Political parties and immigrant associations:  
The resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level  
An interpretive framework

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Abstract

Most studies on the political participation of immigrants at the local level mainly focus on how public institutions shape the channels for their involvement in the policy-making or how they organize themselves as collective actors. However, these studies do not center on the interaction between specific actors (e.g. NGOs and political parties; pressure groups and the media or political parties and immigrant associations) and under specific circumstances (e.g. politicization of immigration, urban conflicts or policy implementation) which can be determinant in their opportunities of participation. Within this overall context, this paper’s objective is to propose an interpretive framework to study how the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. This framework is theory-driven and it is proposed within the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) literature regarding the importance of institutions in the collective actions of social actors. In order to advance this objective, I ask: How do alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge in the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level? I argue that alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge because of the specific local political environment surrounding the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts. Through this framework, I seek to expand the POS debate on the importance of specific alliances in the local management of diversity and under circumstances of conflict resolution. The paper is divided in two parts: the first one concentrates on the justification of the study of the POS and the political participation of immigrants. The second one develops a framework which studies the local political environment where these alliances emerge and proposes a typology for their study based on three types: material, activating and symbolic.

Key words: Political parties, immigrant associations, alliances, diversity conflicts, local level, Political Opportunity Structure

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INDEX

1. Introduction
2. Drawing the problem: the POS and the political participation of immigrants
   2.1. Theoretical framework and literature review
      2.1. The POS at the national level
      2.2. The POS at the local level
   2.2. The focus: alliances with elite allies
      2.2.1. The POS and alliances
      2.2.2. Political parties as an elite ally
      2.2.3. Immigrant associations and their search for elite allies
   2.3. Context framing: conflicts and resolution
3. Drawing the lens: an interpretative framework
   3.1. The premises
   3.2. Local political environment and alliances in the resolution of PDCs
      3.2.1. The local political environment
      3.2.2. Alliances in the resolution of PDCs
4. Conclusion
5. Bibliography
1. Introduction

Most studies on the political participation of immigrants at the local level mainly focus on how public institutions shape the channels for their involvement in the policy-making or how they organize themselves as collective actors (Caponio, 2005; Hoschild and Mollenkopf, 2009; Giugni and Morales, 2011). However, these studies do not center on the interaction between specific actors (e.g. NGOs and political parties; media and immigrant associations or political parties and immigrant associations) and under specific circumstances (e.g. politicization of controversies related to immigration, urban conflicts or the mediatization of the cultural diversity of immigrants) that can be determinant in their opportunities for participation.

Against this background, my objective is to propose an interpretive framework to study how the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. The proposed framework will be done within the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) debate that exists in relation to the importance of institutions in the collective actions of social actors.

The POS debate holds that the mobilization of social movements\textsuperscript{1} stem from the political opportunities perceived by or opened to them (Koopmans, et al, 2005: 183). Regarding the political participation of immigrants, the literature studies how the political context shapes the patterns of involvement and mobilization of immigrants, as a collective actor, at the national and local levels (Ireland, 1994; Giugni, 1995; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Koopmans, 2004a). This study is located within the literature that explores the POS at the local level. This literature considers this level as the one shaping the interactions between immigrants and institutions (Borkert and Caponio, 2010; Giugni and Morales, 2011).

In order to advance the objective mentioned above, I ask: How do alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge in the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level?

\textsuperscript{1} When I refer to social movements and organizations, I refer to the original POS literature which emerged in the 1970s to study this phenomenon; when I refer to immigrant associations, I refer to the POS literature on the political participation of immigrants, as a collective actor, which emerged in the 1990s.
I argue that alliances between political parties and immigrant associations emerge because of the specific local political environment surrounding the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts. In this respect, the study of alliances at the local level can empirically show how conflict affects the political environment which shapes the opportunities for immigrant associations to access the local policy-making. Also, how political parties act as institutional gatekeepers which may facilitate this access.

By proposing this framework, I seek to expand the POS debate on the importance of specific alliances in the local management of diversity and under circumstances of conflict resolution. By doing this, I address the gap which refers to the need to study how specific institutional actors may become highly relevant to the claims of social actors through their alliances (Rucht, 2004: 197). In this respect, the POS literature considers alliances as a factor which can give social movements more chances to put forward their claims (Kriesi et al. 2004: 69).

In this paper, alliances are studied within a specific political environment which takes conflict as a dynamic element that conditions the whole environment. Conflict, in this respect, is the catalyst that sets in motion the emergence of alliances. Based on this, the concept of *politicized diversity conflicts* (PDC) at the local level refers to the clash between newcomers and receiving society which is exacerbated by institutional actors (e.g. political parties, government) through restrictive policies and discourses (Koopmans et al, 2005: 146).

The *resolution* of PDCs is part of the process of change and negotiation connected to the interaction among political institutions, local population and immigrants (Zapata-Barrero, 2004: 120). In this paper, the actions to resolve a conflict are considered *opportunities* for immigrant associations to have access to the local policy-making (e.g. consultation, mediation, activism)

I will divide this paper as follows: first, I will concentrate on the need to expand the study of immigration and specific alliances in the POS literature; this includes justifying the focus on alliances and the use of conflict resolution as the framing context. Second, I will develop a framework to study the alliances which emerge in the local political environment of resolution of a PDC. Based on this, I propose a typology which seeks to
classify alliances between political parties and immigrant associations. This typology has three types: material, activating and symbolic.

2. Drawing the problem: the POS and the political participation of immigrants

In this part, I address the need for expanding the POS literature in relation to the political participation of immigrants and the alliances between specific actors. For this purpose, I will first define the POS and explore the two approaches from which it has been used regarding the political participation of immigrants: the national and the local levels. After this, I will look at the way the POS has been used in relation to the study of alliances and conflict.

2.1. Theoretical framework and literature review

The interest on the role of political institutions and the factors surrounding their openness to the claims of social actors has been the guiding principle behind the POS. Its origin date back to the 1970s and it is related to social movement scholars studying political conflict and mobilization (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; Giugni 1995; Kriesi et al., 1995; Koopmans, 2004).

The POS mainly explores the way powerful groups or institutions – and primarily the State – are susceptible or sympathetic to new demands made by groups that hold a marginal position in the political system (Schroeder and Vermeulen, 2005; Bengtsson, 2007). It is defined as “consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent, dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1994: 85).

The POS dimensions decide on the one hand, the openness or closure of the institutional structures to social movements and on the other, the strategies of social movements to have access to these structures (Tarrow et al. 1994: 26). Overall, the POS dimensions cover the formal institutional structure that decides the access to the political system, the informal procedures and prevailing strategies used to deal with challengers, the configuration of power and the presence of absence of allies.

The POS can provide social movements with opportunities for either social mobilization or policy change (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004:146). The first perspective is more inclined
to refer to those opportunities for social movements to mobilize and be politically active (in the form of activism and protest against the state’s policies or repressive apparatus) (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004: 138). The second perspective is more focused on the way movements and organizations can have influence on the policy process.

The POS in relation to the political participation of immigrants, as a collective actor, is located on the second perspective mentioned above (Boussetta, 2001: 230). Under this view, it has studied those institutional and cultural factors in the political environment which explain immigrants’ choices and political strategies to have access to political institutions (e.g. Ireland, 1994; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Però, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Caponio, 2005, 2010).

This implies looking at the collective organization of immigrants, their relations with political actors and the institutional responsiveness to their claims (Bird, 2004; Odalmalm, 2004; Bengtsson, 2007). In this sense, the access immigrants have to conventional avenues of political participation and the strategies employed to improve it are important components in their study (e.g. Fenemma and Tillie, 1999; Boussetta, 2001; Garbaye, 2004; Vermeulen, 2006; Peters, 2010; Giugni and Morales, 2011).

The adaptation of the POS to the study of the political participation of immigrants, as a collective actor, has been guided by a main question: which level determines the opening of political opportunities for immigrants? The national or the local levels? Based on this, the POS has been explored from two different –but not exclusive– approaches which have defended on the one hand, how national specificities of the political system have shaped immigrants organization and on the other, how local dynamics have shaped the institutional arrangement which provides political opportunities for immigrants’ involvement.

2.1.1. The POS at the national level

The first body of literature focuses on those national features in the political system that defines the collective actions of immigrants. The mechanisms used by the receiving state and other social agents in their affairs with immigrants produce political opportunities that indicate the patterns of immigrants’ social actions (Ireland, 1994;
Koopmans and Statham, 2000). This means that immigrants develop participatory forms which reflect the national POS they face (Ireland, 1994).

Ireland (1994) illustrates the basic principles behind this body. In his comparative study between two French and two Swiss towns, he introduced the ‘institutional channeling theory’. This theory states that the way public institutions channels the political participation of immigrants, as a collective actor, determines how the opportunities for their involvement are structured. Ireland claimed in his research that the participation of immigrants in the selected cities were shaped by the national institutional structure – namely: immigrants’ legal situation; social and political rights; citizenship laws, naturalization procedures, and policies of accommodation– and the access to institutional gatekeepers –namely: political parties, trade unions, parliament, religious organizations, judicial bodies and humanitarian non-profit organizations acted as institutional gatekeepers (1994: 10).

In this line of analysis, Koopmans (2004a: 452) states that field-specific political opportunities are related to citizenship regimes and integration models which shape immigrant identities and their patterns of organization and participation. Citizenship regimes refer to the formal access to residence while the integration models refer to the cultural obligations that this access entails (Statham, 1999: 599). These models depend on the state’s incorporation strategy which may range from assimilationist to pluralist approaches in the degree a state demands cultural homogeneity in granting full rights to minorities.

The study of the POS from this perspective entails carrying out cross-city and cross-national comparisons (Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Odmalm, 2004).

Following this reasoning, Koopmans and Statham (2000) focused on immigrants’ claim-making and mobilization in German, Dutch and British cities. By proposing a two-dimensional POS model which included citizenship regimes and integration models, they concluded that the incorporation of immigrants at the local level occurred along nationally-defined lines. Further, they observed that the patterns of mobilization of immigrants at the local level still clustered most of the characteristics of national level politics.
Another example is the work by Odmalm (2004). He studied the interplay between immigrant associations, individual participation of immigrants and their inclusion in political parties by comparing Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Malmoe (Sweden). He concluded that the strong corporatist elements of the Swedish society were an obstacle to the mobilization of ethnic communities. This meant that these elements constrained the political opportunities for the involvement of immigrants in political institutions.

This body of literature pioneered in the study of the political participation of immigrants through the POS lens. However, the belief that the local level had its own dynamics and that the POS was dependent on them, led to certain scholars (e.g. Giugni and Morales, 2011) to focus on the city as an arena where the mobilization of immigrants could be better studied.

2.1.2. The POS at the local level

The second body of literature to which this study ascribes entails studying the local level as a field-specific arena for the political participation of immigrants. The understanding that accommodation occurs at the local level, making local authorities give a more practical and quicker response, informs this body of literature (Bird, 2004; Hochshild and Mollenkopf, 2009; Borkert and Caponio, 2010).

A large amount of research has highlighted the different ways citizenship regimes and national models of accommodation have been understood at the local level; thus defining the local POS that conditions the political participation of immigrants, as a collective actor (Bousetta, 2000; Caponio, 2005; Morales et al, 2008; Borkert and Caponio, 2010; Giugni and Morales, 2011; to some extent Garbaye, 2004). This has implied questioning the primacy of the national-level in the institutional arrangement which provides political opportunities for the participation of immigrants.

As shown by Borkert and Caponio (2010: 13), questioning the national-level is based on experiences that show that immigration poses similar challenges to local governments in cities throughout Europe. In some cases, the local policy reactions to these challenges have even come before than national legislation. According to Penninx (2011:12), this
shows that the interactions between local governments and immigrants are informed by context-specific features.

Different studies empirically researched these interactions: the project Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities (MPMC) illustrated how differences in national and local contexts resulted in a plurality of policies of accommodation in different European cities (Penninx and Martiniello, 2004:154).

In the same line, Morales et al. (2008) analyzed the local POS for the political participation of immigrants in the Spanish cities of Barcelona, Madrid and Murcia. They focused on policies which encouraged the political involvement of immigrant from a collective perspective. By assessing their effectiveness, they concluded that the institutional commitment to participation at the local level was directly correlated to the participation of immigrants in associations and in their creation.

In her study on the local POS in the cities of Bologna, Florence and Naples, Tiziana Caponio (2005) studied the level of political influence exerted by immigrant associations in local policy networks. Her aim was to explore whether different political majorities in the studied cities provided different political opportunities for immigrant associations and how the local POS affected their organization. She concluded that differences in the political majorities ruling the studied cities affected the local POS for immigrant associations. This situation did not allow immigrant associations to carry a relevant role in their immediate context.

By refining Ireland’s institutional channeling theory, Garbaye (2004) concentrated on framing the institutional structure which determined the minority politics at the local level. He explored how immigrants accessed local political elites by studying the election of local councilmen of foreign origin in Birmingham (U.K.) and Lille (France). He revealed that the local-central relation and the local political system were determinant in the chances of immigrant communities to have elected representatives in the local council.

Although the studies at the national and local levels are part of a growing body of literature on the subject, the study of the POS in relation to immigration is still in a quite
early stage. As it can be seen from this literature review the focus on specific actors and their alliances has not been pursued neither at the national nor local levels. The importance of alliances in this sense is that they may increase the opportunities for participation for immigrant communities in the policy-making as I will discuss in the next section.

2.2. Focus: alliances with elite allies

Alliances are an important component in the POS theory; however, in relation to immigration, the studies done so far do not center on the interaction and alliances between specific actors who can be facilitate the emergence of opportunities for the participation of immigrants. According to Rucht (2004: 197), the studies under the POS establishing the effects of particular sets of allies on overall levels of mobilization have not been sufficiently studied. In order to address this gap, it is necessary to discuss how the POS literature treats alliances and more specifically how it justifies them in relation to political parties and immigrant associations.

2.2.1. The POS and alliances

Political actors are considered key players in the chances for success of social movements and organizations (Kriesi, 2004: 69). Hence, alliances with other social movements and institutional actors are relevant for the movements’ claim-making and own survival (Rucht, 2004: 197).

Alliances refer to those linkages a social movement and/or organization can have with other social movements and organizations and with potential elite allies (Rucht, 2004: 197). In the process of alliance formation, the possibilities for the mobilization of movements and/or organizations are strongly linked to the presence of allies who can serve the movement or be a threat to it (Van Dyke, 2003: 226).

Actors in the POS can be divided in allies, opponents and those who are indifferent to the movements’ claims or aspirations (Kriesi, 2004: 199). Furthermore, those who are not part of the social movement or organization should be considered potential elite allies or antagonists to the movement (e.g. the legislature, political parties, judicial
system, president, businesses, organized labor, scientists, the church and intellectuals) (Van Dyke, 2003: 230).

In line with this, Diani (2011) asks how to study alliances; he proposes to focus on the nature of the ties among social movements with other allies. In his research on alliances he suggested to focus on resource mobilization and exchanges and whether they imply conducting joint projects, sharing information, pooling resources, sharing core members and having personal ties to each other.

Based on this, political parties can emerge as a highly important political actor who can improve the chances of social movements, in our case immigrant associations, to have a better access to the policy-making.

2.2.2. Political parties as an elite ally

In the POS literature, political parties emerge as the targets of social movements and organizations and potential allies with the ability to help them achieve their goals (Van Dyke, 2003: 231). Opportunities for social movements might be derived from the divisions of political elites in the legislative and executive branches. This, in turn, will make some elites more sympathetic to the claims of movements, while others may become antagonistic (Van Dyke, 2003: 244).

When political parties have access to the decision-making process, they become essential in the inclusion of underrepresented groups –such as immigrants– in the political system (Celis et al, 2011:5). Their importance in the democratic game is that when in government they provide the necessary parliamentary majority and also the power to take decisions which are made in light of influences from various sectional interests (Business, labor, environmental, etc.) (Celis et al, 2011:5).

In this sense, studying political parties with access to the policy-making is important because of the general function they exert of aggregating group interests. For instance, it is assumed that parties of the left have historically favored liberal, multicultural or cosmopolitan policies, while right-wing parties have been seen to be more supportive of anti-immigrant positions (Hepburn, 2009).
In more practical terms, political parties are recognized as important determinants in the representation of ethnic minorities through the provision of membership and leadership to immigrants (Celis et al., 2011). This is mainly because political elites in recent decades have increasingly devoted attention to the socio-demographic representativeness of political institutions where immigrants are a concern and a target of inclusion (Bird, 2003). Moreover, the literature has noticed the role political parties have had in politicizing immigration over the last two decades (Celis, et al. 2011).

2.2.3. Immigrant associations and their search for elite allies

For social movements and organizations, the search for elite allies, such as political parties, has been a move to put forward their claims and aspirations in the political system (Rucht, 2005: 208). In the POS literature social movements have sought for those allies which could serve better their interests.

In the study of the collective political participation of immigrants, immigrant associations emerge as the intermediaries between institutions and newcomers (Bengtsson, 2007: 1). In this process, they act as rational actors who seek to find those allies that suit better their interests and goals. They, immigrant associations, are aware of the potential political parties have as an elite ally to put forward their claims and aspirations in the policy-making.

The use of POS in relation to the organization and mobilization of immigrant associations have demonstrated its utility by analyzing political and social characteristics of newcomers (Koopmans and Statham, 2000, 2003; Vermeulen, 2006; Stromblad and Bengtsson, 2008). It has unveiled the importance of political institutions in channeling the organization and participation of immigrant associations.

From the institutional perspective, immigrant associations are considered key players in the process of accommodating immigrants because they can be a potential partner in developing and implementing related policies. Moreover, they are considered ‘the expression of mobilized resources and ambitions.’ (Penninx 2011:5).

I have defended in this section that alliances between political parties and immigrant associations are important because of their role in tackling the democratic
deficit associated with the position immigrants have in the political system. Now, it is necessary to justify the need for a context framing which can help in their study.

2.3. Context framing: conflicts and their resolution at the local level

In the POS, conflicts appear as a mobilizing factor which forces the interaction between institutional actors and social movements and organizations (Kriesi, et al, 2004: 144). Their emergence is not a phenomenon only limited to a situation external to the movement and organization; conflicts can emerge within and among social actors due to competing views, strategies or ideologies (Kriesi et al, 2004:209). They – conflicts– can trigger changes which increase the opportunities for the mobilization of social actors (Kriesi et al, 2004:81).

In the study of immigration, conflicts are understood as part of the process of change and negotiation that accommodating diversity entails in receiving societies (Zapata-Barrero, 2009: 35). They can be linked to the ethnic and religious diversity of newcomers. Additionally, they can also be related to the material distribution of resources between immigrants and the local population and among immigrant communities (e.g. the entitlement of healthcare and education rights, housing or childcare subsidies for immigrants and their families) (Koopmans, et al, 2005: 148).

The politicization of conflicts is connected to what Koopmans et al. (2005: 205) identifies as the politicization of immigration. In this sense, Koopmans et al. (2005: 205) states that “immigration and ethnic relations have become highly politicized issues” and that “… state actors have largely contributed to this politicization by framing the issues and implementing immigration and integration policies.”

Zapata-Barrero et al. (2008: 17) defines the politicization of immigration as a process by which immigration enters into the political agenda and becomes a public discourse. Accordingly, this process makes immigration part of the political struggle which at the end influences social reality.

At the local level, the politicization of immigration generates “a renegotiated modus vivendi between the local power and the ethnic interests” (Garbaye, 2005: 286). This implies accommodating these interests according to the local context. In this process,
the “renegotiated modus vivendi” mentioned above makes institutional and social actors to seek for mechanisms to manage and resolve the tensions which may emerge.

Following the POS logic, the resolution of a conflict can be understood as part of the need for conflicting parties to reach certain level of mutual predictability and reliability in their interactions (Koopmans, 2004b: 36). Accordingly, the more channels opened by institutional actors in the process of resolution should help in decreasing the polarization among them.

When dealing with collective action and waves of protest, Koopmans (2004b: 36) discusses those contractive mechanisms which make social movements decrease of ceased these protests. He states that so far the POS literature has included the closure of opportunities and the demobilization of social movements as reasons for this; however, he claims that re-stabilization and re-routinization of patterns of interaction within the polity is a stronger reason why waves of protests and related-conflicts decrease or cease.

Accordingly, resolution and mediation mechanisms emerge as a channel to reach re-stabilization. These mechanisms include: first, the use of third parties (e.g. parliaments, the electorate, parliament, or the courts); this is because their legitimacy is accepted by conflicting parties. Second, routinized forums for negotiations, such as the systems of collective bargaining. Third, the exchange of information produced in the forums; this is because they diminish the risks of unpredictability in the relations of conflict parties (Koopmans (2004b: 38).

In terms of the accommodation of immigrants, the resolution of a conflict, from an institutional side, involves the management of diversity from a public policy perspective. The normative notion behind is that policy, in this case, should clarify and regulate social issues and endorse those practices which aim to strengthen the cohesiveness of society (Zapata-Barrero, 2004: 37).

A problem pointed out by Poppelars and Scholten (2008: 336) is the lack of a unified view on how immigration is perceived by institutional actors and how this issue should be managed. As stated by Agranoff and McGuire (Taken from Zapata-Barrero, 2004: 38), the resolution of diversity conflicts from an institutional point of view falls into
what is known as a ‘wicked problem’ with ‘wicked solutions.’ This requires the understanding of conflict and its resolution as an on-going process of interaction.

In this context of interaction, the local level emerges as the one where policies may have a more direct impact on immigrants (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 3). The importance of studying the local POS is that local governments are the first ones to act and react to the challenges brought by the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity it entails. It is also the level where more immigrants can more easily become politically active in the daily affairs of the city through their involvement through conventional and less conventional avenues of participation (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 3). Because of proximity, it is at this level where immigrants, as collective actors, can forge links with social actors and institutional ones.

In this part I sought to justify the study of alliances between specific sets of actors –namely, political parties and immigrant associations– in the POS at the local level and in the presence of conflicts. After presenting the problem I am addressing to in this paper and justifying its study, it is time now to present the lens which will help tackling the gap introduced at the beginning.

3. Drawing the lens: the interpretive framework

In this part, first, I will present some general positions which should guide the proposal of the interpretive framework; second, I will present the interpretive framework to study how the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts at the local level facilitates alliances between political parties and immigrant associations.

3.1. Some general positions

The proposed framework departs from the understanding of the POS as a set of dimensions related to the resolution of a PDC in the local political environment. These dimensions condition specific alliances between specific actors –in this case political parties and immigrant associations. The main reason to use a dimensional approach to the POS is because it has proven to be useful in systematically defining the political environment which tends to affect the claim-making of social actors (e.g. Tarrow 1994; Kriesi et al, 1996; Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Van Dyke, 2003).
Although the classical POS models were intended to be used at the national level, its adaptation to the specificities of the local level has proven to be feasible (Giugni and Morales, 2011: 5). The advantage of this adaptation is its focus on urban settings while preserving the POS logic of identifying those dimensions in the political environment which are more stable from those which are more prone to change under specific circumstances (e.g. conflict).

Focusing on alliances entails focusing on the access immigrant associations have to participate in the resolution of politicized diversity conflicts. More specifically, alliances between political parties and immigrant can provide access to the latter to participate in actions to solve a PDC. In this sense, the actions employed in the resolution of PDCs are a political opportunity for immigrant associations.

The study of the city as the most tangible arena to understand the alliances between political parties and immigrant associations can unveil new elements in the policy-making of accommodation. This is because the local level is the level where the challenges and conflicts related to immigrants are more visible to all residents as well as the political actions aimed to manage them.

Summing up, the proposed framework should respond to two issues: how to construct a model of the local political environment which includes the way PDCs affect political parties and immigrant associations’ positions and how to identify the alliances which emerge in the resolution of these conflicts.

3.2. Local political environment and alliances in the resolution of a PDC

The interpretive framework I seek to propose here is based on the understanding that the local political environment is based on a non-conflict and a conflict environment which shapes the alliances between political parties and immigrant associations in the resolution of a PDC. The non-conflict environment refers to those non-related dimensions to the conflict which can indicate the openess of the policy-making structures to immigrant associations; the conflict environment refer to those dimensions which focus on the politicization of a diversity conflict and the interpretation given to it by political parties and immigrant associations.
3.2.1. The local political environment

Alliances between political parties and immigrant associations do not occur in a
vacuum. Accordingly, the political environment entails focusing on those stable and less
stable dimensions which facilitate the emergence of alliances between political parties
and immigrant associations in the resolution of a PDC. Therefore, I propose to study the
local political environment from a narrow-sense and adapted to the contextual
specificities of this study. As mentioned above, the operationalization of the local
political environment entails focusing on a non-conflict and a conflict environment as I
explain next.

The non-conflict environment

This refers to those dimensions of the political environment which are not
related to the conflict itself. These are relevant factors that decide on the one hand the
formal openness of the city to the claims of immigrant associations and on the other
possible opportunities for immigrant associations to find interlocutors in the local
council.

a) Local institutional openness

This dimension refers to the openness of the local political system to the claims and
demands made by immigrant associations. Although the *de facto* openness is somehow
dependent on the political will of the political elites in the city, the existence of specific formal opportunities may indicate the willingness to include immigrants in local decision-making structures.

In the case of immigrant associations, consultative politics is the most visible arena for their institutionalized participation in the local policy-making (Martiniello, 2004: 20). Consultative politics are structured around consultative bodies or councils. They can be defined as a democratic body set up at the local level to provide a forum of consultation between elected representatives and immigrants (GSir and Martiniello, 2004:11).

In this dimension, I will look at the existence or not of consultative bodies specifically created for immigrant-related issues. This information can be found in local immigration plans, local participation departments or a municipal chart on participation. Examples of these consultative politics can be found in cities such as Barcelona and the Consell municipal de immigració (Municipal Immigration Council) or Florence, Italy and the Consigli delle Comunità Straniere (Foreign Residents Council). Both councils have representation from the local government, trade unions, pro-immigrant NGOs and a number of selected or elected (depending on the case) immigrant associations. In the case of Barcelona, the Council contributes in the drafting of the local four-year Plans on immigration.

b) Local political system

This dimension refers to the configuration of power among the different political parties present at the local level and the ruling alignments in the city. The importance of this dimension for immigrant associations is that political parties with access to decision-making institutions can contribute in putting forward immigrants’ claims and aspirations (Bird, 2004: 2). Also the ruling alignments in the city can contribute in the immigrant associations recognized and the type of demands and claims put forward by the local government.

In this dimension I will look at two indicators: first, the configuration of power in the local council (to identify the ruling and opposition political parties). Second, the type of ruling alignment a city has. This is whether they have a majority, minority or coalition
governments. The information for both indicators can be found in the official electoral results and in newspapers.

To illustrate this dimension, I will take my own research as an example. In the Spanish city of Vic (pop. 40.000/ 25% of foreign origin) in the Barcelona province, in the 2007-2011 term, the city was ruled by a coalition between CiU (center-right, 8 out of 21 councilmen), PSC (centre-left, 4 councilmen) and ERC (left, 4 councilmen). Immigrant associations perceived that the presence of the ERC in the government made easier the access they had to put forward their claims in the city council. However, they also mention that the presence of Platform for Catalonia, PxC (far-right, 4 councilmen) in the council made the ruling CiU and coalition partner, PSC assume a tougher stance on immigration.

The Conflict environment

It refers to those dimensions which are directly linked to the politicization and the framing of the conflict. Taking as point of departure a normative stand, the conflict environment is shaped by those situations of clash in the public sphere where immigrants, local population and public institutions are involved (Zapata-Barrero, 2004:120). In it, a politicized diversity conflict arises from the interpretation of the diversity brought by immigrants as a threat against the receiving society (See: Koopmans, 2000; Zapata-Barrero, 2009).

At the local level, certain sectors of the local population may interpret customs, habits and the mere presence of peoples who are not considered to be ‘like us’ as a threat to the way ‘we’ have known ‘our’ immediate space of social interaction –in this case the city. A diversity conflict becomes politicized at the local level when it enters into the political agenda through specific institutional actors (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2008: 16). In this case, ruling political parties and opposition political parties which interpret immigrant diversity as a threat may use political discourses and employ policy actions (when in government) to ‘protect’ the local population.

A PDC always entails a political discourse around it. When it comes to political parties, either ruling or in the opposition, the framing of these discourses is based on a threat or
non-threat language against the local population. For example, the politicization of ethnic diversity from a conflict perspective can be justified by the need to protect citizens against a particular ethnic community that allegedly performs criminal activities.

a) Type of conflict

Based on the classification of conflicts mentioned by Koopmans et al. (2005: 148), conflicts can be of three types: ethnic, religious and over the material redistribution of resources in the receiving society. I shall call the last one a resource-based conflict. These types of conflicts at the local level are all linked to the perception of threat that the presence of immigrants implies for certain sectors of the local population and political elites.

In this sense, the way a diversity conflict is classified affects certain parts of the immigrant population in the city and may also signal the way political elites tend to favor certain groups and demands.

In this dimension I will classify the studied politicized diversity conflicts as ethnic, religious and resource-based. To illustrate the classification, let's use some mediatized local conflicts from Catalonia, Spain. The cases presented here are part of my own research:

A *politicized ethnic conflict* is the case of the Spanish city of Badalona (pop. 220,000/15% foreign population). In 2010, the People’s Party (center-right) released a brochure with the question: Is your city safe? In this brochure they used several pictures of the city with foreigners sitting in parks, or Muslim women crossing a street and one with a banner: We don’t want Romanians. The local party’s leader, and current major of the city, pointed out at Roma Romanians as responsible for local crime and as people who were not civic enough to live in the city.

A *politicized religious conflict* is the case of the Spanish city of Lleida (pop. 250,000/22% foreign population). In 2010 the local government approved a local ordinance regulating the dress code to access public buildings. In this code they forbade women wearing burka from accessing these spaces. Although the city only had few women
wearing this dress; the perception of local political elites on Islam provoked a measure justified on the threat the radical interpretation of the Coram raised against the social cohesion of the city.

A *resource-based conflict* is again the case of Vic (pop. 40,000 / 25% foreign population). In 2010 the local government decided to prohibit undocumented immigrants from registering in the local census. This situation prevented this part of the population from accessing healthcare or education. This decision was connected to the perception of threat that the large flows of migrants who had arrived in the city posed to the redistribution of resources amidst an economic crisis.

b) Position on the conflict

This dimension studies how political parties position themselves on specific diversity conflicts. It aims to understand how political parties in the local council and local immigrant associations interpret the specific PDC. The position that a political party assumes in a conflict is very relevant for immigrant associations. This can signal the type of relationship and potential alliance they can have with a party.

In this case, I will use two indicators: the position political parties and relevant immigrant associations took on the PDC (for or against) and how they justify their position. This implies interpreting whether they see immigrants and their diversity as a threat to the local system of values (ethnic/religious conflict), a threat to the economic and social well-being of the local population (resource-based conflict) or as a non-threat. The sources of information for this dimension are interviews with local councilmen and with representatives from relevant immigrant associations during the conflict and its resolution. Also the use of newspapers can help to clarify the information needed.

After describing the local political environment which will help me study the emergence of alliances between political parties and immigrant association, let’s move now to the second and final part of the proposed framework.
3.2.2. Alliances in the resolution of PDCs

According to Rucht (2004: 202), alliances occur when there is a conjunction of factors that make two potential allies have common interests or goals with the aim of strengthening each other’s’ position. In this framework, alliances between political parties and immigrant associations are understood as a relationship established between this set of actors in the resolution of a politicized diversity conflict. Studying alliances in this framework entails operationalizing the resolution of PDC as an opportunity for immigrant associations and then identifying the type of alliance which emerge in this situation.

The resolution of a PDC

The resolution of a politicized diversity conflict at the local level is guided by the interest of the institutional actors to re-stabilize and re-routinize the patterns of interaction with immigrant associations (Koopmans, 2004). However, this process is based on the interpretation of the conflict the actors involved have. For example, a ruling political party which banned the burka on the streets may see this dress as a threat against western values of gender equality; nevertheless, it will try to create spaces of dialog with those immigrant associations which were against the measure.

Based on the POS, the resolution of a PDC in relation to alliances between political parties and immigrant association is operationalized by classifying it in two types: participatory opportunities where immigrant associations are consulted by political parties and non-participatory opportunities where immigrant associations are not consulted but are involved in the implementation stage of resolution.

Participatory opportunities may include direct mediation through party structures, platforms of activism or legal actions against those institutional actors who started the PDC. Non-participatory opportunities do not imply any consultation; however, there may be a relationship between political parties and immigrant associations through the offer of resources and access to a broader network of actors. In both types political parties emerge as a highly relevant political actor because of their importance in
Chart 3.1. Opportunities to resolve a PDC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities to resolve the PDC</th>
<th>Type of opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory opportunities:</strong></td>
<td>Consultation outside government structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political party – immigrant associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Platform or coalition of political parties, social actors and immigrant associations against the PDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lawsuit from a political party and immigrant associations against the political party which politicized the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-participatory opportunities:</strong></td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funding to those associations which supported the political party which started the PDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key positions in the government or the party organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naming of members of the affected communities in key positions of the government and/or the political party/ies which started or backed the PDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There may not be any sort of relation between political parties and immigrant associations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration

**A typology of alliances in the resolution of a PDC**

Alliances are based on the common interest and willingness both sides have to resolve a PDC. This focus entails, as mentioned by Diani (2011: 3), not focusing so much on the length of the alliance (for how long they have worked together), the frequency of the encounters (how many times both actors have met) or the autonomy both allies have from each other; instead the focus is on the contact both sides have had in the context of resolution. This situation may not necessarily imply trust or sharing the same positions from one side or the other, but the recognition of the position of power that, in this case, political party/ies hold in the local council.
The types of alliances proposed here are circumscribed to those elements which shape the relationships between the two allies based on the purpose the alliance has for each actor vis-à-vis the resolution of PDCs. Therefore, the type of opportunity employed in the resolution, the position the political party have in the local council (ruling or opposition), and the position political parties had on the conflict will serve as indicators to locate the alliance on the proposed typology.

Said all this, the types of alliances proposed can be three: material, activating, symbolic.

1. Material alliance:

The function of this alliance is the provision of material resources from ruling political parties to immigrant associations. Through this provision political parties expand their electoral base (local and/or immigrant) while securing support in the resolution of a PDC from a sector of the affected community. For the association, the provision of resources strengthens their position before the local government and gives them visibility vis-à-vis the ruling political party.

The type of actions implemented by the ruling political party in the resolution of the PDC is non-participatory. Immigrant associations are included in the implementation of actions which had already been decided through the offer of positions in the government and in the party, specific grants through government or party structures and access to a larger network of actors.

From a discursive perspective, in this type of alliance immigrant associations tend to justify the ruling political party’s position on the PDC and the policy approach employed to solve it. This policy approach treats the PDC as a threat which resolution needs to be tackled through a securitizing measure. The ruling political party’s local representatives employ a discourse which seeks to justify actions to protect the autochthonous population and those who have already been ‘assimilated.’

2. Symbolic alliances

The purpose of this alliance entails a symbolic recognition of the importance immigrant associations have in the local sphere and in a context of competition with other
immigrant associations. It also entails a symbolic recognition from the immigrant associations to the political party/ies regarding the participatory actions employed as part of the resolution of the PDC.

From a discursive perspective, the ruling political party sees the PDC as a threat to the local society. This may imply that the ruling political party is the one which started the PDC and may use institutional consultation as an action to demonstrate their willingness to solve it. In this alliance immigrant associations may have two types of discourse: one which does not support the ruling political party’s position on the PDC and other where it supports the ruling political party’s position on the PDC; however, it recognizes the need for a participatory action to resolve the conflict.

3. Activating alliance

The purpose of this alliance is to mobilize political parties and immigrant associations which oppose to the PDC in a way that they vindicate a non-threat approach to diversity. For opposition political parties this alliance legitimates their position against a PDC and for immigrant associations, they help them put forward their claims and reservations against the PDC. In this case, this alliance is useful for those associations which do not have a working relationship with ruling political parties.

The type of actions employed in the resolution of the conflict can be a legal approach and a coalition approach. For the first approach a political party and one or several associations representing the communities affected by the PDC start a lawsuit against those political parties and politicians which started the PDC. For the second approach a group of associations and a political party may start a platform of activism against the PDC. Later on other political parties and immigrant associations may join.

From a discursive perspective political parties and immigrant associations consider the PDC as an unnecessary, electoralist move by those parties which politicized it and based on a perception of threat that does not exist. Their discourse also entails a strong emphasis on public interventions to socialize diversity and educate the autochthonous population on its importance for the city.
This part has aimed to build a solid interpretive framework which could be of use in future empirical research involving the study of actors, alliances and the policymaking of immigration at the local level. The importance of this framework involves going from a general context which studies the political environment to a very specific reality of interaction. As it has been seen, this framework has been constructed on foundations that allow exploring the environment where the alliances between the studied set of actors occur while acknowledging the differences between these alliances.

### 4. Conclusion

By doing a theoretical exercise of proposing a framework that could be applied to empirical cases, this paper has accomplished its main contribution which is to offer a
specific research tool to understand the institutional dynamics that shape the actions and reactions of immigrant associations in the city.

The next step in the use of this framework is to show its viability by making cross-city comparisons where PDCs have emerged and where political parties have had a key role in their politicization and resolution. The utility of such comparison might lead to possible explanations on the nature of these alliances, their connection to party and local politics and the strategies immigrant associations employ when seeking for allies. Moreover, the application from a comparative perspective of this framework can show whether cities, with similar conflicts and similar local politics, are converging or not in the management of immigrant diversity.

Focusing on the alliances between political parties and immigrant associations in a context of conflict at the local level is a good indicator of how cities are confronting the rising politicization of the ethnic and religious diversity of their immigrant population. Moreover, it can show how determinant political parties are in facilitating the access immigrant associations have to policy-making structures.
5. Bibliography


