

***The political agency of British migrants: Brexit and belonging* [ISBN: 9780367462970] /
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Chapter Three

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Abstract

With the introduction of EU citizenship in 1992, intra-EU migrants were enfranchised at the local level: to vote and stand for election as councillors in municipal elections within their country of residence. In this chapter the consequences are examined for Britons residing in Alicante, Spain, and South West France. The chapter examines who became municipal councillors, why, and to what effect. The two British migrant groups are compared: what was common, what different, and for what reasons. Across the two locations, morality and social belonging are consequences of migrants' political agency. It is argued that their habitus remains largely unchanged.

In 1992, legal establishment of EU citizenship bestowed on its newly created citizens the right to 'vote and to stand as a candidate at municipal elections in the Member State in which he resides' (Article 22, Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) (Preuss et al. 2003). The Spanish Government implemented this legislation within its borders in 1997, and the French the year after.¹ This was a small but radical move. For the first time migrant members of the EU not born in Spain or France could engage in local decisions that directly affect them; legitimately criticise in a sustained, public manner their local mayor and councillors, and even attempt to replace them in office.

In this chapter we look at the consequences of that shift for local life in coastal Spain and rural South West France. In each case we examine who became councillors, why, and to what effect. We then compare the experience of the two groups: what was common, what different, and for what reasons. In a closing section we attempt to draw out the more theoretical dimensions of this material.

Alicante province, Spain

The municipal life of Spain is managed by 8,124 town-halls. Their size varies widely: from fewer than a hundred inhabitants to more than half a million. But the majority are small: over 61% of municipalities have less than a thousand inhabitants apiece.² While the number of councillors is officially proportional to the municipal population, in smaller municipalities the ratio is in fact relatively high (Table 3.1).³ This elevated level of representation can make town-hall concerns and activity a more central part of local life in these smaller electoral districts.⁴ Municipal councils enjoy high levels of autonomy and exercise a remarkable diversity of powers: from public security to urban planning, from slaughterhouses to promoting gender equality, from funeral services to co-management of schools and fiestas.⁵

<TABLE 3.1 HERE>

From the late 1990s on, Britons, and migrants from other EU countries, have voted and stood for positions in municipal elections. Alicante, as a province with particularly high volume and dense concentrations of incomers, also has among the highest numbers of EU-migrant councillors, and the majority of those foreigner office-holders are British. For example, in 2007 in Alicante three dozen non-Spanish residents, the majority of them British, had seats on town councils (MacClancy 2019:373). Most of these British councillors stood for office in small or relatively small municipalities: only two had anything close to 20,000 inhabitants.

These British councillors are strikingly diverse: in background, political trajectory, and degree of success. Generalisations here cannot be too specific. All but one had at least a full secondary education, a few were graduates. In the UK they had held various positions: company secretary, accountant, restaurant owner, etc., with a disproportionate representation of ex-policemen. Most councillors were at least in their fifties. None had participated in party-based political activity in Britain, though close kin of two had been councillors or mayor back home. All already had some public presence, sometimes in the UK, more often since migration. In Spain, several had won local reputations as energetic activists who boosted charitable organisations, or organised campaigns, for migrant or environmentalist interests; one had set up Citizens Advice Services, weekly in a bar, where he was also treated as an agony aunt.

Their experience of office is very mixed. Several felt marginalised, by fellow members of the local party and within the council, both in municipal matters and linguistically. One felt her successful efforts to raise party affiliation among migrants was then undermined: other councillors for her party feared she would use the boost in numbers to form a migrant faction bent on unseating them. If within the governing group, the incomers were usually given the

brief of representing European migrants within the area, but excluded from other business. They considered they were left with specific council business they had expertise in and which did not interest fellow councillors. Anything else on the municipal agenda was usually kept from them: 'Things always happened without my knowledge or consultation. "Oh sorry! An oversight", they would say. But it happened too often to be only an oversight'. One councillor, who had got his initiatives implemented, said, 'They were initiatives I was allowed to do to keep me from asking too many questions'. Other initiatives of his had been rejected as they 'would have been good for my reputation'; the governing party did not want him too popular. He thought they regarded him as 'a nuisance, and often a thorn in their sides, because I wanted to change things'. In general, these Britons felt they were being exploited for their electoral support from, plus access to and knowledge of a particular municipal population. They were not invited to ponder other matters. They were being used, and contained.

In contrast several considered they had managed to work well with fellow councillors, and had achieved much while in office. They were no longer merely a bridge between the town-hall and the people they assisted; now in the town-hall they could strive to secure reform. Some listed initiatives they had fomented and seen implemented, successfully: applying for multi-million euro EU grants; revamping their town's tourist strategy; running health campaigns; setting up a charitable network to assist the needy; developing town-hall/migrant relations; integrating the socially isolated; winning national awards for mobility strategies; and so on.

At the time of standing, all spoke Spanish at least moderately well; in contrast, some other non-Spanish councillors in Alicante do not gain a command of the language, even while in office. Two of the elected Britons stated native councillors excluded them in meetings by speaking Valencian. Both learnt to understand Valencian. One councillor who works with German and Belgian counterparts said they spoke English to one another. In other words, in some municipalities, council business is now being pushed towards the polyglot (English, Spanish, Spanglish, Valencian, Vanish [Valencian-and-Spanish]), with basic Spanish as *lingua franca*.

Interviewees stood for a range of parties, with a slight majority on the centre-right. Whatever their allegiance, they talked of national parties in strongly local terms. The municipal chapter was their primary loyalty, its regional branch viewed as occasionally overbearing and self-interested. Interviewees seemed more attracted to municipal personalities than to party stances or national policies. Thus several had changed parties, more than once, justifying their switches by moral assessment at that time of the representatives involved. E.g., one environmental activist started in the Greens, which amalgamated with a left-wing party; she conjointly entered into a coalition with the centre-left. Later she left the coalition and joined a successful motion of no confidence. She then entered a coalition with the centre-right, so

winning control of the town-hall. At the following elections she was elected for the centre-right. Her actions are not particularly unusual, whether among foreign resident or local representatives. For each transition, she explained her actions in local, not national terms: some were ‘corrupt’; councillors affiliated to one party, now with charges brought against them, had been replaced by a ‘new team, people I could trust’. Generally in Alicante politics, indigenous membership of parties can be very unstable. *Transfugas* (‘defectors, turncoats’) crossing the floor is a much-denigrated, much-practised strategy.

Throughout the country, many town-halls have not shown much interest in stimulating migrants’ participation in the democratic process. Funding for town-halls is based on the number of people on the municipal register; this is not the case for their electoral rolls. Hence mayors have no economic incentive to increase the number of resident foreign voters; indeed, they may well be unsympathetic to the idea of outsiders influencing local matters, or even not want to facilitate the registration of new voters, whose political leanings might be opposite to those of the group then ruling the town-hall (Rodríguez 2018:8). In many municipalities, the sum result is relatively few incomers voting, let alone standing in elections (Méndez-Lago 2010; Tomé da Mata 2015; Bermúdez and Escrivá 2016). Since most political parties, as a general rule, have not striven to diversify their membership, but put obstacles in the way of non-Spaniards entering, or rising within their ranks, some resolute migrants have stood as independents or formed their own parties (Simó-Noguera et al. 2005:20-21; Burchianti and Zapata-Barrero 2017).

One interviewee said he had approached local branches of national parties, only to be rejected: they did not want those they regarded as outsiders. He and fellow migrants formed their own political party, though administrators made their official recognition very difficult throughout this bureaucratic process. In 2010 they finally established Partido Independiente por las Nacionalidades (PIPNI). At its height, its representatives were elected to two of the 13 councillorships in its local town-hall, while its busy Facebook page demonstrates its sustained raft of activities and campaigning. Certain comments on the page make clear the desire by some in the party for secession of the large, migrant-dominated estate: electorally, the estate dwarves the original village yet receives a disproportionately low fraction of the municipal budget to fund services. They wish the estate to constitute its own municipality, receiving its residents’ taxed income rather than losing it to the village town-hall. This municipal rebordering, primarily for fiscal purposes, is a long-established practice in Spain. Migrants’ deployment of this strategy is a further example of their adaption to their new place of residence.

Most interviewees were surprised by the deeply politicised conduct of municipal business, with accusations, along political party lines, of corruption or favouritism embittering town-hall debates. Some were taken aback how easily partisan interests smothered communal concerns. But since none had direct party-political experience in the UK, their surprise lacked

comparative base. Some complained of vote-rigging: the registration of some migrant residents ‘dropped off the register’; supporters of the mayor’s party were, interviewees stated, allowed to vote though unregistered. Interviewees also described the ademocratic style of some mayors, which might edge towards the dictatorial. One said the mayor came to his house and banged the table: ‘This is how things are! This is how things will be!’ He was later found guilty on multiple charges of corruption and banned from holding office for several years.

‘Corruption’ was a much-repeated concern of interviewees. Since its perceived scale is an evolving composite of political, judicial, economic, and media factors, Jeremy cannot judge its incidence, only report its perceived prevalence. Alicantine sociologists say over the last 30 years the devolution of powers from higher to municipal levels of government has enabled corruption to spread (Huete and Mantecón 2012a:91). One interviewee stated that in the 2011 elections, the till-then governing party and the opposition forces won four seats apiece, making him ‘the key’. Shortly after, one telephone-caller offered him a car; another said, ‘Go with us, and by the end of your term, you’ll be a millionaire’. Some British councillors have adapted so well to certain local practices that they, in turn, have been accused, sometimes formally, of corruption. One accused resigned so that any of his planned, further municipal actions could not be questioned, and to reinforce his point that the mayor, already facing multiple charges, should himself have stepped down long before.

Nepotism was a further concern. Two interviewees from one municipality said all eight councillors constituting its town-hall governing body are close kin or in-laws, with municipal contracts going to their relations, in-laws, and friends, in a stereotypical clientelist manner: large contracts are rapidly waved through meetings; smaller contracts can lead to surprisingly large bills. Throughout Alicante province, the continuing succession of court cases against municipal corruption, widely reported in the local press, suggest these practices are widespread. According to one British ex-councillor,

‘I have witnessed so much corruption here that some politicians treat it as a hobby. Some councillors treat the Council workforce as their own and get them to do their gardens, paint their houses, etc. The workers say nothing for fear of losing their jobs. Politics in Spain is dirty. It needs to be cleaned out’.

The Alicantine sociologists refer to a ‘deficit in the quality of local democracy’ (Huete and Mantecón 2012a:89).

Anthropologists of Europe speak of small-town inhabitants forming ‘moral communities’ (e.g. Heiberg 1989; Sorge 2009). We may be observing much the same here. As British consular staff underlined, ‘There is a large “grey area” between what is illegal and what is *enchufismo* (“plugging-in”), i.e. helping your family and friends get jobs and make money’.

Corruption appears accepted, so long as it is kept within bounds. British migrants repeatedly told Jeremy most locals, though friendly, still regard them as ‘fair game’. However, his field data suggest migrants are not singled out: any outsider from beyond the locale may be taken advantage of. Spanish colleagues of Jeremy did not deny it, just downplayed its incidence. I.e. these moral communities usually exclude others, whether from other lands or provinces; and when assessing municipal actions, locals live in a constant tension between state-defined legal codes and what they will accept as tolerable practice.

In Jeremy’s interviews, complaints about corruption, nepotism, and local forms of democracy segued with moral assessments grounded on ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’. The secretary of one residents association said, ‘I’m not going to stand for office. I just want things for the people here’. The councillor who set up Citizens Advice Services said he had done so, ‘Because I’m a mean Scotsman’, who thought local service providers overly greedy, ‘just taking money from the expats. This is unfair. Lots of things are unfair in this world, and I’d like to rebalance it’. The PIPN Facebook page speaks of making ‘creative and meaningful steps towards political empowerment of the expat community’. Guided by their ‘moral and ethical concerns, our intellectual contributions and our strength of numbers’, they ‘want to help to give our community the voice it needs and deserves’.⁶ Its founding President told Jeremy its ethos was ‘fairness, equality, openness for *all* the residents of the municipality’ (original emphasis).

Rural France

French municipal elections take place at the level of the commune. There are approximately 35,000 communes, varying in size by number of inhabitants.⁷ 75% of communes have less than 1,000 inhabitants, though they range from fewer than 100 to more than 300,000. Commune size determines how many councillors make up the municipal team (see Ferbrache 2019b). Given that the proportion of councillors to number of inhabitants tends to be quite high, particularly in smaller communes, local government in France is highly accessible to franchised individuals, even more so than in Spain (Collard 2013). Each council is headed by a *maire* (mayor), holding considerable power to manage the local unit in accordance with national policy. However, development of intercommunal structures (e.g. syndicates, community of communes), has reduced some of this power by encouraging communes to work together around issues such as refuse collection, water management and road repair.

Britons participated in local elections in 2001, 2008 and 2014 and were most prevalent in councils of smaller communes, i.e. those below 3,500 inhabitants (Collard 2013, Ferbrache 2019b), reflecting the residential preference for more rural properties. Those Fiona interviewed were councillors in populations ranging from 180 to 4,200 inhabitants. In small-sized communes such as these, participation tends to be apolitical, though this does not prevent the possibility that teams of candidates will share political perspectives (Collard

2010). The number of Britons standing and elected as councillors has risen considerably across three terms and in 2014, 896 Britons became council members (see Table 3.2). While this number appears relatively small considering that there are roughly half a million municipal councillors in France (and also in comparison with estimated numbers of Britons residing in France), Britons constitute a significant proportion of non-French councillors, particularly in smaller communes (Collard 2013). Moreover, there has also been very little official promotion of electoral opportunities for non-French EU citizens, just as this has been lacking in Spain.

<TABLE 3.2 HERE>

Fiona interviewed 13 individuals who stood for election, most of whom gained office, and two who were invited to stand but declined. She carried out the interviews in 2016, mostly with solo participants. On three occasions, partners sat in and contributed to the interview, while in another instance a councillor's wife intermittently joined the conversation while cooking in the kitchen where the interview was taking place. In one interview a former and current councillor were simultaneously present, and another where the councillor took Fiona to the *mairie* (town-hall) to meet the maire. Everyone was interviewed just once.

The majority of interviewees were in their 50s or 60s; two respondents were in their 40s when elected; one in their 70s. At the time of interview four were fully employed (farmer, consultant, financier, self-employed), the others described themselves as working part-time (an English teacher, consultant) or retired (semi-, early- or entirely). Their former UK professions were diverse across teaching, nursing, telecommunications, financial, managerial and governmental work. Three Britons had children under the age of 18. The children had previously attended their local village primary schools before progressing to secondary schools in nearby towns. Most interviewees were the only Britons on their council, but three councils had two Britons, and another had three. No individual had prior municipal experience in the UK. However, one had been engaged in social activities of his village before moving to France. No one had been involved in what they considered to be activist organisations in either country at the time of interview.

All electoral candidates had been invited or encouraged to stand by the incumbent or prospective maire. This is characteristic of the personalised nature of elections in smaller French communes (Collard 2013). They said they were chosen because they spoke French, at least to a good level, and were known to engage with locals. One stated that she was regularly seen around the village walking her dog and that during those walks she would often stop for short chats with other residents. Another explained that he had become friendly with the maire through attending all the commune's events. Almost all interviewees were already active in other commune groups and activities: two served on their school Parent and Pupil associations, one was President; another played and coached local sport; one served on the

festival committee organising events and hosting social activities; someone else had established a local choir; another was part of the patchwork group; one managed two holiday rental properties belonging to the commune; two ran their own businesses and frequently engaged with local organisations.

Some said the maire was expressly in favour of including British people. One, for example, was invited as, 'There were more and more Brits coming to our particular commune and [the maire] thought, quite rightly, proportional representation...that we ought to have a Brit. on the local council'. Similarly in other communes:

'Our maire was quite keen that there was a representative from the English community because at that time we were about 15% of the total population'; [I was recruited to] 'represent the interests of and to communicate with the English speakers'.

In practice few councillors would find acting as a conduit between the council and British residents became a particular part of their mandate.

In most cases, being a councillor involved taking responsibility for one or two public services in the local area. Portfolios held by individual councillors included council finances; schools and playgrounds; culture and heritage; sustainability; and the community magazine. One claimed no particular responsibilities, since everyone contributed to everything in his commune. Others became involved with their commune's water and electricity services, tourism, sustainability strategies, local planning, road repairs, street lighting, and sport and recreation facilities. To manage these activities and contribute to broader commune business, each person gave their time and effort, which ranged from one meeting per month to more frequent arrangements when specific projects were carried out. Councillors with responsibilities such as roads, water, electricity, and sustainability might also attend intercommunal meetings. In one instance, a participant explained 'I did go on training courses to learn how to be on these committees, which was very useful. So I spent a day with the electricity people and a day with the water people and that gave me a lot of confidence in what I was doing'. Others laughed off the idea of training: 'no, it really wasn't that well organised'. Overall, respondents were active in overseeing the public services and general wellbeing of their commune and the people within it. In the words of one, 'It really is the minutiae of daily life', a banal politics.

Banal, perhaps, but not without conflict. Though councillors did not divide along political party lines, Fiona was told on several occasions of major differences and factionalism within the council and commune. Three councillors defined factions in their village 'between people who have supported the last maire and the ones who support this maire'. One woman found herself excluded for standing against her maire: 'the maire and the maire's wife and a couple

of other people with whom I'd been friendly, started ignoring me. It was all very much "you stood against us so we won't have anything to do with you". Another explained:

'one of our members turned out to be a sort of hidden supporter of the last maire, undercover. She caused so many problems, until it got too uncomfortable for her and she resigned'.

A third Briton explained that two opposing electoral teams were in conflict over claims of electoral fraud. A regional electoral commission was called on to help resolve the matter but mistrust persisted: 'the maire had his finger in a lot of pies and contacts with politicians further up the political ladder, and strings had been pulled'.

Conflict also arose due to 'village politics', as one Briton called it. He referred to differences and disputes 'between French people, historic families of the village'. One councillor told Fiona how 'inhabitants took particular sides because that's what their parents and grandparents had done'. Another suggested that 'the disagreements go back and back, and nobody really remembers what it was all about'. However, these Britons were able to avoid such 'historical' conflicts by positioning themselves as 'newcomers' and 'outsiders'. In contrast, one suggested that her position as a newcomer (and non-French councillor) gave her the ability to intervene:

'I can say things on a council meeting, "Why don't you shut down that polling station, it seems a lot of waste of manpower". And then everybody looks askance and says "You can't say that". And everybody agrees but they don't dare say it, because it would be too political because they've all been living there years and years. It doesn't matter to me, and for them to say "well she doesn't understand". It actually brings the subject to the table without anybody saying, "Oh well, it was him or it was her that said that". That would get around the village and then they get black balled by the whole of that village. It doesn't matter for me'.

To participate fully, Britons told Fiona 'you have to have the confidence to do it, and the language', the latter because all council business is conducted in French. All British councillors spoke fluent or good levels of French. In practice, four of them found the speed, accent, and jargon of spoken French challenging. One elaborated: 'particularly if they're excited and heated in conversation and then I find them almost impossible to understand'. Most who were not already fluent speakers valued the challenge and the benefits. In addition, two said that lack of fluency had prevented them making significant contributions.

Socio-cultural belonging

The geographer Lynn Staeheli has written of notions of democratic community as ‘rooted in some form of commonality’. Whether one stresses what is ‘common’ or the striving for ‘unity’, she argues a sense of community is constructed via shared experience, common values and a common concern for place (Staeheli 2008:8). All three factors were evident when Fiona asked interviewees about the meanings they gave to their municipal participation. One was motivated by the opportunities ‘to share in the day to day running of the community’; another wanted ‘to integrate’ with the people; a third valued ‘being able to participate and being able to be part of the local commune’. A further interviewee said she participated in ‘the hope of trying to forge some deeper relationships. . .and to show we’re willing to take part’. One respondent said he enjoyed,

‘just getting to know a pretty large proportion of the population, to have a real sense of community. When I go to the market on a Saturday morning, there will always be a number of people that I know, and who will come up for a chat’.

For another, his time on the council was about finding common values with fellow residents:

‘It was really important getting to know the people on the council better and understanding what their concerns were. They were not my age (we were the oldies of the group) so we didn’t necessarily have the same interests’.

In other words, the council helped to bridge perceived differences through working together.

Becoming a councillor was also a conscious means to develop a deeper attachment to the place, by engaging in more diverse and, for them, more significant networks of exchange:

‘I enjoy the fact I can be actively involved in this small community. If I live somewhere, I want to feel that I’m part of that structure, part of that place’.

Several spoke in similar terms: ‘to contribute to the life and development of the village in which I live’; ‘I like getting involved, it’s interesting, and you give something back’; ‘it’s the ability to take part really. . .to do some good and make a difference to some of the things in the village’. Only one articulated a desire to combine a sense of shared experience with common concern for the future: ‘sharing in the day-to-day running of the community and involvement in plans and investment projects for the future’.

When Fiona asked Britons about key contributions they had made, several referred to visual changes in the village and to longer-term alterations which clearly demonstrated improvements to the local environment and its services. One walked Fiona through the centre of the village, proudly pointing out the trees she had selected for planting. Another laughed as he explained ‘my legacy’:

‘Inside toilets.

I have been banging on about this all the time on the council and then when they finally agreed they were going to extend the hall, they agreed to put toilets and handwashing facilities inside’.

A further respondent underlined his involvement in a tree-planting ceremony, a local custom where each new member of the council plants a tree at the start of their mandate. Since the tree would outlast his term on the council, its continued existence and gradual growth would display his contribution and presence in the village for a long time hence. This was not so much an individual achievement, more his personal participation in a common, and communal mode of memory-marking. Other personal contributions and achievements ranged broadly: ‘a sense of economy’; ‘a charging point for an electric vehicle’; ‘refuse sorting’; a walk for locals and tourists; recruitment to staff a village café.

Fiona’s interviewees revealed that these various changes to the commune contributed to the sense of place which they felt, and valued. As one councillor said ‘to improve the quality of life in the village and its economy’. To their pleasure, they had actively, visibly, perhaps even memorably participated in the ongoing maintenance and amelioration of their village and to the wider benefit of the community there. They were making a place for themselves, in their place of residence, which others could see, use, and appreciate.

However, not all participants could easily identify specific contributions that they had made. One councillor explained:

‘I wasn’t doing anything. I did ask about it and they said ‘don’t worry, when they need you they’ll ask you’, and as yet I have not been asked to attend anything’.

The limited contribution had left her feeling ‘a bit embarrassed’.

A second woman was very modest about her achievements. She showed Fiona copies of the council magazine that she put together twice yearly and then said ‘I’m just happy to let the ones who are in a better position to get on with it, those who have a better understanding of the system’. There were also those who did not feel that they had made any achievements at all: ‘None, to be honest. None’. Another suggested that ‘successful initiatives are limited because the maire resists change’, while a further example confessed ‘I am generally disappointed with my achievements compared to what my expectations were and I have found it incredibly difficult at meetings to make any significant effective contribution’. Reasons for limited contribution included a council resistant to change, lack of confidence to share ideas, lack of French fluency, and a sense of banality towards the matters being discussed:

‘I wouldn't go as far to say that I had any feeling of achievement. I did my bit. It was a frustration. I very quickly learned, like a lot of things in French life, it is heavily laden with procedure and bureaucracy and so on, and you just have to get on with it’.

Three of five councillors stood for a second or third term. Two moved to a new house in a different commune which prevented them restanding; one was adamant he would not repeat the experience in his new location: ‘I think once is enough. It was mundane to the extent that it wasn't an experience I would like to repeat’. One councillor starting in 2001 hoped to step down at the end of her mandate by recommending someone in her place. She was advised otherwise: ‘the maire said to me “look, it’s taken everybody seven years to get used to you, so don’t rock the boat now”’. Of the councillors elected for the first time in 2014, several aspired to stand in 2020, some felt it was ‘too early to know’. This turned out to be a wise comment in the wake of the June Brexit referendum, which took place a week or so after the interview. Post-referendum, one woman told Fiona ‘not being able to be on the council, it's like having a slap in the face’.

Comparing experience in Spanish and French municipal councils

The experiences of British councillors in these neighbouring countries appear strikingly different. But perhaps these contrasts mask what may be similar. Let us see.

In Spain, the councillors speak of personal scruples, when defending their various initiatives and occasional campaigns. These elected representatives attempt to justify their actions and aims in terms of what they might class as everyday ethics. They propound a morality whose appeal and persuasive power is based on an implicit claim: their ethics is so commonsensical, so universally acceptable that no further grounds of justification are necessary; hence their unquestioned concern to denounce corruption, nepotism, and other municipal abuse. They utilise an ‘unofficial’ ideology, one not subject to the same stringent criteria of internal coherence as the carefully thought-through social theory of professional party politicians. For councillors, unexamined notions of fairness and justice are good-enough yardsticks; popularly accepted modes of evaluating ideas and behaviours whose deployment should prove relatively uncontroversial. In effect, they argue what kind of municipal candidate could have any chance of electoral success if they dared to openly oppose the upholding of fairness and justice?

Their words have bite because, in their view, self-interest, factionalism, and political partisanship threatened to dominate town-hall business. Their counterparts in France told a very different story. Instead of heated debates about the award of municipal contracts, they talked of a cordial ambience where consensus was usually achieved without too much effort. For British councillors in France, their work in their council consisted mainly of serving and

managing the commune, for the sake of its general improvement. They did not suggest there was significant resistance to change, rather they spoke of working together relatively harmoniously to manage the daily functioning of the commune in an efficient, effective manner. The only fault-lines within their meetings appear to be ones internal to the commune, and not grounded on economics or avarice. When Fiona asked about the politics of the local council, one interviewee replied, 'Do you mean big 'P' politics or little 'p' politics? Because the only politics relates to historical local disputes between certain families'. Another revealed, 'It is not political, it is personalities really'.

At first glance, this Hispano-French difference appears to be one of municipal size. Jeremy's interviewees came mostly from municipalities several-thousands strong, with some having populations close to 20,000; most of Fiona's interlocutors lived in communes with less than 1,000 inhabitants. In fact, on further examination, this does not appear a relevant difference, as in Spain the town-councils of even very small municipalities, those with only a few hundred inhabitants, are usually divided down party lines. A key dimension here is thus one of political culture: in Spain, party affiliation is a crucial identifier of elected representatives even at the lowest levels of government; in France, party membership is of little significance in smaller communes where local matters take precedence.

British councillors in Spain and France also had somewhat different ultimate aims. Those in Spain wanted to bring about important change: to counter injustice and correct poor management. If they also wished to integrate more closely into local society, they did not openly refer to it as a personal priority. The social benefits of councillorship were only mentioned in some interviews, and were presented as a by-product of one's term of office, albeit a pleasurable one. Whether this was foreseen or intended was not stated. Fiona's work in France demonstrated almost the opposite. Britons there stood for election primarily for social reasons: to expand their acquaintance and get involved in local projects (Ferbrache and Yarwood 2015, Ferbrache 2019b). The social orientation of their municipal activity was also suggested by the political ignorance of some councillors. Fiona found evidence of a few who, initially, were 'not really clear on the process'; Drake and Collard (2008) found much the same in northern France.

In neither area did British councillors speak of their work in terms of citizenship, rights, their nation-state, or the EU. In fact, a few days after the referendum one woman discussing her role on the local council made it very clear that she had no idea it was contingent on her EU citizenship. Their focus, and their activity was bounded by the local; and their moralities, though universal in potential application, enmeshed with the local. The regional, the national, and the supranational were not mentioned in our interviews. In France, British councillors wished to enhance their social interactions and attachment to place. At the same time, they wanted 'to contribute', 'to give back': they recognised their role within a network of exchanges, and wished to develop that. Moreover, it was a way to perform their vision of, and

further participate in a just society. In Spain, their counterparts upheld similar ideals, but here some put up front the need to actively fight injustice. And to achieve that they intermeshed more strongly in local society. In other words, councillors in both areas upheld comparable dreams of how people should live in communities, with the key difference that those in France put sociability first with local participation as a means to that end, compared to some of those in Spain who gave priority to securing justice whilst acknowledging the concomitant benefits of sociability.

Whatever the specific priorities of either group, both examples highlight the local polity as a central site in which belonging can be negotiated and maybe deepened. In Staeheli's terms, these non-Spanish and non-French councillors manifest that though village life is to an important extent conditioned by higher levels of management, an engaged, active sense of local belonging 'is part of daily life, something we enact, even as it is part of a broader system by which order is maintained...an order that enables us to go about our lives' (Staeheli et al. 2012:631).

Practice theory and town-hall habitus

Bourdieu's approach, born out of his study of Kabyle rural society in 1950s Algeria (Bourdieu 1977), and modern versions of practice theory fit cases where change is gradual or modulated. They dovetail with an analysis of maintained, but developing municipal practice, where foreign residents exploit their social capital to win seats, and develop their cultural and local capital, e.g. by learning to understand Valencian, French, and local ways.

In Spanish town-halls, the routines are humdrum, though the practices may be lively. Councillors' habitus has long accommodated fiery debate, petty tyrants, secession, nepotism, clientelism, switching parties, and other forms of ill-regarded but much-pursued municipal behaviour.⁸ The election of British residents has not altered significantly this habitus; indeed some have been accused of corruption themselves. British councillors may propose and see implemented innovative initiatives, but this is a long-established part of municipal government. Native councillors may work to restrict their effectiveness, to limit their activities, and to fragment their power blocs but, again, this is in the nature of time-honoured interfactional competition: i.e., the elected foreigners have both learnt to adapt, and to adapt to, municipal ways. The habitus evolves; it is not questioned fundamentally. Similarly in France where routines and practices are banal, mundane, habitus evolves but slowly.

Janoschka, who fieldworked in Spain during the mid-2000s expropriation campaign, asked whether the 'temporarily radicalized habitus' would turn into a permanently reconstituted one (Janoschka 2011:229). None of the British Jeremy spent time with mentioned this campaign; when asked, most confessed ignorance or very mild, distanced knowledge of it. This suggests

foreign residents' sense of activist history is shallow: no incomer councillors have yet retained their posts for a third term, while many migrants return home on widowhood or impending infirmity. Jeremy's field data also suggest the mid-2000s radicalisation of habitus was indeed temporary; it did not extend beyond the successful achievement of the campaign's aims. The organisation formed by the protestors achieved its aims and ended. Its lessons have seemingly been forgotten.

Until EU laws were introduced into national legislation, it was commonly accepted non-national residents were not to criticise Spanish politics publicly. In France non-nationals had long been excluded from any level of franchise. But once the respective governments had accepted that non-national EU-member state residents could vote and stand in municipal elections, Britons and other migrants became able to exercise hitherto-unknown rights: to become political participants in a European country in which they had not been born or raised, but in which they resided. The bond between nationality and the ability to voice local political opinion had been broken.

In Spain, for the first time, non-native residents could stand on soap-boxes or rise in town-hall meetings, and publicly damn the conduct of local Spanish representatives without being accused of meddling in other people's business: from 1999, it was their business. In France, this change proved particularly controversial even at a level where participation was almost apolitical (Arrighi 2014). While France enacted a significant step by enfranchising EU-citizens, their involvement was at the same time curtailed by additional legislation. To prevent their influencing national sovereignty, they were prohibited from holding office as maire, or deputy maire, and from participating in any process connected with the election of senators (Ferbrache 2019b).

This enabling shift in the link between nationality and political participation is the key, perhaps revolutionary change here: in terms of practice theory, it was more a change of field than a radicalisation of habitus. In other words, the verbal strategy or disposition was not new. Habitus did not change. But those who could practise it had altered. The field had been expanded to include migrant residents. Legitimate political activity within an EU country was no longer dependent on the actor being a citizen of that country. Though confined to a municipal stage, migrants could now be political agents.

¹ The history of implementation in Spain is explained by Rodríguez (2013) and in France by Arrighi (2014).

² <https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/633516/numero-de-municipios-segun-numero-de-habitantes-espana/> (Accessed 19 May 2020).

³ <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/espana/organizacionestado/Paginas/index.aspx> (Accessed 19 May 2020).

⁴ This comment is based on Jeremy's observations of town-hall activity in Navarre, the Basque Country, and Alicante province, in periods between 1985 and 2020.

⁵ «Ley 7/1985, de 2 de abril, Reguladora de las Bases del Régimen Local. Título 2. Capítulo 3.» (Accessed 19 May 2020).

⁶ Quotes from PIPN Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PIPN-Partido-Independiente-Por-Las-Nacionalidades-189052697809847/> (accessed 30 May 17).

⁷ It is difficult to determine the precise number of communes as different sources provide varying figures.

⁸ Evidence for this statement comes from Jeremy's experience of rural fieldwork in Spain, which started in Navarre in 1984 and continued into the late 1990s; and from his discussions about this chapter with two Spanish anthropologists based in Alicante province.