Article

'From Sanctuary to Welcoming Cities': Negotiating the Social Inclusion of Undocumented Migrants in Liège, Belgium

Sébastien Lambert [1] and Thomas Swerts [2,*]

[1] Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Liège, B-4000 Liège, Belgium; E-Mail: sebastien.lambert@alumni.uliege.be
[2] Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands; E-Mail: swerts@essb.eur.nl

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Cities have become important sites of sanctuary for migrants with a precarious legal status. While many national governments in Europe have adopted restrictive immigration policies, urban governments have undertaken measures to safeguard undocumented residents' rights. Existing scholarship on sanctuary cities has mostly focused on how cities' stance against federal immigration policies can be interpreted as urban citizenship. What is largely missing in these debates, however, is a better insight into the role that local civil society actors play in pushing for sanctuary and negotiating the terms of social in- and exclusion. In this article, we rely on a qualitative study of the 2017 Sanctuary City campaign in Liège, Belgium, to argue that power relations between (and among) civil society actors and city officials help to explain why the meaning and inclusiveness of 'sanctuary' shifted over time. Initially, radical activists were able to politicize the issue by demanding the social inclusion of the 'sans-papiers' through grassroots mobilization. However, the cooptation of the campaign by immigrant rights organizations led to the adoption of a motion wherein the local government depicted the city as a 'welcoming' instead of a 'sanctuary' city. By showing how immigrant rights professionals sidelined radical activists during the campaign, we highlight the risk of depoliticization when civil society actors decide to cooperate with local governments to extend immigrant rights. We also underline the potential representational gap that emerges when those who are directly implicated, namely undocumented migrants, are not actively involved in campaigns that aim to improve their inclusion.

Issue

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1. Introduction

On Thursday, September 14, 2017, a coordinated action by the Belgian NGO Centre National de Coopération au Développement (henceforth CNCD-11.11.11) simultaneously gathered citizen supporters in 51 municipalities across Wallonia and Brussels to demand more welcoming and inclusive municipal policies towards migrants. The campaign had been launched amidst growing concerns over the 'hostile public opinion' and repressive migration policies in Belgium. By chanting slogans and holding up signs saying "Make Our Town Hospitable," citizens tried to pressure their city councils "to undertake action to improve the information for and the reception of migrants, *regardless of their status*" (Commune Hospitalière, 2019; emphasis in original). Over the course of the next months, citizen groups, activists and civil society organizations joined forces to negotiate a draft 'motion' with amenable elected officials. On 27 November 2017, the City of Liège became the first major *commune hospitalière*. Nine Brusselian municipalities, the Wallonia–Brussels Federation and the Province

of Luxembourg would follow suit. Towards the end of 2018, State Secretary Theo Francken (N–VA, a Flemish nationalist party) justified the introduction of a daily limit to asylum applications by stating that "we have shown a lot of hospitality over the last years, but of course this needs to stop at some point" (Het Laatste Nieuws, 2018). In direct opposition, the message "for a different migration policy based on hospitality, respect for human rights and solidarity" spread by 66 'welcoming' municipalities and 90 citizen appeals resounded loud and clear (Commune Hospitalière, 2019).

The recent rise of 'welcoming' cities in Belgium can be situated in a broader international struggle for the social inclusion of undocumented migrants at the local level. The CNCD-11.11.11 campaigners were in part inspired by the historical precedent set by the 'Sanctuary Cities' and 'No One Is Illegal' campaigns that had unfolded in the US and Canada since the mid-1980s. Notorious sanctuary cities like New York, Los Angeles and Chicago recently entered the international spotlight when President Trump threatened to cut federal funding if they continued to accommodate undocumented migrants (Savage, 2017). But also in Europe, cities have become important sites of sanctuary for migrants with a precarious legal status. The term 'sanctuary cities' generally refers to "policies and practices [that] serve the purpose of accommodating illegalized migrants and refugees in urban communities" (Bauder, 2017, p. 174). It signals the counterweight that urban governments and citizen actors aim to give to the restrictive immigration policies and exclusionary border practices that many national governments in Europe—and elsewhere—have adopted over the last few decades. A notable example from the United Kingdom includes the City of Sanctuary movement that emerged in 2005 in Sheffield, which resulted in the city officially becoming a 'sanctuary city' two years later (Squire & Darling, 2013). The Cities of Sanctuary Network now boasts 17 cities and municipalities and local initiatives in more than 70 cities in the UK.

Not surprisingly, researchers in various disciplines have studied the rise of sanctuary cities from different angles. Based on an international comparison, Bauder (2017, p. 180) suggests that existing scholarship largely revolves around legal, discursive, identity-formative, and scalar themes. The legal component of sanctuary focuses on how municipal governments strategically make use of legal and juridical instruments to safeguard the rights of undocumented migrants. The theme of legality is closely related to that of scale, in which scholars explore how cities' stance against federal immigration policies can be interpreted as urban citizenship (see Varsanyi, 2008). Looking beyond formal interpretations of sanctuary, other authors stress the more informal ways in which sanctuary is symbolically constructed through governmental discourses (see Darling, 2010). Furthermore, urban scholars interpret claims to sanctuary as expressions of undocumented migrants' struggles over citizenship and the 'right to the city' (see Purcell, 2003; Sassen,

1996). Whereas scholarship on formal modes of sanctuary tends to be focused on outcomes like the adoption of local legislation, scholarship on informal modes of sanctuary tends to concentrate on mobilization by advocacy groups and immigrant communities. What is largely missing in this debate, however, is a better insight into the role that local civil society actors play in negotiating sanctuary policies. In particular, we argue that more attention needs to be paid to dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion that characterize the negotiation process.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we situate our contribution within the emerging literature on sanctuary cities and immigrant rights movements. Second, we briefly situate the 2017 Sanctuary City campaign in Liège that serves as our case. Third, we explain how the meaning of sanctuary shifted due to the dual processes of politicization and depoliticization that unfolded during the Liège campaign. Finally, we argue that the lessons learned from this case study entail broader lessons that can be applied to urban struggles for social inclusion in different contexts.

2. Theorizing Urban Citizenship and Immigrant Rights Movements

2.1. Sanctuary Cities and Urban Citizenship

Cities have become important arenas for the enactment of urban citizenship through the social inclusion of non-citizens like the undocumented (see Bagelman, 2016; Bauder, 2014; Czajka, 2013; Sassen, 1996; Squire & Bagelman, 2012; Varsanyi, 2008). Sanctuary policies are regularly interpreted as expressions of urban citizenship because they safeguard immigrant rights at the city level and often implicate a certain degree of protection against the risk of arrest and deportation. Furthermore, such policies tend to circumscribe the extent to which undocumented city residents can make use of local initiatives in domains like welfare, work, education, culture, transportation and community participation, despite their illegalized status. Scholarship that explores such formal modes of sanctuary tends to underscore its importance by highlighting the shift in power relations that takes place between nation states and (global) cities. While demarcating the terms of belonging and non-belonging used to be the undisputed terrain of the nation-state, cities have increasingly become assertive actors that define citizenship in terms that deviate from national standards (see Ávila, 2014). Since globalization tends to exacerbate the tensions between national and local governments, "local citizenship for undocumented immigrants will continue to be defined, contested, and advocated for within the local sphere" (Villazor, 2010, p. 598). The rise of sanctuary cities thus signals the ability of cities to contest the exclusionary nature of national citizenship and redefine citizenship in a more inclusive manner.

The urban citizenship that sanctuary policies install is enacted legally through the local extension of rights

and discursively by publicly adopting and propagating a welcoming climate towards migrants with a precarious legal status. On the one hand, legal expressions of urban citizenship refer to the ways in which cities strategically use local laws to offer pathways to social inclusion for undocumented migrants (see Varsanyi, 2006; Villazor, 2010). Such laws can range from driver licenses for undocumented migrants, scholarships for college-goers, and the prevention from sharing police databanks with immigration officers to 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policies (see, e.g., de Graauw, 2016). Whereas the legality of such laws is regularly disputed by federal governments, the law hereby becomes an instrument of cities' emerging activism. On the other hand, sanctuary policies tend to involve discursive expressions of urban citizenship as well. By openly welcoming and acknowledging their rightful presence in the city, cities try to create a climate of refuge, support and relative protection for non-citizens and supporting organizations. In a climate of growing criminalization of immigrants in the public debate, such symbolic declarations can set in motion discursive changes and explicate an alternative vision regarding political membership and belonging (Darling, 2010; Ridgley, 2008).

Yet, sanctuary cities have also been subject of stringent critique. Most notably, federal governments argue that the non-cooperation of local governments severely hampers the roll-out of migration policies. From the other side of the spectrum, activists and civil society actors have criticized existing policies for being nothing more than an 'empty shell.' Bagelman (2013, 2016), for example, argues that sanctuary cities render permanent the waiting that asylum seekers face while trying to remedy their legal situation by indefinitely deferring (and even extending) this waiting. From such a critical perspective, sanctuary cities contribute to rather than contest repressive migration regimes. A proper analysis of whether or not sanctuary fundamentally questions or challenges the dominant logics that underpin national citizenship, is beyond the scope of this article. However, disputes over the political impact of sanctuary signal the need to understand how the 'meaning' of sanctuary is negotiated between actors (see Darling, 2010). We argue that analyzing the inclusionary intentions of sanctuary laws and discourses is insufficient, since negotiating sanctuary often involves the transformation of initially politicizing, egalitarian demands into depoliticized compromises. Furthermore, the important, yet ambiguous role that civil society actors play in negotiating sanctuary policies is all too often overlooked.

2.2. Immigrant Rights Movements and the Right to the City

Urban citizenship does not only get enacted formally through local policies, but also informally through the actions undertaken by civil society organizations and immigrant communities. The claims to social inclusion made by undocumented immigrants and other excluded populations are often interpreted as expressing a 'right to the city' (see Dikeç & Gilbert, 2008; Lefebvre, 1996; Purcell, 2002, 2003). In this respect, Purcell (2002, 2003) argues that while globalization has fundamentally undermined the centrality of the nation state, the structures of political membership have not evolved accordingly. This discrepancy has made cities the primary loci for the materialization of new citizenship claims that raise the question "whose city is it?" (Sassen, 1996, p. 206). These claims are said to communicate what Lefebvre (1996, p. 158) has called the right to the city, referring to "a cry and a demand" that "can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" which "gathers the interests…of the whole society and first of all those who inhabit." The right to the city and its emphasis on inhabitance as a new criterion for political membership resides in its demand for an "urban-hegemonic vision of political membership" that is opposed to the current national hegemony (Purcell, 2002). The struggles of immigrants over citizenship are thereby deemed to express their right to fully participate in urban life and make use of the city.

The 'right to the city' literature adequately points out that the social inclusion of undocumented immigrants is a contested terrain. Scholarship on immigrant rights movements, however, has argued that we should be looking at 'rights through the city,' rather than to the city, since immigrant mobilizations are regularly used to make national claims as well (Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012). The literature on immigrant rights politics stresses that advocating for the rights of undocumented migrants through sanctuary in hostile environments depends on protracted episodes of mobilization and negotiation (see Pallares & Flores-Gonzales, 2010; Swerts, 2014b). Marginalized actors like the undocumented rely on coalition formation and network expansion in order to pressure local governments into taking action. Cities provide environments that can ease the process of meeting, collaboration and mobilization between immigrant rights activists from various groups leading to the emergence of social movement networks (Miller & Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008). Elsewhere, Swerts (2017) has argued that undocumented activists make strategic use of the city as a 'backstage' and 'frontstage' for the assertion of citizenship claims. Backstage processes include the negotiating of political strategies and discourses within movement networks that set the terms of social inclusion. Even within movements that aim to advance immigrant rights, power inequalities exist that hamper the ability of the undocumented to raise their voice (see Nicholls, 2013; Swerts, 2014a). Squire (2011), for example, demonstrates that citizen residents tend to overpower undocumented migrants in sanctuary city campaigns. This signals the risks pertaining to representational cleavages and the exclusion of more vulnerable movement constituents while negotiating sanctuary.

3. Methods

This study adopts a case study design to study how processes of politicization and depoliticization in urban sanctuary campaigns affect dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion of undocumented migrants at the local level. More specifically, we focus on the case of the 'Liège, Commune Hospitalière' campaign advanced by the CNCD-11.11.11 between September 2017 and June 2018. We relied on qualitative methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviewing and content analysis to get better insight into the run-up, execution and aftermath of the campaign. Firstly, the lead author of this article was involved in the campaign as a member of an affiliated organization from the start. In this capacity, he had regular access to reports and other information. He performed six months of intense fieldwork when he joined the campaign in early 2018. His intentions as a researcher were communicated openly and transparently in order to stimulate trust and facilitate access. He actively participated in and contributed to the campaign's subcommittee on mobilization during fieldwork. This allowed him to engage in informal conversations, direct observations and group discussions. Observations were also done during public events and demonstrations in front of Liège city hall. Secondly, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of member organizations, the campaign coordinators and local elected officials. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed with NviVo. Thirdly, campaign materials, internal documents and press releases from the welcoming cities campaign's website (Commune Hospitalière, 2019) and social media pages were analyzed in detail.

4. Exploring the Tension between Politicization and Depoliticization

In this article, we build upon the insights from the literatures on sanctuary cities and immigrant rights movements to explore why and how the meaning and inclusiveness of 'sanctuary' shifts over time in interactions and negotiations between urban actors. We introduce a relational model (see Table 1) that shows how the dual processes of politicization and depoliticization coincide with specific (uneven) power relations and constellations within movement networks and between movement and governmental representatives. Drawing on the work of Swyngedouw (2014, 2018) and Uitermark and Nicholls (2014), we respectively understand politicization to be the process whereby previously unheard claims to equality are put forward, whereas depoliticization refers to the effective neutralization of the transformative potential of such claims through cooptation. Politicization voices "the demand by those 'that do not count' to be counted, named, and recognized" that appears, for example "when undocumented workers shout, 'we are here, therefore we are from here,' and demand their place within the socio-political edifice" (Swyngedouw, 2014, p. 129). Such egalitarian demands for the social inclusion of undocumented migrants have the potential to transform the status quo since they call into question the exclusionary premises upon which citizenship is built. In this view, politics should be conceived of as space of dissensus where difference can be enunciated, and conflict can be negotiated (Swyngedouw, 2014, p. 130). Depoliticization, then, refers to the effective foreclosing of such spaces by relying on expert knowledge and administration. Dissensus thereby gets replaced by consensual, techno-managerial forms of governance that reduce politics to institutionalized social management (see Swyngedouw, 2018, pp. 32–37). While the literature on post-democratization helps us to theorize the tension between politicization and depoliticization, it tends to portray both processes as radically opposed political logics that structure how politics works for different actors. However, through this case study, we argue that the occurrence of politicization and depoliticization is often much subtler than that, with initially politicizing de-

Table 1. The dual process of politicization and depoliticization in sanctuary campaigns.

	Dominant actors within movement	Movement strategy	Goal	Relations with local government	Relations movement network	Dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion
Politicization	activists, 'sans-papiers' > immigrant rights professionals	• grassroots networking • citizen mobilization • putting issue on agenda	pressure local government to acknowledge 'right to the city' of the 'sans-papiers'	radical and conflictual	• coalition formation • cooperation between civil society actors	• sanctuary city discourse • undocumented migrants included and represented
Depoliticization	immigrant rights professionals > activists, 'sans-papiers'	• top-down campaigning • cooperation with local authorities • expert mediation	pressure local government to adopt the 'welcoming cities' motion	moderate and collaborative	• emergence of conflicts • disintegration and demobilization	• welcoming city discourse • undocumented migrants no longer referenced nor represented

mands eroding and subjects being sidelined as time goes by. Hence, our relational model pays attention to how both dynamics can gradually emerge within sanctuary cities campaigns that aim to make egalitarian demands.

In the empirical section below, we argue that power relations between (and among) civil society actors and city officials help to explain why the meaning and inclusiveness of 'sanctuary' shifted over time. Initially, 'radicals' activists were able to politicize the issue by demanding the social inclusion of the 'sans-papiers' through grassroots mobilization. However, the cooptation of the campaign by professionalized organizations led to the adoption of a motion wherein the local government depicted the city as a 'welcoming' instead of a 'sanctuary' city. By showing how immigrant rights professionals sidelined radical activists during the campaign, we highlight the risk of depoliticization when civil society actors decide to cooperate with local governments to extend immigrant rights. We also underline the potential representational gap that emerges when those who are directly implicated, namely undocumented migrants, are not actively involved in campaigns that aim to improve their inclusion.

4.1. Situating the 'Hospitable Municipalities' Campaign

As the local elections approached in October 2018, nearly 70 local authorities had officially declared themselves 'welcoming' cities through the adoption of a legally non-binding motion. This shift in the social inclusion of undocumented migrants and refugees was less the result of party politics than the outcome of coordinated efforts by civil society actors. In order to explain this outcome, we need to trace back the origins of and situate the 'Hospitable Municipalities' campaign within the broader political climate. In September 2017, the CNCD-11.11.11, a coalition organization of more than 80 German-speaking and French-speaking NGOs, tried to capitalize on the citizen solidarity initiatives that had sprung up in the aftermath of the European 'migration crisis.' As they announced in a statement introducing their campaign for migration justice: "From the makeshift Maximilian Park camp in Brussels to American sanctuary cities, citizens are mobilizing for a humane welcome. The CNCD-11.11.11 is part of this movement" (CNCD-11.11.11, 2019). They thereby situated themselves as part of an international sanctuary movement that was gaining momentum. The welcoming cities' campaign was officially launched by way of a citizens' conference on migration in six cities, including Liège. More than 2,000 people took part in workshops aimed at countering exclusionary anti-migrant policies and debating possible alternatives.

Following this kick-off, CNCD-11.11.11 installed a top-down campaign model whereby resources like the definition of a welcoming city, press articles, local actions map, and a virtual toolbox were made available to citizen groups. Most importantly, a 'citizen's guide' was pub-

lished that suggested a standardized modus operandi. First, citizens were encouraged to meet with local elected officials in order to find allies to introduce a motion to the city council. Next, citizens had to reach out to immigrant rights organizations in their city and raise local awareness. Finally, citizens should submit a request for a citizen appeal in their local council. Throughout this process, the CNCD-11.11.11 campaigners were available to support local campaigns with their expertise. From early 2017 until the October 2018 elections, the national campaign unfolded unevenly at the local level. Citizen groups aiming to put pressure on local authorities formed in a majority of cities that ended up passing the motion. A minority of cities adopted the motion at the initiative of political parties or the mayor himself. However, the content of the motions differed sharply from one city to another. A cursory reading of the outcomes suggests that municipalities with citizen groups tended to adopt 'stronger' motions.

Since organizers aimed to set a national example with a 'strong motion' in a major city, the Liège campaign was of strategic importance. A CNCD-11.11.11 organizer explained that if Liège would become a sanctuary city, then other cities and towns would be more likely to do so as well:

> It's a local dynamic but I believe in the snowball effect....What is going on in Liège helped me for the dynamics in Huy, Waremme, Herstal, in lots of other municipalities....The situation in Liège sets a precedent in a way. Then there is the snowball effect when a big city like Liège engages itself and that's why it was fundamental for us to have a strong motion in Liège. (Interview 1, CNCD-11.11.11 coordinator)

In order to understand the unfolding of the campaign in Liège, we need to properly situate it within the urban context. Liège is the fourth most populated city in Belgium with a population of nearly 200,000 inhabitants, of which approximately 29% are immigrants (Lafleur & Marfouk, 2017, p. 30). As a former industrial city that heavily relied on labor migration, Liège historically adopted a welcoming stance vis-à-vis migrant population. The city has been run by the Socialist Party (social democrats) for 45 consecutive years. Immigrant rights had traditionally been defended by labor unions representing the numerous economic migrants. When the Belgian federal government started to adopt repressive policy measures targeting immigrant communities in response to the rise of far-right parties in the 1990s, local immigrant rights activism emerged. The 1999 opening of the closed detention center for undocumented immigrants in Vottem motivated the formation of the Collective of Resistance against Centers for Immigrants (CRACPE). In addition, the 'sans-papiers' rose to the scene as a local political actor by organizing occupations throughout the city and demanding the regularization of their status. A substantial support network of citizen allies and organizations, of which the collective 'La Voix des 'sans-papiers'' (hence-

forth VSP) is the latest incarnation, has put the issue of the social inclusion of undocumented migrants on the local political agenda (see Laureys, 2013).

Both the immigrant-friendly political climate and pre-existing activist networks provided fertile ground for the adoption of a 'strong motion' aimed at advancing the cause of undocumented migrants' social inclusion in Liège. In the next section, we examine how local citizen groups and organizations succeeded in politicizing the issue by pushing for a motion.

4.2. Politicization in the 'Sanctuary City'

In Liège, the CNCD-11.11.11 campaign did not start from square one. The welcoming city campaign benefited from an already existing campaign initiated by two radical left-wing organizations. In April 2017, these organizations held a conference to discuss the launch of a local campaign explicitly aimed at "making Liège, along the lines of Montreal or Barcelona, a city of refuge for undocumented migrants" (JOC Liège, 2017). The rationale behind the initiative was explained by one of the activists involved as follows:

> Incredible pressure is being put on migrants. The government is effectively allowing migrants to be hunted upon, and I believe that we must respond to this….American cities have declared themselves 'sanctuary cities' since Trump came to power in the USA. These cities exclaimed that they will not adopt anti-immigrant policies that Trump wants to implement….Honestly, I think we should do that in Liège too. (Interview 2 activist)

As we explained above, undocumented activism in Liège historically revolved around their right to be present on the urban territory. VSP, which was occupying an abandoned school site in Burenville at the time, was facing eviction. Given this precarious situation, activists invited speakers with expertise around working with undocumented migrants in the city, including a social worker from a social assistance association, a union member for the undocumented workers' committee and an undocumented immigrant woman. Since activist organizers had been informed about the existence of the 'welcoming cities' campaign before the event was publicized, a CNCD-11.11.11 coordinator was also invited to participate. By the end of the conference, the participants were urged to concretize their commitment by taking part in a demonstration in support of undocumented migrants a few days later in front of the Liège City Hall. The explicit inclusion of undocumented migrants as speakers at the conference and the open call to join the protest clearly demonstrate the 'radical' and 'activist' spirit of the organizers. Nevertheless, recognizing the potential benefits of a full-blown national campaign, they decided to join the CNCD-11.11.11's efforts "in order to avoid isolating ourselves in a sectarian way" (Interview 2 activist).

Radical activists became involved in the Collectif Liège Hospitalière (Welcoming Liège Collective), alongside other actors like the socialist trade union, CRACPE and grassroots associations focused on helping migrants. As described in the introduction, the Collective organized its first 'citizen mobilization' event 14 September 2017 in front of City Hall as part of the CNCD-11.11.11 coordinated national action day. Two weeks later, a citizen appeal was scheduled at the Liège city council session, where a lawyer presented herself as "speaking on behalf of a collective of associations supported by more than fifty organizations" (Interview 3 professional). While the lawyer handed over a text stressing the need to adopt a 'strong' motion aimed at immigrant rights, radical activists were handing out leaflets outside. As the following quote illustrates, they regarded it strategically imperative to frame the issue of hospitality more broadly around 'the right to the city' (see also Lefebvre, 1996):

> Migrants must receive access to housing, but all Liège residents have an interest in the city…applying the law on the requisition of unoccupied housing. Similarly, asking the local police not to make any arrests for the sans-papiers on the territory makes no sense if, at the same time, the homeless and beggars are criminalized. To link the demands, to unify the struggles, is thus to weave bonds of solidarity and to increase the mobilization which will allow us to prevail. (Parti Socialiste de Lutte, 2017)

The interpellation led to a mayoral decision to create a working group around the issue. From then onwards, immigrant rights professionals came to play a dominant role in drafting the motion and meeting with local authorities. Radical activists' call to foreground the rights of the 'sans-papiers' and to use the motion as an instrument to claim a broader 'right to the city' were increasingly ignored. Respondents referred to both legal and professional expertise as reasons why immigrant rights professionals should take a seat at the negotiation table:

> The campaign's expertization does not worry me because, obviously, I can see its effectiveness. I love it when it's effective by speaking directly on the basis of the texts. With the police, we have made very concrete progress. Nobody feels attacked because we base ourselves on texts—and this is the strength of lawyers, we refer to texts that we push to respect. It's very simple. So I think it can piss off some people who aren't represented in the texts, but that doesn't stop them from keeping up the pressure. (Interview 3 professional)

Potential issues around political representation or de-politicization were downplayed by emphasizing the effectiveness of expert knowledge (see Swerts, 2014a). In the end, the negotiations led to the successful adoption of a 'strong' motion by the Liège city council on November 27,

2017. However, as we will argue in the next section, the downgrading of the 'sanctuary' city to a 'welcoming' city amounted to a depoliticization of the issue.

4.3. Depoliticization in the 'Welcoming City'

The motion that was adopted unanimously by the local authorities of Liège is entitled 'Liège: A Hospitable, Responsible, Welcoming and Open City.' It is an eight-page non-binding document in which the City of Liège commits itself to "further improve the reception and stay of migrants while respecting human rights" and to "raise awareness among the population on migration and reception," while police forces subscribe to "adopting a humane and respectful approach to the enforcement of laws and regulations" (Ville de Liège, 2017). What started off as a campaign spearheaded by radical activists around the social inclusion of undocumented migrants, quickly watered down once the Collective started negotiating with the municipal authorities. During the negotiations, the municipal authorities made it clear that they would only adopt a motion if it would highlight the efforts that were already being undertaken to welcome migrants in Liège. This stance forced the Collective to 'make concessions' that eventually resulted in the shift from a 'sanctuary' to a 'welcoming' city:

> A constant obstacle in the negotiation was the mayor's fear that the campaign aimed to hide the work already accomplished by the City....The other concern was that some commitments were difficult to put in black and white, election-wise....So we made concessions. The authorities therefore really played on two tables: 'let us value what we already do,' but at the same time 'let us not say too loudly what we already do so that it does not put us in difficulty'—clearly in relation to undocumented migrants. (Interview local coordinator)

The social inclusion of undocumented migrants was thereby brushed aside as an 'obstacle' to collaboration.

The unanimity with which the motion had been adopted by local authorities, stands in stark contrast with the contradictory analyses that emerged within the Collective itself. Immigrant rights professionals welcomed the broadening of the motion's scope as reflected by the title:

> I think [the name change] is a good idea because if you focus too much on migrants, you forget the others....I think that this also...explains why it was adopted in the municipal council. If we had only targeted migrants, as we formulated our objectives at first, we probably would not have had a consensus like that. (Interview 4 professional)

From this perspective, the main objective of the campaign was achieved since the approved motion represented a recognition of the hard work done by civil society in the field as well as a reaffirmation of the productive collaboration with local authorities. As one of the respondents put it "with this motion, we are not in opposition....Rather than always saying 'we are in opposition,' let us be in a constructive alliance with universal values" (Interview 5 professional). Collaboration thus set in motion a process of cooptation and depoliticization that was considered 'productive' by professionals.

For radical activists, however, the motion ended up being an 'empty shell.' They initially intended to capitalize on the campaign's dynamic to put a broader claim to the 'right to the city' on the political agenda. Yet, the concessions made by immigrant rights professionals during the negotiations led to a depoliticization of the motion. Broader claims such as the right to affordable housing and access to healthcare that had been put forward by activists, were dropped along the way. Furthermore, the explicit inclusion of the 'sans-papiers' as those most concerned in both the policy negotiation process and the motion itself was abandoned. Subsequently, several radicals disengaged themselves from the campaign, voicing their outrage about the fact that the motion remained completely silent concerning the situation of the 'sans-papiers' in Liège:

> We tried to include transformative claims in this motion. I think we kind of failed....For the sake of cooperation and immediate results...we prevented ourselves from asking for things that could have a real usefulness....A classic but crucial demand is however absent from the motion: a regularization of undocumented migrants, which would allow them to work legally, under employment contracts, and which would prevent a kind of social dumping from employers who hire undocumented migrants in undeclared jobs at the expense of legal workers. (Interview 6 activist)

The notable absence of any mentioning of those most concerned in the motion signals the representational deficit that had emerged ever since professional organizers took over the campaign. While VSP had been asked by activists to help launch their campaign, undocumented migrants did not become structurally integrated into the Collective:

> Where are the migrants? Where do they have the floor? I think that's a little problematic....We want to stimulate a dynamic of grassroots mobilization that is already somewhat present in theory but not really in practice. (Interview 6 activist)

Since they do not master the professional codes of conduct and discourses that typify the legalistic approach adopted with the motion, their absence was never really questioned among professionals. However, as the following interview excerpt from a VSP member illustrates, the 'sans-papiers' themselves hardly considered

the passing of the 'welcoming cities' motion a 'solution' to their problems:

> In our opinion, we are still a long way from great improvements. Yes, there are, little by little, some changes....We are tolerated by the city, but it is mainly because we are supported in our struggle....With this campaign, everything moves or gives the illusion of moving, but concrete changes are still a long way off. (Interview 7 'sans-papiers')

The disillusion regarding the motion is well illustrated by VSP's intervention in June 2019 at the municipal council regarding their precarious housing situation, where the 'sans-papiers' reminded the authorities that they were still living in fear for deportation. Despite the earlier promises made, the Mayor responded that they were in favor of a durable solution, which "necessarily involves a regularization, which is a federal competence" (Bechet, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Across the world, a growing number of cities have declared themselves 'sanctuaries' as they pursue a policy of protecting undocumented immigrants in opposition to federal laws (see Bauder, 2017). In this article, we explored the recent emergence of sanctuary cities in Belgium through an in-depth analysis of a CNCD-11.11.11 initiated campaign. By zooming in on the city of Liège, we argued that local power relations and elements of political culture structure the playing field wherein sanctuary is negotiated. More in particular, this case study showed that the ability of immigrant rights professionals to comply with the local government's rules of the game (cooperation, compromise and dialogue) enabled them to overtake the initiative from activists. Furthermore, the socialist governing tradition, which takes pride in its capacity to integrate immigrants in local institutional structures and favors consensus over conflict, helped to set in motion the depoliticization of the campaign. These insights thus confirm the findings of recent scholarship on immigrant rights movements that stress the importance of the urban context (Darling, 2010; Miller & Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008). Liège's large and well-organized migrant population, its industrial past and pre-existing activist networks are all factors that contributed to the emergence and rise of the Collectif Liège Hospitalière. Over the course of a few months, the pressure exerted by this coalition led to the adoption by local authorities of a 'strong' motion according to CNCD-11.11.11 standards. These findings are in line with scholarship that highlights the important role that civil society actors play in defining the social inclusion of undocumented immigrants at the local level (see de Graauw, 2016).

In contrast to de Graauw (2016), however, our findings issue warning signs about the effectiveness of local

governments and civil society collaborating to make immigrant rights 'real.' Building on the work of Uitermark and Nicholls (2014), Swyngedouw (2014, 2018) and Swerts (2017), we argued that processes of politicization and depoliticization caused shifts in the meaning of 'sanctuary' that radically altered the terms of social inclusion and exclusion of undocumented migrants. On the one hand, radical activists aimed to politicize the campaign by integrating claims to equality like the regularization of all undocumented migrants into a broader discourse around the 'right to the city' (see Lefebvre, 1996) for the entire population of Liège (e.g., in terms of affordable housing). On the other hand, immigrant rights professionals contributed to depoliticizing these demands through negotiations with local authorities whereby the idea of the 'sanctuary city' was downgraded to a 'welcoming city' in the interest of 'productive collaboration.' The resulting motion finally depoliticized the issue by highlighting the practices already put in place by the city and avoiding any explicit mentioning of the 'sans-papiers.' While undocumented migrants became part of the grassroots campaign alongside radicals, the CNCD-11.11.11 campaign's legalistic approach prevented them from taking up an active role. This finding resonates with scholarship which argues that representational cleavages within immigrant rights movements accentuate existing dynamics of social exclusion (see Nicholls, 2013; Swerts, 2014a). Furthermore, we show that dynamics of politicization and depoliticization can gradually emerge within a movement network over time.

On a broader scale, we argue that the sanctuary cities literature's emphasis on analyzing outcomes like sanctuary laws and discourses obscures that the need to reach a consensus about the terms of inclusion can generate new forms of exclusion and foreclose space for dissensus. By focusing on how episodes of politicization and depoliticization are triggered by changes in relational power configurations between civil society and governmental actors, the model advanced in this article is well equipped to trace what is won and what gets lost in the negotiation process. Our findings equally speak to debates around the 'right to the city' and urban citizenship (see Purcell, 2002, 2003) by demonstrating both the potentialities and difficulties involved in turning radical political imaginaries into reality. While the power of the 'right to the city' to mobilize citizens around a common struggle and question the terms of urban inclusion and exclusion should not be underestimated, its politicizing potential can be undermined when established actors continue to set the tone. Although we showed how the meaning of 'sanctuary' changed throughout the negotiation process, further research could explore if and how sanctuary cities impact the social inclusion of undocumented migrants in practice. Furthermore, linkages between immigrant rights struggles and broader struggles over the 'right to the city' need to be empirically investigated, rather than assumed beforehand. Because sanctuary cities not only protect and safeguard undocu-

mented migrants, but also exemplify the 'right to the city' of us all.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Sébastien Lambert is a Social Worker in the Immigration Field in Liège. He previously received his Master's degree in Social and Political Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Liège in September 2018. For his thesis, he conducted a study to investigate the role of the local associative and militant fabric in pushing for urban sanctuary policies in Liège.

Thomas Swerts is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. He previously received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago. For his dissertation research, he performed an ethnographic study of undocumented activism in the US and Europe. His research focuses on the nexus between irregular migration, political sociology and urban studies. He has contributed to edited volumes on citizenship studies, immigrant rights mobilization and relational poverty politics.