity-based policies in a triple context of symbolic redefinition of the referents linked to the urban identity (the different ways of living in the city), of major transformations in the governance of the metropolis and the cities surrounding it (municipal mergers) and competition of the cities at the international level; necessity to manage the ethnic diversity and to do a mediation of identity-based claims; strong relations of differentiation/rapprochement with the other levels of government; and the major role played by the cities in the cultural offer (local cultural policies). The choice of the cities is moreover justified by the will to compare differing elements between them, notably regarding the models of integration put forward: interculturalism in Montreal, multiculturalism in Toronto.
Conclusion

I would like to briefly go back over the path covered together. My researches are centered on identity politics at the local level, and more specifically on the relations – on the discursive as well as on the practical planes – between identity-based claims of ethnic groups and the configurations of local public action. Two broad questions direct my reflexion: How do the cities fulfill a function of mediation of identity-based claims?; How do the cities produce themselves a local urban identity?

The general hypothesis which guides my research is that we cannot understand both the nature of ethnic demands and the forms of public actions without making reference to the major models of integration of immigrants and ethnic communities put forward, discursively, by the social and political agents. In this manner, we have been able to notice that the cities answer in various ways the inescapable question of how to live together with our differences. If some cities do this explicitly by establishing the interethnic relations as a specific and complete sector of the public policies, and others do it indirectly via common law and universal policies, all must propose various solutions and try to find the good equilibrium about interethnic cohabitation.

I attempted to tackle these questions by using an hermeneutical perspective. This approach attach importance to the interpretation that an agent can elaborate about its own practice and its own situation. For this reason, it seems to me that hermeneutics can be a useful tool to conceptualize this complex object that is identity. Seen from that point of view, the concept of narrative identity has an interesting exploratory potential for the study of individuals, groups and institutions. However, it has some limits that we must keep in mind. In this case, two kinds of stumbling blocks must particularly be avoided: simply add a comment on the words of the agent, without really conceptualizing his discourse and his actions or, conversely, produce improper interpretations and interpretative generalities which have not much to do with the agent’s thoughts. Moreover, we must keep in mind that hermeneutics is not an end in itself but a tool that the researcher in political science can use in order to better understand the agents and the power relations they develop in society and its institutions. So it must be coupled with other tools, like the various ones about the study of public policies.

It would also be interesting to study a few questions which are not tackled directly here but are closely related. Notably, what are the modes of constitution of an ethnic
association? What are the practical and symbolic resources used by ethnic leaders in order to mobilize the members around identity-based stakes? An interesting field of research could also be explored regarding the professional insertion of migrants (recognition of diplomas and professional skills, regulation of occupations, mechanisms of corporatist protections, linguistic and cultural factors). However, in order to be relevant, this kind of research would probably have to locate itself at the microanalytical level of the socio-professional group. The integration of a storekeeper differs in many aspects from that of an engineer or a professional musician.

In order to reinforce the relevance of a comparative approach, it would be interesting to get under way the research in a comparison between municipalities of various European countries. This would allow us to examine how policy windows (« fenêtres d’opportunité politique ») have opened up for cities outside France, to better understand what variables structure the local policies about ethnicity in other countries and, eventually, to grasp the dynamics which play in France.

It would also be pertinent to examine the modes of public action in cities which have encountered interethnic tensions. Finally, it would be interesting to direct the hermeneutical look on other important dimensions of identity (women, the youth, etc.).

In sum, many fields of research remain unexplored and demonstrate that identity, in terms of mediation and construction, is at the heart of contemporary urban questions and at the center of the modes of local public action.