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Struggles for democracy: strategies and resources of initiatives for non-citizen voting rights at local levels in Europe

Katrin Sontag[1*] , Metka Herzog[2] and Silva Lässer[3]

*Correspondence:
katrin.sontag@unibas.ch
[1] National Center
of Competence in Research
– The Migration-Mobility
Nexus (nccr –
on the move), Seminar für
Kulturwissenschaft und
Europäische Ethnologie,
University of Basel,
Rheinsprung 9/11,
4051 Basel, Switzerland
Full list of author information
is available at the end of the
article

Abstract

This paper deals with non-citizen voting rights from the perspective of grassroots initiatives that campaign for more inclusive local voting rights for migrants. It looks at three initiatives in three European cities with a growing foreign population: in Basel (Switzerland), Brussels (Belgium), and Freiburg (Germany). All three initiatives address authorities with the need to increase options for migrant political participation at the local level, encourage political engagement, and raise awareness of the topic. The initiatives use different strategies, which include the performance and appropriation of rights in symbolic elections or parliamentary sessions. We interpret these activities as "acts of citizenship" and observe that these acts are not only responses to available political opportunity structures, but rather mobilize external and internal networks and invest considerable resources to make this kind of engagement possible in a specific "resource environment".

Keywords: Non-citizen voting rights, Migrant political participation, Migrant voting rights, Civic engagement

Introduction

With increased migration some countries now have a high proportion of non-citizen residents,[1] who are excluded from suffrage rights. This exclusion, described as "democracy deficit" (Blatter et al., 2017), poses a threat to the state of democratic systems and challenges the very idea of democracy (Pedroza, 2019). Traditional understandings of democracy and citizenship that focus on long-term sedentariness and naturalization are called into question and there are increasing calls to include non-citizen residents in the electoral systems (Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017; Caramani & Grotz, 2015). Two options to include non-citizens can be distinguished: either by providing migrants with access to citizenship or by enfranchising non-citizen residents before they acquire nationality (Blatter et al., 2017). This paper concentrates on the latter by studying three city-level initiatives in Europe that advocate local voting rights for non-citizens.

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[1] This includes EU- and third country nationals who hold a different nationality than the country where they reside.

City-level initiatives are currently actively campaigning against the political exclusion of migrants and for more inclusive voting rights in several European countries, for example in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. These initiatives employ a variety of different strategies ranging from awareness raising and interpellations (short presentations in a local parliament) to creative ways of appropriating and performing rights (Coll, 2011), as in symbolic elections. This qualitative study, based on participant observation, a survey and interviews presents the different strategies and practices of three current initiatives in Europe in the cities of Basel (Switzerland), Brussels (Belgium), and Freiburg (Germany).

Local levels of citizenship are relevant because most changes aimed at enfranchising non-citizen residents have happened at the sub-national level (Bird et al., 2011). For example, the Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Belize and Venezuela have introduced voting for non-citizens at communal levels (Bauböck, 2006). In other cases, non-citizens are given voting rights in certain parts of the country (e.g. in some cantons in Switzerland, parts of the United States) and only in rare cases also at the national level (New Zealand, Malawi, Chile, Uruguay) (Bauböck, 2006). In some cases, the communal voting rights only extend to migrants who are members of certain supranational associations e.g. the Commonwealth or the European Union [EU]. For example, EU citizens who reside in other EU countries can vote in municipal elections. Moreover, social belonging and membership are dependent on the local context and often happen at the local rather than a national level (Brändle, 2018; Koopmans, 2004). Observing pathways to inclusion at the local level is particularly relevant in federal states, such as in our case studies, where the role of local actors is especially pronounced.

Earlier studies addressed the topic of voting rights initiatives mainly in the context of the United States. Hayduk (2004, 2006, 2015) wrote extensively on the situation and history of voting rights, along with the struggles, mobilizations, arguments and dynamics of advocates and opponents. Coll (2011) conducted fieldwork among a movement involved in voting rights in the United States and analysed arguments, discourses and larger dynamics in this context. Political debates, dynamics and developments have also been analysed in European countries (e.g. Jacobs, 1998, 1999; Pedroza, 2019), but qualitative research that focuses on the micro level of current single grassroots initiatives in Europe remains scarce and creative practices, such as the performance of rights in symbolic elections, have rarely been described in the literature so far (except for e.g. Blatter et al., 2016). We thus aim to contribute to the literature with a grassroots perspective on initiatives and their different practices in three European cities.

We ask in this paper: What are the strategies and practices of the initiatives and which resources does this kind of engagement need? We propose to connect two theoretical approaches to answer this question. First we show how the initiatives make use of creative strategies to work towards their goals and interpret these as "acts of citizenship" (Coll, 2011; Hayduk & Coll, 2018; Isin, 2008). Secondly, we argue that these acts must be seen in relation to their specific "resource environment" (Levitt et al., 2017). We look at the level of both individuals and initiatives and observe how resource environments influence repertoires of actions and agency and how initiatives and single activists

interact with and co-create resource environments. Our study reveals that this kind of engagement comes at a particularly high cost in terms of time, funding, networks, education, civic and political skills. As a result, it is available mostly to those who have the preexisting required resources.

We present the main theoretical debates we engage with in the second part of the paper, and our cases and methodology in section three. Section four describes the situation of non-citizen voting rights and the activities of the initiatives in the three cities. Section five focuses on the resources the initiatives invest and gain from their participation and section six presents our conclusion.

Initiatives for local migrant voting rights and resources

The literature on migrant voting rights has mostly addressed the topic from a political science or normative perspective, explaining why or how states grant or should grant rights to non-citizens (Bauböck, 2006; Blatter et al., 2017; Garcia, 2011; Hayduk, 2004, 2015; Pedroza, 2014; Song, 2009; Varsanyi, 2005). Arguments for conferring electoral rights to foreign residents include the principle of coercion, that those subjected to laws should have a voice (Dahl, 1989), the "all-affected" principle that all who are affected by a decision should be included (Whelan, 1983), and the notion of stakeholder citizenship which includes all who claim a stake in a polity's future (Bauböck, 2008). This indispensable scholarship made vital contributions in expanding the boundaries of citizenship and sets a fertile starting point for empirical research on initiatives towards more inclusive voting rights.

The success of enfranchisement has been analysed from different perspectives. Jacobs analysed the topic from the perspective of parliamentary debates (Jacobs, 1999). In the case of Belgium he showed that between 1970 and 1997 migrant associations did not have a significant influence on political debates and decisions on enfranchisement (Jacobs, 1999). In fact, several factors that make enfranchisement processes more likely or even successful have been mentioned in the literature. These include coalitions and alliances with organisations such as unions, and support from elected politicians (Hayduk & Coll, 2018), a lower share of resident foreigners (Kayran & Erdilmen, 2021; Stutzer & Slotwinski, 2019), partisanship (Jacobs, 1998, 1999; Kayran & Erdilmen, 2021; Pedroza, 2019), or even dramatic events (Jacobs, 1999). However, Hayduk and Coll argue that the "success" of initiatives should also be judged by their effects on education about migration related topics, the development of (e.g. leadership) skills and building coalitions (Hayduk & Coll, 2018, p. 341).

Migrant mobilization more generally has often been studied with the perspective of "political opportunity structures". A number of studies show how national and local institutional and discursive frameworks shape how migrants participate and make claims. Formal institutional dimensions, such as citizenship regimes, as well as discourses which construct collective identities, create opportunities for intervention in the political field. As a result, some claims are considered legitimate and have more resonance in the public space (Koopmans et al., 2005). It has been shown again and again that closed political opportunity structures are an important reason for low levels of political mobilization among migrants (Eggert & Giugni, 2010; Giugni et al., 2014; Giugni & Passy, 2004;

Iredale, 2001; Manatschal & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014; Morales & Giugni, 2011; Strijbis, 2015).

Critiques of the political opportunity structures approach point out that initiatives are in place not so much because it is possible for them to exist, but as a reaction against the restraints of the official structures that exclude certain groups from voting and limit participation (Però, 2008a). With an anthropological lens, we seek to acknowledge this dimension of protest as well as the role of the initiatives and their members as political actors. In fact, Jacobs (1999) assumes that, in Belgium, "the negative attitude of the Belgian political establishment proved the best incentive for immigrant and antiracist action" (p. 659).

To do so, we engage, firstly, with recent debates on urban citizenship. The urban citizenship discourse picks up localised forms of citizenship practices and the role of local actors, and is concerned with broader issues of their participation and recognition (Bauböck, 2003; García, 2006; Guentner & Stanton, 2013; Hess & Lebuhn, 2014; Purcell, 2003). Recent contributions on (urban) citizenship have emphasized the social and processual character of citizenship rather than merely the legal status. In that light we interpret the engagement of the initiatives and actors as acts of citizenship (Isin, 2008, 2009). Isin defines "acts of citizenship as those acts that produce citizens and their others" (Isin, 2008, p.37). Isin differentiates between activist and active citizens, the former as those who "engage in writing scripts and creating the scene", while the latter "follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created" (2008, p.38).

Secondly, we draw closer attention to the resources required for the engagement of the initiatives. In fact, in his criticism of the political opportunity structures approach, Però (2008b) adds the following factors in order to explain why and how migrants mobilize: "migrants' political socialization, backgrounds, experiences, and values", "living conditions" (p. 121), "networks and social capital" (p. 122). Però and Solomos (2010) further add feelings and emotions (p.10).

To contribute to this perspective, we operate with the concept of "resource environment" introduced by Levitt et al. (2017) to analyse transnational social protection and adapt it to the context of political participation. Resource environment consists of resources coming from different sources, such as the state, third sector organisations, and social networks. We understand it as a combination of possibilities within the national and local institutional frameworks, the capacity of migrant initiatives, and the characteristics of individual members. The latter can be an individual's social and economic characteristics, political socialization, experiences in the receiving context, social networks, and notions of belonging that are prevalent in resident societies (Hercog, 2019). We aim to contribute to a better understanding of practices of non-citizen voting right initiatives on the ground by drawing attention to the resource environments in which they take place.

The study: initiatives and methodology

The three initiatives are all situated in cities with growing immigration, they are located in federal states, where the role of local actors is especially pronounced, and the three countries often serve as examples for demonstrating the decisive importance of the local level for migrant integration (Ireland, 1994; Koopmans, 2004). The initiatives are also

similar in that they largely consist of volunteers and are not part of any larger organisation. At the same time, they are different in terms of their activities and the sample thus allowed us to show a range of different strategies. The selection was based on the process of fieldwork, during which we learned about the different practices of initiatives in Europe, and approached three initiatives that organize different rather than similar activities. It was also based on the accessibility of the initiatives, and our previous contacts and field research.

The study was conducted in four steps. Firstly, we carried out participant observation in the initiatives, with a stronger focus on Basel and Freiburg. In these two cities, we attended regular meetings and took part in major activities over a longer period of time, and became members of the associations (Author 2 in Basel since 2015, Author 3 in 2019, Author 1 in Freiburg since 2019). Joining as members was a practical way to take part in preparations, discussions and public activities, as our goal was to gain a better understanding of the initiatives and their strategies from the members' perspective. It allowed us to gain deeper insights and practical experience on how the initiatives worked and what kind of efforts were in place in the background for organizing public activities, and also to introduce our survey to the members. At the same time, working as a research team was very helpful in order to critically reflect on this kind of involvement and possible blind spots and take into account different perspectives.

Secondly, we conducted a survey. We discussed the questionnaire with representatives of the initiatives and took their feedback into account. The questionnaires asked about the respondents' background, their involvement in the initiatives, their broader political interests and their stance on voting rights. The survey was available online and distributed through the existing communication channels of each initiative between February and March 2020.

Thirdly, we conducted in-depth interviews during and after the survey to talk about the results and ask open questions. This included six interviews with coordinators and members of initiatives in Basel, two in Freiburg, and one in Brussels.

Fourthly, we studied the webpages, social media entries and other documents of the initiatives.

Survey

Overall, 38 people filled out the questionnaire (Table 1). To set these numbers in perspective it is important to know that the initiatives function with a small number of active people. 19 people responded in Basel, where around 20 people are regularly active and 163 attended the main event in 2019. In Freiburg, 15 people responded, out of 6–12 who are regularly active and around 40 who take part in major activities, and in Brussels 4 people responded, from a team that consists of 8–10 people. The link of the survey was sent to much larger mailing lists in Basel (200) and Freiburg (300). We also introduced the survey personally at meetings. From the answers it became clear that responses came mostly from those who are active members of the initiatives. Compared to the number of active participants, the response rate we received on the survey was thus very good.

Most age groups are represented in the survey, with a median age above 45 and a slight majority of women. A clear majority of the respondents across all three initiatives have been living in the country for over ten years and none claim to be there on

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Table 1 Demographic data of the sample

	Basel (n = 19)	Freiburg (n = 15)	Brussels (n = 4)	Overall (n = 38)
Age				
Up to 35	3 (15.8%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (25.0%)	6 (15.8%)
36–55	6 (31.6%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (50.0%)	13 (34.2%)
56–65	5 (26.3%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (25.0%)	11 (28.9%)
Over 65	4 (21.1%)	3 (20.0%)	None	7 (18.4%)
No response	1 (5.3%)			1 (2.6%)
Gender				
Female	9 (47.4%)	9 (60.0%)	2 (50.0%)	20 (52.6%)
Male	8 (42.1%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (50.0%)	15 (39.5%)
No response	2 (10.5%)	1 (6.7%)		3 (7.9%)
Residence status				
Citizenship	9 (47.4%)	10 (66.7%)	1 (25.0%)	20 (52.6%)
Long-term residence permit	7 (36.8%)	2 (13.3%)	None	9 (23.7%)
Short-term residence permit	3 (15.8%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (75.0%)	8 (21.1%)
No response		1 (6.7%)		1 (2.6%)
Citizenship				
EU	12 (63.2%)	12 (80.0%)	2 (50.0%)	26 (68.4%)
Dual citizenship	7 (36.8%)	3 (20.0%)	1 (25.0%)	11 (28.9%)
Only non-EU	2 (10.5%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (50.0%)	7 (18.4%)
No response				
Education				
Graduate education (Bachelor)	2 (10.5%)	2 (13.3%)	None	4 (10.5%)
Post-graduate education (Master/PhD)	11 (57.9%)	7 (46.7%)	4 (100.0%)	22 (57.9%)
Other	6 (31.6%)	6 (40.0%)	None	12 (31.6%)
No response				
Time lived in country of arrival				
2–5 years	1 (5.3%)	None	None	1 (2.6%)
6–10 years	2 (10.5%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (25.0%)	4 (10.5%)
Over 10 years	16 (84.2%)	13 (86.7%)	3 (75.0%)	32 (84.2%)
No response		1 (6.7%)		1 (2.6%)

a temporary basis. In total, over half of respondents are citizens of their country of residence. Roughly a quarter of the respondents are dual citizens and across all three samples, nineteen different nationalities are represented. The majority of them are EU citizens. A clear majority of the respondents are highly educated, with over half of them having at least a Master's degree. A large majority report proficiency in the local language, a few report medium level language skills.

The triangulation of methods described above and the discussions we had in the initiatives and in the research team helped us to ask additional questions, set the results into perspective and also to discuss potential biases. For example, we wondered whether the high level of education was due to the format of an online survey. We provided the survey in English and German in all three places. Yet our observations and interviews did confirm that, especially in the core teams, the level of education was indeed very high and we will return to this topic in the coming sections. Only in Freiburg is the organizing team more diverse when it comes to larger events and this diversity did not show in our sample.

Strategies and practices of the initiatives as acts of citizenship

In the following, we introduce the three initiatives and their practices and strategies. In each case, we briefly present some background on the citizenship regimes and the situation of voting rights at different levels. All three countries have a multi-layered voting system with at least three levels: the communal, regional (cantonal/state), and national levels. Belgium and Germany, in addition, share the level of the EU. In all cases, it is the city that is relevant for the initiatives and their claims, even if the city, in the cases of Brussels and Basel, is governed as a region/canton. In Brussels and Basel only nationals can vote on the level of the canton/region, while in Freiburg EU citizens can vote on the level of the city. All three cities/regions also have parliaments that have a stronger composition of left-leaning parties than the respective national governments.

In the three countries, the duration and process for naturalization are also very different. In Switzerland, continuous residence in the same commune is necessary for ten to twelve years and in Basel obtaining citizenship can cost up to 2000 Swiss francs.[2] Some cantons apply a facilitated process for EU citizens. In Germany, six to eight and in Belgium 5 years of residence are required to apply for citizenship. Dual citizenship is becoming more widespread: 18% of the Swiss resident population held an additional citizenship in 2018 (FSO-SE, 2020). Belgium does not anymore require people to drop their 'other' citizenship either. In Germany it is more complex to obtain dual citizenship, especially with a non-EU citizenship (Federal Office of Administration [BVA], n.d.). Yet, there are also a number of reasons why people do not naturalize. They may not want to give up their former citizenship and are in a situation where dual citizenship is not possible, as countries of origin may not allow dual citizenship, may not permit individuals to give up their former citizenship or only accept dual citizenship with selected countries (SEM, n.d.). Moreover, costs were mentioned as a hurdle in our interviews, such as the costs of obtaining Swiss citizenship or of giving up a former citizenship. An interview partner mentioned practical reasons for keeping one's citizenship, such as travelling or moving. It was also pointed out that citizenship was a very personal issue and that people might not want to completely relinquish this link to their former home.

Basel

In Switzerland, non-citizens (25% of the inhabitants) do not have voting rights at the national level. On sub-national levels, the situation is heterogenous. Non-citizen voting rights at the local level exist with different conditions in seven cantons out of 26. In terms of local voting rights, the same conditions apply for all non-Swiss nationals. In Basel, the city parliament is at the same time the cantonal parliament. Of a population nearing 200,000, 35% of residents are not Swiss citizens (Statistisches Amt Basel-Stadt, 2020). The proportion of non-citizens over the age of 18 was 30.3% in 2020. The proposal to extend voting rights to non-citizen residents was turned down by voters in Basel during a recent referendum in 2010. Like other Swiss cantons, Basel has substantial autonomy, and cantonal and communal voting rights can be adapted through a local referendum. Currently, a new motion to extend voting rights

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[2] The requirements differ between cantons and communes.

to non-citizens after they have lived in the canton for five years has been accepted by the parliament and a new referendum will take place.

The association "Mitstimme" in Basel expresses in their vision that political rights are not something that migrants "get", but something they already have (Verein Mitstimme, n.d.a). The association was founded in 2016.[3] It focusses on migrant political participation by organizing migrant parliamentary sessions (*Migranten- & Migrantinnensessionen*), which it did in 2018 and 2019. The sessions were prepared by a group of 10 to 30 people over a course of eight months. During this period members of the initiative were also educated about the Swiss political system and met local politicians. They discussed which topics were important to them in Basel and formed working groups to do further research and formulate demands. In November 2019, the migrant parliamentary session took place for a full day in the Basel town hall and the groups presented their demands in front of local politicians and a full hall of public audience. Those without voting rights could make their demands, discuss, and vote on the motions in the seats of the actual Cantonal Parliament and Cantonal Government. The topics included questions around discrimination in car insurance, equality in the health sector, means of political participation, advice and support for male refugees and migrants, and German courses for newcomers from other language regions in Switzerland (Verein Mitstimme, n.d.b). The demands were then handed over to local politicians who agreed to pursue them in their parliamentary sessions. This act of citizenship is thus a campaign and a protest as much as it is a way of actually participating in the current political structures. In their publicity, the association emphasises political education (learning about "rights, possibilities to act and responsibilities") (Verein Mitstimme, n.d.b). By taking the platform to formulate and present their demands to the political elites, they also present themselves as politically interested and responsible citizens. The association is actively supporting a new motion to extend voting rights to non-citizens who have lived in Basel for at least five years and who have a permanent residence. They are currently preparing a campaign and speaking to the press about the need to extend democracy (Turcan, 2020).

Brussels

The 'Brussels Capital Region', generally referred to as Brussels, consists of 19 communes and its population was estimated at something over 2 million in 2020 (Brussels Population 2022, n.d.). The regional government has exclusive authority in certain areas, such as public transport or environmental policy and in other areas the authority is shared with the communes. This case is similar to Basel, not only because it represents a city and a region at the same time, but also because 35% of the residents do not have the right to vote (1bru1vote, 2018). Roughly 90,000 are citizens with non-EU nationalities, and 220,000 are EU citizens, who have voting rights in the commune of their residence, but not in the Brussels Capital Region (1bru1vote, 2018). To change this, the national constitution of Belgium would have to be reformed. A previous campaign, VoteBrussels, that was run by the Migration Policy Group in 2018, addressed the fact that very few EU citizens made use of their voting rights and

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[3] The pilot project Migrantensession (migrant session), organized by the Swiss migrant umbrella association Forum for the Integration of Migrants (FIMM) in Switzerland first started in 2015 with the goal of strengthening political participation of migrants. It included education about the functioning of the political system in Switzerland and mentoring by local politicians, and prepared participants for the final plenary session in the cantonal parliament.

managed to increase the number of registered voters by 24% compared to 2012 (in Belgium registration is necessary, which most foreigners did not know). The campaign also supported "1bru1vote", the initiative introduced in this paper (Huddleston, 2019).

The initiative 1bru1vote in Brussels, Belgium is the youngest of the three initiatives. The core group consists of around 10 active members. They started in 2017/18 with the clear focus on the elections of the Brussels Parliament in May 2019, in which they demanded that all Brussels residents should have the right to vote. They focus specifically on Brussels with the argument that this is an anomaly arising from the fact that the city is governed as a region—while non-citizen voting rights already exist in other cities of Belgium (because they are not regions). The initiative thus has one very specific target and has so far used the pathways in the official political system to reach this goal. They have collected signatures and have created videos with supportive politicians holding the initiative's logo. And they have presented their demands in the form of "citizens' interpellations" in the communes that make up the Region of Brussels in order to raise awareness and finally also attended a hearing in the Regional Parliament. A further step would be a change to the national constitution.

Freiburg

Freiburg is a city located within the state of Baden-Württemberg in Germany. It is governed by a city council. Its population in 2019 was estimated at 227,090. Non-citizens make up 17.1% of the city population, of which 10.2% are non-EU nationals (in 2018) who are not allowed to vote at the communal level (Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau, 2019). In 2008, the majority of the city council was in favour of expanding the voting right to non-EU nationals (Freiburger Wahlkreis 100%, n.d.). The topic has been discussed at the state and national level in Germany, but has not found a majority support. In fact, in 1998 enfranchisement laws were passed in the states of Hamburg and Schleswig Holstein, only to be overruled by the German Constitutional Court in 1990, as, like in Brussels, the national constitution would need to be changed (Pedroza, 2019).

The initiative in Freiburg, "Wahlkreis 100%", is the oldest of the three. It started in 2002 and developed out of the local migrant council. Its main strategy is to organize symbolic elections for residents without voting rights that run alongside local or national elections. These are intended to raise awareness, to introduce non-voters to the system, and to show what the result could be if non-citizens voted. In May 2019, for example, Freiburg had elections for the city council and the initiative organized 14 booths throughout the city, equipped with professionally designed ballot papers of the actual parties and candidates, information sheets, T-Shirts and homemade brownies, where people could vote symbolically. The results of the symbolic votes, even though they are not representative, contradict fears that migrants would have a very different voting behaviour. The four strongest parties in the symbolic elections were the same as in the official elections.[4]

After communal elections, the association organizes symbolic city council meetings in the town hall, inviting all those party members who were elected in the symbolic

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[4] The CDU (Christian Democratic Union) got 20,7%, the Left Party "Linke Liste" 19%, the Green Party 18,7% and the SPD (Social Democratic Party) 14% as the Wahlkreis 100% states on its facebook page. In the official election the Green Party had 26,5%, the CDU 11,8%, the SPD 12,7 and "Linke Liste" 6.9% (Amt für Bürgerservice und Informationsmanagement der Stadt Freiburg, 2019). The strong result for the CDU in the symbolic election was explained by a representative of the initiative with Angela Merkel's popularity because of her asylum politics in 2015.

elections. After national elections, the votes are also handed over to the respective politicians. The results of the symbolic elections are also disseminated in press releases and on the web (e.g. Facebook). Parallel to the symbolic elections, all citizens can also signal their approval or disapproval of the demands in a "symbolic referendum", signing a "yes/no" ballot paper at the same booths. In 2019, 96% of those with voting rights signed the symbolic referendum for more inclusive communal voting rights with a "yes". However, this is not a representative sample and there is to our knowledge no representative data on how citizens view the symbolic elections or demands of the initiative. Wahlkreis 100% encounters a lot of support in Freiburg, won the city's integration award, and the topic has even gained a majority in the city council. The initiative formulates its demands clearly: "All legal-age residents of a city should be equally entitled to elect their communal parliament independent of birthplace or passport" (Freiburger Wahlkreis 100%, 2019)—after a minimum of five years of residence, as the current proposal says. A further argument to extend voting rights to non-EU citizens was the fact that EU citizens are already allowed to vote locally based on the Maastricht treaty.

Members of the Wahlkreis are certainly aware that the national constitution needs to be changed in order to reach their goals. However, a representative justified their activity at local level on the grounds that awareness of and support for more inclusive voting rights need to start at this level. In addition, for national elections in Germany, in 2017 and in 2021, the Wahlkreis 100% got together with other initiatives throughout Germany to launch a national campaign, organize symbolic elections in different cities, and in 2021 an online symbolic national election to raise awareness at the national level.

Acts of citizenship and resource environments

All three initiatives make use of political opportunity structures and support. For example, in Freiburg the support was manifested by an integration award from the city of Freiburg and different kinds of public and private funding, in Basel with funding and meetings with politicians, and in Brussels with public supportive statements by politicians. This shows the importance of supportive institutional frameworks as posited by the approach of political opportunity structures. Yet, in our material, two points were most salient: The initiatives carried out activities with a high degree of investment and engagement that took place on a voluntary basis, and because of, or indeed against the limits of the political system. We thus interpret the activities of the initiatives as acts of citizenship and then look at the resources that are used in terms of resource environments.

All three initiatives are campaigning for a more inclusive understanding of political rights. However, they are neither inventing completely new forms of political participation nor opposing existing ones. Instead, they make use of existing forms of political participation, as e.g. in interpellations or collections of signatures, or imitate them, as in the case of symbolic parliamentary sessions or elections. The existing forms of political participation are thus appropriated and extended in a visible performative act to create an "as if" scenario. One of the members in Freiburg said: "We are not waiting [for someone to give us the right], we are voting" (Member's quote).

These acts of citizenship involve a great amount of different resources from the initiatives and their members. Verba et al. (1995) consider time, money and civic skills as the

most important resources for political participation, and indeed these were found to be major resources for the resource environments (Levitt et al., 2017) of the observed initiatives, too. Participation was found to be very time intensive. The questionnaires give some insight into the workload of the initiatives: In Freiburg and Brussels some of the respondents report they have invested 100 h or (significantly) more per year. In Basel, the project coordinator—who was employed for a workload of 50%—reported she had gone over her hours on a regular basis, often even doubling her time invested into the project. Quite a few people had invested between 10 and 80 h, while a few respondents from Basel and Freiburg were only active sporadically, e.g. for specific tasks or events, and some found it difficult to count. The workload also depended on the current projects, for example symbolic elections and their preparation in Freiburg were time-intensive and a larger number of volunteers joined to carry them out. Many respondents were either employed part-time (especially in the cases of Basel and Freiburg) or self-employed. 30% of the Basel respondents and 7% of the Freiburg respondents were retired. The preparation of symbolic elections and parliamentary sessions spanned several months of regular meetings in evening hours.

With regards to funding, the initiatives in Basel and Freiburg have raised funds from a number of sources (such as the Federal Commission for Migration in Switzerland, or the EU). In Basel there was temporarily a paid position of association coordinator and in Freiburg the wish for funds for such a post was mentioned. However, representatives also reflected that funding is often attached to fixed projects and the writing of reports. In Brussels, working in the campaign can also mean members making financial contributions, as the initiative has no external funding. Skills such as programming the webpage exist within the group and are contributed without pay.

Members' public communication skills, considered as civic skills (Verba et al., 1995, p. 304), are also a resource for the initiatives. The initiatives are well aware of the context in which they operate, the importance of their presence in social networks and media and the best ways to formulate their demands. In Freiburg, for example, there is a range of visual material and branding with T-shirts, posters, flyers, photos, films, even a song. In Brussels, an eye-catching logo was developed and the initiative made films with local politicians, each holding the logo. All three initiatives emphasize the importance of being non-partisan and of communicating with politicians of different parties about their issues (Schiller et al., 2020). Members of the initiatives report that their activities have created awareness among politicians, in media and society. The founders and leaders of the initiatives play a special role in this respect, by bringing with them a lot of resources, networks, and professional experience in the field of migration and passion towards more inclusive political participation.

The individual members of the initiatives had high levels both of education and personal and professional skills and experience, ranging from radio hosting to research, politics, IT, education, social work, and cultural programmes, with some engaging with migration also professionally. Statistics show that non-citizens in fact have a slightly higher level of higher education than citizens in Basel and Brussels, while in Freiburg it is only slightly lower (Statistisches Amt des Kantons Basel-Stadt, 2020; Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau, 2020; email exchange with ibsa Brussels). We can thus not directly conclude that the high level of education seen in our survey is representative for the cities:

it seems to be specific to this kind of activity. In fact, the literature on political participation in general and the literature focusing on migrants in particular corroborate the importance of education and occupation as a critical resource for political participation (Eggert & Giugni, 2010; Koopmans et al., 2005; Morales & Giugni, 2011). High level education and occupational profiles provide resources and give members the confidence to get involved in this type of political activity. The project leader in Basel expressed it this way: "This is not a low-threshold program." Similarly, a respondent in Brussels noted that their work "requires volunteers with strong political interests or contacts".

Moreover, knowledge about the political systems and command of the local languages are important. The three initiatives handle the need for these skills differently. The initiative in Basel offers workshops explaining the Swiss political system and requires all activities and discussions to be in German, partly in order for everyone to practise their German. This commitment to the German language is justified by the Swiss narratives of integration through language: according to the organizers, to be credible in the Swiss political system, it is necessary to carry out such activities in the local language. The other initiatives are more flexible when it comes to languages. 1bru1vote communicates in English within the initiative and in three different languages on their webpage. The initiative in Freiburg, for their symbolic elections, have translated their information material into 14 different languages.

Confirming other studies, we have found a link between rootedness and migrant volunteering (Manatschal & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014; Stadelmann-Steffen & Freitag, 2011) and a strong link between the length of the migrants' stay in a new country of residence and patterns of political participation, which is in line with the theory of exposure to the new society (de Rooij, 2012; White et al., 2008). A great majority of members in the studied initiatives are long-term residents and even citizens of their country of residence, proving that rootedness provides a key resource for engaging. Likewise, a member's personal migration experience in other countries also offers them insights into the experience of exclusion which can act as a motivating factor to change the situation (Negi, 2013; Però, 2008a; Wray-Lake et al., 2008). In Freiburg two members with German nationality explained that they had experienced the lack of voting rights while living abroad, which motivated them to change the situation in Germany for others. Thus, these kinds of resources can be created transnationally, through members' migration experiences, and applied locally as a resource affecting how members participate.

A further resource is openness to learn, so that investing resources leads to new resources. Almost all respondents said that they learned something or were able to take something away from their work in the initiative. This could be contacts, friends, knowledge about the political system and rights, about exclusion, how a campaign works, or that it is possible to make their voice heard and create change. In all three initiatives, we saw a lot of commitment and passion, emotions and feelings, as Però and Solomos (2010) put it.

When asked about the accessibility and openness of their respective initiative, most respondents from Freiburg perceived their initiative as very open and accessible. Mitstimme in Basel is overall perceived as a bit less accessible, as is 1bru1vote. Two particular points were mentioned in the case of Basel: It has been running cyclically, with new members joining each year and forming new working groups, which can result in easier access

for new members. On the other hand, many respondents considered that the fact that the whole project is carried out in German was a potential barrier. At the same time, a very clear majority supported the fact that the project is carried out in German. Other potential hurdles mentioned in the survey in the different cases included time investment, differing interests, fear of political engagement (in the case of undocumented migrants, for example), and the difficulty of joining a tight-knit and highly knowledgeable team.

Networks played an important role in the work of the initiatives, e.g. with local politicians, migrant organisations or other initiatives. In Basel, coordinators had also managed to create strong connections with local politicians who provided regular support and advice to the working groups and agreed to have their requests discussed in the city parliament. Networking and cooperation with other initiatives, like the migrant council in Freiburg or VoteBrussels in Brussels, were providing relevant resources in terms of information and experience or as the basis for larger campaigns. Moreover, all the initiatives were connected with academic researchers and some members were working or doing research in the field of migration. Networks and also friendships were a gain for the members.

Away from the local level, the transnational level played a role in the resource environment, by serving as a point of comparison and argument. Especially in Freiburg and Brussels, the argument was used that other European cities or countries already have local voting rights. The initiative in Freiburg had in the past been involved in a larger international EU project. Transnational connections were also used for knowledge exchange and the initiative in Freiburg had invited international guests as symbolic "international election observers". In fact, the initiatives have recently started regular online meetings across Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland) in order to share their experience and support each other.

Acts of citizenship are thus carried out within a specific resource environment of networks, time, funding, personal and professional skills, migration experiences and learning potential. The initiatives can work the way they do because of the pre-existing resources and the preconditions that allow for such acts of citizenship. Hayduk and Coll argued that "Success can also be measured by local stakeholders as advancing other goals" (2018, p. 341), among which they included building coalitions, education of the different stakeholders, support for other migration related topics, or developing the skills of the members. And indeed, in line with their argument, we observed successes such as building coalitions, resources and skills during the activities of the initiatives. In fact, many respondents described what they gained through their participation and for some, it seemed like an important part of their lives. However, it is important to acknowledge that the successes of the initiatives come at a high cost, a fact which has so far not been sufficiently recognised in the literature.

Conclusion

Our study focused on collective political activism at the local level. The city was the main level of this activism, even if this meant addressing different administrative levels in our three cases (i.e. the city of Freiburg, but the greater Region of Brussels and the Canton of Basel). Yet, the initiatives are not calling for city-citizenship, but an extension of voting rights at the local level. Some people even mentioned national voting rights or easier ways of achieving dual citizenship as long term goals. Thus, even though these

acts of citizenship start at the city level, they still operate with a national understanding of citizenship.

The groups were diverse with regard to nationality, but united in their political goals. Their arguments for extending non-citizen voting rights are based on the ideas of democratic legitimacy, representation, the equality of all residents, participation and inclusion. In Freiburg, especially, the initiative included a number of German citizens who believed that the extension of voting rights to non-citizens was a critical, essential part of their vision of democracy and equality. The study thus highlights that the political struggles that arise from migration are not just an issue for the migrants or the non-citizens. Rather, all future developments in the areas of citizen representation and extension of democracy will be a concern for society at large.

We interpret the practices of the initiatives as acts of citizenship (Isin, 2008) and show that an important aspect in the analysis of these acts of citizenship is the question of their "cost" and the resource environment (Levitt et al., 2017) in which they take place. We show that the initiatives work with different strategies and activities. Two of the initiatives use symbolic forms of appropriating and performing rights. This takes place in a specific resource environment, which comprises local and transnational networks, time, funding, personal and professional skills, learning and personal migration histories. However, high demands on available resources can also put up barriers against involvement in such "acts of citizenship". Language skills and the time commitment involved in attending regular meetings can be a significant barrier. And the relative lack of diversity when it comes to education was also identified as a potential barrier for joining. Collective action groups whose aim is to improve migrants' political participation thus require significant external and internal resources. These resources can lead to successes in such initiatives, but at the same time they can also limit the extent to which such organizations can grow and be more inclusive.

Questions posed in this article are an initial step towards better understanding strategies of and resource demands on enfranchisement initiatives. One possible research avenue could be to go beyond the perspective of initiatives' members and extend research on public opinion on extension of voting rights. Moreover, given the limited number of observed initiatives and the correspondingly small survey sample in our paper, a next step could be to look at the empirical evidence from a large-scale study. In addition, the topic could be further explored in longitudinal studies to observe developments and success factors of initiatives. Considering the strong dependence of initiatives on leaders' resources, such explorations over a protracted period of time could point to factors affecting initiatives' sustainability and possible growth. We propose to further enquire into the cost and resource environments in studies on struggles for political rights and consider how resource environment is a relevant aspect of initiatives' successes.

Authors' information
Katrin Sontag is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Basel, Switzerland, in cultural anthropology. She is a member of the National Center of Competence in Research—The Migration Mobility Nexus (nccr – on the move). Her fields of research include migration and mobility, forced migration, citizenship, and entrepreneurship.
Metka Herzog is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Basel, Switzerland and works as a research coordinator at swisspeace. Her research centres on highly skilled and talent mobilities and migrants' civic engagement. She is an alumni of the nccr – on the move.
Silva Lässer is a graduate student and researcher at the University of Basel, Switzerland. She has completed her undergraduate studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Environmental Studies at the University of Zürich. Her research interests include transnational communities, sustainability practices, and public environmentalist participation.

Declarations

Author details
[1]National Center of Competence in Research – The Migration-Mobility Nexus (nccr – on the move), Seminar für Kulturwissenschaft und Europäische Ethnologie, University of Basel, Rheinsprung 9/11, 4051 Basel, Switzerland. [2]University of Basel and swisspeace, Steinengraben 22, 4051 Basel, Switzerland. [3]University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland.

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