Essay

System Intertwining and Immigration Action Plans: The Case of a Provincial Funding Program in Quebec (Canada)

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Abstract: The ability of political power to be deployed on several levels of governance is a key element of public administration, insofar as it enables the various needs of the population to be met. However, conflicts of competence, jurisdiction or vision can arise when it comes to articulating these different levels of management or intervention, particularly when policies with a broader scope are applied to local situations, thus proving ill suited to the realities experienced on the ground. This essay, with an example in the province of Quebec, illustrates how the provincial and municipal levels of governance—each with differing visions and objectives—are confronted with dilemmas respecting the constraints imposed by their levels of government. Through a systemic point of view, I show how intertwining systemic levels can produce conflicts since each has its own logic. This is explained with the example of a text-based mediated organization conducted by the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC). The essay also identifies some challenges faced by civil servants working at two different levels of government as well as the place of the idea of resilience, and proposes recommendations.

Keywords: action plan; administrative prescription; city; levels of governance; resilience; system

1. Introduction

The number of immigrants and migrants residing over the years in Canada has increased from 167,810 in 2009 to 193,100 in 2020 [1] and numbers continue increasing. The most recent figures indicate 430,635 new people in Canada as the "highest population growth rate in any quarter since the second quarter of 1957" [2]. International migration is the main source of this growth as it represents 96% of it. The number of temporary migrant workers is also increasing rapidly from 340,000 in 2017 to 470,000 in 2019 [3], and new figures indicate that in the third quarter of 2023, there were 312,758 in Canada [2]. Other than helping cope with the demographic decline in Canada, immigrants have contributed economically and socially. In a recent report, the Government of Canada explains that immigrants account for one third of all business owners, over one third of people working in science, technology and research, and one fourth in social care and service sectors [4]. From this, it can be deduced that the Government of Canada sees several advantages to immigration in certain sectors of its activity. At the same time, immigration is complex, and the lived experiences of immigrants are not always positive.

As the literature has shown, immigrants tend to settle in large metropolitan areas [5] contributing significantly to the country's urban socioeconomic and cultural fabric. For small and mid-sized cities, numbers are growing [4], helping address the risks of depopulation, socioeconomic decline and revitalizing those communities. However, to these ends, preparing the communities becomes a priority for different levels of governance in a context of increasing social diversification (among and within humans with their history, experiences, worldviews, etc.) that has been increasingly taken into account, at least in the literature [6,7]. To this end, programs are developed. However, conflicts are observed

between different levels of governance when working on the premises of programs developed at one institutional level and implemented at another institutional level. Confusions and conflicts that are sometimes difficult to understand emerge.

In this essay, I show how intertwining systemic levels (institutional, group and individual) can produce contradictions and conflicts since each has its own logic. This is explained with the example of a text-based mediated organization carried out by the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) (an administrative prescription) that has, like any national program, a broad scope and therefore is not well adapted to the realities experienced on the ground as I will demonstrate. The essay also identifies some challenges faced by civil servants working at two different levels of government and the place of the idea of resilience. After a brief literature review about the tensions produced by implementing policies in multilevel governance structures, I propose a theoretical analysis of how systemic levels can be seen to intertwine with each other and produce undesirable outcomes. The essay continues with a summary of the territorial and governmental organization; an example of the development and implementation of an action plan on immigration; the analysis of the program used to finance it; followed by a discussion and finally some recommendations.

2. Implementing Policies and Tensions in a Multilevel Governance Structure

The implementation of public policies in organizations and/or at different levels of governance is often fraught with tensions, which can significantly impact the success of a policy. These tensions can be seen at two different systemic levels: (a) within each organization or (b) between organizations. Within the organizations, the role of frontline supervisors is important to minimize disruptive tensions [8]. Handling the tensions can be performed by identifying strategies such as legitimating, interpreting and shielding [9]. Furthermore, it is recommended to develop organizational policy capacity among civil servants who should be supported by policy leadership (discretion and judgment) to manage tensions like administrative capacity and state capacity [10]. The studies underscore the complexity of policy implementation and the critical role of organizational actors in navigating and mitigating tensions within organizations.

Similar tensions and conflicts can be observed between levels of government [11,12]. Tensions can be exacerbated in a multilevel governance structure, such as the European Union, where power struggles between different actors can hinder policy delivery [13] and the multiple accountability to both member states and citizens [14]. Even within a single level of governance (a city), in a multilevel governance structure, tensions can arise because decentralization seems to generate centralized relationship [15].

Furthermore, in a multilevel governance structure, the role of municipalities in immigration and settlement policies can be limited to a consultative involvement by the federal or provincial levels or governance [16]. Despite this possible limitation, cities are crucial in the settlement and integration of immigrants, serving as policy innovators [17] and with an increasing international role (participating in networks and foreign policy) [18]. The literature supports the idea that cities can influence national policies, as seen in the case of refugee settlement policies in Denmark and Sweden [19]. However, tensions can arise between local and national governments, particularly in the provision of services to residents, for example, with irregular immigration status [20]. The tensions emerge in part because city civil servants are at the front line and can be influenced by the socioeconomic and individual consequences of exclusion they observe.

In a federal setting like Canada, a truly multilevel governance structure [21,22] in the realm of municipal policy action is almost nonexistent [23] in a format allowing policy development. Nevertheless, the different administrative levels (federal, provincial and municipal scales) maintain the channels of communication open. This is not to say their representatives speak continuously, but specific situations and continuous interactions can trigger collaboration. How does this collaboration evolve? How do the mandates, the missions and the administrative prescriptions of the respective organizations influence the

discussions or negotiations between civil servants on the front line? How do administrative prescriptions set the framework of interactions?

3. Intertwining Systemic levels: Resilience, Administrative Prescriptions and a Common Conception of the City

From a systemic point of view, it is important to differentiate between distinct levels of governance with their mandates and missions. This facilitates the understanding of civil servants as agents of the administration with constraints and leverages during the interactions.

Here, it is important to remember the centrality of "difference" and "interactions" in the influential work of Gregory Bateson. His ideas of interaction patterns (symmetrical and complementary), the creation of relationships during communicative exchanges and the importance of the accumulation of interactions for the differentiation of human behavioural norms (schismogenesis) [24] are important for the understanding of social organizations as based on relations of differences (interactions where differences are observed). The relational perspective on human communication of Bateson (individuals' behaviours arise from their interactions [25,26]) is here based on the idea that "a difference which makes a difference is an idea. It is a 'bit,' a unit of information" [25] (p. 199). If this is a highly abstract way of approaching the world, it is also one that is grounded on the idea of constant contact in the world where interactions are produced and where: "mutual influence generates effects [. . .] which in turn modify the initial situation" [27] (our translation).

In an asymmetrical interaction between, let us say for the sake of the argument, two different institutions where one (the city) has less financial capital than the other (the ministry), the idea of resilience comes to mind to explain how the city will cope with the situation. There is a vast literature about this concept first used at the individual level, and which has gradually been applied to the community and city levels [28,29] and even at the national level [30]. Today, the idea of social resilience [29] is used as a way to indicate the work that has to be carried out on both sides (the host society and the newcomer) to produce a welcoming environment. It also points to the importance of local institutions and local contexts in facilitating the resocialization of individuals and groups and their inclusion in the new environment. Resilience as a process and a reaction [31] entangles the main ideas of flexibility and resistance: a person or an institution needs to be flexible in order to resist and cope with a difficult situation. Even though these characteristics are present and active, resilience as a process and a reaction can be incorporated as a method of governmentality which helps keep power structure in place [32]. The idea of governmentality plays a great role here:

> Its understanding is inspired by the Foucauldian definition, understanding governmentality as a form of governance characterized as "conduct of conduct" (Foucault, 2000, p. 341). Closely related to the concept of bio-power, this type of governance "includes any program, discourse, or strategy that attempts to alter or shape the actions of others and oneself" (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 4). [. . .] The governmentality model gets rather dispersed, with different actors on different levels, which can be understood as nodes within a complex web. Given this structure, the knowledge and power flow in different directions—governance is deployed in a less structured and hierarchical manner. As noted by Chandler, the government no longer claims it governs—rather, it facilitates, enables, rules through life rather than over life, which turns everyday governance into a "management of contingency" (Chandler, 2014, p. 104) [32] (p. 9).

Knowledge plays an important role since: "Governance on the micro-level of sites and citizens is powered by 'knowledge that can be organized into governmental solutions' (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 40)" [32] (p. 23). Power is then exercised through individuals (or groups) with their consent and for themselves. This course of action performed willingly does not imply control over individuals but some influence exercised through different means. In this paper, the influence or form of power that is of interest is the one between

the ministry, the city and the civil servants at the city level. Working at the institutional organizational level (there are three main interrelated organizational levels: individual, group and institutional) of the city implies the knowledge of (if not learning) the rules and procedures, i.e., codes of conduct and the coordination of these codes for action [33]. These rules and procedures set the expected frameworks for action since there is an expectation of a particular outcome from the institution as a specialized organization which standardizes and generalizes its operations across different locations [33]. The organization of translocal relations, as institutional ethnography teaches us, is mediated by texts:

> What I call the ruling relations [...] come into view from a standpoint in the everyday world as a distinct organization of translocal relations that are based on or mediated by texts. The replicable text makes it possible for the same words and images to be present to people in different places and at different times and hence to introduce into people's doings the same organizing—though not determining—component [33] (pp. 205–206).

Here, I will propose to adopt the idea of administrative prescriptions (programs, policies, laws, documents, etc.) since it addresses two elements of the capacities institutions have: (1) to manage or take control/handle something (administer); and (2) the official requirement or recommendation of something (prescribe). Indeed, "the institutional level is the one that can impose on the population a systematic organization that reflects a desire for control and surveillance." [34] (our translation). The need for control and by extension surveillance is found in this tendency that I call management technologies. Starting with the idea that our productive way of being in the world guides us to conceive everything around us as a tool to be manipulated [35–37], our technological engagement is marked by a will to control that is not limited to things and can also be applied to our relationships with others [38,39]. Darin Barney has explained this in an elegant manner:

> Because technology combines *techne* and *logos*, its political impact is not confined to the material world, and to conceive of these consequences as if they were so limited is to ignore the fundamental ontological implications of technologies that weave a particular range of political possibilities into the essential fabric of our humanity. Marx, Heidegger, and Grant understood that technology uses us as we use technology; that technology is not just the motive force changing our external world, but also constitutes our inner world, our mode of thinking about, and caring for, things. Technology affects what we *are*, not just what we *do* [36] (p. 55).

Thus, taking into account the extension of our technological experiences in our lives and returning to the Greek root of *tekhnologia* as systematic treatment, it can be argued that administrative prescriptions constitute important means based on text for the systematic treatment of the population. They are a constitutive part of the tendency to control and surveil by different means (management technologies) present in our society. In this context, administrative prescriptions are a good starting point to explore the means of organizing work and social relations since they help the coordination of institutional processes.

Text-based mediated organization carried out by administrative prescriptions can acquire variations by the actions of civil servants and the influence of their situation-specific particularities within a particular setting. Administrative prescriptions are also culturally situated as will be evident in the following sections with the analysis proposed about the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) from the "*ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration*" (MIFI). Here, I want to highlight some factors that anchor the civil servant's professional posture and some factors that facilitate a common ground and eventually an opening for agreements on contentious points.

(a) Anchors to the profession

Every institution has a mission and they can suggest vision mandates or objectives which propose general orientations. They cannot be ignored for the understanding of its functioning since they permeate the whole organization and constitute a division of

labour. The example I explore in this essay illustrates the interaction between the city of Saguenay and the MIFI through the PAC. Given the space I have, I will limit the analysis to the mission of these institutions.

The MIFI describes its mission as follows: "The Ministry's mission is to select immigrants who meet Quebec's needs, and to promote their francization, integration and contribution to Quebec's prosperity."[40] (our translation). What stands out is the idea of selecting people that meet the needs of the province and contribute to its prosperity. Even if there is a will to help some people to learn French (francization) to include them in their new society (integration), they are subjected to the utilitarian imperative of meeting needs and contributing to prosperity. In the case of the city of Saguenay, here is the mission given by the "*ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation*" (MAMH): "Working alongside municipal authorities to plan and develop quality living environments in the interests of our citizens." [41] (our translation). Here, the main idea is the development of an environment where it is good to live.

The focus of these missions are completely different: the first one promotes the management of a population to achieve certain gains and the second one prioritizes the engineering of the environment for the good of citizens. Here, I would like to draw our attention to the interesting choice of the word "citizens" which can be conceived as having an inclusive or an exclusive connotation. Indeed, it can indicate that we talk about the whole population (inclusive), but it can also indicate a more restrictive use and only apply to people who are considered to belong (citizenship). Having raised this concern, I want to insist on the fact that these missions guide the work of civil servants. And, in the case of the city, another influence comes from the social development approach adopted by employees in the departments responsible for recreation and community development ("*loisirs et vie communautaire*"). They oversee municipal action on diversity and inclusion in Quebec municipalities.

These influences coming from institutional preferences are at work during the interactions between civil servants from these two different institutions and found them in the institutional vision they are part of or the limits imposed by other organizations like the Treasury Ministry, which sets the amounts and the norms to allocate funds.

(b) Facilitating a common ground

The interactions between two different civil servants, each representing two different levels of governance and therefore different divisions of labour and missions, can at a certain point join in a common conception of the city where two ideas converge: *la ville et la cité*. In an urban setting, the ideas of *ville* and *cité* as Holden [42] explains, following the conception of Sennett [43], is one where the *ville* is seen as the spaces and the structures, while the *cité* is the way of living and conceiving our interactions with the others that live in the same city:

> In French, the distinction between the city of building and the city of dwelling is the distinction between the ville and the cité. The ville is a physical place, set of structures, functional flows; the cité is the anthropology, the consciousness, the political economy and the citizenship of the city [42] (p. 238).

The conjunction of these ideas (ville and cité) and the possibility that it could be shared among civil servants in opposite camps, can produce an opening towards negotiable outcomes. In other words, this is what happens when civil servants negotiate to improve the life of the population in the city as the objective.

Another factor that can play a part is the feeling of belonging to a shared community. We know the feeling of belonging, and sharing this feeling helps to maintain positive interactions with its emotional dimension and degree of participation [44,45] and therefore can also facilitate the development of a common ground between civil servants. Here, positive interactions are a key element and are based on the contact hypothesis from Allport [46] and the subsequent studies stressing, among other factors, the importance of

time spent with the other [47], and the sites or "zones of encounter" [48] where shared activities and common goals can take place.

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From a systemic point of view, we have the institutional level of interaction with the ministry and municipality (which are also two levels of governance) that impose some constraints on the civil servant. And we also have the individual level of interaction that can be observed when civil servants meet and their multiple identities operate. We can also observe the group level that can play a part as members of specific services in the respective institutions or as part of their preferred identities. Clear dividing lines between these different organizational levels (institutional, group and individual) are difficult to work in life since they are always intertwined and their different components articulated with each other in a way that can produce varied outcomes. To give a more concrete example of this intertwining of organizational levels and some challenges it produces, the next sections present an analysis of the "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) as an example of a text-based mediated organization that frames the relationship of civil servants and helps us better understand the interactions between individuals navigating different systemic levels.

4. Quebec Territorial and Governmental Organization and Inclusion

Canada has a federal and a provincial government and each province has its own organizing structure of the territory. Quebec's territory is divided into *seventeen administrative regions*. These regions constitute the first geographical division of the province, but without political power associated. The second division constitutes a supralocal level consisting of the "*Regional County Municipalities (RCM)*" (territory grouping municipalities and, in some cases, unorganized territories—there are 87 of them in Quebec—and there are also fourteen cities and agglomerations that exercise some of the powers and responsibilities of RCM) and the "*Metropolitan Communities (MC)*" (there are two in the province: Montreal and Quebec). The RCM administer the development of the territory among other things and the MC ensure a more coherent planning and administration of the regions they cover. At this level, there is also the "*Regional Administration of Kativik*" which administers the development of the territories above the 55th parallel with some exceptions. The third division of the territory constitutes the local one. At this level, there are 1133 *local municipalities* and one regional government (Eeyou Istchee Baie-James) [49]. The territory of the province is vast but most of the population resides in the urban areas which are concentrated along the Saint Lawrence River. Moreover, there is a disparity among regions when comparing the total population living in those territories and the extent of the land (for example, in 2021, Montreal had a population of 2,025,900 inhabitants; a land area of 498 km^2 for a population density of 4155.1 inhab/km^2. The Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, for the same period had a population of 279,900 inhab.; a land area of 95,760 km^2 for a population density of 2.9 inhab/km^2 [50,51]). Most of the population is concentrated in 66 RCM (33% of the population). It is also important to acknowledge that 16.7% of the population (1,397,821) lives in 56 RCM of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants and 16.3% of the population (1,368,654) live in 10 RCM of 100,000 inhabitants or more [49]. There is clearly a divide in the experience of these populations growing in urban constructs that are so different in density.

Because of these differences that affect the experiences of the population, cities and RCM are well positioned to help create the conditions of inclusion for the new population: they have the authority to administer their territories and the proximity with their citizens which informs their knowledge about the needs. Despite their relative autonomy, municipal administrations remain at the mercy of government programs (federal or provincial), their funding opportunities and their policy and structural changes. Among many examples, the abolition of the "*Directions régionales de l'immigration*" (Regional Immigration Departments, RID) in 2015 still resonate in the collective memory. They helped coordinate programs and services with other structures that disappeared at the same time. Since 2019, the provincial government has started to implement a similar network, and today, there are nine RID, 86 integration officers and 73 regional immigration counselors [52]. As in any development,

there is always an impetus that comes from real needs and challenges like the shortage of labour force, the aging population, etc. The new regional structure in place is not a stranger to these challenges.

5. Organizing for Inclusion

In the case of the City of Saguenay, the process of development and implementation of the Immigration Action Plan (IAP) (Funded at 50% by the *ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration* (MIFI) at the provincial level through the "*Programme Mobilité-Diversité*" (PMD) (Mobility-Diversity Program)) represents a pathway that starts with economic and labour needs, demographic challenges, occupation and vitality of the territory and considerations of the humanity of people. Indeed, the process has made it possible for elected officials and members of the municipal administration to go beyond the economic dimension of the migrant's (a person with a temporary status) and immigrant's (a person having permanent residency or citizenship by naturalization, and born outside Canada) trajectory and include other human dimensions (democratic participation, health, leisure, sports, culture, community life, etc.) (I was privileged to witness this since I participated as an expert and member of a community group. I am still collaborating as a member of a consulting board organized by the city. Furthermore, I was also involved in a similar process (creation of an IAP) coordinated by an RCM).

This transformation of the vision of the other has not been achieved in silos, but throughout the process of promoting accessibility to local actors. Indeed, for elected officials and the municipal administration, it is essential to avoid exclusion so as not to create "citizens who are more equal than others". The city administration, along with the person in charge of the project, organizes the work in four steps: "(1) the completion of the state of affairs and the portrait of immigration services and initiatives, (2) the creation of working committees with partners consulted during the process, (3) the development of a concerted action plan, and (4) the evaluation of the process" [53] (p. 202) (our translation; for more details, see [54] (pp. 9–11)).

The first step (July to December 2018) being crucial, the choice to meet with people allows for the establishment of stronger bonds of trust between the community and the project leader, and by extension with the City of Saguenay. More specifically, the process included: (a) individual meetings, (b) the distribution of a questionnaire that identified organizations, services offered and initiatives in the community that promote intercultural relations, and (c) the organization of discussion groups that focused on the issues and challenges of living together in an intercultural context. These consultations also provide a space for reflection on considerations related to rapprochement, intercultural dialogue and the sustainable sociocultural inclusion of immigrants. During this stage, four major challenges were identified:

> (1) Promote the conditions necessary for the reception, settlement and sustainable establishment, (2) promote the conditions necessary for sustainable economic and professional integration, (3) promote the conditions necessary for intercultural rapprochement and dialogue and for sustainable social and cultural integration, (4) promote the conditions necessary for concerted action, strategic partnerships, transversality and complementarity of actions [54] (p. 10) (our translation).

It is important to understand that this first step allowed immigrant communities and their allies to address all their needs/concerns and make them visible/compelling to the city.

The second step (creation and consultation of working committees; January to February 2019) allows for the validation of the issues and challenges raised by the partners, the identification of elements of strategic positioning, and the confirmation of the objectives, means and adequate partners for their realization. The third step (February to April 2019) is the development of the action plan, which was officially launched on 3 October 2019. Finally, the fourth step should have started in 2020 with a series of evaluations over time. Given the disruption produced by COVID-19, only the progress and the final reports (from

the agreement that allowed the development of the action plan) submitted to the MIFI contain some information about the evaluation. Indeed, these documents mention the activities/actions that could be carried out until 2020. In this context, the fourth step is resumed in 2021 with the signing of a new agreement with the MIFI, announced on 17 June 2021. This agreement provides the necessary funds to restart the consultation, present the advances and find the best way to evaluate the process. It was therefore proposed to the MIFI to give the city one more year to fulfill the commitments of the action plan. This is so because the measures introduced by public health during the pandemic forced civil servants to make difficult choices which directly affected the consultations and evaluations.

6. The Programs

Developing services in a city requires investment. The provincial government's immigration ministry "*ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration* (MIFI)" developed and updated the past years different programs to help cities and community groups elaborate different projects at the municipal and the provincial levels. One of these programs was the "*programme Mobilisation-Diversité*" (PMD) that was replaced by the new "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) in June 2020. In this section, both programs are explained since they influenced the conception of the City of Saguenay Immigration Action Plan (IAP) and the following steps.

The "*programme Mobilisation-Diversité*" (PMD) was established in 2012–2013 and the City of Saguenay developed and implemented its IAP with the help of two versions of the PMD (2018–2019 and 2019–2020). These two versions are presented simultaneously here, and later sections address the variations between them and subsequent versions, including the latest one (2023–2026). The PMD is described by the ministry as a program helping "building more welcoming and inclusive communities. This program is designed to promote the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in French." [55,56] (our translation). Two main objectives are mentioned:

> Support for structuring projects likely to promote the full participation in community life, in French, of people of all origins through the implementation of actions aimed at: (1) supporting the building of more welcoming and inclusive communities conducive to the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities, by encouraging openness to diversity and open and active intercultural exchanges; (2) creating conditions conducive to attracting and sustaining the settlement of immigrants in welcoming and inclusive communities, including fostering the growth of primary immigration and secondary migration out of the Montreal metropolitan area [55,56] (our translation).

Five ideas/aims stand out: welcoming and inclusive communities, participation, proper conditions, attraction and settlement. These ideas and aims continued in the new "*Programme d'appui aux collectivités*" (PAC) since they are steered to help achieve one of the main objectives of the government action plan: "The Program thus responds to Objective 4.1 of the ministry 2019–2023 Strategic Plan, which aims to 'increase the contribution of immigrants to the vitality and prosperity of regions.'"[57] (p. 4, our translation). The important aspect here is the growth of the regions using immigrants as a resource for that end. For that reason, the new version of the program in 2020 develops the previous objectives and specifies:

> [General objective] The program aims to contribute, through society's collective commitment, to building more welcoming and inclusive communities for immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities so that they can participate fully, in French, for the prosperity of Quebec.

> [Specific objectives] (1) Create conditions beneficial to the attraction, sustainable settlement in the regions and integration of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities; (2) promote harmonious intercultural relations between Quebecers of all origins; (3) ensure the full participation of immigrants and other ethnocultural

minorities in the life of the community, in French; (4) contribute to the fight against racism, intimidation and discrimination in order to promote respectful, egalitarian and inclusive living together [57] (p. 5) (our translation).

The latest version of the program (2023) insists on "promoting regionalization" [58] (p. 4, our translation) and eliminates the participation in the life of the community in French (this is because a new agency, *Francisation Québec*, was created):

[General objective] The program aims to increase the capacity of communities to be more welcoming and inclusive. It contributes, with other departmental and government programs, to the attraction, integration and sustainable settlement of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities, so that they can participate fully, in French, for the prosperity of Quebec [...].

[Specific objectives] (1) Create conditions favourable to the attraction, long-term settlement in the regions and integration of immigrants and other ethnocultural minorities; (2) promote harmonious intercultural relations between Quebecers of all origins; (3) combat racism, intimidation and discrimination to promote respectful, egalitarian and inclusive living together [58] (p. 5) (our translation).

The programs are designed to help increase the dynamism of municipalities, but also to meet the "government desire to give overall coherence to the ministry's policies" [57,58] (p. 4, our translation). This is important to understand as a motive for certain restrictions imposed on municipalities in relation to another program which is specific to the community sector. The government expresses a will to not overlap the responsibilities with the services, which is a laudable objective, among other things, for its logic (maximization of resources). Nevertheless, as the next sections explains, this introduces limits and biases for the development and the engagement of people in the field.

Each program has a specific component for municipalities and RCM. The PMD had a broader description which did not precisely ask for the creation of an action plan as a condition to finance the imagined activities or projects included in that plan. The PAC explicitly does that in both versions:

The activities and projects funded under this component must be integrated into an action plan for the attraction, sustainable settlement, civic integration and full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in French [...], including priorities for action based on a strategic needs analysis [57] (p. 6) (our translation).

The ministry also has to approve the action plan before signing another agreement for the implementation of the activities and projects included in it. In the latest version of the PAC (2023), the government introduced "eight characteristics" to define an inclusive and welcoming community, which cities applying to the PAC need to consider as a starting point for the reflections leading to development of their action plan [58] (p. 5, 32). In addition, the provincial government recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of the immigrant population in the context of each city. To do that, the government asks the cities to carry out a diagnostic of the needs in the territory concerning the attraction, the integration and the full participation of immigrants and ethnocultural minorities in the life of the community.

Like any program, the PMD and the two versions of the PAC set different conditions of admissibility (for organizations, activities and projects) and the rules or criteria applied (how to present the projects, activities or action plans, for the evaluation, the eligible expenses and their calculation, how the funds will be given, and other conditions (among the powers of the ministry, there is the capacity to terminate the financial assistance agreement at any time)). Furthermore, the new version of the PAC insists on the admissibility of "activities with a community impact" [58] (p. 6, our translation), the respect of previous agreements and to take into account sustainable development principles [58] (p. 15). All of these makes the selection of activities more complex.

Within all versions of the PAC, there is a closer oversight by the government through the supervision of the work conducted and the participation of an individual (representing the ministry) of the activities. On a side note, the regional immigration counselor participated in all the meetings leading to the creation of the IAP. With the PAC, this oversight (control and surveillance) can also be observed during the creation of an action plan since the MIFI can ask for preliminary versions or ask for any document. There is also a "management, monitoring and assessment committee" set in place as soon as the ratification of the financial assistance agreement to draw the action plan is carried out. This committee oversees the implementation of the action plan with members of the city and the MIFI among other individuals. As mentioned, the MIFI makes the final decision since they can reject the IAP (terminate their agreement to finance it) even if the municipality has approved it before sending the IAP to the MIFI. These measures of oversight allow the government to keep the initiatives proposed within the boundaries established by the programs.

The control and even the surveillance established by the government with these programs does not come solely from specific dispositions (although details matter), but also from the influence on the mindset of civil servants as the following sections explain.

7. Building with . . . Pressure

Before explaining the effects of the administrative prescription, it is important to give more context to the relationship between the city and the MIFI in our example. Among the partners, the relationship with the MIFI was a structuring factor that had an impact on the scope of the process. The city, from the beginning of the process, integrated the MIFI regional immigration counselor based in Saguenay. The good relationship between the MIFI's counselor and the civil servant responsible for developing the IAP was inestimable through the whole process: they show proof of dialogue between them. Indeed, it was not difficult to have access to each of them during the process and they were instrumental in helping to understand specifics with regard to their respective institutional knowledge. If the relationship with the counselor from the MIFI was positive, there was another factor which influenced the dynamic over time: the election at the end of 2018 of a new provincial government (*Coalition avenir Québec*, CAQ). The change of government was effective as of March 2019. The CAQ came with a strongly held economic view of immigration issues and a will of oversight and intervention which is the product of the politicization of immigration in the province. Indeed, immigration was one of the main delicate issues debated during the campaign and the CAQ proposed drastic changes in a campaign based on a nationalistic (see nativist) rhetoric that considered immigrants and some minorities as a problem to solve (see, for example, [59]).

The good relationship between the two civil servants helped go through a complex process of development but could not ease the structural weight of text-based mediated organization carried out by at least one of the many administrative prescriptions (the programs) (for example, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (S.C. 2001, c. 27), the Act to ensure the occupancy and vitality of territories (O-1.3), the Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act (E-15.1.0.1), etc.). This is performed by *two elements* of the framework set by the administrative prescription. The first element of the framework set by the programs start with the structure imposed through three components. *The first component* is the action plan which, on the first versions of the program, was not included in the section about the eligible projects. It appeared in the second version. In the latest versions, it became the first phase of the program accompanied by a guide to elaborate the action plan (see [60]). The second phase is the implementation of the activities and projects included in the IAP. The requirement of conceiving an action plan moved from a less central section (other conditions for municipalities) to the first requirement before starting any project on the territory. This change is important for understanding the coordination taking place across the province since every municipality willing to start any project for their immigrant population is forced to organize their work as prescribed. As I mentioned, the work

will presumably become more complex with the added requisites in the latest version of the PAC.

The second main structural organizing component of the programs is the section of the eligible initiatives, the projects and the interventions. This is where the main discrepancies in visions and objectives are situated since city civil servants can be confronted with different dilemmas. For example, guaranteeing access to services for all residents on the territory while respecting the constraints imposed by another level of government and the equilibrium of the social ecosystem of its territory. During the process of the IAP's conception, some negotiations between the city officials and the representatives of the ministry took place. Some friction was visible about the vision regarding the actions to be implemented and the conception of how the program should be. This is a classic imbalance between two systemic levels which do not share the same objectives and capacities. It creates an unbalance of power relation: the ministry having more leverage than the municipality who needs the subsidy. The program remains a rigid framework that is questioned since it does not allow much flexibility/adaptation to the reality of the city's environment. This seems more frustrating since the civil servant is well aware of the extended needs in the city. Before writing the IAP, the municipal employee mapped the situation and needs expressed by immigrants in the territory of the city with its partners, which, among them, was the MIFI's counselor. It was obvious that the civil servant's mandate constitutes a frame almost impossible to avoid. The MIFI's counselor always turned back to her superiors for information and verification. This reaction is guided by their procedures which affect the actions (self-control in this case) even if the individuals have agency. The new versions of the program (the PAC) mention the importance of having an IAP adapted to the particularities of the cities and the characteristics of their environment. However, there is a clear separation for the ministry between the projects or initiatives that can be subsidized by the PAC and the ones that fall into the "*Programme d'accompagnement et de soutien à l'intégration* (PASI)" (Program of accompaniment and support for integration). This can create some frustration as it reduce the possibilities for the city. Indeed, the city can only privilege some activities and there is no room to develop structures that can be needed in the territory.

The description of overall initiatives, projects and interventions expected is important for two main reasons: (1) the exclusion of projects which are inadequate following the descriptions but could have contributed to the vitality and the development of the localities; and (2) by extension, the capacity to orient the projects that could be proposed by the partners. Individuals or groups will not present projects that have any chance to be financed by the city and the MIFI if they do not respond to the objectives of the IAP and which could not go along the lines established by the actions mentioned in the IAP. Here, the gap created by the program and the community initiatives is more evident. However, civil servants were resilient in writing broader descriptions and when implementing the action plan: allowing projects which could fit with the objectives or replace some initiatives. This flexibility is possible by the resistance shown during the process of conception of the IAP and the subsequent work of organizing the selection of projects or contacting the partners to discuss the possibilities during a one-on-one session with the civil servant responsible for the IAP. Moreover, the concern about access to services and the knowledge accumulated after the first two steps of conception of the IAP grounded the three concepts adopted by the city: inclusion, equity and diversity. These ideas seem to influence the city's conception of social development through access to services and information, and were instrumental in countering the pressure from the ministry who at the time started to reorganize their provincial vision for access to services (through the channels decided and controlled by them). Another problem that can rise is that there is room for friction about the interpretation of criteria formulated in the PAC (the civil servants from the MIFI interpret the norms of the PAC) and the will from the representative of the MIFI to find ways to help. They are the keepers and the interpreters of the norms and establish where the line is drawn.

The third main structural organizing component of the programs is the accountability and financial assistance. Like every subsidy, there is always a set of rules for the accountability which are crucial for the respect of the agreement, but also the responsibility of managing public funds for the collective good. These obligations are standard procedures guaranteeing compliance with certain rules and allowing an oversight over the entire process. For example, one of the obligations is the authorization that a person representing the ministry (usually one of their civil servants) could attend any initiative or project carried out under the program (which was performed throughout the process of creation of the IAP). The more systematic and pressing method of oversight imposed is usually composed of three documents: (1) the signing of the financial assistance agreement; (2) the midyear progress report; and (3) the final report. These documents provided by the ministry include or ask for a multitude of information, allowing the reader to assess the progress or set more precise rules for future agreement. This oversight also comes with the leverage of the subsidy since, for example, at the one-year agreement in 2018, upon signing, the ministry gave 50% of the amount, then 40% at the positive evaluation of the mid-year report, and finally 10% at the positive evaluation of the final report. In 2020 and 2023, the percentages changed since the agreement is for three years and the amount of the subsidy was divided accordingly (one-third per year). The total subsidy for the conception of the action plan in 2018 amounted to CAD 125,000 (50% of this amount came from the ministry), and the second agreement obtained in 2019 was for the same amount [61,62]. The pressure to "fulfill the commitments" is obvious and civil servants in the city are expected to complete and send the required documents on time. A large number of resources (time, expertise, energy, etc.) are required to ensure the documents are properly completed and the addendums included, if needed. Here, it is not only the burden of the work that plays a great role, but also the dependency that is created for the subsidy with the stress related to the period of evaluation of the reports since their validation is linked to the funds.

Finally, the second element of the framework set by the programs is the influence of the idea that immigrants and minorities are resources that can contribute to the vitality and prosperity of regions. If there was a step towards the understanding that people need more than a job to settle, the economic imperative still has a strong influence on the structure of the program. Nevertheless, other human dimensions are present particularly on the guide to produce an action plan [60]. In the guide, there is a section about the characteristics of an inclusive collectivity, where several propositions contrast with the governmental discourse. For example, it explains systemic discrimination [60] in an understandable and coherent manner, which is surprising given the fact that the provincial Premier has denied its existence consistently [63,64]. In any case, the tendency to conceive immigrants as resources (demography, economy and settlements) is present, promoted and reproduced through the program across the province.

To conclude, the framework set by the program (structure and conceptions) plays an important role in organizing the work and social relations with the ensemble of mechanisms helping to coordinate the expected actions. Civil servants show some resilience through the process, allowing some openings for different initiatives, but helping at the same time to maintain the structure set with the help of the program. In the following sections, some recommendations are proposed to ease the framework set by the program and there is a discussion of some other important elements to consider in this analysis.

8. Discussion

We are used to seeing programs (governmental in this case) as frameworks organizing different projects with the same objectives, considering them to be simple procedures to follow. However, administrative prescriptions like the PAC have structuring and coordinating impacts that can limit or help the development of cities depending on their capacity for resilience, their knowledge of the needs expressed by the immigrant population and the centralized relationship created in a decentralized institutional context, as the literature points out.

Cities have demonstrated their leadership in coordinating their partners, mobilizing the experts in their territories and consulting the necessary sections of the population [65]; but they have limited resources. The extent of the coordination required to create an action plan and then implement it encourages us to understand the consequences of the framework developed by an administrative prescription as an example of management technologies. Knowing the possible consequences of this apparatus contributes to helping initiatives adequate to the contextual needs of the city to flourish. However, there is a fine line between the influence exercised by an administrative prescription like the program analyzed and the benefits of giving tools or guidance which necessarily orient the other.

An important corollary to this proposition is the centrality of resilience (flexibility and resistance) as a force of equilibrium which needs, from civil servants, the acquisition of institutional knowledge and an understanding of the social and organizational ecosystem of the territory. However, resilience can be a strategy of governance since it helps keep the power of the organization in check. This is not something consciously performed by the employees of the municipalities or the MIFI. Rather, it is a mechanism activated by their role as civil servants and their objective to provide access to services and valuable information.

On a more concrete note, programs are not based on a common, long-term understanding of local and regional immigration issues. They are focused on government objectives at the national level/scale, which do not necessarily respond to the realities and needs of municipalities. For example: (a) the impossibility of using leverage from other ministries; (b) the impossibility of using the 50% of the fund given by the city as they see fit; (c) the absence of liberty to implement services even if they are given by another partner like a community group; (d) the short time given between the program call and the submission deadline; (e) corollary to this is the lack of awareness of municipal deadlines; or (f) the tendency to privilege activities over the development of structures which are needed to prepare the territory. For these reasons, a collaboration that benefits the city requires structured, complementary, coherent, tailored and long-term actions between municipalities and the ministry. This is possible since the ministry has already acknowledged the importance of municipalities: their proximity to the population which other levels of governance lack. This proximity allows the cities to be aware, for example, of division among community groups or the internal difficulties some of these community organizations face. This knowledge is important when framing long-term strategies with community groups behaving with territorial reactions that undermine the common good.

A final element to mention is the fact that even if civil servants in the cities are obliged to conduct a diagnostic to assess the needs of the immigrant population—before conceiving their IAP—the needs and concerns of this population can be diminished during the process if they are considered as simply a few voices among a multiplicity of others from actors with different interests (employers, school boards, etc.). This can also be understood as the result of intertwining systemic levels (individual, group and institutional) when people position themselves during the process and communicate their preferences during the interactions.

Departing from some points raised in this essay, future work can focus on the impact the process of developing an action plan had on civil servants (their understanding of the process, the ecosystem, etc.). Deepening this knowledge could give us a better cartography of the impacts a process of development has on professionals in that sector. Research can also be carried out about the impact the development and implementation of action plans had on social relations, and more precisely, on intercultural relations. This is important since the process of socialization can be easily disrupted. Also, analyzing different cases with a comparative framework can lead us to understand some variations and commonalities. Finally, a second phase to test the propositions put forward in this essay has been considered, employing semi-structured interviews with municipal employees. In spite of some limitations, the idea that administrative prescriptions have structuring and coordinating impacts that can limit or help the development of cities depending on the resilience

of civil servants seems valuable for understanding the complexity of social relations and social constructs.

9. Recommendations

This list aims for a more harmonious development of the organizational capacities in every municipal community:

- The PAC should be flexible regarding the needs expressed by the cities: for example, by allowing the implementation of any project the city considers valuable for their population or institutional development (their structure).
- The capacity to use other resources from other ministries.
- The liberty for the city to use their part of the total budget from the program as they see fit among the initiatives proposed by the community.
- A reduction in the workload of city civil servants: simplify the MIFI forms and provide more resources to help them through the process.
- A recurring subsidy for the development of the city's capacities in relation to immigration issues.
- Through all the processes of elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the IAP the voices of immigrants in the territory must always be present and taken into account.
- A long-term common and coherent vision of the actions to be implemented regarding the regionalization of immigration between the cities and the ministry.

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