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CITY NETWORKS AND THE MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION

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Abstract

Hailed for their pragmatism, innovativeness and progressive views, cities and their networks seem to bring a fresh air in current migration debates. Our intent, in this special issue, is to address the scale and significance of this trend by contributing to a greater understanding of their networking activities. Revisiting the conceptual framework used in the literature to date, it addresses the diverse forms of networks, their drivers, internal operation and the functions they perform, at all levels of governance. This introductory paper starts with a review of the scholarship on migration-related city networks. From there, we draw a more fine-grained sense of the ambivalent role of city networks in the design and implementation of migration governance. The final part of this introduction introduces the papers included in this issue, pointing to the ways in which each casts significant new light on these aspects which, in the current literature, remain unresolved.

KEYWORDS

city networks, European Union, integration policies, migration governance, United States, welcoming policies

A few years ago, Benjamin Barber announced that cities, one day, might rule the world (Barber, 2013). On environmental issues, lifestyle or participatory democracy, on the development of new technologies or the integration of disabled people, cities have been celebrated for being the crucible for innovative experimentations. Is that so when it comes to migration? Steps have been made in that direction in recent years. In Europe and other destination countries, local authorities have increasingly been acknowledged as a key implementation level of integration policies (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). But the adoption of such policies seems to be, more often than not, embedded in collective mobilizations of municipalities such as the U.S. sanctuary or the EU solidary cities movements. And they are now making use

of this role to convey a distinct voice in the global diplomacy of migration governance (Thouez, 2020). The recent creation of the Mayoral mechanism, an institution bridging local authorities and the broader UN-driven global framework of migration governance, is a signal of their growing presence in international debates. Local authorities, it is argued, are carving a distinctive place in the concert of international stakeholders. Between the two ends of involvement, city networks are now instrumental in shaping an emerging voice and identity of cities as locally grounded international actors.

Our intent here is to address and question this trend by contributing to a greater understanding of city networking activities: the drivers, diverse forms of networks and the functions they perform, at all levels of governance, and their internal operation. The mushrooming of migration-related city networks is a worldwide phenomenon (Lacroix, 2021). In Latin America, several organizations such as Sello migrante and Mercociudad were created to tackle the new migration realities the subcontinent is facing. In Africa (e.g. Africities, the coalition of African cities against racism) and in the Middle East (e.g. the Host Local Municipalities Network), local authorities organize to have their say in the management of refugee populations. And yet, over half of these networks are based in Europe and North America (Caponio, 2018; Lacroix, 2021; Oomen, 2019). The scholarship highlights the sheer diversity of existing configurations: some of them spontaneously created 'from below', partly in reaction to the authoritarian drift of migration management, and others driven by international organizations 'from above'—a distinction we shall explore. This body of work is part and parcel of a change of perspectives on migration and cities: from a mere background stage shaping immigrant settlement, cities are now increasingly regarded as policy agents embedded in multi-scalar dynamics. Hailed for their pragmatism, innovativeness and progressive views, cities and their networks seem to bring a fresh air in current migration debates; but are they genuinely the driver for change in migration governance that they are portrayed? This thematic issue steps back to explore some of the underlying issues, interrogating the drivers of diverse forms of city networks and their actual, if evolving, impacts at local, regional and international levels, concluding that their growing impact on migration governance is significant, but at an early stage. We revisit the functions city networks are said to perform, challenging the depiction in the literature of certain key functions as 'symbolic', providing a new typology of functions for future research. It addresses an imbalance in the literature by including a focus on the internal dynamics of networks and the socialization of their members that facilitates the accommodation of difference, before addressing a dimension not yet addressed by research, the role of universities in the facilitation of networks whose primary and apparent function is knowledge exchange. In sum, it considers what difference migration-related city networks actually make when it comes to influencing policy debates and advancing progressive policies. With a focus on developments in Europe and North America, it highlights the limitations and constraints weighing on city mobilizations, but also the potentialities of such collective involvement and their actual bearing on policymaking at the local, national and international levels. We learn more about the motivations and expectations of their members (is their interest in 'instrumental' or 'symbolic' outcomes?), their differing and evolving priorities (do they pursue a merely technical or a broader political agenda?), the implications for the operation of the network, and for migrants themselves. It explores the role of the meso-level of city networks in the circulation of more inclusive policy models, but also its potential capacity to unsettle the deadlock of global and regional migration governance.

This introductory paper starts with a review of the extant international scholarship on migration-related city networks. Drawing on the state of our current knowledge, it gives, first, an overview of the nature of city networks in this field. This is not an easy task: confronted with the sheer diversity of collective groupings of cities, researchers usually prefer to use catch-all, vague definitions. From there, we strive to draw a more fine-grained sense of the ambivalent role of city networks in the design and implementation of migration governance: on the one hand, city networks have formed a milieu in which cities are increasingly being exposed and contribute to a city voice on migration issues; on the other hand, these networks remain selective groupings of potentially like-minded actors that allow the most active cities to have a platform for their leadership. The final part of this introduction introduces the series of papers included in this issue, pointing to the ways in which each casts significant new light on these questions which, in the current literature, remain unresolved.

CITIES AND MIGRANTS: FROM LOCAL SETTINGS TO GLOBAL ACTORS

The city appears as a focus of analysis in the academic literature on immigration as early as in the works of the Chicago School. Robert Park et al., in particular, account for the division of urban spaces as the joint outcome of inter-individual competition and ethno-economic collaboration (Park et al., 1984). This approach was imported in Europe from the late 60s onwards, at a time when immigration from former colonies was gaining momentum (Miret & Audebert, 2019; Rex & Moore, 1967). Since the early 90s, scholarly attention centred on the neoliberal city and its embedding into globalized networks. Research on global cities (Sassen, 1991) addresses globalization as a canvas of interlinked metropolis hosting the headquarters of multinational companies. Their specific position in this geography of capital has made these cities a magnet for two opposite forms of migration: highly skilled labour working in the high tiers of the job market, and low-skilled, sometimes irregular (undocumented) immigrants working in service provision sector (such as cleaning, care and security) (Yeoh & Chang, 2001). Cities also are the matrix of super-diversity, that is contact zones where people with different immigration backgrounds mingle (Cohen & Sheringham, 2017; Vertovec, 2007). Cities are places of conflicts and competition, but also of artistic creativity, social adaptation and cultural innovation (Bhabha, 2004; Holston & Appadurai, 1996; Soja, 1989).

In parallel, research on the neoliberal city highlights the role of municipalities in the governance of immigrant populations and their settlement. Although local policies targeting immigrants are nothing new, the devolution of powers granted to local authorities all over the world in the last two decades and the introduction of public management techniques have given a new salience to the role of municipalities in this field. In addition to 'settings' of settlement, cities are now regarded as 'agents' of change in immigrant settlement and integration, as with housing and job markets, political and class tensions and cultural dynamics (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Varsanyi, 2010). The growing presence of local authorities is, moreover, not limited to the local scene. The global consciousness of cities translates into the development of 'urban diplomacy': a growing number of cities nurture and implement an international agenda in domains as varied as the economy, culture and climate change (Andonova et al., 2009; Viltard, 2008) and, most recently, immigration (Thouez, 2020).

From settings to agents of change, local to global actors, these trends identified in the literature converge into the novel interest in migration-related city networks. Research on this issue is relatively small and recent. The scholarship on cities in international cooperation initially focused, from the early 90s onwards, on the place of local authorities in the building of a European political space (Le Galès, 2011; Van der Knaap, 1994) and more recently on environmental governance (Bulkeley et al., 2003; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Fünfgeld, 2015). This surge of interest has paralleled the rise in the number of such city-led organizations at the national and international levels. Despite this trend being global (Lacroix, forthcoming), the literature almost exclusively focuses on North America and Western Europe, and, to a lesser extent, on global-level networks¹. As we will see below, the different contexts of emergence and evolution of migration-related city networks have driven both scholarships on different pathways.

North American networks

In North America, early works on migration-related networks focused on the Sanctuary cities in the United States. In the early 80s, the Reagan administration refused to acknowledge the refugee status of immigrants fleeing conflicts in Central America (Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador). In reaction, church organizations called for 'civil disobedience', advocating for the reception and support of exiles in defiance of the national policy. San Francisco, in 1985, followed suit and became the first 'sanctuary city' by refusing to support immigration enforcement in its constituency².

¹ An exception is Tarumoto (2018) on city networks in Japan

² This claim is embedded in a century-long dispute between local and federal governments on migration issues: it is not until the early 20th century, with a Supreme Court decision in 1882 and the creation of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalisation in 1906, that the federal state gained the exclusive power to regulate migration management over municipalities.

(Lippert & Rehaag, 2013). In the mid-90s, local authorities saw their powers and responsibilities widened with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and Welfare Reform Act (Huang & Liu, 2018). In parallel, following the Clinton laws after the Oklahoma City bombings and the Patriot Act after the World Trade Centre attack, the number of undocumented immigrants reached a staggering 13 million.

In the mid-2000s, the failure of federal immigration reform triggered contradictory reactions among local authorities: while some of them supported the federal administration by enacting repressive legislation (e.g. barring landlords from renting accommodation or employers from recruiting undocumented people), others adopted pro-immigrant policies meant to protect this population from immigration enforcement (Varsanyi, 2010). Research shows that municipalities in the Southern United States experiencing a growth in the foreign population are more likely to endorse exclusionary policies. And conversely, coastal localities with better educated populations tend to be more inclusive (Walker & Leitner, 2011). Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that local authorities have all endorsed a positive attitude towards migrants. Nevertheless, this context set the background for a revival of the Sanctuary city movement. It includes nearly 200 members in the United States (although not all cities adopting this approach adopt the 'sanctuary city' label). The sanctuary city movement is in itself a grouping of cities that rejects an anti-immigration enforcement rhetoric and agenda. Another instance is the so-called 'Welcoming cities' movement. Launched in 2013, it embraces 93 cities (in 2020). It is coordinated by a civil society organization, Welcoming America, which provides a platform for experience sharing and guidelines for welcoming policies (Housel et al., 2018). Unlike sanctuary cities, which remains a relatively amorphous movement, Welcoming America provides an institutional backbone to the network of Welcoming Cities. It puts a greater emphasis on the reception of immigrants and access to services than on anti-deportation activism. Other institutionalized migration-related city networks in the United States have also flourished, focusing not only on people with an irregular status, but also on racism, children of undocumented immigrants (the so-called dreamers) or unaccompanied minors. But these organizations have received less scrutiny³. Beyond their diversity, these movements appear as a host of relatively like-minded cities whose degree of engagement varies a great deal, from mayors merely displaying a symbolic support to a cause, to municipalities endorsing legislation in blunt contradiction with national orientations: such as creation of municipal ID cards (De Graauw, 2014), specific measures preventing the transfer of information to immigration enforcement administration (the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy) and policies meant to create a context of trust between the local administration and undocumented residents (Mancina, 2019). The state/city conundrum over immigration has spurred a strand of research on the moral implications of local policies: should cities regulate immigration flows? Should they grant citizenship rights to their inhabitants? Authors respond positively arguing that cities are the authorities which ultimately cope with the bulk of immigration flows (Shalit, 2018). Others argue that cities are best equipped to cope with contemporary global challenges at large, and not migration only (Barber, 2013). And finally, residence, rather than belonging, should be an essential tenet of citizenship provision since it embeds citizenship in time and space (Baubock & Orgad, 2020; Lenard, 2015).

A strand of work studying the motives for these cities highlights two drivers: the presence of a large immigrant population and the liberal orientation of the local government. Drawing on a Baltimore case study, Felipe Filomeno argues that the existence of a committed civil society sector is also of crucial importance to bridge immigrants' needs (including those of the undocumented) and municipal political aims (Filomeno, 2017a; see also Majka & Longazel, 2017). Xi Huang and Cathy Yang Liu also found that higher levels of education and economic insecurity make cities more prone to be welcoming (Huang & Liu, 2018).

Fewer studies have paid attention to the actual effects of these municipal policies. Against the expectation of critiques of sanctuary policies, research has shown that these measures have either no or a positive effect on crime, and a positive effect on poverty rates (O'Brien et al., 2019; Wong, 2017). Susanne Schech argues that even the symbolic gesture of claiming the status of sanctuary/welcoming city affects the way in which immigration is presented in public debates. Cities and their mayors have built over time a narrative framed in terms of human rights or economic assets rather than of a burden for the welfare system (Schech, 2013).

³ Instances include City for Action, the National League for Cities and the Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination Studies.

While this above-mentioned research throws some light on the role played by networks, it has focused more on the cities within them than on the networks themselves. Others seek to move beyond methodological urbanism by showing that cities joining pro-immigration movements are embedded in a multi-scalar and multi-sectoral canvas of relations (Filomeno, 2017b; McDaniel et al., 2019): hierarchical relations with national authorities and trans local connections with other cities and civil society networks. In this regard, several authors point out the international diffusion of the sanctuary movement, a movement in which cities are but one set of actors next to churches, universities or civil society organizations (Lippert & Rehaag, 2013; Villazor & Gulasekaram, 2018). Canada, as one of the countries where the sanctuary city movement is well embedded, illustrates this point (Moffette & Ridgley, 2018). Worthy of note has been Cities of Migration⁴, a web portal that offered information for and on welcoming policies in the country and internationally. The drivers and modalities of this diffusion remain, however, understudied. Susanne Schech evokes the role of activists from Toronto touring in Switzerland or Germany to present the sanctuary policy of the city (Schech, 2013). Zurich, following the New York model, is in the process of planning a municipal IDcard, subject to the final approval of the not insignificant cost by the city parliament. And one observes the multiplication, since 2006, of cities of sanctuary in the United Kingdom. But, beyond these apparent similarities, the situations in North America and Europe are extremely different (Bauder, 2017): while in the first case, the focus of sanctuary policies is undocumented workers to be protected from immigrant enforcement, European 'welcoming cities' target asylum seekers and other newly arrived and vulnerable immigrants. Those that are inclusive of migrants with an irregular status do not adopt the city of sanctuary label, nor overt measures to oppose enforcement measures. While in North America, cities represent a dissenting voice in the federal state architecture, in Europe, their networks are part and parcel of the European political space and, more often than not, those within the EU operate within its institutional framework. Against this background, the divergent pathways taken by the European scholarship on migration-related city networks comes with no surprise.

European networks

In the European Union, it was not until 1992 and the Maastricht treaty that a political space for local authorities took shape at EU level. During this period, a number of representative institutions and networks came to fruition: the Assembly of Regions (AoR), the Committee for European Municipalities and Regions and, not long before, Eurocities, a grassroots network of Europe's largest cities created to voice their needs and concerns. Through the URBAN programme, the Commission supported city-level poverty-reduction programmes (Russeil & Healy, 2015) and consolidated the role of AoR, CEMR and Eurocities as policy partners. Immigrant integration became part of the urban agenda of the European Union in the mid-2000s only. The active lobbying of Eurocities (now with a group of members focused on that issue, in its Working Group on Migration and Integration [WGIM]), coupled with a relative disengagement of Member States, has driven this shift. The adoption of the 2000 Lisbon strategy which identifies immigration as a key economic asset and the ensuing implementation of the Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows in 2007 were a catalyst for the so-called 'local turn' of integration policies (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). Interestingly, this 'turn' took place at a time when European institutions were, under pressure from Member states, curtailing their support to local authorities. The URBAN programme was replaced by URBACT in 2006, which puts the emphasis on benchmarking and experience sharing instead of financial support (Russeil & Healy, 2015). That context favoured the setting up of a multiplication of city networks across Europe: Long-standing European networks such as Eurocities' WGIM; the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM-) (2010), Solidarity cities (2016) and time limited networks such as Cities for Local Integration Policies (CLIP) in 2006 and the City-to-City project (MC2CM) (2015), to name but a few.

These networks have contributed to informing and disseminating some of the policy models that have fed into the local turn of integration policies. However, the gist of the research to date focuses on cities and their local policies,

⁴ <http://citiesofmigration.ca/>

either as stand-alone case studies or in a comparative perspective (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Hoekstra et al., 2018). We learn little of the contribution of the different functions the networks perform, or the implications of the differing forms these networks take or their evolving internal dynamics.

City networks have thus, in comparison, received scant attention. Barbara Oomen is an exception in offering an overview of this European dynamic (Oomen, 2019). The author argues that the multiplication of migration-related city networks signals a decoupling between urban-level progressive policies and national-level restrictive migration policies. This 'decoupling' thrust does not, for the most part, compare with the overtly confrontational situation observed in the United States between local and national administrations but it points to the difficult coordination between local and national policymaking where responsibilities for migrants overlap. A strand of research has addressed this issue under the lens of multi-level governance (MLG), exploring vertical relationships with higher tiers and horizontal relationships between cities and with non-state actors in civil society (Caponio & Jones Correa, 2018). Research has explored the conditions which lead to different modes of vertical relationship, consensual and conflictual (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008), including 'de-coupling' found most clearly in the governance relationship on irregular migrants (Spencer, 2018). Although there are also local authorities which support the restrictive and 'hostile' approaches of their national governments (Walker & Leitner [2011] on the United States, Marchetti [2020] on Italian cities for instance), most research is undertaken on inclusive policies and on the networks within that frames (Marchetti, 2020).

Multi-scalar policy frameworks and the rise of assertive city networks

The MLG approach focuses on the local level within a broader multi-scalar policy framework. By contradistinction, another body of works focuses on the interplay of multi-scalar actors, legal and policy regimes at the local level. This approach raises the question of scaling. What makes a policy or a process 'local' when its actors are not necessarily local actors? The transnational scholarship had pointed out the intertwined scalar nature of the migration process in the neoliberal city (Schiller & Çağlar, 2011). Likewise, civic mobilizations and immigrant associationism are fashioned locally by a range of legal strata, from global human right regimes to national legal frameworks and local political contexts (Soysal, 1994). Another strand of work points to the complex scalar dimension of local policies. The body of research on 'street-level bureaucrats', in particular, shows how local agents interpret and combine various and at times conflicting national, local and supranational sets of rules in their daily activities; as shown, for example, by studies of civil servants assessing the credibility of asylum seekers' narratives (Tangen, 2017) or visa applications (Alpes & Spire, 2014). Likewise, different local-level administrations can follow conflicting guidelines. This has been shown in Toronto where the actual implementation of the sanctuary policy is constrained by the local police' ingrained adherence to the national-level security institutional framework (Hudson, 2019).

Over the last decade, another networking dynamic, akin to the one observed in the United States, gained momentum: the emergence of more grassroots and assertive city networks, related to the dispersal policy of asylum seekers in different European countries. This strategy raised the issue of responding to their local presence, including in smaller cities and rural areas in which this question had been virtually unknown (Tazzioli, 2019). The 'migration crisis' of 2015–2016 amplified this trend, while mayors were confronted by the pressing needs of newly arrived and vulnerable populations. In countries such as Italy, Spain and France, the security-oriented response of state authorities towards asylum seekers triggered resentment and calls for more humane approaches. This context favoured the development of militant forms of mobilizations, decoupled from and, at times, in opposition to national policies. The ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network) initiated by the parliament of writers in 1996 and the cities of sanctuary movement in the United Kingdom (the latter launched in 2006 in Sheffield) can be regarded as two forerunners (Bagelman, 2016; Ridgley, 2008). The countries bordering the Mediterranean became a crucible of such mobilization

⁵ In France, examples are manifold. Following the dismantling of the Calais Jungle in 2016, a group of far-right cities created the 'ma commune sans migrant' network. In 2013, the city of Calais launched a call to its inhabitants to report any informal squat.

after 2015 (Lacroix et al., 2020). They can take diverse forms: refusal to implement liberty-threatening legislation (cf. the anti-Salvini decree movement in 2018); promotion of alternative migration governance (unconditional welcoming in France, migration as a human right in Italy); programmes of reception and settlement of asylum seekers in Southern Italy or Catalonia; lobbying for the closure of detention centres in Barcelona; and so forth. Their field of involvement moves beyond the realm of integration policies to claim alternative migration policies, the prerogative of the national state. An instance is the claim by the Sea to City movement for the opening of legal corridors allowing the circulation of asylum seekers within Europe from port to host cities. Another contrast with prior engagements is the emphasis put on the 'right to have rights' of those with irregular, or undocumented, status, excluded by national laws from the right to work and to access most welfare support (see Sarah Spencer in this volume). These challenging demands resonate with the sanctuary movement in North America. Another similarity is the presence and influence of civil society actors who are, in many cases, the actual spur of city mobilizations (Tiziana Caponio in this volume). It has been the case for the city of sanctuary movement in the United Kingdom, 'safe port' (Seebrücke) in Germany and Communes hospitalières in Belgium. The parallel stops there, though. On both sides on the Atlantic, municipal militancy dwells on a distinct intellectual framework: from the libertarian municipalism of Murray Bookchin to the Derridian notion of *hospitalité*, Europe-based city involvement differs from the religion-touched notion of sanctuary (Bauder, 2017). Likewise, the general terminology used to name their commitment refers to the welcoming of newcomers rather than to the protection of settled populations: welcome, *hospitalité*, refuge, safe ports and solidarity (Boudou, 2018; Furri, 2017). This new lexicon marks an expansion of focus, from integration to welcoming, from long-term settlement to short-term needs (Anouk Flamant in this volume). In practice, this distinction should not be overstated: integration is also on the agenda of grassroots activist organizations geared towards vulnerable immigrants (e.g. Welcoming America), whereas hospitality has equally become an issue of concern of more established institutions: Eurocities has supported the solidarity cities network since 2016 and Urbact the arrival cities programme since 2015.

Going global?

Finally, the last strand of work we want to highlight here asks whether city networks, on migration but also beyond, are going global. Indeed, the development of city networking is generally presented as inherent to globalization and the emergence of global cities (Curtis, 2016; Oosterlynck et al., 2018). The research on networks per se has highlighted how these networks have been instrumental in the development of international economic strategies, urban marketing, policy tourism and urban diplomacy (Jacobs, 2012). And the resources drawn from their embedding in cities' modes of operation does not only affect their capacity to upscale their agenda at the global level, it is also a tool for adjusting intercity relations at the national level (Peyroux, 2016). Their role has primarily been pointed out in the governance of climate change (Bulkeley et al., 2003; Andonova et al., 2009; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009). Immigration is another domain of engagement: the Global Parliament of Mayors, the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities and the global network of municipalities, Metropolis, are three examples of global city networks whose ambition is to advance an urban agenda in global discussions, including migration.

This commitment to develop global networks has, significantly, been fuelled by the support of international organizations. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the growing engagement of international organizations with local authorities is underpinned by their search for partners beyond national governments. International institutions have supported the creation and activities of cities in the domain of immigration, including the UNESCO-led ICCAR network (International Coalition of Cities Against Racism). Intercultural Cities is supported by the Council of Europe (White, 2017), and various initiatives are led by United Cities and Local Governments, a UN body representing local authorities. In 2015, the International Organization for Migration organized its annual conference on the theme of cities and migration (Ahouga, 2017). This paved the way for the inclusion of local authorities in the preparation of the Global Compact on Migration, an international framework of collaboration for migration governance. This process resulted in

the creation of the Mayoral Forum for Migration and Development and Mayoral Migration mechanism, two bodies formalizing the presence of local authorities in the broader migration governance framework, along with states and civil society organizations (Oomen, 2019). Yet it is not clear that on all issues there is drive by international and regional organizations for a stronger municipal voice: while evident in some instances, the limits of this symbiotic relationship remain to be explored.

MOVING BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART: WHAT KIND OF 'NETWORK' FOR WHAT IMPACT?

The multiplication of migration-related city networks results from parallel and interrelated local, regional and global dynamics: the growing gap between evolving local integration strategies and the national migration policies, the place of municipalities on the agenda of international organizations and, in Europe, the building of a multi-scalar political space. These intertwined trends have led to a flurry of different forms of mobilizations and institutions, often termed as 'networks' by the researchers, but covering very different realities. It is worth noting that the definitions found in the literature remain elusive (and this imprecision is also found in the other strands of literature): they are commonly defined as groups of cities endowed with some form of organizational structure and pursuing a common agenda.

City networks: Towards a typology

The elements of this definition are to be clarified. Some organizations specialize on migration-related issues (to develop an integration policy for instance); others are generalist institutions for which immigration is but a theme among others. This is particularly so for national or international associations of cities (e.g. the U.K.-based Local Government Association and Eurocities). Said differently, some networks are formed ex-ante to identify and address common areas of interest, including with regard to immigration. Other are formed ex-post, around a common issue or project.

The membership can also vary. Members can be exclusively composed of municipalities (whether elected officials, administrative or technical staff), or be composite groups also including NGOs, ministerial representatives or international organizations. They can be formed of permanent members, or made up of rotating groups whose composition fluctuates. This is particularly true for forums representing local authorities in international organizations: such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; the Mayoral Forum for mobility, migration and development, which embodies the 'migration' voice of municipalities at the United Nations; or the International Organization for Migration. And finally, they can display a temporary membership, when a network is formed around a particular, often time-limited initiative, with one or more functions: an example is that of City-2-City, a project meant to foster experience exchanges between cities on both sides of the Mediterranean, piloted by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Another instance is the City Initiative on Irregular Migrants in Europe (C-MISE), the focus of Spencer's paper in this volume, and the Communes hospitalières in Belgium, resulting from a campaign of mobilization around the reception and the perception of migration launched by the NGO CND11.11.11. The institutional structure of a network can be centralized with a dedicated administrative and decision-making body, or decentralized, each municipality managing its own involvement, with no more in common than adherence to a common framework or charter: Sello Migrante, in Latin America, brings together Chilean municipalities around a charter for the reception of Haitian refugees.

This sheer diversity of networks is also a result of the variety of their aims and modes of creation. We have distinguished between networks formed out of grassroots mobilizations in confrontation with existing immigration policies (mostly in the United States and more recently in Europe) while others have been initiated and supported by state or international organizations (mostly at the European and global levels). Both categories present very different features.

These grassroots mobilizations tend to be loosely coordinated networks of permanent members adhering to a common political agenda: sanctuary, unconditional welcoming (ANVITA in France) or, for instance, circulation as a human right. Some of them are spontaneous and others result from civil society movements (Seebrücke in Germany, Sanctuary cities in the United States and the United Kingdom, Communes hospitalières in Belgium) but the vast majority of them are national networks. By contrast, networks sponsored by one or several state and/or international organizations tend to be international in scope. They tend to enjoy greater financial resources, and stronger capacities of coordination.

Differing functions still little understood

The scholarship on migration-related city networks on both sides of the Atlantic has, as we saw, followed relatively distinct pathways, accounted for by the divergent histories of their institutionalization. This thematic issue seeks to bridge both strands of work by investigating, first, the bearing of city networks on the formulation and implementation of migration and integration policies. Said differently, what difference does networking make for cities, for migrants and for migration governance? Barbara Oomen identified three functions of these organizations: practical, symbolic and juris-generative. The exchange of practical experiences (practical) and the showcasing of practices (symbolic) are central: city networks enable the adjustment and circulation of policy models that may have a direct impact on migrants' integration, in particular. The symbolic statement of pro-immigrant narratives, in turn, fosters a re-branding of cities as cosmopolitan and welcoming, but may also have an indirect impact on migrants through their bearing on the perception of immigration and on electoral behaviours. Finally, the legislative changes for which some city networks advocate may have long-term impacts on national and international policy orientations. But what is the actual added value of networks in relation to these three goals? Are they more than a sum of cities engaged in similar activities? The literature tends to showcase committed cities with charismatic mayors and a global outreach such as Michael Bloomberg in New York, Valerie Plante in Montreal, Ada Colau in Barcelona and Domenico Lucano in Riace (De Graauw, 2014; Driel & Verkuyten, 2020; Russell, 2019). Is the embedding of the latter into municipal networks of any use to them? Do they represent more than a stage on which these leaders can voice their engagement? And what of their actual role for 'ordinary cities' (Robinson, 2006). Does the participation of these low-profile cities induce more than some cosmetic changes in their approach to immigrant integration? Are they, as members of the network, in a stronger position to overcome the legal and political constraints that they face (Wilcock, 2019)?

PAPERS IN THIS THEMATIC ISSUE

These aspects are revisited by the papers in this thematic issue, as are questions that are even less well explored, such as the differing aspirations and priorities of city participants within a network, the tensions to which that can give rise and their implications. Providing fresh empirical material, the papers throw light on questions essential to understanding the unfolding phenomenon of city networks, the long-term impact of which on migration governance could be profound.

Taking up our core question, Colleen Thouez explores the implications of cities becoming international, the ways in which they are mobilizing in national and international contexts, and the emerging outcomes. While not over-stating the significance of this development, at this early stage, she nevertheless argues that we have in the past decade seen new configurations of power emerging, the political leadership of cities seeking to use their collective influence to shift debates on migration, as on climate change. Going beyond the standard, instrumental, function of sharing best practices, she illustrates her argument on these 'symbolic' roles with two networks she foresees likely to have a growing influence: one in the United States, addressing the Federal Government's response to the needs of undocumented migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic, and, in contrast, a network of cities that are 'cross-border problem

solvers', connecting cities across the major migration corridors between Africa and Europe to shape new approaches to inter-state cooperation. Thouez argues that these developments point to a redesign of governance in which local knowledge informs national policy, local action drives national responses and local needs trigger global cooperation. In contrast to Oomen's work, in which city networks are part of a strategy to resist national policies, Thouez finds some city diplomacy on the international stage is fostered by national governments, here contributing to, not thwarting, their objectives. She concludes that 'cooperative localism', led by principled and pragmatic mayors, could lead to cities becoming significant players in migration policy debates at the international level. For that to happen, unity will need to triumph over division at the local level. Cities' visible contribution in leading the response to Covid-19 will serve to strengthen their authority to play that role.

Anouk Flamant takes that analysis of city engagement in networks forward through her focus on three large French cities: Nantes, Lyon and Strasbourg. The 2015 'refugee crisis' represented a turning point for each city but also, for some, an opportunity to claim increased reach on migration matters, and served as a spur to developing new relationships with cities and with civil society. She finds that engagement in national networks, albeit not always signifying a high level of actual involvement, was a factor in those cities' capacity to adopt a pro-active and assertive approach to the reception of migrants. That contributed to a trend from weak integration policies to a surge of welcoming measures—the making of those cities as 'welcoming communities'—with implications for relations between cities, their regional embedding and the national authorities. Like Oomen, Flamant does find that networking between cities was a resource for those activist cities to reinforce decoupling from national policies. Where relations with national authorities were cooperative, however, cities favour the networks' instrumental functions.

The role of city networks is thus not only understood under a geopolitical lens. Opening the box of migration-related networks uncovers the complexity of interrelations between actors. The exchange of experiences, the production and learning of expertise, the building of common narratives, the experimentations of policy models or the acculturation to the codes of conducts with state bureaucrats, international organizations and civil society actors creates a sense of groupness and an identity of national or international players. City networks are, in that regards, agents of socialization.

But cities and mayors never act in isolation. They are always already embedded into a range of relations with civil society organizations and other public actors. Tiziana Caponio argues that this focus on the 'vertical' dimension of city networking (i.e. the relation cities maintain with the higher tiers of government) can overlook the significance of horizontal networks, here addressing not only city-to-city engagement but city networks that also embrace civil society. She finds horizontal state–society relations poorly conceptualized and mistakenly treated as subordinate in importance to vertical multi-level governance arrangements. Taking as her case studies the Eurocities' Working Group on Migration and Integration, the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities and, like Thouez, the U.S. network, Welcoming America, she finds they differ in the extent to which they have vertical or horizontal agendas. While Eurocities maintains a strong vertical agenda focused on influencing the policies of higher tiers, with a marginal civil society role, Welcoming America displays a more horizontal agenda, more likely to be shaped by a policy vision (such as welcoming or interculturalism), and focuses on mutual learning. In between, Intercultural Cities maintains balanced relations with the Council of Europe member states on the one hand, and local NGOs involved in intercultural policies on the other. Civil society can play a key role, so that inter-governmental relations are less the driver than a means for the network to deliver its world view. Alternatively, in a top-down network, the parent body can be the driver, with inter-governmental relations to the fore and civil society, once again, marginalized to the implementation stage. Caponio's study found, nevertheless, that the balance in these relationships can evolve over time. Here, institutional contexts provide only a partial explanation. Rather, the agendas of the cities' political leaders, and of the leaders of city networks, play a crucial role. She urges caution in claiming that city networks promote new alliances in migration policymaking or represent an effective challenge to national restrictive approaches: rather, the extent to which they do in each case must be a matter of empirical analysis. Comparing top-down networks with those which are city led, she concludes that collaborative relations on the horizontal and vertical dimension are more likely to be achieved in a top-down programme: coordination between actors and organizations with different interests and levels of power

will not emerge spontaneously. The role of researchers as facilitators of city networks, raised by Spencer and explored in depth by Broadhead and Allen, provides an interesting, contrasting model for achieving that goal (see below). Sarah Spencer picks up that analysis in her scrutiny of a network established to address one particular and sensitive multi-level governance issue, city responses to migrants with irregular status. Unusual in exploring the evolving, internal dynamic of a network and uncovering the reasons for participants' differing aspirations, she demonstrates how tensions were resolved through exposure to each other's reasoning, in the context of relationships of trust fostered before and during the network's operation. Facilitating accommodation of differences, socialization contributed to achievement of the network's goals. Challenging the widely used depiction of the key functions of networks in the literature as 'symbolic', Spencer identifies instead its constituent parts, legitimation, substantiation, framing and advocacy, finding numerous examples to illustrate her case. An expanded typology of functions of city networks is provided to guide future researchers in the field. In contrast to Thouez's finding of an appetite among international institutions for city voices to counter less constructive national approaches, Spencer finds at EU level, on the issue of irregular migrants, only a tentative willingness to respond to first overtures from those cities eager to engage. There is scant research on the role of experts in city networks (Russeil & Healy, 2015). As demands for research impact grow, universities increasingly facilitate as well as study social change in concert with decision-makers and users, a development under-examined and under-theorized. Another impetus for the growing presence of academics is the role of scholarly oriented think tanks such as the Migration Policy Institute or International Committee for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) providing guidance to cities on migration issues. This gap is addressed by Jacqueline Broadhead and William Allen in their focus on the role of academic researchers not simply as participants but as facilitators of networks. Those networks are also, in turn, their object of study. Drawing upon analysis of two university-initiated networks, engaging 28 European cities, the authors cast light on the particular role that universities are here playing as facilitators of change. They argue that the knowledge exchange which the researchers facilitate is a vector through which cities are socialized into a more cohesive group with shared goals and agendas for change: thus, the instrumental function of shared learning contributes to the 'symbolic' functions of framing and developing common goals. Those goals are taken forward by each city, reflecting its own context, and collectively, to an extent, in a nascent advocacy agenda. Broadhead and Allen suggest that the boundary between facilitating the instrumental function of knowledge exchange and engagement in symbolic functions, not least advocacy, could raise ethical issues for researchers, as Spencer also found for city policymakers where the network's role threatened to extend beyond the instrumental mandate they had been given.

We began this introduction by noting that cities have been celebrated as the crucible for innovative experimentations and asking whether that is also true in relation to migration. The answer, on innovation, we can see is most certainly yes. On the necessary next question, whether this will lead to a step-change in their influence on national, regional and international policy agendas—to Barber's 'cities ruling the world' (2013)—an answer could only as yet be tentative. That leaves a rich agenda for future research to which each of the articles in this themed issue individually attests.

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