Local electoral rights for non-French residents? A case-study analysis of British candidates and councillors in French municipal elections

Abstract

The French Constitution restricts local electoral rights to French nationals and EU citizens. Third country nationals have long been excluded from suffrage as France has maintained a stronghold on nationality and republican values. Academics have called for expansive and liberal citizenships that would allocate political rights to all non-citizen residents, independent of nationality. This paper argues that Brexit and cessation of Britons' electoral rights presents a pivotal moment to discuss expansive citizenship and alien suffrage. Taking a bottom-up approach, the paper presents actual experiences of Britons as candidates and councillors in French municipalities. It demonstrates the importance of residency, representation, participation and inclusion, rather than nationality at local level to underpin claims for expanding electoral rights. These findings foreground an empirical case for further promotion of theoretical ideas that propose expansive citizenship based on effective residency rather than nationality. Consideration is also given to third country nationals.

1. Introduction

Until 1992, the French Constitution (Article 3, 1958) stipulated that only those with French nationality were eligible to vote and stand as candidates for election in France. Effectively, long-term residents lacking French nationality ('foreigners' in French law and discourse) were excluded from political participation. With the legalisation of European Union (EU) citizenship in 1992, the French government was obliged to adjust its constitution and expand electoral rights to enfranchise resident non-French EU citizens in local municipal elections[1] (Strudel 2002, 2003; Arrighi 2014, 2018). Granting alien suffrage, albeit on a partial basis at local rather than national level, and to a specific group of non-French residents, was deeply controversial for a state that privileges close links between nationality, citizenship and political rights, and considers the social diversity of resident foreigners a potential threat to republican values (Lefebvre 2003; Nicholls 2012). At the same time, this process enabled new opportunities for incorporation and political belonging for non-French EU citizens at the local level, while effectively reinforcing the exclusion of third country nationals (non-EU citizens) (Day and Shaw 2002; Preuss et al. 2003).

It is within such topics that this paper intervenes with an empirical study of local political participation among British migrants residing in France. Since 2001, Britons in France have been able to vote for and stand as representatives in municipal elections on account of their EU citizenship. These rights, however, are due to be revoked when the United Kingdom (UK)

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[1] DECISION 92-312 DC OF 2 SEPTEMBER 1992, available (in English) at https://www.conseilconstitutionnel.fr/sites/default/files/as/root/bank_mm/anglais/a92312dc.pdf (accessed 04 January 2019).

leaves the EU (popularly known as Brexit), on or before 31 October 2019[2]. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Europe, this places Britons in 'a strange no-man's-land between ministerial portfolios responsible for EU citizens and those responsible for third-country nationals.' (Benton et al. 2018, 6). The French Ministry of the Interior has confirmed that following the UK's departure, Britons residing in France will no longer be able to stand for, or participate in election of municipal representatives because they will no longer meet the nationality requirement (to be a national of a Member State of the EU) set out in French law (Article LO 227-1 and 228-1) (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2018b)[3] [4]. This means that in terms of voting and electoral rights, Britons in France will be subject to the same exclusions as third country nationals.

Considering the revocation of EU citizenship rights under Brexit, this is a pivotal moment when the terms upon which electoral rights are granted, and to whom, could be reopened for discussion. The aim of this paper is to stimulate such dialogue towards expanding citizenship while providing empirical insight from everyday accounts of local political participation in the formation of citizenship. It is guided by four research questions:

- i) who is included and excluded from participation in French municipal elections?
- ii) what theoretical ideas have been proposed to expand voting rights?
- iii) what principles might underpin claims for Britons to retain or reclaim their electoral rights? and
- iv) what implications does this have for third country nationals?

The paper's empirical focus is based on accounts of participation by 15 British citizens residing in France and who have stood as candidates and/or elected councillors in their municipalities. While the sample size potentially limits participant diversity and thus a wider range of findings, the strength of this empirical work is revealed in the everyday, even mundane, practices, experiences and meanings of local participation 'and, by extension, what this might mean for those excluded from such forms of citizenship.

The paper addresses the first research question with an initial discussion of the relationship between electoral rights, nationality and alien suffrage in France, before examining EU citizenship rights as expansive forms of local electoral participation. Following that, some

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[2] At the time of writing, mid-April 2019, the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement for leaving the EU has not been approved by UK Members of Parliament and the country's departure date has been extended twice, initially from 29 March 2019, and then from 12 April to 31 October 2019. The UK may leave sooner if a withdrawal agreement is ratified. It is also possible that the UK could leave the EU with no agreement. This would not alter the revocation of Britons' local electoral rights. Other outcomes for the UK remain possible.

[3] An English translation is available at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-france?utm_source=7b5cb718-865a-4d5e-a2c6-8e76e41da999&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=weekly#driving-licenses (accessed 04 January 2019)

[4] Britons who are local councillors at the time the UK leaves the EU will be able to remain in office to complete their term but will not be able to stand for election in the next round (in 2020).

theoretical ideas are identified that deemphasise nationality as the determining factor for granting citizenship and local electoral rights. To address the third and fourth questions, the paper then introduces the empirical research with accounts of participation from Britons standing as candidates and councillors in local French elections. The concluding section reflects on these findings and considers the possibilities and implications for expanding electoral rights for different groups in France.

2. National citizenship, foreigners and electoral rights

Traditionally, electoral participation (to vote and run as candidate for electoral office) has been regarded as a fundamental and exclusive right of democratic citizenship within a political community (Bauböck 2005, 2008; Jaffe 2015). While academics argue that we have seen a liberalisation of democracy over the last century (i.e. extension of electoral rights to groups of citizens previously denied access, such as women and some non-citizen residents) (Joppke 2008; Bauböck and Guiraudon 2009; Arrighi and Bauböck 2017), the continual exclusion of foreign residents from the polity in some countries remains a key limitation of contemporary democratic and citizenship regimes (Kostakopoulou 2008). With birth-right citizenship status defining access to political rights, and contemporary citizenship regimes so often defined by national belonging, electoral participation remains closely related to, if not largely dependent on, nationality (Brubaker 1992, Bauder 2014). This condition means that non-national residents (also referred to in different countries and literature as aliens, foreigners, immigrants, third country nationals and non-citizens) have been denied equal treatment and excluded from the political community which, according to Beckman (2006) applies to roughly 10 million long-term resident foreigners in Europe and twice as many in the United States (US) who may nevertheless be affected by democratic decisions in the countries where they reside.

Immigrant integration, alien suffrage and expansive citizenship rights have become deeply political issues for many western countries, including France (Nicholls 2012). Academics have responded with theoretical ideas through which citizenship and franchise could be granted to expand alien suffrage beyond nationality and/or citizenship criteria (Bauböck 2005, 2008; Kostakopoulou 2008; Bauder 2012, 2014). While some countries have granted electoral rights to non-citizen residents, Bauböck (2005) identifies this as an irregularity (in contrast with rights for non-resident citizens), and expansions have been applied almost exclusively at local, rather than national, levels. Such expansion of voting rights from the top down represents increasing liberalisation of citizenship regimes towards greater inclusivity where national and ethnic identities are set aside in favour of more universal principles (Beckman 2006; Joppke 2008; Song 2009).

Alongside these examples of citizenship rights granted from above, literature within Critical Citizenship Studies discusses ways in which rights are struggled for, claimed and re-taken from below through the activism of 'outsiders' or non-status immigrants (Ataç et al. 2016).

The political mobilisation of migrant activists is argued to recreate citizenship in ways that demand recognition and support both from the wider population and from governments, as in, for example, the case of Algerian non-status refugees in Montreal, Canada (Nyers 2003), and the *Sans-Papiers* in France (Balibar 2000; McNevin 2006). This latter group included asylum seekers and 'long-term working residents of France whose status has been made irregular as a result of legislative changes.' (McNevin 2006, 135). Through political activism, the *Sans-Papiers* contested their outsider status and made claims for the right to regular status and the right to remain in France.

The 'outsider' status of the *Sans-Papiers* and other irregular residents in France emerges in contrast with 'insider' status based on a normative connection between nationality, citizenship and political rights (Lefebvre 2003). Histories of French politics surrounding immigration and citizen rights demonstrate the national character of French citizenship that has persisted through dynamic citizenship regimes, which have been implemented by successive governments in the name of republican universalism and anti-particularism (Lefebvre 2003; Nicholls 2012). The 'national character' of French citizenship emphasises community coherence based on a common language, shared history and culture that underpins national norms and values that could be acquired through national institutions such as schools and the army (Brubaker 1992, Nicholls 2012). Those born on French soil (*jus soli*) participate through a privileged birth right while long-term resident foreigners wishing to gain franchise must naturalise.

Exclusion of foreigners from French citizenship can be traced back to the 1789 French Revolution and a fear that social diversity (i.e. immigrants' ethnic, cultural, religious and economic characteristics) potentially threatened the integrity of the political community. Immigrants' cultural and religious demands and their perceived influence on national society and other groups were managed, largely by prohibiting alien suffrage (Lefebvre 2003, 25; Nicholls 2012; Barras 2017).

However, the term 'foreigners' is problematic in this context as it veils diversity among non-national residents in terms of skin colour, ethnicity, nationality and religion. Concerns about, and restrictions for foreigners tend to be focused on North African (Nicholls 2012) or Muslim (Barras 2017) populations in France, rather than white, Christian western European residents, including Britons. Since the legalisation of EU citizenship, foreigners in France, as elsewhere in the EU, have been divided into two groups: 'EU citizens' and 'third country nationals'. Arrighi (2018, 14) helps to capture difference between these two groups:

> *Political parties in France have seldom paid attention to non-national EU citizens… . Instead, the dominant attitude has been that of a benign indifference to a population that is numerically small, does not have the right to vote in national elections, and tends to participate significantly less than French nationals do in municipal…elections.*

The perception that the government shows benign indifference to EU citizens serves to augment the contrasting attitude and concerns towards (certain) third country nationals. Yet this distinction still masks internal differences and the racialised experiences of, for example, people of colour within what it normatively assumed to be a white and Christian 'indigenous' European population (Goldberg 2006).

Despite Arrighi's claim that political parties seldom paid attention to non-national EU citizens, expansion of electoral rights in 1992 was highly controversial given that it was considered to challenge the centrality of French nationality at the heart of republican citizenship regimes (Lefebvre 2003).

3. Expanding citizenship to EU citizens at local level

The legal establishment of EU citizenship bestowed 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 European Union) (Preuss et al. 2003)[5]. Municipalities are typically 'self-governing insofar as they have democratic authorities elected by local citizens and legislative competencies in local matters.' (Arrighi and Bauböck 2017, 632). Bringing EU legislation into effect in France was controversial given that it meant specific franchise for non-national residents, a topic that had sparked political debate in the 1980s, under proposals from the Socialist party, to enfranchise foreigners (Arrighi 2014). While the EU ruling contradicted the Constitutional emphasis on nationality, there was also concern within government that non-nationals might influence national sovereignty given that certain council members are part of a formal body that elects the Senate (Collard 2010). Eventually, the Constitution was amended (Article 88.3) to deal with both issues:

> *Subject to reciprocity and in accordance with the terms of the Treaty on European Union signed on 7 February 1992, the right to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal elections shall be granted only to citizens of the Union residing in France. Such citizens shall neither hold office of Mayor or Deputy Mayor nor participate in the designation of Senate elections or in the election of Senators.*

Implementing EU legislation was a slow process in France, and it was not achieved in time for the 1995 municipal elections. EU citizens were able to participate only from 2001 and in subsequent rounds in 2008 and 2014. The next municipal elections are due to take place in 2020 though Britons will be unable to participate (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2018b).

EU citizenship provides an example of expansive citizenship offering specific franchise for non-national residents (Bauböck 2005, Day and Shaw 2002). While academics have

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[5] At the same time, EU citizens were granted the right to vote and stand for election to the European Parliament in their country of residence. However, there is a distinct absence of participatory entitlement granted by the EU to national elections and decisions relating to who can vote in national elections remains the political authority of member states.

highlighted that EU citizenship ultimately derives from holding nationality of a member state, it also offers provision for *de jure* rights at the local level which is defined by effective residence, also referred to as domicile (Day and Shaw 2002; Blank 2007). In the context of British (EU) citizens residing in France, an individual has the right to participate in the municipal elections of the commune in which they live. As Bauder (2014, 98) argues 'local residence effectively amounts to local citizenship because residents share citizenship rights, including the right to vote in local elections'. However, local citizenship remains exclusionary because third country nationals are not permitted to participate. Thus, EU citizenship offers a partial but valuable lens through which to examine everyday accounts of local political participation among non-French nationals. Such work contributes to a wider body of literature examining lived and local experiences of citizenship (Ferbrache and Yarwood 2015; Brändle 2018).

Practices of EU citizenship emerging at local level have been subject to enquiry by scholars of EU integration examining the building of a European demos, EU identity and deeper integration (Favell and Guiraudon 2011; Brändle 2018). Such enquiries have reflected little on the impact for member state democracies. Methodologically, these studies demonstrate consensus, challenges and contradictions between top-down policies and the actual lives that are lived or predicted for them, with practices potentially unmaking and remaking policies (Favell 2009). Reflecting on EU citizenship, Day and Shaw (2002, 185) define the political goal as 'development of principles of civic inclusion to foster sense of belonging…to the host Member State as a place of residence'. This is about EU citizenship facilitating how EU citizens might live and act in a place based on effective residence, rather than birth-privilege, ancestry or ethnicity. It draws attention to the potential of the local place of residence as a site of active participation and inclusivity for members of the European polity, yet it simultaneously excludes non-EU citizens as well as the 'racially non-European' who are not white or Christian (Goldberg 2006; Benson and Lewis 2019). Focusing on local elections (as a proponent of EU citizenship) this paper follows Jaffe (2015) in arguing that elections should be conceptualised as sites where citizenship can develop beyond the criteria of nationality because they are a form of civic inclusion with others in the place of residence that could potentially foster belonging. Before outlining the empirical study that examines actual experiences of electoral participation, the paper briefly identifies some alternative models that have been proposed to expand alien suffrage.

4. Residency, domicile and stakeholder citizenship

Scholars have proposed expansive citizenship around principles or models of, for example, domicile (Hammar 1990; Bauder 2012, 2014), territorial inclusion (Bauböck 2005), affected interests (Bauböck 2005), *jus nexi* (Shachar 2009, 2011), postnational citizenship (Soysal 1994) and stakeholder citizenship (Bauböck 2005, 2007, 2008). Such ideas tend to be grounded on effective residence within a territorially bounded community, which assign different criteria for the acquisition of formal citizenship. Domicile, for instance, refers to

formal membership based on effective residence, offering an a-national model of citizenship (Hammar 1990). Formal membership can be acquired through residency via different criteria such as formal presence (Bauder 2014), formal presence with an intent 'to reside in a country indefinitely' (Kostakopoulou 2008, 114), or through the 'connections and bonds of association that one establishes by living and participating in the life of the community' (Kostakopoulou 2008, 115). Similarly, Shacher's focus on *jus nexi* defines membership based on 'rootedness' or a 'grounded connection that stems from being a participant in the relevant bounded membership community' (Shachar 2009, 112) and an 'actual, real, everyday, and meaningful web of relations and human interaction' (Shachar 2009, 167).

Elsewhere, Bauböck (2005) suggests that expansive citizenship could be built on 'affected interests' where individuals have the right to participate when they are affected by decisions so that membership is based on a decision by decision basis, rather than person basis. Interest remains at the heart of Bauböck's (2007, 2008) model of stakeholder citizenship whereby

individuals whose circumstances of life link their future well-being to the flourishing of a particular policy should be recognized as stakeholders in that policy with a claim to participate in collective decision-making processes that shape the shared future of this political community (Bauböck, 2007, 84).

This brief consideration of some theoretical material concerning expansion of citizenship rights serves, in this paper, to draw attention to prevalent ideas such as residency and affected interests, as well as the wider theoretical context to which the paper's empirical findings relate. These potential ways in which participatory rights could be granted rely to a large extent on the active engagement of individuals. To help gain a sense of what active engagement means in practice, scholars also need to explore everyday experiences of participation and exclusion.

5. Methods: Britons as local councillors in France

Local politics in France operates through the administrative unit of the commune, of which there are more than 35,000. In total, roughly 500,000 councillors are elected every six years from the local resident population to fill the allocated number of municipal seats, which varies depending on the size of the commune (see Table 1). The high number of councils and seats offers significant opportunity to participate in France, compared with other countries (Collard 2010). The municipality holds administrative authority over its territorially bounded area which includes responsibilities such as local planning applications, taxation rates, utility provision and primary education. Strudel (2002, 2003), Collard (2010) and Arrighi (2018) provide further insight to the organisation and operation of local French elections and Collard provides some initial qualitative insight to British participation in voting and candidacy. The research in this paper complements existing literature with original in-depth accounts of Britons' meaningful experiences in municipal councils.

[Table 1 near here].

Data comprises 15 in-depth interviews with Britons involved in their local municipal councils through one or several of the 2001, 2008 and 2014 mandates. The participants consist of two Britons who were invited but declined to stand for election, one candidate who stood but was not elected, and 12 elected councillors. Interviews took place April to July 2016 with participants from 14 communes (ranging from 180 to 4,200 inhabitants) across ten departments (Ain, Aude, Calvados, Dordogne, Haute-Garonne, Gironde, Lot-et-Garonne, Yvelines, Tarn, and Tarn-et-Garonne). As demonstrated in Table 2, 446 Britons became councillors in 2008, and this number more than doubled in the 2014 elections with 896 elected from a total of 1,529 British candidates. Collard (2010) and Arrighi (2018) provide an indication of the relative contribution of Britons compared with other EU citizens, showing that Britons make up a significant proportion of contributors, particularly in smaller communes. However, to find research volunteers who had stood for election the net had to be cast widely and interviewees were recruited through a series of emails sent to established 'British' associations, societies and groups in France, as well as subsequent word of mouth contacts. While most interviews were carried out face to face, others were conducted by skype depending on participant location. All participants were given pseudonyms for anonymity.

[Table 2 near here]

The research formed part of a larger project examining practices of citizenship and impacts of Brexit among Britons in France (see Ferbrache 2019). The focus on local political participation sought to understand how Britons became involved as candidates and councillors, their responsibilities and experiences of the process, and what participation meant to them. When compared with the numbers of Britons taking part in elections, the sample of 15 is limited, particularly in terms of the diversity of participants. Although analytical saturation was reached after 15 interviews, with identification of common experiences and meanings[6], saturation was potentially facilitated by the respondents all being white British, middle class and above the age of 50[7] (see Table 3). In addition, there was a concentration of participants from communes of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, although this is consistent with Collard's (2010) findings that British councillors are more prominent in communes of less than 3,500 inhabitants. While there is no record of the socio-economic or socio-demographic particulars of British councillors, the lack of diversity among participants potentially masks more varied experiences. In the next section, interviewees' accounts of local political participation are considered.

[Table 3 near here].

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[6] This is not to negate the idiosyncratic experiences that emerged from participants' accounts within specific councils and among specific individuals.

[7] The age at interview indicates that no individuals were below the age of 40 when they became councillors.

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6. Findings

6.1 The political inclusion of Britons

'The *Maire* asked me to join his team' are Peter's words, and they demonstrate how all interviewees came to be actively involved in their municipal councils (corroborating Collard's (2010) findings). Direct recruitment was key and without which it is unlikely that these Britons would have realised their electoral rights. Diana, for example, expressed that she 'had no intention of standing at all, but it's the *Maire* who came to me and said they were looking for somebody', while Howard 'wasn't really clear on the process' before the *Maire* explained how things worked. May and Grace both declined invitations in 2008 but joined when asked again in 2014. These findings do not negate that other Britons have put themselves forward for local French elections, however, there appears to be passivity in taking up candidacy rights without first being prompted or invited to do so. Woods (1998) and Barron et al. (1991) found similar behaviour among Britons in local elections in the UK where their involvement 'notably…involves individuals being approached and asked to stand for election to a local council.' (Woods 1998, p.2114). In France, Collard (2010) and Arrighi (2018) suggest that a relatively small uptake of electoral rights by EU citizens, including Britons, needs to ~~take into account~~consider the cumbersome process of registration and lack of information provided by the government for communes and potential candidates[8]. Being invited to stand as a candidate was thus an important step in realising candidacy rights and it suggests the important role that the *Maire* can play to include residents. Taking this further, questions sought to understand why these Britons had been invited to participate.

Active recruitment can be partially understood in pragmatic terms. As Arrighi (2018) indicates, given the high number of communes in France, many experience a dearth of potential self-nominating candidates. This was something observed by some of the interviewees. Richard, for example, reflected how '[local] associations, [are] important but not many people are willing to get involved'. Guy, similarly: 'the number of people to choose from is a little restricted really, and the number of people who are willing to do it'. Thus, Britons help to widen the pool of potential candidates available through being resident in the territorially bounded community, effectively turning local residence into practices of local citizenship (Blank 2007). Yet, the inclusion of Britons was sometimes considered as part of a strategy by the *Maire* towards widening participation in a more representative way.

Maires seemed to have been forthcoming with candidates about their reasons for inviting them to stand (and there was no indication of hidden agendas). For example, Bridget's *Maire*

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[8] 5,965 non-French EU citizens standing in the 2014 municipal elections represented roughly 2% of total candidates (Arrighi 2018).

had quite a lot of foresight and there were more and more Brits coming to our particular commune and he thought, quite rightly, proportional representation and all that, that we ought to have a Brit. on the local council.

Bridget was invited to join the council at the first opportunity in 2001. Howard was also the first Briton invited in his commune in 2014. His *Maire*

Was looking for a team which represented gender balance, the right age balance, and to represent the changes that have occurred in the village for the last 10-15 years in terms of foreigners.

Similarly for Hayden in 2001:

Our Maire was quite keen that there was a representative from the English community because at that time we were about 15 per cent of the total population.

For Bridget 'proportional representation' may have been a driving factor behind her *Maire's* invitation though the other two participants suggest something closer to 'diversity in representation' where the candidacy or elected body aims to reflect gender, nationality, ethnicity and age, etcetera, of its resident population. When Diana was first invited to join the council, she was slightly sceptical and explains in a light-hearted way:

And there I was thinking the Maire was after the British votes [laughter] but I think there were only six families who were registered to vote.

In practice, the representation that interviewees spoke about falls short of full inclusiveness given the continued exclusion of third country national residents. Thus, the ideology of diversity in representation is limited by nationality requirements, but as it played out in the above examples, it offers a potential space and mechanism though which councils could become more committed to incorporating individuals at local level as active citizens. This was a deliberate strategy formerly used in several US states (until roughly 1920) to transform resident foreigners into 'good citizens (Coll 2011), and local participation has been used effectively by some authorities in Portugal to integrate immigrants (Fonseca et al. 2002). To achieve this, citizenship needs to be detached from nationality criteria at local level.

Exploring further, some interviewees were quite clear about what it was they were being invited to represent. There was some evidence that Britons were invited, as Howard explains, to: 'represent the interests of, and to communicate with the English speakers, of which there was an increasing number in the village'. For Ross too: '[the *Maire*] asked me quite directly if I would be interested because I could represent the interests of the English-speaking community, it was specifically for that'. These explanations define differences of nationality and language between residents though as Guy confirmed when interviewed, translating between French and English was a practical measure ensuring that the *Maire* had someone on the team who could communicate with English-speaking residents who spoke little or no French. It is unclear from this research whether non-English-speaking non-French residents were also provided for in a similar way. Despite these potential roles for Britons, only two interviewees claimed that they acted as representatives in the daily activities of the council

once they took up office and, in both cases, this was neither their sole nor their most important responsibility. Up to this point in analysis, nationality and associated language abilities appear to hold some influence in participants' accounts of how they came to be involved in local elections. However, the interviewees were all selected for candidacy from a wider pool of potential British or English-speaking candidates, so what further characteristics were important?

A more individualistic perspective emerged of the active and public persona which respondents displayed within the commune. If individuals were not already involved in local associations, they tended to be frequently active or visible in the commune in other ways. Table 3 includes local activities that individuals were involved with when invited to stand for election, and covers a spectrum relating to sports, hobbies, children and education, and membership of local associations such as the *comité des fêtes*[9]. Britons might have been members or presidents of these associations, and in Ross' case, the founder of two formal associations in the commune. Michael, for example, 'was fairly active as a volunteer in one of the local sports clubs', while Jayne and Diana were 'well-known', through the local schools as, respectively, President and member of the Parents-Pupils association. For other individuals, being seen to participate in local events or engage frequently with other inhabitants made them visible to the *Maire* and demonstrated an ability and willingness to communicate in French (the only language employed in council meetings). Pam, for example, revealed how she regularly walked her dog through the centre of the village, taking time to chat with the inhabitants. It was this way for all the participants, though some also held specific professional skills.

Guy was recruited to help with the commune's water management given his former professional experience in the UK. Michael and Peter both joined knowing that they would be employing their professional financial experience to manage their commune's finances. Similarly, Richard's professional work involved agriculture and tourism and he had already been active in local discussions to help promote the region via the local tourist board when the *Maire* 'thought I could help the council in those areas and sorts of things'. Trying to assess the relative weight of nationality and personal/ professional skills, I asked whether this was more important than his British nationality or native English tongue and both Richard and his wife replied:

> Hélène: *I think that Richard is not known as…well he is English, but I don't think they consider you as British all the time. As soon as the council meets, you are part of it, and you are considered as a Frenchman really.*

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[9] The fete committee is a commune-based association responsible for organising municipal social events such as picnics, musical events and car boot sales. The committee may be funded by the *Mairie* but is a separate organisation.

Richard: *I would hope that it's not just because I'm English that I'm on the council, it's through the other things, because I'm English it's an added bonus for them, but it's not the reason.*

Examining the actual experiences of how Britons come to stand for election at local level begins to suggest what is important to the *Maire,* who appears to act as a catalyst for Britons to turn *de jure* rights into *de facto* rights. Invitations to participate can be understood in terms of pragmatics such as a limited availability of willing and potential candidates, proficiency in French and English, or specific professional skills required to contribute to the daily management of the commune. They can also be understood as a strategy for increasing representation at commune level; and more individualised skills and attributes such as sociability, professional skills and experience.

Thus, there is some, though limited evidence that nationality plays an influential role at the local level (EU citizenship criteria aside), and little to suggest that recruitment of Britons is likely to be fundamentally different from recruitment of other EU citizens. In this way, the importance of nationality appears out of sync with actual experiences of recruitment and participation, and from this perspective the revocation of electoral rights may appear unjust.

To understand the post-Brexit electoral status of Britons in France, we need to acknowledge that Britons will move from the category of EU citizens to third country nationals, and that this group has long been excluded from participation. For the Britons in this research, their political participation has been meaningful and valued, mostly in positive ways. Their experiences thus demonstrate what will be lost, and what those who are excluded potentially miss out on. These Britons' experiences also begin to show what alternative values local citizenship could be constructed on. The next section provides further empirical insight to everyday meanings of participation.

6.2 Everyday Life at the Local Scale

Being a councillor meant active involvement with the habitual function and management of the commune and its inhabitants. For example, schooling, water, electricity, roads, transport connections, local planning applications, street lighting, local taxes, tourism, sport and recreation facilities were key issues discussed in council meetings and areas for which respondents took responsibility (see Table 3). Each councillor tended to be responsible for one or two issues and then contributed more generally to discussion around other matters of concern. In this way, they had a clear stake in the contemporary and potential future of the commune even if, as James expressed in a tone suggesting banality, council business 'really is the minutiae of daily life'.

Managing 'the minutiae' (as Hayden also claimed, though more enthusiastically) was mainly coordinated through regular council meetings, usually one evening meeting per month, bar

July and August, which sometimes turned into 'drinks and chatter afterwards so it was also a social catch up'. Beyond official meetings, the time that councillors spent on municipal business varied depending on their responsibilities and the individual council (some *Maires* were considered more active than others, while a commune engaged in a particular project might require additional meetings for a temporary period). Thus, organisation and function of the council provided opportunity to liaise with fellow residents in an official, and sometimes leisurely capacity, demonstrating an inclusivity based on active and shared participation in the domicile (Blank 2007).

More personally, respondents valued their involvement in the municipal council in three interrelated ways: i) taking an active role and contributing within their place of residence, ii) being a part of the local community, and iii) building and strengthening social relationships. Beginning with the importance of place, Michael's motivation for joining the council was 'to make a contribution to the financial management of our community'. Howard's aim was 'primarily about the ability to take part…in the village', while Grace stood for election to 'make a difference to some of the things in the village'. Peter's focus was longer term: to be involved in 'projects for the future'. Jayne summarised these values succinctly as she explained her own aspirations: 'I wanted to contribute to the life and development of the village in which I live'. These examples correspond closely with Shachar's (2009, 112) emphasis on grounded connections as a basis for rights 'that stems from being a participant in a relevant bounded membership community'. Participants demonstrate how living in a place provides an inherent connection that can be grounded further through active participation and contribution. As Sarah explained: 'If I live somewhere, I want to feel that I'm part of that structure, part of that place'. While some referred to place as 'village' (even if they lived in more isolated properties away from the central hub of inhabitants), the point of reference was clear in this context as the formally-recognised and bounded unit of the commune.

Other Britons focused more on human relationships that were facilitated by their council involvement: making contributions to the community of fellow inhabitants or developing and strengthening personal social relations. As Peter explained:

> *I've found that becoming an elected councillor quickly results in an increase in positive recognition within the community. It's a pleasant aspect of the function and makes it easy to discuss with members of our community who I had not met before.*

Pam expressed the same, revealing how being a councillor had improved her recognition in the village, even more than regularly walking her dog:

> *It was amusing because I was going by one lady's house, I walk every weekend around the village, and she said 'oh you're the one' and I said 'yes', so she wasn't quite sure who I was [before that].*

Michael too, 'just getting to know a pretty large proportion of the population' is what he values as a councillor. Occasionally, the relationships that emerged were not always positive as Grace experienced when she stood as part of a team in opposition to the existing Maire:

the Maire and his 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'.

In these examples, the formation and development of social relations demonstrate elections as forms of civic inclusion that foster a sense of belonging, as conceptualised by Jaffe (2015). Individuals believed that they had become (better) known, appreciated and respected by co-inhabitants as a result of participating in the formal life of the commune. These values challenge the relationship between nationality and political rights at grassroots level, and instead promote the importance of residency to foreground 'connections and bonds of association' (Kostakopoulou 2008, 115) around which an alternative model of citizenship might be built. This sense of community nurtured through political participation implies collective decision-making and shared futures. Yet, these insights rest on the experiences and perceptions of those interviewed and do not imply that other inhabitants would attach similar meanings or consider relations in the same way.

Nevertheless, these accounts of everyday participation from those who are due to lose their electoral rights, provide some indication of what will be lost and how these Britons feel about it. As Sarah reflected: 'Not being able to be on the council, it's like having a slap in the face. As an EU citizen, I can be on the council. As a non-EU citizen, probably not.' This is a reminder of the current institutional position on the centrality of nationality requirements to electoral rights. Yet, is it possible that local citizenship – as effective residency (Blank 2007) – will disappear just as suddenly as one's status to claim rights? 'No', Guy insisted as he shared a photograph of the (2014) elected council planting trees on their first day in office: one tree for each councillor as has been the commune's tradition for many years. Guy explained how the relationships he had built, and the contributions he had made would, like the trees, 'flourish' and provide 'a legacy for many years hence'.

7. Conclusions

This paper has examined everyday accounts of local political participation by British migrants in French municipal councils to stimulate discussion on alien suffrage for foreign residents excluded or soon to be excluded from electoral participation in France. Taking Brexit and the revocation of EU citizenship rights as a pivotal moment to stimulate such thoughts, this conclusion places the empirical findings in a wider context while addressing two questions: on what basis might an argument be made for continuation or reinstallation of electoral rights for British citizens post-Brexit? and, by extension, what implications does this have for expanding rights to third country nationals?

The everyday accounts from Britons demonstrate a variety of important principles that are common to discussions of democratic participation and expansive citizenship. First, the idea of representation emerged as Britons found themselves actively recruited by the *Maire* who played a key (in these examples, *the* key) role locally to realise inhabitants' formal inclusion. While a *Maire* may promote participation by aiming, for example, towards greater inclusion, representation or anti-discrimination in the local commune (and may also intentionally or unintentionally exclude), the *Maire* acts within the constitutional laws that govern participation. Therefore, while these accounts indicate some potential for greater inclusivity at local level, they are post-reform measures for they remain limited by current nationality criteria, serving as a reminder that existing institutional regulations act as barriers towards expansive citizenship in France.

Second, everyday experiences of British councillors and candidates demonstrate meaningful but complex interconnections between formal citizenship rights, and a personal sense of inclusivity and belonging, that are entangled by living and participating in the daily life of the commune. The language used by the participants evokes that which is employed in theoretical thinking on expansive citizenship - 'connections and bonds' (Kostakopoulou 2008, 115), territorially-based inclusion (Bauböck 2005), and grounded connections (Shachar 2009) – and the experiences resonate closely with Shachar's (2009, 167) vision of official membership based on an 'actual, real, everyday, and meaningful web of relations and human interactions'. The above accounts of local political participation thus provide empirical support for residency-based models of expansive citizenship and Britons, post-Brexit, could benefit from such future developments.

At this pivotal moment when Britons in France are anticipated to move from the category of EU citizens with local franchise, to third country nationals without, norms and assumptions associated with citizenship are thrown into question. Literature is emerging on the way that Brexit has triggered both a shift in British migrants' identities, sense of belonging and home (Higgins 2018; Benson and Lewis 2019; Miller 2019), and mobilisation for claims of justice and citizenship (Brändle et al. 2018; MacClancy 2018, 2019; Ferbrache 2019). Local electoral rights are part of the bundle of EU citizenship rights that Britons have been seeking to reclaim, though they have not featured as distinctly within such efforts as, for example, claims for free movement rights and cross-border health care. Furthermore, local political participation appears to hold less significance than national voting rights, as demonstrated in the relatively long-standing campaigns for non-resident British citizens seeking 'Votes for Life'[10]. The significance of local voting rights might be something that becomes valued through practice (otherwise we might anticipate more Britons seeking to become councillors of their own accord, rather than prompted through invitation). However, if calls for democratic

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[10] See https://www.britonsvotingabroad.co.uk/

participation were to be taken up by Britons, these actors might go beyond their own claims for reinstallation of rights for they hold potential to give voice to the wider group of disenfranchised foreigners in France, by framing themselves as third country nationals.

Britons' anticipated status as third country nationals is inevitably entwined with the wider group of foreign residents in France, and among whom Critical Citizenship scholars have examined political activism and claims for rights (McNevin 2006). Yet, caution is required in connecting these populations for while Britons will loose electoral rights through their shift in status, they are unlikely to be considered 'outsiders' in the same way as racialised 'others'. This serves as a reminder of the political views and institutional concerns on the potential threat from cultural difference, which acts as a barrier to political inclusion (Lefebvre 2003; Nicholls 2012). Moreover, in the context of local political participation, the relative number of foreigners to native residents can be accentuated (Arrighi and Bauböck 2017), reinforcing concerns of those who fear imposition of different cultural ideas as possible threat to republican values. However, it is misleading to assume that all Britons and all Europeans are the same, and a limitation of this empirical research is its lack of engagement with, for example, people of colour. Specific inclusion of such individuals would be a helpful insight to the experiences of participation or non-participation among those racialised in different ways who, it has been argued elsewhere, may never have felt part of the European polity (Benson and Lewis 2019).

Taking an optimistic stance, participation can evoke feelings of inclusion and belonging, and residency-based citizenship in practice may therefore help to enhance relations between otherwise different individuals at local level. Expanding local citizenship from above, and making claims for entitlement from below would reinvigorate democratic participation, bringing France in line with some other European countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium (Arrighi and Bauböck 2017). Although the current political climate does not appear to be open to reforms for more liberal citizenship, there has previously been institutional support to enfranchise third country nationals in France (Arrighi 2014, 2018). This is encouraging for the discussion of alien suffrage. Brexit, one might hope, could stimulate further dialogue.

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