

Lifestyle Migrants or European Citizens? Communicating European Citizenship to British Residents in France.

Dr Sue Collard, Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex.

Introduction

The need for greater efforts to communicate European citizenship was demonstrated forcefully by the Flash Eurobarometer Survey 213 on “European Citizenship” carried out in 2007 across all member states at the request of the European Commission: it revealed that whilst 78% of respondents said they had heard of the term ‘citizen of the European Union’, 22% of respondents claimed to have never heard of it. Only 41% said they knew what it meant, and half the people interviewed (49%) indicated that they were “not well informed” regarding their rights as citizens of the European Union. One respondent in five (19%) considered him/herself “not informed at all”. Thus, more than two thirds of EU citizens felt uninformed about their rights as EU citizens (68%).

(http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_213_en.pdf)

Since this survey was based on approximately 1000 respondents chosen at random within each country, we can assume that most, if not all, of the respondents were probably sedentary nationals of that country, with possibly little interest in citizenship rights that are largely aimed at facilitating mobility within the EU. This is not to suggest that they should not be well informed of their rights, regardless of whether or not they have any interest in actually exercising them. But what if the same survey was carried out on respondents who have already actively ‘become’ European citizens by dint of taking up residence or employment in another member state? Would we find their level of knowledge and understanding to be noticeably higher? If so, through what mechanisms did they become better informed of their rights as European citizens? If not, why not, and how might their lack of knowledge be addressed? What can their various experiences tell policy makers about how best to communicate with ordinary citizens at the ‘frontline’ of European citizenship about their rights?

This paper proposes to explore these questions by drawing on an empirical case study of a specific group of intra-EU migrants: British residents in France. Most of them can be categorised as ‘lifestyle migrants’ rather than economic migrants, even though economic factors can play an important role in the choice of migration for many lifestyle migrants.¹ Of all the nationalities in the EU, it is the British who have consistently displayed the lowest level of positive engagement with the EU institutions and the processes of integration: indeed, this was confirmed in the Eurobarometer survey referred to above, which found the highest proportion of respondents who felt “not informed at all” about their rights as EU citizens in the UK (26%). It is therefore of particular interest to discover whether these British lifestyle migrants become more engaged as European citizens once they change their country of residence: does living in continental Europe make them feel more ‘European’? Do they become more aware and actively engaged as European citizens, and if so,

¹ Lifestyle Migration hub, Loughborough University
http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/lmhub/lmhub_home.html

through what mechanisms? If not, why not? What lessons can be drawn from their experiences?

In order to investigate these questions, the paper will be divided into two sections: the first will draw on results of a survey carried out in 2006/7 of British residents in Normandy, which was initially carried out as a case-study of intra-EU migration (Drake & Collard, 2008). The second section will draw on the results of a follow up survey carried out in 2007/8, involving a specific group of British residents in different parts of France who, having taken up their political rights as EU citizens, had been elected as local councillors in 2001 (the first local elections to take place in France after the implementation of Maastricht Treaty legislation). Since both of these surveys reveal very low levels of awareness and knowledge of European citizenship, I will conclude by suggesting specific ways in which the communication of European citizenship could be enhanced at grass roots level in France, not only with regard to British residents in France, but across all EU nationalities.

1) British residents in Normandy: lifestyle migrants or European citizens?²

The unprecedented form of intra-EU migration from Northern Europe to Southern Europe, mainly Spain, Italy and France (Sriskandarajah, D., Drew, C., 2006), described as ‘consumption led migration’ (driven less by employment considerations than by the search for residential rural space and a different lifestyle), which could not be explained by any existing theories of migration, is well illustrated by the significant wave of migration of British residents to mainly rural France since the late 1980s. Since then, the subject of ‘Brits in France’ has been widely reported in the media, both in Britain and France, though attempts to quantify the movement have always been thwarted by the absence of reliable and comprehensive statistics.³ The earliest academic research into the phenomenon derives from a large survey, in which two British migration geographers studied the question primarily through the prism of the property market and its impact on the local economy and social fabric of the areas most affected (Hoggart & Buller, 1994). Besides their attempt to understand what motivated this wave of consumption led migration, they focused their attention on the relations between the migrants & the host communities, and concluded that rather than creating bifurcated social spatial and environments (as was the case with the phenomenon of urban to rural migration in Britain in the post-war era, known as ‘counterurbanisation’), most British migrants to rural France (with the exception of the earliest communities established in the Lot & Dordogne which tended to remain ‘closed’ towards the host culture), sought above all to integrate with their local communities rather than to challenge them. Similar findings were reported by two French anthropologists, based on case studies of three areas of France with a particularly high influx of British: the Dordogne, Normandy and Brittany (Barou & Prado, 1995). They concluded optimistically, in the wake of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, that the future lay in the capacity of rural France to create and nurture a new sense of European citizenship.

² This section includes some sentences extracted from Drake & Collard, 2008.

³ The figures provided by INSEE show that in 2004 there were more than 130,000, British residents in France, whereas in 1996 there were only 50,000, and 75,546 in 1999. In 2006 the figure was estimated to be around 200,000 (Sriskandarajah, D., C. Drew, (2006) *Brits Abroad. Mapping the Scale and Nature of British Emigration* Institute of Public Policy Research).

The survey on which the first part of this paper is based was carried out in an attempt to ascertain whether or not this had indeed taken place, and was conducted in 2006 in one of the areas which was studied by both sets of researchers, Normandy, where I also had personal connections. It aimed to address the question by evaluating the experiences of migration, twenty years on, of the specific group of people who had been the subject of the Normandy survey led by Barou & Prado in the early 1990s, soon after their arrival. This is therefore a group of people who had exercised their right to mobility and residence within the EU before the entrenchment and extension of these rights by the Maastricht Treaty. The original interviewees were identified through a combination of 'hints' given in the original text, and personal contacts in the area. They were all located geographically in a small part of what is called the Pays d'Auge, in Lower Normandy, straddling the cantons of Vimoutiers and Livarot. The area is reputed for its cider-making, its cheese (Livarot, Pont l'Evêque, Camembert), its studs, and its gently rolling countryside dotted with distinctive timber-framed houses and cider apple trees. This is the stuff of picture post-cards, and it is easy to see why it attracted the British.



The method of enquiry was to conduct semi-structured individual interviews lasting between 45 minutes and three hours each, based on a questionnaire but allowing for free discussion as volunteered by the interviewee.⁴ This methodology made it possible to ascertain the fact that all these respondents felt that in many ways they had been 'pioneers' in migrating to a country where they did not speak the language. This meant that whilst they did not not all know each other personally, most of them knew of each other by name or reputation, and there was a certain sense of solidarity between them, largely associated with memories of the struggles they had all experienced in establishing their new lives. This made for a strong contrast with their feelings of animosity towards a later wave of British lifestyle migrants who moved in to the area after the turn of the century in the wake of a second property boom in the UK and the introduction of low cost flights: the 'Ryanair generation'. I have defined these two groups as 'first wave' and 'second wave'. The resentment of the former towards the latter was inspired largely by their failure to make any efforts to learn French or to integrate socially as they had done, and by the sense that whereas they had had to learn the hard way in their dealings with bureaucracy, the newcomers had been given an easy ride by the proliferation of information and services now available to them in English. The arrival of the Internet and its social and professional

⁴ This work was carried out with the endorsement of the original author of the chapter, Jacques Barou, who unfortunately has not retained any of the archives relating to the field work, which was carried out by a research assistant.

networking possibilities had also facilitated for the second wavers the development of an ‘internal market’ of British expats content to remain within their closed circles. The identification of this second wave of British residents by the ‘first wavers’, inspired an extension of the survey with a second set of interviews with a similar number of more recent arrivals in order to compare the responses of the two waves.⁵

The full results of this survey of the first and second wavers have been published elsewhere (Drake & Collard, 2008), but what is of interest to us here is that a clear distinction can be made between the extent to which the two groups have integrated with their local communities. Interviews with the first wavers largely confirmed the earlier findings of Barou & Prado and Hoggart & Buller with regard to the non-confrontational and largely successful integration of many of those who had settled between 1988 – 1992. Indeed, in telling their stories, it was clear that all the respondents took for granted the idea that integration was the appropriate model of behaviour, and indeed they measured their own degree of ‘success’ by what they perceived as their own level of social integration with the local community, as much as by their ability to earn a living (those of working age). Although command of the French language had initially constituted a major problem for all but three of the respondents, they had adopted a range of different strategies in their determination to learn, since they all felt this was the key to their being able to gain acceptance from the local population. So by 2006, all these respondents felt totally at ease in their changed lifestyles and had been well received within their adopted communities. By contrast, interviews with the second wavers confirmed the claims of the first wavers that these more recent arrivals had not undergone the same socialisation processes because they had not developed sufficient command of the French language. They were largely ‘discouraged’ from doing so by the fact that over the past decade, a plethora of guides in English to living in France have flooded the market. Moreover, the use of English has become increasingly commonplace in the provision of public services, with English helplines being operated by banks, telephone and broadband operators, tax offices, social security offices and so on. There is even an English version of the main gateway to the French administration designed for individual users needing specific information.⁶ Thus they did not feel an urgent need to learn French for administrative purposes, and whilst paying lip service to the desire to engage socially and linguistically with their local communities, in reality they function very much as ex-pat communities, establishing social networks with other British residents, mainly through the Internet.

So, given these two contrasting sets of relationships with their host communities, were there equally differentiated levels of knowledge and understanding of their roles and rights as European citizens? Might it be logical to hypothesise that the second wavers, whose migration took place post Maastricht, and was accompanied by a significant body of relevant information, would be better informed than the first wavers? In fact this proved not to be the case: when asked about their understanding of the term ‘European citizenship’, nearly all respondents from both waves replied that it meant very little or nothing at all to them, and subsequent questions regarding knowledge of the accompanying rights were met with

⁵ These ‘second wavers’ were identified partly through word of mouth, and partly through the ‘Alliance Anglo-Normande’, a social networking association set up by British people.

<http://alliance-anglo-normande.info/index.php>

⁶ <http://www.service-public.fr/langue/english/001444.html>

overwhelmingly negative responses. The first wavers, who had moved to France before the introduction of European citizenship with the Maastricht Treaty, tended to associate their right to mobility within the EU with 'the Common Market' but had not picked up on any new rights bestowed by the TEU. Many of them took the question as a cue to evoke the bureaucratic difficulties they experienced after their arrival, regarding registration for residence permits and French driving licences (compulsory at that time), arranging medical insurance, pension transfers, and applying for various state benefits (such as child allowance). Those who had set up businesses had experienced a range of difficulties pertaining to non-equivalence of qualifications, and the extensive bureaucratic demands of French administration. All were aware that many of these procedures have since been greatly facilitated for new arrivals, but none of the respondents saw any of these problems as relating in any way to a wider European framework, and they all saw the abandoning of residence permits in 2003 as a purely French initiative.

The second wavers were mainly preoccupied with regulations regarding health care provision (especially for early retirees) and pension payments, and few had any clear idea of whether this legislation derived from EU law or French. Some had tried, with varying degrees of success, to claim various state benefits to which they felt entitled, in accordance with their understanding of reciprocal arrangements for foreign residents in the UK. Interestingly, it emerged that a controversy had developed over access to French language lessons which in some cases were being provided free to EU citizens and in others not. This was traced back to the fact that an Irishwoman in the Paris region had taken her case to the High Authority for the Struggle Against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE) in 2005 when she had been refused a place on a language course by her local unemployment agency because she was Irish (and therefore an EU citizen), and the ruling had been made in her favour, on the grounds that it is illegal for discrimination to be exercised on the grounds of nationality.⁷ This ruling had gradually trickled down to some of the centres of French language provision across the country (largely aimed at non-EU immigrants) as a result of coverage in the anglophone press in France; amongst the Normandy second wavers there were a number of cases of conflict involving particular individuals who had failed to get free language lessons to which they felt entitled, though as with health care and pension provision, they were unclear whether the relevant regulations were of EU or French origin.

Thus, the two sets of interviews revealed a generally low level of knowledge and understanding of European citizenship and its practical meaning in terms of the respondents' everyday lives, which, if articulated statistically, would produce a figure well below the 26% of British people who in the Eurobarometer survey of 2007 claimed not to be informed at all of their rights regarding European citizenship. There was however one area where first wave respondents in particular were all well informed of their rights: the right to vote and stand as candidate in European and municipal elections. Significantly, however, none of them attributed this right to the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty; rather, they assumed that these were the result of initiatives of the French government. Despite being aware of their right to vote, only about half had in fact registered on the separate 'complementary lists' as required under French law for EU citizens. Yet even this figure actually compares very

⁷ The HALDE was set up as a somewhat delayed response to Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

favorably with the estimated rates of registration nationally for British residents in France, as shown in **Table 1**, though a few of those who had registered admitted they had not then actually voted, giving reasons relating to practicalities or simply ‘not getting round to it’.

Table 1: British and NFEU registered voters in European and municipal elections since the Treaty of Maastricht

	June 1994 European			June 1999 European			March 2001 Municipal		
	Registered voters	Potential voters	%	Registered voters	Potential voters	%	Registered voters	Potential voters	%
British voters	4,978	63,522	7.8	7,759	65,353	11.8	12,439	68,095	18.3
Total NFEU voters	47,632	1,250,049	3.8	72,399	1,224,492	5.9	166,122	1,201,206	13.8
	June 2004 European			March 2008 Municipal					
	Registered voters	Potential voters	%	Registered voters	Potential voters	%			
British voters	15,496	73,626	21	34,011					
Total NFEU voters	147,660	1,221,115	12.1	264,137					

Source: Compiled from figures made available by the Ministry of the Interior, Bureau des Elections. Estimates of potential voters are obtained from the number of applications for residence permits; as these were abandoned in 2003, these estimates are not possible for 2008. Figures are not currently available for the 2009 European elections.

Voting in the elections for the European Parliament was seen by all as a less worthwhile exercise than voting in local elections, which are seen as playing a vital part in the day to day life of the many small rural communities in France, such as those where all the respondents lived. Indeed, the system of French municipal democracy is exceptional in Europe, because of the very large number (36,779) of elected municipalities, known in France as *communes*, which together constitute 41 per cent of all local government units in the EU.⁸ The fact that 33,922 of these *communes* have less than 3500 inhabitants, and of these, 20,739 have under 500, means that across vast swathes of French territory, local democracy is very accessible to ordinary citizens both in terms of voting and in standing for election (**Table 2**): even the smallest municipal council in France has 9 councillors and the mayor of the smallest *commune* has on paper the same powers as that of the largest *communes* (discounting benefits of scale). This proximity of local government in rural France explains the apparent anomaly thrown up by the Normandy survey of a low level of knowledge and understanding of European citizenship in general, but a high level of

⁸ <http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/institutions/approfondissements/collectivites-locales-au-sein-union-europeenne.html> Germany has 14%, Spain and Italy 9% each, and the Czech Republic 7%. These five countries together account for 80% of the municipalities in the EU. France and the Czech Republic both have the lowest average number (1600) of inhabitants per municipality. The highest is the UK with 135,000. http://www.dgcl.interieur.gouv.fr/Publications/CL_en_chiffres_2006/accueil [CL en chiffres 2006.htm](http://www.dgcl.interieur.gouv.fr/Publications/CL_en_chiffres_2006/accueil)

awareness of its political dimension: since rural residents are bound to come into contact with their local mayor at some point (regarding matters such as planning permission, septic tanks, problems relating to local roads and pathways, primary education, or even simple bureaucratic procedures and certification etc), they are likely to have been sensitised to their voting rights, because it is in the local *mairie* that registration takes place.

Table 2: Number of communes by number of inhabitants and number of councillors by size of commune

No. inhabitants	No. communes	No. of councillors*
0-99	3907	9
100-299	11,200	11
300-499	5632	11
500-999	6780	15
1000-1499	2812	15
1500-2499	2439	15
Sub-total 0-2499	32,770	
2500-3499	1152	23
Sub-total 0-3499	33,922	
3500-4999	876	27
5000-9999	1029	29
10,000-19,999	511	33
20,000-39,999	268	35
40,000-49,999	55	43
50,000-59,999	83	45
60,000-79,999	32	49
80,000-99,999	16	53
100,000-149,999	17	55
150,000-199,999	9	59
200,000-249,999	4	61
250,000-299,999	2	65
300,000 +	5	69
Lyon		73
Marseille		101
Paris		169
Total	36,779	* including the mayor

The question of voting in European and local elections led many respondents of both waves to volunteer comment, given the open ended nature of the interviews, on two specific issues which they felt were related and which were of concern to a large number of them: first, the fact that they become disenfranchised from voting in UK elections after 15 years of residence outside the UK, and second, by extension, the question of whether or not to apply for French nationality. Neither of these are formally related to their status as European citizens, but in their understanding of citizenship, these were important questions. On the question of disenfranchisement, there was a unanimous feeling that citizens should be allowed to vote nationally in the place where they pay their taxes: that there should be ‘no taxation without representation’. When presented with the option of applying for French nationality

which would grant them full voting rights, there was equally unanimous hostility: the procedure was time consuming and demanding in terms of paperwork, and brought no other tangible benefits than voting, which they thought they should acquire by paying taxes. In this respect, their views were representative of many other Britons who live abroad, who regularly lobby the British government on this issue through electronic petitions and various other devices. These issues were clearly of much more importance to many respondents than their right to vote in the EP elections, considered as largely irrelevant.

A final, but highly pertinent element to emerge from the Normandy survey, in addition to the relatively high level of awareness of the right to vote in local elections, was the fact that three of the first wave respondents had in fact been elected as local councillors in their villages, and could therefore be described as ‘European citizens *par excellence*’. Interestingly, their responses to the questions regarding European citizenship were totally in line with those of the rest of the group: their position as local councillor had apparently not increased their awareness or knowledge, and none of them even knew that their right to vote and stand for election as local councillor was derived from the Treaty of Maastricht. Nor could any of them relate their own venture to the broader framework of Europe or the concept of a European citizenship: even participation in local ‘politics’ was seen as a purely parochial affair with no wider implications, even though one of them saw herself as a committed ‘European’. Another thought that it was ‘a load of rubbish’ to attempt to put local council matters into a European perspective. The significance of these answers for the broader picture that concerns us here raised another major question for my research agenda: how many other British (or other EU) residents had been elected in 2001, and did they share similar views to the Normandy sample? Would there be any increase in the number of British and other EU residents elected as local councillors in the elections of March 2008? To what extent would the answers to all these questions give substance to Barou & Prado’s hopes that the post Maastricht future lay in the capacity of rural France to create and nurture a new sense of European citizenship?

2) British local councillors in France: pioneers of European citizenship?

The enquiry into the number of British and other EU residents in France that had been elected as local councillors in 2001 revealed the fact that the Ministry of the Interior (responsible for elections) had only collected data for the 2857 *communes* of over 3500 inhabitants. In these *communes* there were 79 British candidates and 16 of them were successful: they accounted for just under 8% of the total number of non-French EU candidates and elected councillors, which was almost exactly the same percentage of British to non-French EU voters registered for the same election (see Table 3).⁹ However, it was clear from the Normandy survey that there were potentially many more in the smaller *communes*.

Table 3: Non-French EU Citizens Resident in France (NFEUCRIF): candidates and elected councillors by nationality in the municipal elections of 2001 in *communes* of over 3,500 inhabitants.

Country of Origin	Number of	% of total EU	Number of elected	% of elected
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⁹ These statistics are presented and analysed in greater detail in Collard, S., 2010.

	candidates	candidates	councillors	candidates
Austria	3	0.30	0	0.00
Belgium	100	10.09	21	10.29
Denmark	6	0.61	1	0.49
Finland	5	0.50	1	0.49
Germany	106	10.70	17	8.33
Greece	7	0.71	1	0.49
Ireland	8	0.81	2	0.98
Italy	144	14.53	28	13.73
Luxemburg	4	0.40	0	0.00
Netherlands	32	3.23	8	3.92
Portugal	389	39.25	83	40.69
Spain	99	9.99	23	11.27
Sweden	9	0.91	3	1.47
UK	79	7.97	16	7.84
TOTAL	991	100.00	204	100.00

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Bureau des Elections.

In the absence of ministerial data, an alternative tactic was adopted of seeking to identify municipal councillors elected in 2001 through the anglophone press in France.¹⁰ Over a period of six months, this produced a total of 50 identified councillors, which constituted a sufficiently significant sample to justify the continuation of the research. Of the 50, eight were in *communes* of over 3500, and therefore already included in the statistics published by the Ministry. However, since one of them had taken French nationality he would not have been officially counted as British;¹¹ therefore, of those 16, nine remain unidentified, meaning that in total, at least 59 British councillors were elected in 2001.¹² (This figure makes an interesting comparison with the figures published by the Ministry of the Interior for 2001 giving 16 British councillors in total, and it is quite clear that the official figure is probably much higher, especially since one can assume that a large number of well-integrated British residents do not ever look at the anglophone press, especially in rural areas where it is not widely distributed). Having identified 50 potential respondents, a second set of semi-structured interviews was then carried out by telephone, lasting from between one and three hours: only three individuals did not want to participate in the survey, and three others (one of whom had moved back to the UK) could not be contacted. They were questioned on their various experiences, first as migrants to France then as municipal councillors, on their views of French local democracy, and on their understanding of European citizenship. Given the limitation of space, this paper will discuss only the findings relating to how they came to be elected and their understanding of European citizenship, the rest of the responses having been reported

¹⁰ This involved offering articles for publication in *French News*, *Connexion* (national distribution), *The Rendez-Vous* (Lower Normandy), and a number of other local newsletters and local magazines identified through extensive Internet research, in exchange for which, appeals were published for any councillors to make contact with the author.

¹¹ Altogether, seven had taken French nationality, but some of them had not obtained it before 2001. For the purposes of the research at this stage it is irrelevant whether those in the *communes* of under 3500 are statistically considered as French or British, though it raises some interesting questions about integration and national identity.

¹² A small number of the respondents had in fact been elected as a result of by-elections at various moments during this mandate.

in other papers (Collard 2008a, 2008b). But first, I will provide some data relating to their sociological profiles.

Where were they?

The breakdown of the size of the communes in which these councillors were elected is illustrated in **Table 4**: 8 of those identified were in communes of over 3500, and the remaining 42 in communes under 3500.

Table 4: Numbers of British councillors elected in 2001 by size of *commune*

Size of <i>commune</i>	Number of elected British councillors
Under 100	4
100 - 300	22
300 - 500	5
500 - 1000	5
1000 – 2500	4
2500 – 3500	2
3500 +	8

The geographical distribution of the sample is illustrated in **Table 5**: it shows clearly that the *départements* most concerned are Aude, Hérault, Pyrénées Orientales, Dordogne and Haute Vienne.

Département	Councillors	Département	Councillors
06 Alpes Maritimes	2	47 Lot-et-Garonne	1
11 Aude	6	49 Maine-et-Loir	1
14 Calvados	1	53 Mayenne	2
16 Charente	2	56 Morbihan	1
17 Charente Maritime	1	59 Nord	1
22 Côtes d'Armor	1	61 Orne	2
24 Dordogne	4	62 Pas-de-Calais	2
31 Haute Garonne	1	66 Pyrénées Orientales	4
32 Gers	1	76 Seine Maritime	1
33 Gironde	1	79 Deux-Sèvres	1
34 Hérault	4	81 Tarn	2
35 Ile-et-Vilaine	1	83 Var	1
45 Loiret	1	87 Haute Vienne	5

This is very much in keeping with the geographical distribution of those registered to vote in 2001 shown in **Figure 1** below.

Britanniques inscrits sur les listes électorales - 2001
Elections municipales

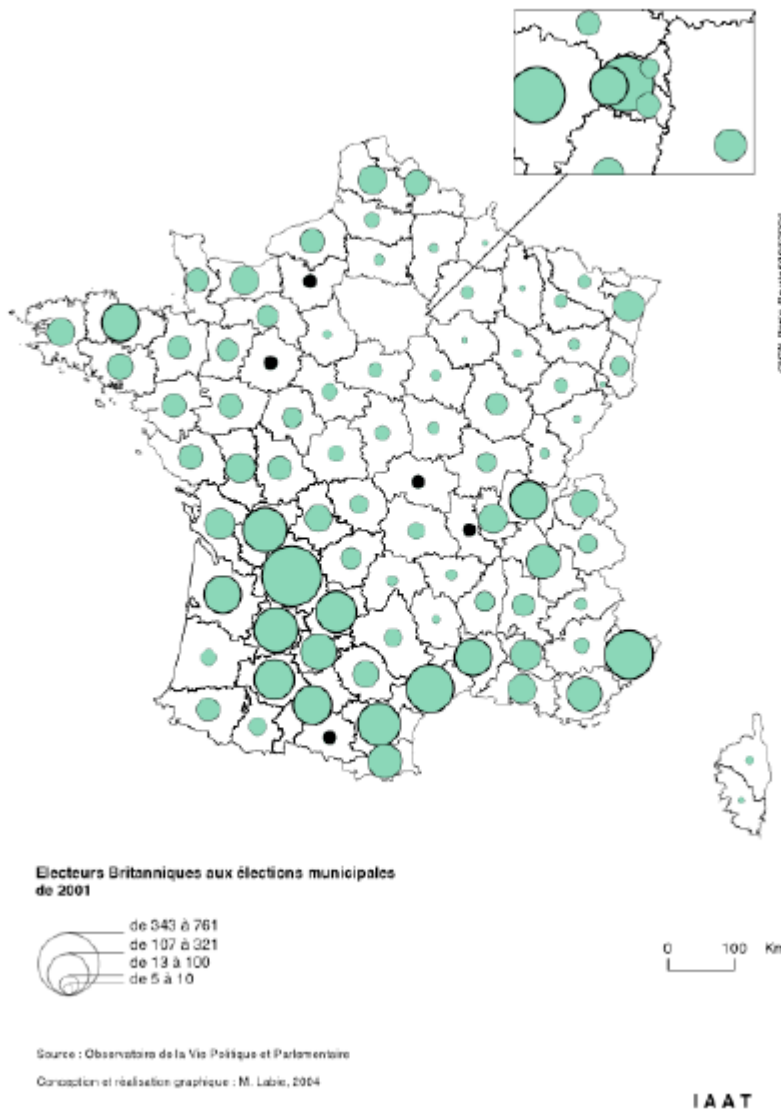


Figure 1: Geographical distribution of British residents registered to vote in 2001 municipal elections

Source: Madeleine Labie, 'L'installation de Britanniques en Poitou-Charentes', June 2004, p.3.
<http://www.iaat.org/telechargement/britanniques.pdf>

Who were they?

The gender breakdown was 28 male and 22 female; 18 were retired, 29 were employed or self-employed, either full-time (including 6 farmers) or part-time, and a few had been employed but retired (4) or were made unemployed (2) during their mandates. In terms of age group at the time of interview (Autumn 2007 – Spring 2008) only 8 were under 50, 22 were 50-65 and 13 were over 65. 16 had moved to France as 'individual migrants' in the 1970s and 80s, as a result of marriage or for employment reasons; this was particularly the case with those who lived in urban areas. A similar number (15) had moved to France in the 'first wave' of significant migration from Britain to rural France, between 1988 – 1993, and the rest between 1994 – 1999. Many of them had previously owned second homes, so they knew their locality well before taking up permanent residence. In terms of educational level or

qualifications, 13 had a university degree (7 in French), 18 had other certification of higher education or qualification (such as agricultural college or nursing), while 12 had no formal qualifications beyond school age. Their level of French on arrival in France varied from the extremes of nil (8) to fluent (with degrees in French), with a range of levels in between, depending on individual circumstances.

How had they come to be elected?

Only three respondents had actively sought to be included on a list: one in a small *commune* of under 300 inhabitants, and the other two in large *communes* (13,000 & 138,000 inhabitants). All of these were men now aged between 47 – 50, and fluent French speakers with degrees (two in French and one in Politics). Two of them were members of the Labour Party, and two had obtained French nationality before 2001. Their motives were partly political and partly the desire to play an active role in the local community and become more integrated. For the rest of the respondents, the majority of whom had been elected in small *communes* with under 2500 inhabitants (as we saw in **Table 4**), all of them said that they had been elected as a result of having been asked to stand on a list, either by the outgoing mayor or by another list leader. Two had already been elected in 1995, after having taken French nationality. None of them expressed any desire to use their role on the council to further their own personal interests (such as obtaining planning permission), and very few of them were even aware that they had a right to stand as a candidate before being asked. Few had shown any previous interest in the ‘politics’ of the *commune*, and only ten had any previous political experience of any kind in the UK: three had been active in a trades union, one was a Liberal Party member, one was a local councillor and one had started a Young Conservative’s Club. Four women said their husbands had been either on the Parish Council, the Chair of the local Conservative Party or had stood as parliamentary candidates. All of them, but particularly those in the smallest *communes*, said that they did not see their role as councillor as a political one, and emphasised that if party politics had been involved, they would not have agreed to participate. None of them had any idea what would be involved in being a councillor, but all were very flattered to have been asked, and saw the invitation as an opportunity to integrate further into the *commune*, to give something back to the community, or to learn more about how their local affairs were managed, as well as to improve their French in the case of some. Indeed, perfect French does not seem to have been a prerequisite to being asked to join the council, and other reasons appear to have often taken precedence over linguistic competence.

The reasons given by the mayors (some of whom were also interviewed) for inviting these EU citizens on to their lists tended to emphasise the desire to embrace the spirit of Maastricht, but some also stated the need for the increasing numbers of British in their *communes* to be represented. There was probably also partly in some cases an undeclared instrumental aspect to their choice: a number of councillors were asked to take on the issues (in particular relating to drainage systems and planning permission requests) relating to more recent British incomers, most of whom do not speak much French, and others were given tasks on the council relating to the management and development of tourism in the *commune*. It is important to note also that in small rural *communes* it is often hard to find enough people willing and able to take on a position as councillor: two small *communes* even took two British residents on to their councils. Why did the mayors choose these particular individuals (as opposed to other British or other European nationals)? In many cases there was a

personal link: they were neighbours, or friends of neighbours, their children had been in the same class at school, or they had initially met when purchasing their house. These personal links were particularly important in the larger *communes*, where the more common way of entering local politics is through party activism. In other cases, it was because these particular people were seen as ‘doers’ in the community: joining in any activities that went on, helping to organise events such as the local fêtes, running the old people’s club or the local choir, or helping in the local school. For some it was because of their line of employment: in towns this was relevant especially with regard to those engaged in some form of tourism, or provision of language services (mainly teaching and translation) and in rural *communes* this applied particularly to farmers. Some women felt they may also have been asked because of the context of the new legislation on parity applied for the first time in 2001 (though not in *communes* under 3500 inhabitants). Retirees were perceived as having spare time and therefore available for council business. None of this should detract however from an apparently very genuine desire on the part of some of the mayors to welcome these incomers and make them feel a part of the local community, especially when they had been seen to be participating in that community themselves. In this respect, it is clear that individual personalities played an important role: a few councillors in small *communes* even won the most, or nearly the most number of votes in the election.¹³ It is possible that in some cases the incomers were popular partly because they had no history of involvement in any of the long-standing quarrels that tend to dominate life in small *communes*.

Did they see themselves as ‘pioneers’ of European citizenship?

When asked if they had any sense of being a ‘pioneer’ of European citizenship, most respondents asked for clarification of the meaning of the question, after which they still failed to grasp its implications: only a very small number were aware that the eligibility of EU citizens to vote and stand as candidates in municipal elections was derived from the Treaty of Maastricht, and few could make any link between their activities as municipal councillor and the European Union. For the vast majority of these councillors, like the Normandy respondents, their role was an entirely local one, and one even said ‘Europe is a long long way from my lovely commune’. On the other hand, the small number (7) who did not seek clarification of the question, felt very strongly that they were contributing to the building of a real Europe : ‘1000% yes’ answered one man, ‘very definitely’ said several others. These respondents were mostly (but not all) aware of the introduction of European citizenship by Maastricht, and all put themselves across as being broadly in favour of the European project, usually with reservations of one kind or another relating to the actual functioning of the EU. By contrast, a small number of those who saw their role as purely a local one, expressed views of open hostility to the EU, very much in line with the Eurosceptic arguments of the British in Britain, invoking economic arguments and opposition to the Brussels bureaucracy.

As with the Normandy survey, almost all the respondents volunteered comment on the question (discussed earlier) of their disenfranchisement from UK elections after 15 years, and expressed similar views. A small number had in fact taken French nationality (in addition to British, via dual nationality), for this very

¹³ Votes are counted against individual names in *communes* under 3500 inhabitants: see my full explanation of the rather complex voting system at <http://www.anglophone-direct.com/A-more-detailed-look-at-the-French>

reason, but others felt that this should not be necessary and one woman even felt that it was ‘insulting’ to have to request nationality in order to gain the right to vote in national elections. One man who had moved to France in the 1970s when he married a French woman, had taken French nationality in order to be able to stand as mayor (not possible for those without it since they act as members of the electoral college for the Senate), and in fact has been mayor of his village since 1995.¹⁴

Conclusions: towards active awareness of European citizenship?

Clearly, the increased number of respondents in this survey produced a wider range of responses than for the Normandy sample, with some encouraging indications of positive European engagement and awareness from a small minority. Yet the overall picture is one in which European citizenship remains very much a mystery, even to those who are actively involved in fulfilling one of its key dimensions, and it presents a woeful illustration of the need for better communication of what it means and what benefits it bestows on EU citizens. The EU is doing itself a disservice by failing to reach the very people who are at the frontline of European mobility and citizenship.

How then might this situation be remedied? The first stage could be to conduct further empirical research, in order to formalise and expand upon the two ‘pilot’ surveys reported above. This would now be possible on the basis of the statistics collected by the Ministry of the Interior for the 2008 municipal elections, which for the first time included all *communes*. Those election results show that the number of NFEUCRIF councillors in *communes* of over 3500 rose from 204 to 396, of which 41 are British, representing 10.3% of the total, which marks an increase over the 2001 figure of 16 and percentage of 7.84. In the *communes* of under 3500 inhabitants, there are at least 1,154 NFEUCRIF councillors, 405 of whom are British.¹⁵ Thus a data set now exists consisting of a list of identifiable individuals who, despite being active ‘political’ participants, probably remain largely unaware and uninformed of their status, and this could be exploited for further surveys and interviews. A second stage in the research agenda would be to launch a bilingual web-site (French and English) specifically for NFEUCRIF local councillors of all nationalities, where information relating to the very complex business of French local government could be provided in an accessible form to members, and where discussion fora could provide them with a means of communicating amongst one another, sharing problems, ideas, best practice and so on, in relation to the role of local councillor.¹⁶ In this way, the site could also serve as a ‘laboratory’ of different national perspectives coming together to find ‘European’ solutions. The site could also disseminate information about matters relating to European citizenship and the rights it confers, as well as providing explanations of EU legislation where relevant, on issues such as health care, discrimination, car registration, access to benefits, all of which would be of direct interest to them as individuals. This would have the advantage of adding a European dimension to a range of practical matters that are not necessarily seen as deriving from the EU.

¹⁴ <http://kentatham.blogspot.com>

¹⁵ The ministry’s figures are not entirely accurate and the figure could be significantly higher: for a fuller analysis, see Collard, 2010.

¹⁶ An *association* (Association des Conseillers Municipaux Européens en France, ACMEF) has already been set up in France to this end, and has a holding page at www.acmef.eu.

If these individuals were themselves made more aware in this way of the European context in which they are in fact operating, they could also pass on this information to others in their local communities. Indeed, there was evidence in the case of some of the British councillors, for example, that they were being encouraged by their mayors to take responsibility for helping the non French speakers in their *communes* to get to grips with language learning, with setting up businesses legally, and with a whole range of other matters relating to their daily lives and which also impact on the local population. In this way, the councillors could take on a vital role in communicating European citizenship at a level where it can be most easily understood. This grass roots approach may seem somewhat low key and amateurish, but since top down measures to achieve the same goals have been largely unsuccessful, would it not be worth at least trying? The level of funding involved would represent a mere fraction of some of the costly Brussels-led exercises that have so far yielded poor results, and it would be a unique opportunity to try to answer Barou & Prado's post Maastricht question: 'might our French countryside be the laboratory of European citizenship?' ('nos campagnes seraient-elles le laboratoire de la citoyenneté européenne?')

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