



HAL
open science

The Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants : The Becoming of an Activist City Network

Anouk Flamant, Thomas Lacroix

► To cite this version:

Anouk Flamant, Thomas Lacroix. The Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants : The Becoming of an Activist City Network. 2025. <hal-04929066>

HAL Id: hal-04929066

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-04929066v1>

Preprint submitted on 4 Feb 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - No Derivative Works - International License

WORKING PAPERS

The Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants: The Becoming of an Activist City Network

Anouk Flamant & Thomas Lacroix

Working Paper No. 2025/01

January 2025



The *Working Papers* Series is produced jointly by the
Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS)
and the CERC in Migration and Integration

www.torontomu.ca/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement

www.torontomu.ca/cerc-migration

Toronto
Metropolitan
University

Canada Excellence
Research Chair in
Migration & Integration

Toronto Metropolitan
Centre for Immigration
and Settlement

Working Paper

No. 2025/01

The Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants: The Becoming of an Activist City Network

Anouk Flamant

*Institut National Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche pour L'éducation Inclusive
(INSEI), Institut Convergences Migrations*

Thomas Lacroix

*Sciences Po Paris, Centre de Recherches Internationales (CERI), Institut Convergences
Migrations*

Series Editors: Anna Triandafyllidou, Richa Shivakoti, and Zhixi Zhuang



Canada Excellence
Research Chair in
Migration & Integration

Toronto Metropolitan
Centre for Immigration
and Settlement

The *Working Papers* Series is produced jointly by the Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement (TMCIS) and the CERC in Migration and Integration at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Working Papers present scholarly research of all disciplines on issues related to immigration and settlement. The purpose is to stimulate discussion and collect feedback. The views expressed by the author(s) do not necessarily reflect those of the TMCIS or the CERC.

For further information, visit www.torontomu.ca/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement and www.torontomu.ca/cerc-migration.

ISSN: 1929-9915



Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5
Canada License

Abstract

This paper focuses on the Association Nationale des Villes et des Territoires Accueillants (ANVITA), a network of local authorities created in France to support local reception policies for asylum seekers. Drawing on qualitative research undertaken with members of the network and its secretariat, the study first explores the socio-historical conditions that facilitated the emergence of this network. Then, it highlights the processes of standardization and internationalization shaping local actions to facilitate the welcoming of newcomers. In the third part, this paper examines how the coexistence of large, medium, and small cities with very different objectives and capacities within the same network influence the agenda of the ANVITA. Finally, this paper contributes to understanding the real capacity of local authorities to play a role in migration governance and to challenge established norms of action and security-oriented logic produced by national and international authorities.

Table of Contents

Abstracti

Introduction 1

From Scattered Political Initiatives to the Structuring of a National Network of Welcoming Cities...2

 A Networking Dynamic to Face an Emergency Situation..... 2

 A Green and Socialist Exchange Space..... 3

Local Solutions for Building a Shared Welcome Policy 3

 Building the “Alliance Migrations” to Strengthen Advocacy Capabilities..... 4

 A Rationale for Standardizing Local Public Action 5

Trajectory of ANVITA Member Cities 6

 “Making the State face up to its responsibilities”: Advocacy as the Driving Force behind
 Membership..... 7

 Cities in Search of Shared Solutions 8

 Membership for Regional Development 9

Conclusion 10

References..... 11

Introduction

The proliferation of city networks focused on migration issues is a phenomenon that became more pronounced at the turn of the 2010s (Lacroix, 2021). In France, the creation of the *Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants* (ANVITA) in 2018 is central to the process of networking and collaboration between cities and subnational governments (*départements*, regions). The ANVITA was established following the mobilization of a few elected representatives who were confronted with the presence of immigrants settling in public spaces within their constituencies (e.g. public gardens, urban wastelands). City networks provide an opportunity to understand the dynamics of change in migration governance. While local authorities grapple with the challenges of welcoming and integrating migrants, the formation of such networks of local authorities on a national or even international scale demonstrates their desire to be players in migration governance alongside states and international institutions (Thouez, 2020). On the one hand, local authorities must respond to the needs of their affiliates. On the other hand, they must engage with broader stakeholders of migration governance. How do these different levels of engagement relate? This question becomes even more acute for activist networks such as ANVITA, which actively challenges existing governmental policies. Does the evolution of membership composition and expectations affect the political agenda of the organization? Conversely, how do members adjust and react to the network's positioning in the realm of migration governance?

This article examines the structuring of this network by co-analyzing the organization's claims and the evolution of its membership. Extant research has uncovered the variety of engagement within such networks, distinguishing between their symbolic, juris-generative, and practical activities (Oomen, 2020). Other studies focus on the motives of involvement at the international level (Caponio, 2017; Fourot et al., 2021). However, they tend to consider city networks as homogeneous entities. This paper seeks to open this black box and explore the co-evolution of involvement, activities, and membership. We will look at how the cities involved in the ANVITA networks have followed distinct trajectories, which can be explained by their financial and administrative capacities, geographical positioning, and migration histories.

We begin by analyzing the political and partisan context that led to the creation of ANVITA. Next, we examine the internationalization dynamics in which the network is involved, resulting in the development of standards for defining local hospitality policies. Finally, the analysis focuses on three distinct city trajectories: cities primarily aiming to produce advocacy; cities prioritizing the exchange of practices; and cities linking their involvement to a territorial development policy. These profiles are not mutually exclusive but reveal the differentiated objectives and capacities of local authorities in the field of migration.

This paper, written by four collaborators, is based on the pooling of intermittent field studies on ANVITA since 2018. This work draws on a diverse range of materials. Anouk Flamant conducted semi-structured interviews with ANVITA administrative staff (n=1) as part of her research on national and transnational city networks, as well as with elected representatives involved in the network from the outset (n=6). Thomas Lacroix has undertaken participant observation with ANVITA since 2019, investigating issues of reception and migration policies in all aspects including governance, control policies, and integration policies. In addition to these sources, the researchers have relied on and analyzed the written material produced by the ANVITA network since its inception including policy reports, training material, and press releases/newsletters. These exchanges provide us with a wealth of material that informs the analysis of cities' trajectories within this network, as well as the logic behind its internal structuring.

From Scattered Political Initiatives to the Structuring of a National Network of Welcoming Cities

In March 2018, the *Convention Nationale pour L'accueil et les Migrations*, a national convention for the reception of immigrants was organized under the aegis of the Grande-Synthes town hall and the *Etats Généraux des Migrations* (EGM). This can be seen as a key milestone in the formation of a national network of local authorities addressing migration issues. The first section describes the event and the profiles of the mayors who participated.

A Networking Dynamic to Face an Emergency Situation

In the brochure presented at the event, shared with both participants and journalists in attendance, the convention organizers refer to the recurrence of a theme in public speeches of elected representatives and civil society actors. The text denounces a “repressive approach endorsed by national and European migration policies” and identifies the need for a “convergence of struggles and practices.”¹ The event brought together civil society actors, local elected representatives, and researchers. Mayor Eric Piolle of Grenoble and Mayor Damien Carême of Grande-Synthes called for the coordination of these different stakeholders, and first and foremost, for the construction of a network of municipalities. This networking of local authorities committed to welcoming migrants is in fact part of a process that began several years earlier. For many cities, the migrant reception crisis intensified in 2015 with the proliferation of makeshift camps in their territories and the increased establishment of reception centres for asylum seekers following the evacuations of the “Jungle” in Calais and the camps in northern Paris. Faced with these dynamics, municipalities found themselves at a loss. They had to respond to citizens who were criticizing cities’ lack of response, actions, and protections, and also address the fears and anti-immigration rhetoric from other residents. In the absence of adequate support from the State, many cities sought a space where they could receive advice and guidance in response to the deteriorating living conditions migrants were facing. As early as 2012, a first “network of welcoming mayors” or *réseau des élus hospitaliers* was established in the Hauts-de-France region, centred around Mayor Carême and a few local elected representatives from small towns in the vicinity of Calais. These elected representatives sought to denounce the security-oriented strategy endorsed by the municipality of Calais and explore more humane alternatives. Within this framework, Mayor Carême decided to establish a camp following UNHCR standards with the support of the Red Cross in Grande-Synthes (Bouagga, 2021). In December 2017, an op-ed by mayors declaring themselves “up against the wall” was published in *Le Monde*, calling for resources for towns facing the urgent situation (Le Monde, 2017). The creation of ANVITA in September 2018 draws on the growing need for elected officials to express their concerns and establish a balance of power with the State to find solutions for accommodation and facilitate the reception of people in exile.

In addition, during the *Convention Nationale pour L'accueil et les Migrations*, the need for “talking differently about migration” was emphasized by all the associations and elected representatives present. It is worth noting that, at the time of this event, the government was developing a new law on asylum and immigration. The law's stated ambition was threefold: to promote the integration of migrants, combat illegal immigration, and shorten asylum procedures. In practice, the emphasis was primarily on mechanisms to promote the dispersal of migrants across national territory and on the expulsion of illegal immigrants. In opposition to governmental positioning, ANVITA emerged as a platform for member cities to advocate for an alternative agenda based on the principle of “unconditional reception.”² It brings to the fore a plurality of local

¹ *Convention Nationale pour L'accueil et les Migrations*. (March 1-2, 2018). Conference brochure.

² See the ANVITA Charter, available at: <https://www.anvita.fr/fr/qui-sommes-nous/notre-charte/>

solutions to facilitate this reception, including those financially supported by the State. The participants emphasized that immigrant reception is primarily a state responsibility. However, they criticized national authorities for failing to fulfil their duties, while simultaneously highlighting the efforts made at the municipal level to promote a proper welcome for migrants.

A Green and Socialist Exchange Space

Over the past decade, Mayor Damien Carême and Mayor Eric Piolle have established themselves as leading figures among mayors from the ranks of *Europe Ecologie Les Verts* (EELV). EELV's influence was evident at the founding of ANVITA in September 2018. At its inception, several cities joining the network came from the ranks of municipalities governed by the Socialist Party, such as Nantes and Strasbourg, as well as the Communist Party, such as Montreuil and Ivry-sur-Seine. However, the elected representatives from Nantes and Strasbourg who were directly involved in the project and represented their cities at the network's establishment in September 2018, were members of EELV. They maintained a partisan, if not friendly, relationship with Mayor Carême. Although the documents published by the network did not overtly assert a left-wing political alignment,³ their standpoint was reflected in the evolution of municipal membership between 2018 and 2022. In 2022, 25 member municipalities were led by mayors from the Socialist Party, often elected as a part of coalitions that combined the Socialist Party with EELV and civil society groups, as seen in Nantes. Thirteen municipalities had mayors from EELV, some of whom had been elected in the 2020 local elections, such as Lyon. Seven municipalities had a mayor elected under the banner of the Communist Party. Finally, only one municipality and one département in 2022 had chief executives affiliated with *Les Républicains*, but they had inherited their positions from previous members. The vast majority of ANVITA members are ideologically aligned with the left end of the political spectrum.

This partisan orientation helped to revitalize the network at the end of 2020, following a period of sharp slowdown amid campaigns for local elections and the crises emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the arrival of new municipal majorities in executive bodies, as seen in Lyon, Bordeaux, and Marseille, was conducive to growth in ANVITA's membership. What's more, from 2020 onwards, new local authorities (*départements* and *régions*) became members of ANVITA. These subnational governments have received considerable investment from the association's project managers. The goal was to reduce the dependency of ANVITA's activities on municipal electoral cycles by pursuing discussions with other local authorities, particularly départements, which are responsible for the reception of unaccompanied minors. Additionally, the aim was to expand membership to include entities representing several million inhabitants.

Parallel to these membership dynamics, we reveal below that ANVITA was structuring its partnerships with civil society actors to establish common guidelines for the reception of migrants.

Local Solutions for Building a Shared Welcome Policy

While the challenges of hospitality became paroxysmal for cities in the autumn of 2015, it was civil society that mobilized to make this hospitality possible. The concept of a collective structure in France arose from this profusion of initiatives, uniting national charitable associations, organizations defending migrants, local support associations, and residents' collectives. This associative dynamic was closely linked to the structuring of ANVITA. The creation of *Alliance Migrations*, bringing together ANVITA and civil society organizations (CSOs), was an attempt to

³ There is no mention of partisan labels on the forums or on the local authority presentation pages on the website.

build an alternative discourse in relation to national authorities and to disseminate relatively standardized guidelines for local public action in the field of migrant reception.

Building the “Alliance Migrations” to Strengthen Advocacy Capabilities

In June 2017, Alliance Migrations released its first inter-associative statement addressed to President Emmanuel Macron, in which 470 signatories challenged the orientations of the proposed immigration and asylum law and called for the organization of a national consultation with CSOs on this issue (EGM, 2017). In May 2018, local organizations gathered to establish the first iteration of the *Etats Généraux des Migrations* (EGM), aiming to present a collective voice to public authorities. They were structured around a common platform advocating for unconditional reception, respect for the right to asylum, equality between French citizens and foreigners, recognition of the work of activists and citizens in reception, reform in migration policy at the European level, and the actions of national ministries overseeing the issue (EGM, 2018).

EGM complemented the structuring of ANVITA and facilitated exchanges between civil society actors and local authorities. For example, at the Convention Nationale de L'accueil et les Migrations in March 2018, an EGM representative emphasized that establishing a balance of power depends on both the national structuring of the associative movement and the creation of connections with local elected officials.⁴ This work was all the more necessary considering that local authorities often partner with associations in their daily efforts to support migrants. Several elected representatives within ANVITA valued these exchanges with civil society representatives, particularly Mayor Carême, who emphasized that associations were the linchpin of the assistance provided at the municipal level, describing them as “ambassadors of a possible welcome in France” and “central to the day-to-day support of people” (Arab, 2021).

And yet, despite the relationships forged through EGM, cooperation between civil society organizations and local authorities was not without its challenges. Several EGM member associations were critical of the measures implemented by local authorities, specifically the lack of substantive action beyond speeches and symbolic gestures, and expressed concerns about being instrumentalized by local elected officials. As a result, cooperation between CSOs and ANVITA was initiated—not with the EGM, but rather with the Organization for Universal Citizenship (OCU).⁵ This partnership was formalized with the creation of the Alliance Migrations in October 2019. The Alliance Migrations founding text outlines the three main orientations of the players involved in organization. First, the local level is highlighted as the most appropriate for adopting an alternative discourse to security-based migration policies. Second, this collaborative effort underscores existing local partnerships aimed at fostering a genuine welcoming environment for migrants. Third, the Alliance seeks to propose an alternative discourse in favour of reception that would be integrated into the development of a framework of global migration governance that began to take shape following the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in December 2018.

Such an alliance with civil society aims to strengthen ANVITA's advocacy capabilities, and to amplify the voice of local authorities at both national and international levels. This is reflected in an international joint declaration issued in August 2021, signed by mayors from all over the world and promoted by the Mayor Migration Council in New York, advocating for the welcoming of Afghans following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul (ANVITA, 2021a). As examined below, this

⁴ Remarks by a member of the Etats Généraux de la Migration. (2018, March 2). *Welcoming migrants and refugees in France* [Roundtable]. Convention Nationale de L'accueil et les Migrations, Grande Synthes.

⁵ Driven by international French solidarity organizations like Emmaüs International and the Utopia Movement, the OCU follows discussions at the Social Forum on Migration held in Sao Paulo in 2016. Although the OCU is keen to internationalize its thinking, its primary activities remain focused in France.

international lobbying activity occurred alongside the gradual establishment of shared principles and standards of action to be implemented at the local level.

A Rationale for Standardizing Local Public Action

The Alliance Migrations is critical of both the French government and European migration policies, which it describes as “unwelcoming.” The Alliance proposed the creation of a common platform, bringing together a coalition of actors and territories committed to welcoming immigrants based on a survey of innovative initiatives in eight European cities: Barcelona, Grenoble, Lisbon, Palermo, Montreuil, Le Vigan, Liège, and Berlin. The platform is built on three pillars: “the guarantee of a local citizenship that enables every inhabitant to participate in the political life of his or her city, the promotion of interculturality as a vector for inclusion and social cohesion, and the guarantee of unconditional access to rights” (Alliance Migrations, 2022). An analysis of the preparatory documents for this initiative reveals three key dynamics. First, while the report about local initiatives focuses on a European scale, the online meetings convened in 2021 between representatives of CSOs and municipal authorities included participants from more than thirty different countries. Expanding the scope of this coalition is part of an effort to engage with broader debates on the global governance of migration. In contrast to the discussions fostered by the EGM, the Alliance does not issue explicit demands of the French government. For instance, there is no emphasis on the need for interministerial dialogue with local actors. Second, the associative network is highlighted as one of the fundamental conditions for welcoming and supporting migrants. Third, this initiative reinforces the importance of local hospitality and highlights its political significance. It serves as a reminder that reception is only possible when towns and their inhabitants demonstrate a “strong and assertive” political commitment. This raises the question of whether such a commitment can be effectively maintained and whether a cohesive local migration policy can be developed. The multifaceted nature of such a policy keeps migrants in a state of ongoing vulnerability, as their lives remain in a liminal state, and they rely on national and local infrastructures for their reception.

Further, the collective platform is indicative of the emerging logic of action standardization. The use of eight city initiatives to inform the platform of action is reminiscent of benchmarking approaches central to the work of European city networks. By presenting panoramas of different European cities, the platform aims to highlight “best practices” while also underlining the challenges faced by municipal authorities and civil society in welcoming and integrating migrants.

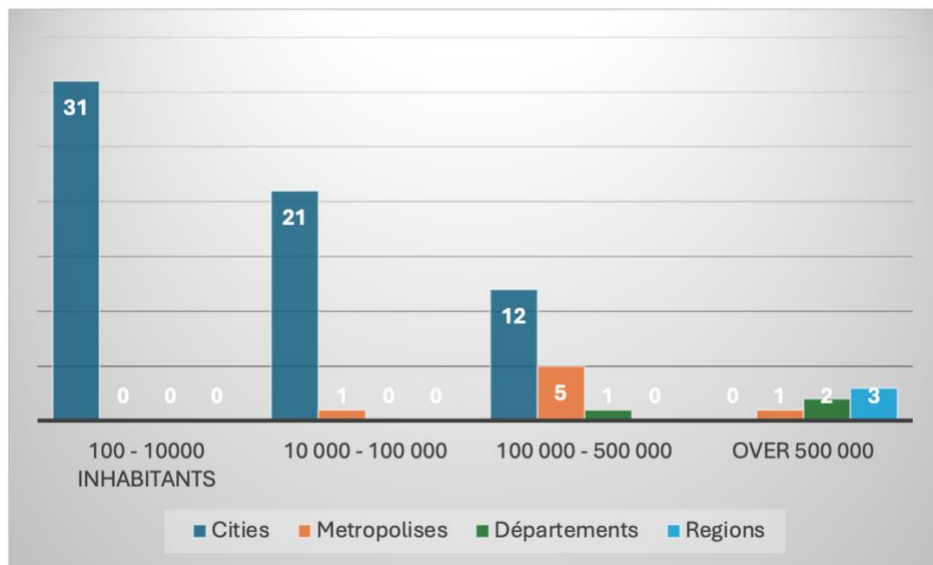
Admittedly, the various members of Alliance Migrations and ANVITA in particular, insist on the existence of distinct, plural solutions tailored to the realities of each territory. However, a closer examination of the platform’s recommendations reveals how local public action is gradually being structured around action standards compiled into a single toolbox. Thus, as stated in the document, the political participation of migrants is identified as the “sine qua non” condition for the development of an effective welcoming policy. Among the five recommendations presented, we find a long-standing demand for foreign nationals’ right to vote and run for office in local elections, as well as more general guidelines for establishing a dialogue between associations and public authorities. Above all, the residency citizenship card is promoted as a symbolic and political tool for overcoming the challenges of regularization. The goal of Alliance Migrations is therefore to promote specific public action mechanisms, building on the work produced by OCU and ANVITA within their respective organizations. Second, the recommendations focus on the promotion of cultural and political efforts to recognize the history of migration in local areas. By concentrating on local cultural institutions (e.g., libraries, museums), the Alliance Migrations addresses issues beyond reception, emphasizing instead the recognition and integration within the broader discourse on migration. The final set of recommendations emphasize access to rights for all exiles and challenges categorization logics produced by national authorities.

Finally, the desire to build this common platform reflects the Alliance Migrations’ ambition, and ultimately that of ANVITA and OCU, to be actors in promoting a specific local policy towards migrants, whether they are in transit or permanently settling on the territory. A form of standardization is emerging in the methods and principles of local action, featuring a mix of highly valued tools—such as the residence citizenship card—and broader, and in some ways more idealistic, objectives, like replacing security-oriented state narratives and practices with an alternative migration policy. This raises the question of whether the Alliance Migrations is capable of generating concrete joint work between civil society and municipal actors. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that conflicts between resident collectives, associations, and local authorities are part and parcel of everyday relations. For activists, these collaborative initiatives can sometimes appear symbolic in comparison with the day-to-day realities of reception. Moreover, this involvement at international level is relatively distant from the daily concerns of cities and, more broadly, the reasons why local authorities choose to join ANVITA.

Trajectory of ANVITA Member Cities

Investigating an expanding network of cities necessarily raises questions about the profile of members who join and the trajectories of the cities in order to delineate sub-groups within it. Between 2018 and 2022, ANVITA experienced a significant increase in its membership from eight founding cities to 69 members in September 2022. This network growth has led to a diversification of its membership in terms of population size, migration history, financial capacity, and the presence or absence of reception centres for asylum seekers. It is on this diversity and the aim to capture a few key trajectories that this paper now focuses. We will seek to understand how the networks’ activities evolved in relation to the changing expectations of its members. In particular, this offers insight into the increasing importance of the exchange of practice and training for elected representatives. In fact, while the vast majority of participants share similar political preferences, they are primarily characterized by a high degree of diversity. This diversity is reflected both in their demographic composition, ranging from tiny villages to large metropolises, and in their legal status, encompassing cities, regions, metropolises and départements.

Figure 1: ANVITA Memberships in September 2023⁶



⁶ This figure is based on data available from anvita.fr

Four distinct groups of members emerged within ANVITA in September 2022: those with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (sometimes fewer than 100), those with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, those with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants (including four conurbations and one département), and those with more than 500,000 inhabitants (including, of course, the member regions). As a result, these municipalities' different forms of involvement tend to reflect this demographic breakdown, as well as distinct expectations within the network. By contrast, other distinctions between cities, such as the distinction between European capitals or border cities offered by the research team Babels (Agier & Le Courant, 2022), does not appear to be as relevant. It is true that ANVITA comprises a substantial number of towns and villages located in the Alps (twelve, including six in Savoie), close to the border and at the centre of Alpine migration pathways (Del Biaggio et al., 2020). However, other border towns, such as Bayonne and Ventimiglia, are not members, and Grande-Synthes and Briançon, which were active from 2018 to 2020, cancelled their membership following changes in municipal leadership in 2020.

On the other hand, demographic variations between member cities affect their political and administrative capacities. Small towns and villages have elected representatives who are often salaried or retired and lack administrative support. By contrast, large cities, metropolises, regions, or départements have at least mission managers, if not municipal teams, involved in shaping reception policies in their areas. As a result, the motivations for participation in ANVITA are distinct, not so much in nature as in the emphasis placed on certain activities, such as advocacy, exchange of practices, or support for territorial development. However, these different approaches frequently intermingle and evolve over time.

“Making the State face up to its responsibilities”⁷: Advocacy as the Driving Force behind Membership

For some ANVITA members, the main purpose of their membership is advocacy. This advocacy is largely directed at national authorities, in the same way as European city networks strive to reach European institutions (Caponio, 2017). From the early days of the association's development, elected representatives, primarily from the network's largest cities, insisted on this form of engagement. In interviews, elected representatives from Lyon, Nantes, and Strasbourg expressed their desire to be “heard,” to “make the State face up to its responsibilities,” and to “remind the State that these are its responsibilities”. This objective is also reflected in city council deliberations, with the city of Bordeaux affirming its desire, through its membership, to “challenge the State on its missions of reception, accommodation, and support through ongoing dialogue with the prefecture and inclusion in national and European dynamics.”⁸ This plea marks a commitment against the national orientations of migration policies. Between the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, major cities governed by EELV or by coalitions in which EELV played a significant role (Lyon, Bordeaux, Tours, and Marseille) joined ANVITA. The expression of their concerns is at the centre of recurring tensions with the State, dating back at least to 2015, over accommodation issues and the proliferation of informal dwellings (squats) caused by structural shortages in the state's accommodation system. These advocacy efforts are communicated through regular press releases, particularly during international events such as the Taliban's return to Afghanistan in August 2021 and the war in Ukraine (ANVITA, 2021b; 2022).

For such large cities, the ability to collectively voice their concerns is the main driving force behind their membership in ANVITA, with the exchange of experiences and practices coming second. While modest-sized members, such as Bègles, which joined in 2018, support this political discourse, it is large towns that best exemplify this style of action. This is first and foremost

⁷ Bouagga, Y. (2020, December 17). Mayor of Lyon's 1st arrondissement, Lyon City Council.

⁸ Membership of the City of Bordeaux to ANVITA. (May 4, 2021). Bordeaux City Council.

because these councillors have internal resources that differ from those of smaller municipalities. Indeed, they can mobilize administrative staff to monitor advocacy operations, and their elected representatives are also part of the competitive political field at the national level. Second, for several municipalities, ANVITA provides a space in which they can engage in dialogue with civil society organizations. These are cities with a strong local network of associations. They rely heavily, and often institutionally, on these associations and local collectives to support newcomers. Furthermore, several municipalities had already launched their own initiatives in favour of migrants, gaining expertise in the process. For these municipal teams, investing in ANVITA served a dual purpose: to remind the State of its responsibilities and to gain a foothold in migration governance by leveraging local experience.

Cities in Search of Shared Solutions

Advocacy actions are of lesser importance for other elected representatives—predominantly those from medium-sized towns (those with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants). Some migration issues have emerged in these municipalities due to the asylum seeker dispersal policy enacted by the 2018 France Asylum and Immigration Act. From then on, local resident collectives in these areas often supported the arrival of newcomers in liaison with municipal teams. After a few years of localized adjustments to address the challenges posed by the presence of asylum seekers (accommodation, loss of residence permit, etc.), these municipalities identify ANVITA as a resourceful space to improve their strategy. The structure of the association's working groups and the publications posted on its website reveal the significance of such exchanges within the association and their relevance for member cities. For example, the city of Chambéry identified its desire “to strengthen existing local policies alongside the State, the main competent authority in this field, and the local associative fabric” (Ville de Chambéry, 2021).⁹ Ultimately, this was about facilitating access to a space in which members can exchange practices to imagine local level reception prior to engaging in dialogue with the State. For instance, when Grandville joined ANVITA, the elected representative sitting on the town council insisted that this membership would also provide a support framework for locally committed associations by offering them new tools for action.¹⁰ For example, the town of Melle (Deux-Sèvres) is eager to continue its activities in support of migrants, following the work they initiated after the establishment in 2016 of a *Centre d'Accueil et d'Orientation* (Reception and Orientation Centre). In particular, they intend to enhance partnerships with committed inhabitants to support their efforts.¹¹ Given their limited administrative capacities, exchanges of practice are crucial for smaller towns. Further, new councillors of large municipalities that have poorly structured local policies recognize the importance of benefiting from the experience of other local authorities. For example, the elected representative of the city of Lyon in particular insists that this membership is “helpful for a team just starting out, to exchange with other teams who have already tried things that may or may not have worked.”¹²

It is clear that some local authorities, particularly smaller ones, see ANVITA as a place to learn about migration issues. In these areas, groups of residents have organized themselves to help people in exile (e.g., by offering places to rest), sometimes to people without residence permits, and in collaboration with municipal teams that make vacant apartments or buildings available that are outside state accommodation structures. These dynamics are particularly

⁹ See the presentation of Chambéry's membership on the municipal website: <https://www.chambery.fr/actualite/4071/140-la-ville-de-chambery-signe-la-charte-anvita-l-association-nationale-des-villes-et-territoires-accueillants.htm>

¹⁰ Grandville Town Council minutes. (2021, September 24).

¹¹ Melle Town Council minutes. (2020, October 21).

¹² Interview with assistant in charge of hospitality. (2020, October).

common in small towns and villages in the Alps or in the Basque Country. They allow these municipalities to reiterate not only their local commitments, but also their attachment to the values of hospitality that are presented as traditions. These small municipalities were not among the founding members of the networks but, as of 2021, they account for a quarter of ANVITA's membership. Their growing presence directly supports the claim that welcoming migrants is not solely the concern of France's large cities.

For these municipal teams, who are supported by a very small municipal staff, membership in ANVITA provides access to valuable documentary and networking resources (e.g. practical guides, social capital) as well as training opportunities. The training courses offered by ANVITA focus on the legal framework for local action, the types of populations that can be accommodated, and the competencies held by local authorities in the field of hospitality. The aim of these courses is to enhance the theoretical and practical skills of elected representatives, who are often faced with numerous challenges and opposition to the reception arrangements they have implemented or are considering. Further, these training sessions offer an opportunity for representatives to take a step back from daily emergencies and reflect on how migrants have transformed their town.

Membership for Regional Development

For ANVITA's member cities, membership serves as a means to promote territorial discourse about the tradition of welcoming immigrants in the region. Many of these cities connect their involvement to a history of sheltering and hiding Jews during the Second World War. While this argument is shared by the majority of ANVITA members, it is sometimes put forward by smaller towns or those with few migrants in their territory to justify membership. ANVITA's values, presented in turn as "hospitality," the implementation of a "fair" reception policy and the fight against the infringement of fundamental rights, are thus presented by the town of Vizille as shared principles justifying their membership.¹³ The promotion of the territorial tradition of hospitality, supported by associations, civil society, and elected representatives, justifies their political commitment.

In addition to enhancing regional image, membership of ANVITA serves as a tool for regional revitalization policies. For some local actors, the establishment of a state reception centre was welcomed with optimism: the incoming population of immigrants was seen as a means to maintain public services (school, post office, etc.) that might otherwise close due to depopulation. Joining ANVITA reflects a desire to offer deprived areas the chance to avoid being subjected to the opening of accommodation centres by the State as part of a policy of territorial dispersal and rather position themselves proactively to negotiate the terms of this reception. Joining ANVITA therefore serves a dual objective: promoting a positive image of the area and supporting a development policy that identifies the arrival of new people as a resource. In the negotiations often held between national and local authorities regarding the establishment of reception centres, being a member of ANVITA can serve as an asset for accessing peer practices and for identifying the profile of the people they wish to welcome.

Finally, this analysis of the trajectories of ANVITA's member cities reveals how different logics are intertwined both at the time of commitment and in the pursuit of activities. Undoubtedly, the growth of the ANVITA network has led to a diversification of expectations and objectives among elected representatives. That being said, ANVITA membership does not mean that the municipal majority agrees that certain policies be pursued locally. For example, some elected representatives argue that ANVITA membership is the lowest common denominator among members of the municipal majority. There has been no debate with regard to the content of the

¹³ Vizille Town Council Minutes, ANVITA membership. (2021, November 8).

ANVITA charter, particularly Article 2, which stipulates that territories are committed to “unconditional access to accommodation, food, hygiene, health, education, and culture to meet vital needs.” This issue of “unconditional reception” frequently arises in debates with civil society actors. It is also reflected in ANVITA’s efforts to build a partnership within *Alliance Migrations* in order to establish itself as a key player in migration governance and, ultimately, to promote new standardized practices.

Conclusion

Local hospitality practices have fed into the networking activities that have been undertaken within ANVITA since the mid-2010s. This networking, which operated in opposition to national authorities, has involved an increasing number of local authorities, including towns of various sizes and significance across the country. These towns joined ANVITA for different reasons such as being attracted by political advocacy, the exchange of practices, or the desire to enhance territorial development. These motivations are not mutually exclusive; in fact, some cities gradually become involved in exchanging practices after initially supporting advocacy activities, while the importance of advocacy decreases in favour of the work undertaken in the working groups. Thus, ANVITA, echoes the practices developed in other networks such as Welcoming America (Rodriguez et al., 2018), in an attempt to foster exchanges with civil society, and is committed to promoting a model of local public action in favour of migrants through the Alliance Migrations. Nevertheless, this emphasis on local action raises questions about the real capacity of local authorities to play a role in migration governance at a time when challenging established norms of action and security-oriented logics is still far from reaching consensus among local authorities and has yet to emerge as part of a common discourse.

References

- Agier, M., & Le Courant, S. (Eds.). (2022). *Babels: Enquêtes sur la condition migrante* [Surveys on the migrant condition]. Seuil.
- Alliance Migrations. (2022). *Vers un socle commun des territoires* [For an unconditional welcome and universal citizenship]. <https://alliance-migrations.fr/fr/vers-un-socle-commun-des-territoires/>
- Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants (ANVITA). (2021a, August 28). *Déclaration Commune Internationale des Maires - Accueillir les réfugié-es afghan-es dès maintenant!* [International Joint Declaration of Mayors - Welcome Afghan refugees now!]. <https://www.anvita.fr/fr/actualites/notre-plaidoyer/view/declaration-commune-internationale-des-maires-accueillir-les-refugiees-afghanes-des-maintenant>
- Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants (ANVITA). (2021b, August 19). *L'accueil des Afghan.es fuyant leur pays est possible* [Welcoming Afghans fleeing their country is possible] [Press release]. <https://www.anvita.fr/fr/actualites/notre-plaidoyer/view/communique-de-presse-laccueil-des-afghan-es-fuyant-leur-pays-est-possible> ;
- Association Nationale des Villes et Territoires Accueillants (ANVITA). (2022, February 25). *Solidarité avec l'Ukraine* [Solidarity with Ukraine] [Press release]. <https://www.anvita.fr/fr/actualites/notre-plaidoyer/view/communique-de-presse-solidarite-avec-lukraine>
- Arab, C. (2021). From Grande-Synthe to Europe. How to welcome migrants. Interview with Damien Carême. *Migrations Société*, 185(3), 99-110. <https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.185.0099> .
- Bouagga, Y. (2020). Politiques de l'urgence et bricolages humanitaires. Genèse des “centres d'accueil et d'orientation” dans la crise Calaisienne [Emergency policies and humanitarian tinkering. Genesis of “reception and orientation centres” in the Calais crisis]. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 36(2-3), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.15710>
- Caponio, T. (2017). Immigrant integration beyond national policies? Italian cities' participation in European city networks. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(12), 2053–2069. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341711>
- Del Biaggio, C., Giannetto, L., & Noûs, C. (2020). Réfugié.es et montagne [Refugees and mountains]. *Journal of Alpine Research*, 108(2). <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.6886>
- Etats Généraux des Migrations (EGM). (2017, June 20). *Appel à un changement radical de politique migratoire en France* [Call for a radical change in migration policy in France]. <https://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article5703>
- Etats Généraux des Migrations (EGM). (2018, May 27). *Manifeste des Assemblées Locales Réunies pour la 1^{ère} session plénière des États Généraux des Migrations: Socle commun pour une politique migratoire respectueuse des droits fondamentaux et de la dignité des personnes* [Manifesto of the Local Assemblies Meeting for the 1st plenary session of the the États Généraux des Migrations: Common base for a migration policy respectful of fundamental rights and the dignity of people]. https://web.archive.org/web/20190509055705/https://eg-migrations.org/IMG/pdf/egmigrations_socle-commun_27mai2018.pdf
- Fourot, A. C., Healy, A., & Flamant, A. (2021). French participation in transnational migration networks: Understanding city (dis)involvement and “passivism”. *Local Government Studies*, 48(6), 1152–1174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2020.1857246>
- Lacroix, T. (2021). Migration-related city networks: A global overview. *Local Government Studies*, 48(6), 1027–1047. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2021.1938553>

- Le Monde. (2017, December 16). *Face aux flux migratoires, nous, les maires, sommes au pied du mur* [Faced with migratory flows, we, the mayors, are up against the wall]. https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/12/16/face-aux-flux-migratoires-nous-les-maires-sommes-au-pied-du-mur_5230673_3232.html
- Oomen, B. (2020). Decoupling and teaming up: The rise and proliferation of transnational municipal networks in the field of migration. *International Migration Review*, 54(3), 913–939. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918319881118>
- Rodriguez, D. X., McDaniel, P. N., & Ahebee, M. D. (2018). Welcoming America: A case study of municipal immigrant integration, receptivity, and community practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 26(3), 348–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2018.1477081>
- Thouez, C. (2020). Cities as emergent international actors in the field of migration: Evidence from the lead-up and adoption of the UN Global Compacts on migration and refugees. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 26(4), 650–672. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02604007>