

Urban Traces Report

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Brussels is certainly a place to be for researchers exploring cities, urban policymaking, and connections between cities. It is a city of diversity, policymaking, and transnational organizations. It has been a great place to develop my project on city networks and immigrant integration practice at the local level because of its centrality for academic and policy circles. With the help of the ideal organizational structure of the Brussels Centre for Urban Studies (BCUS), I got connected with notable scholars and established lasting collaborations.

When I joined the BCUS, I was about to finalize the research design for my project, "Transnational City Networks and the Local Globalness of Immigrant Integration Policy." In the first couple of weeks, I prepared for the first set of in-depth interviews with local integration practitioners from several cities in Germany. My empirical focus was a particular city network established between selected cities from the United States and Germany. However, being in Brussels provided an excellent opportunity to strengthen my project's theoretical and conceptual framework as the institutional home of several established city networks and organizations focusing on local immigration policy.

During my fellowship at the BCUS, I completed the majority of the fieldwork for my project consisting of several day trips to selected German cities, interviewed several local integration practitioners and city network administrators, and analyzed secondary data comprised of cities' strategic plans for diversity, action plans for immigrant integration, and sources from local media outlets. My research explored the role of horizontal knowledge exchanges between cities in shaping local integration policy at the national and transnational levels. My project's broader research objective is to investigate city networks' potential in globalizing the local immigration policy knowledge while functioning as a mechanism for "globalization from below."

My preliminary findings on the role of city networks in facilitating horizontal knowledge exchanges between localities for immigrant integration indicate immediate tangible networking outcomes in building new community partnerships, mobilizing innovative ideas on becoming more *welcoming*, and promoting policy tools to evaluate the *welcomeness* of cities. However, the knowledge exchanges tend to be more structured between cities that resemble each other in their strategic positioning in the global economy. Besides the knowledge exchanges between the cities, city network involvement also triggers synergies between the involved community partners at the city level. This analysis of transnational knowledge flows with concrete community development consequences also shed light on city networks' potential in mobilizing policy knowledge for integration while surveying the state-of-the-art welcoming city strategies in place.

I was based in Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research during my time at the BCUS. Prof. Bas van Heur was my primary contact at the Centre, and he supported my fellowship application. He was very welcoming even before the start of my fellowship, not only as the director of Cosmopolis but also as an encouraging and caring mentor. My fellowship was co-supported by Prof. Ilke Adam from the Institute for European Studies, and as great mentors often do, she introduced me to the right people to help advance my project soon after my fellowship started. Within the first month of my fellowship, I was already in dialogue with Prof. Tiziana Caponio from the University of Turin, a leading scholar in city networks and immigration policy. This connection has led to long-lasting collaborations. Right after my fellowship at the BCUS, Prof. Caponio invited me to a workshop at the European University Institute in Florence to share my fellowship project results. This workshop has also led to a forthcoming publication in a Special Issue along with contributions from several notable scholars working on the city networks and local immigration policy.

While I was still at the BCUS, Brussels Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Migration & Minorities (BIRMM) was founded to encourage and support cross-disciplinary research among VUB researchers. In April 2019, BIRMM's first Research Day took place, where over 30 researchers across VUB campus including me presented their migration and diversity-related research. This first major event of BIRMM has led to a book project that consists of essays targeting a broad audience and written as op-eds. I am contributing to this important book project with a piece titled "Empowering Cities to Make Immigrant Integration Happen," which argues that immigration is largely an urban phenomenon, and the city is an efficient and effective scale to make immigrant integration happen. In this piece, my arguments build on the data I collected during my fellowship at the BCUS. I propose that city networks empower cities for local immigrant integration by facilitating knowledge and policy exchanges, and community-building for integration practitioners.

Fellowship at the BCUS also provided me the access to productive workshops that helped me complete a project dragging on for years. I have been working on a co-authored piece tackling the shortcomings of megaproject planning for earthquake risk mitigation in Istanbul. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to publish, I had almost given up on the manuscript. I reworked the piece at two workshops organized by Cosmopolis, one on academic publishing and the other titled "Writing (on) the urban question." The manuscript is now a forthcoming article in the pipeline of a high-impact journal.