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City diplomacy of ordinary cities: Harnessing migrant inclusion policies for international engagement in Amadora, Portugal

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Abstract

This paper adds to the literature on urban diplomacy by focusing on the role of smaller cities with an active international engagement in migration matters. What are the motives driving the involvement of these "ordinary" cities in international groupings? What role do these cities play in the circulation of policies related to migration integration? How does it translate into local policies? To do so, we rely on a quantitative analysis of 64 networks around the world and on the case study of Amadora (Portugal). It is argued that "ordinary" cities may gain visibility when participating in transnational networks of cities. However, the research also shows that the city involvement is driven by the search for financial capacities, thereby nurturing a form of dependency from international subsidies. In addition, Amadora's involvement in city networks is not necessarily connected with actual activism in favor of migrant integration. The research shows the tensions between political discourses at national and local levels, and the loopholes of the "transnationalization" of migration governance.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The global village is made of global cities. But not only... The current analytical lines of the city networks' scholarship (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Caponio, 2021; Lacroix & Spencer, 2022; Leitner, 2004; Oomen, 2019; Payre, 2010) largely emphasize large cities with dense international connections, what Sassen (2013) has called "global cities". And yet, the presence of smaller towns has remained unheeded in the urban policy scholarship. It is particularly so in the domain of migration.

The growing involvement of cities in migration and integration issues is testified by the scholarship since the early 2000s and more specifically since the 2010s. It documents a local turn of integration policies driven by the support provided by EU institutions to municipalities active in this area (Borkert & Caponio, 2010). For others, municipal engagement is a reaction to the security-oriented policies undertaken by states at the national level: Researchers shed light on a decoupling between local and national policy orientations (Oomen, 2019). But most research investigating this dynamics has studied large cities (Desille et al., 2023; Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2022; Schmiz et al., 2020). Instead we rally to the calls made by fellow scholars to study what Robinson (2006) has called "ordinary cities", that is, following OECD definition, small and mid-sized towns or cities as comprising between 50,000 and 500,000 inhabitants. Indeed, dispersal policies of asylum seekers as well as more complex migratory dynamics have led to the surge of migrant populations in more unusual places. This paper adds to a burgeoning scholarship on the involvement of smaller cities in reception and integration policies (Amin & Graham, 1997; Bonizzoni & Marzorati, 2015; Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021; Flamant et al., 2020; Hinger, 2020; Kreichauf, 2015; Triviño-Salazar, 2018; Van Breugel, 2020) by investigating their urban diplomacy agenda (Acuto, 2013; Stürner-Siovitz, 2022; Viltard, 2008).

The number of migration-focused inter-city formations is on the rise since the early 2000s and more particularly the 2015 "migration crisis" (Lacroix, 2021). Migration is a common issue of interest among smaller cities with an international agenda, and an active presence in city networks. Arguably, the growing presence of smaller cities at the international level has grown hand in hand with the development of intercity networks. The paper aims to document the relative importance of smaller cities in the surge of urban diplomacy and city networks. More specifically, it raises three questions: What are the motives driving the involvement of these "ordinary" cities in such international groupings?; what role do these cities play in the circulation of policies related to immigration integration?; how does it affect local policies and civil society organizations? Through a quantitative analysis of the participation of cities of various sizes and roles, and a qualitative study we document how and why "ordinary" cities have found in city networks an accessible way to be present on the international scene, but also the limits of such an involvement. The quantitative part of the research relies on a database of 64 migration-related city networks mustered by the authors and focuses more specifically on "nodal cities" (i.e., cities that are members of two or more city networks) to target local governments displaying a high level of engagement on the international scene. The qualitative part draws on the particular case of Amadora in Portugal. In the fields of migration and integration only, Amadora has taken part in four transnational city networks (TCN), and therefore falls in the category of "nodal cities". This article will unpack the administrative management of its multiple involvement and the resources it gains from it. In this regard, Amadora can be regarded as a "pathway case" (Gerring, 2007) for the study of small and mid-sized cities international engagement. This case study sheds light on the policy conundrum faced by ordinary

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cities, between the search for international openness and the need to respond to claims of its inhabitant, between the scarcity of financial resources and the proliferation of easily accessible policy models circulating in international spheres, between the transnationalization of migration governance and the relations maintained with local organizations. Through the case of Amadora, we observe how small cities with limited resources cope with these paradoxes.

This paper starts with a joint review of the literature on small cities, and their urban diplomacy in commitment to immigrant reception and integration. The third section presents the methodology of the mixed method analysis used in this study. The fourth section proceeds with a quantitative assessment of the presence of small and medium sized cities in city networks while the sixth part unpacks the case study of Almadora.

2 | CITY NETWORKS AND THE ROLE OF SMALL AND MID-SIZED CITIES IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Transnational city networks and the surge of city diplomacy in Europe

City activism on the international sphere is nothing new. The formation of groups of cities around common interests at the national or international level is observed at least since the modern era, and more specifically since the 19th century (Acuto et al., 2021; Kihlgren Grandi, 2020). However, the notion of "city diplomacy" is relatively new. It dates to the creation of the commission of the same name within the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), at the conference held in Beijing in 2005 (Viltard, 2008). The UCLG defines city diplomacy as a tool for local governments to "promote social cohesion, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction". Yet, scholars have mainly understood city diplomacy as the external relations sustained by cities with "the aim of representing themselves and their interest" (Van der Pluijm and Melissen, 2007, p. 6). As Acuto and Rayner (2016) have argued, "an important portion of city networking activities can be justifiably described as "city diplomacy," in that they constitute mediated "international" relations between rightful representatives of polities (cities in this instance), and that they result in agreements, collaborations, further institution-building and cooperation across boundaries". City diplomacy is seen as a potential fruitful conceptual framework to explore the "pervasive agency" of cities in contemporary global governance (Acuto, 2013). Yet it remains unclear "how do cities develop and enact agency through TCN" (Stürner-Siovitz, 2022).

In Europe, the recent development of urban diplomacy and city networks is embedded into the building of the political multiscale architecture of the European Union. In this regard, the 1992 treaty of Maastricht, and the introduction of the subsidiary principle is considered a milestone (Lacroix & Spencer, 2022; Leitner, 2004; Russeil & Healy, 2015). The principle of subsidiarity defines the scales at which decisions should be made, explains Leitner (2004), yet the application and interpretation of the subsidiary principle means that Member States as well as regions and cities are in constant "struggles over the location and extent of power and authority within the EU" (ibid. p. 236). And this particularly so in the domain of migration and integration. A voice and a legitimate capacity of action in this field is a long-standing claim of certain city networks such as Eurocities.[1]

In 1997, with the adoption of the treaty of Amsterdam, migration and integration matters became part of the European field of competence. It was inserted in the urban agenda defining the

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urban policy of the EU (Lacroix & Spencer, 2022). City networks have become an important tool of the EU. They are encouraged by the Commission to develop direct communication with regions and cities—this is the case of the reshuffled Council for European Cities and Regions. Networks are also encouraged to support the circulation of policy. For instance, the URBACT program is an EU policy framework supporting municipal networks exchanging best practices, in a logic of *benchmarking* (Healy & Russeil, 2015). And conversely, networks such as Eurocities are used by cities to voice their claim toward the Commission. The EU elicits the formation of networks via calls for funding targeting European-wide consortium of municipalities. For instance, the "Integrating Cities",[2] fostered by Eurocities, "effectively consisted of a succession of individual EU-funded peer-learning projects" (Gebhardt and Güntner, 2021). The EU 2014–2020 Asylum and Migration Integration Fund has funded several projects with a main objective of fostering exchange between cities, including the IncluCities project,[3] formed by 8 cities, which aims at improving the integration of third-country nationals in middle-sized cities through city-to-city cooperation and with the involvement of migrant-led organizations or representatives.

This fund also encourages collaborations between municipal and civil society actors. In consequence, the insertion of cities within the broader European political architecture developed in two complementary directions: vertically by establishing channels of interactions between different tiers of governments (municipalities, subnational and national authorities, European institutions) and horizontally with non-state actors (city networks and civil society organizations (Caponio and Donatiello, 2017). Looking into the organizations partnering in various consortia,[4] one can note the presence of refugee organizations, migrant-led organizations but also private consultancies and research institutes. Indeed, next to civil society organizations, it is hard to ignore the "heavily populated world of consultants, exchanges and visits, political and professional networks that cluster around urban initiatives and which often have a longer history than is sometimes acknowledged" (Desille et al., 2023; see also Payre & Spahic, 2012; Caponio, 2018). In their analysis of Eurocities, Gebhardt and Güntner (2021) show the importance of expert partners such as MigrationWork, the Migration Policy Group and the Migration Policy Institute for its integration-related activities. Russeil and Healy (2015) also highlight the work of two research centers and their directors: the European Institute for Comparative Urban Research (EURICUR) in Rotterdam directed by Leo Van den Berg and the European Institute for Urban Affairs (EIUA) in Liverpool directed by Michael Parkinson. Hence, the diffusion of policies in TCNs is sustained by a web of international, national and local actors—mayors, other elected representatives, agents, and civil society representatives -, by experts (including research centers and sporadically hired academics) and professionals recruited by the networks during the existence of particular projects—but also by non-human assemblages of institutional working procedures, manuals edited by experts and translated in various European languages, policy papers and more (McCann & Ward, 2013), which we will come back to in the following sections.

The growing involvement of municipalities in the domain of migration is also a reaction to security-oriented migration agendas and discourses. These policies and their consequences on local immigrant populations have triggered a surge of municipal and civil society activism in different countries of Europe. In the early two-thousands, British cities declared themselves as sanctuary welcoming asylum seekers in vulnerable situations. But it is in 2015, during the so-called "refugee crisis," that we see a turning point in the expression of a more militant urban diplomacy in Europe. One observes a multiplication of networks promoting policies that are distancing themselves from restrictive national migration policies (Oomen, 2019). Cities associate to promote a more welcoming agenda toward migrant persons, in a hostile national context. This is

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particularly the case in the Mediterranean, a region affected by the crossing of migrants on small boats and the ensuing militarization of their surveillance (Lacroix et al., 2022).

Against this background, a flurry of migration related city networks were created, be they sponsored by European-wide integration programs, or more grassroots groupings with a more militant stance. However, whatever the orientation they endorse, city networks have become a privileged vehicle for the expression of contemporary urban diplomacy. The scholarship focuses on unpacking the formation of these mobilizations to understand the motives of the various actors and territorial entities they represent, but also the way policies, ideas and narratives circulate from one site to the others. In fact, with the transnationalization of governance, (migration) policymaking is to be seen "as both a local and, simultaneously, a global socio-spatial and political process" (McCann & Ward, 2013).

A look into this scholarship sheds light on the motives and actors spurring their involvement.

2.2 | Migration and municipal diplomacy in large cities

Larger cities have more capacities to dedicate time, money and personnel in networking activities. Unsurprisingly, they have attracted the bulk of scholarly interest (Desille et al., 2023; Schmiz et al., 2020). The literature shows how migration has become, for global cities, a key sector of international involvement.

Indeed, the internationalization of urban policies is an instrument of para-diplomacy and a way for city leaders to "push themselves on the negotiation table" (Stürner & Bendel, 2019). Visibility, legitimacy and money is what they gain from their participation. Caponio (2018) and Teixeira (2020) have mentioned how participation in TCNs is an instrument of soft power. Large metropolitan cities may choose the types of TCN they partake in accordance with their agenda. In her comparison between Barcelona and Paris, Hombert finds that the Spanish metropole favors militant networks, such as Fearless cities, promoting a progressive approach to immigration (Hombert, 2022). Spencer, in her analysis of C-Mise, a group of European cities focusing on undocumented immigrants, she shows that Barcelona is among the members unsettling the more conservative positions of Northern European cities by promoting an agenda that may go against the grain of national priorities (Spencer, 2021). By contrast, Paris seeks to depoliticize its refuge policy with a marked preference for more institutionalized networks co-opted by international organizations (Hombert, 2022). It is active in networks such as Metropolis, the UNESCO network ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities Against Racism), of the integrating cities program of Eurocities. These networks are characterized by the search for an "anti-political" consensus (Clarke, 2012), that is, a technocratic governance rather than political debate, and the avoidance of conflicts. Taking the example of Eurocities, Teixeira argues: "The Charter has been disseminating good practices of comparable policies based on benchmarking between signatory cities. It monitors and evaluates local policy performances and its achievements. This process of peer reviewing and benchmarking assumes a discourse of political neutrality which applies adequate instruments and standardized procedures informed by an evidence-based policy-making agenda" (Teixeira, 2020, p. 70).

Research shows that large city activism is motivated by a multi-level agenda. This is the case of Barcelona: at the subnational level, the municipality develops an international engagement that is distinct from state foreign diplomacy, thereby pursuing a regionalist agenda in Catalonia. At the national level, Mayor Ada Colau gathered in 2015 a group of municipalities into the *Ciudades Refugio* network: she thereby went to the foreground as a leader of progressive mayors

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(most of them where members of leftist political formations such as *Comunes* or *Podemos*) (Lacroix et al., 2022). At the regional level, the municipality is present as a leading European or Mediterranean city (Zapata-Barrero, 2022): it is a founding member of Eurocities and other key European inter-city formations, and it is involved in attempts to create safe harbors for Search and Rescue organizations in the Mediterranean along with Palermo or Marseille. At the global level it is home of United Cities and Local Government, the body representing local governments at the UN level. Such a multilevel agenda has been highlighted for other major metropoles and secondary cities such as Lyon (Flamant, 2014) or Paris (Hombert, 2022).

However, researchers note that the ripple effects of this international involvement on local policies is far from obvious: if large cities may locally incorporate policies developed elsewhere (e.g., the diffusion of municipal ID card in the US, the building of reception center in Paris inspired by the camp build up in Grande Synthes, in the vicinity of Calais), they are more active in promoting their homebrewed policy innovations and having them adopted as a "good practice" at the international level. The "methodology" developed by Barcelona is a case in point examined in greater detail in this article in the section focusing on the case of Amadora. For Caponio, the participation of large cities in networks has more symbolic than practical effects. In her study on Turin (2018), Caponio argues that the main function of participation in TCNs is to legitimize and rebrand their image as a welcoming, cosmopolitan city. Similar conclusion is drawn from research on diversity policies: "Diversity, if managed well through immigrant integration, is seen as an opportunity to create and foster an image of the city, which makes it attractive for foreign investment, tourism, and increased consumption" (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 5, see also Desille, 2019). Following the precepts of Richard Florida (2014), these municipalities posit their narratives on the idea that openness and diversity is more appealing for a young, creative and entrepreneurial class than a more conservative attitude based on security and homogeneity. As Garrido and Raposo (2020, p. 3) affirm: "there is consensus over the idea that 'cultural diversity' stands among the most valuable assets mobilized by property developers and policy makers to gauge the coefficient of originality and 'trendiness' of cities and regions to attract the creative class."

In brief, large cities use their involvement in city networks to appear as leading and innovative cities to be imitated rather than to muster resources for their own activities. They multiply their membership in different formations to enlarge their audience and occupy complementary arenas. And this goes beyond the migration-related networks: for instance, Paris and Barcelona are also members of C40, a coalition of over a 100 cities committed to the reduction of their greenhouse effect gas emission. This is particularly so for capital cities who wish to appear as global leaders, but also for secondary cities such as Barcelona, Lyon or Rotterdam, that do not have the resources of capitals to access the international scene. How does it work for smaller cities? Examining the motives explaining the engagement of large cities will help contrasting and understanding those of smaller municipalities. Do they display loser forms of involvement due to lesser financial and political capacities? or do they find more innovative ways to be part of an international conversation?

2.3 | Ordinary cities: Marginal players or places of innovation?

As one can see, the literature has overwhelmingly focused on large cities. However, Barbara Oomen shows that "there is no correlation between city size and the number of networks in which a given city participates. This finding contrasts with the literature on city diplomacy,

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which tends to take global cities as its point of departure, and shows how the rise of TCN not only concerns global cities but also smaller places" (Oomen, 2019, p. 13). In this paper, we grant a specific interest for these smaller places, or what Robinson (2006) has called "ordinary cities"', that is, small and mid-sized towns or cities. The OECD defines medium-size urban areas when their population counts between 200,000 and 500,000 and small urban areas when their population is between 50,000 and 200,000. We understand that this statistical category may be contested, as it may include capital cities but also global cities with substantial political, economic, cultural and touristic weight and attractiveness at the regional (which we called secondary cities in the graphs below) and global levels, and therefore a high share of immigrant residents. But for the ones that are not capital or global, one reason why scholars usually discard those cities is the little leeway they are perceived to have when it comes to policy making: "mayors appear especially constrained when they govern immigrant-receiving municipalities that in one way or another are left behind, because they have lost out to globalization (Trucco, 2021) or have fragile, weak or long declining economies, such as those in post-industrial regions (Hillmann, 2021) or deprived rural areas" (Bazurli et al., 2022). For Nina Glick-Schiller and Ayse Çağlar, a "downscaled city" refers "to its relative positioning within emerging national, regional, and global hierarchical configurations of power" (Glick-Schiller and Çağ;lar, 2010, p. 191). Scoring very low in those new hierarchical configurations of power, (Glick-Schiller and Çağ;lar, 2010, p. 191) those "downscaled cities" may rely on immigration as a tool for regenerating a deserted town center, or sustaining the demographic growth necessary to the maintenance of public services. But in general, the authors argue that they do not make policies to leverage migrations.

This assessment of small and medium cities as places constrained by their downscaled situation, is being questioned by a more recent strand of works. Without rejecting the argument that global capitalism has reshaped our space in a way which left important areas at the margin, small and mid-sized cities can take advantage of the lack of dedicated policies to participate in a rescaling of migration governance from below. Indeed, as renewed enthusiasm for mid-sized cities has emerged across urban studies in the past decade, they are now seen as sites of innovation. Several special issues of scientific journals have been dedicated to mid-sized cities (Carrier & Demazière, 2012; Flamant et al., 2020; Loubière, 2011; Mestres, 2017). Carrier and Demazière most crucially state: "small and mid-sized cities, even much more than big cities, are simultaneously connected to other urban spaces, crossed by flux, influences, but also rooted in history, in heritage. This inclusion and this distancing of the world make small and mid-sized cities complex research objects, at least as sensitive to analyze as very big cities" (2012, p. 141).

Although there has been some recognition that these localities were neglected in migration policymaking and urban diplomacy, the scholarship has not developed as fast as the one surveying gateway cities—particularly Global North metropolizes of 1 to 5 million inhabitants (Desille et al., 2023). Some studies focus on a town or village itself, analyzing in-depth the way migration is included in the municipal agenda (Hinger, 2020; Triviño-Salazar, 2018). Sometimes, studies draw on a comparison between a handful of towns/villages (Bonizzoni & Marzorati, 2015; Kreichauf, 2015) in a same country, more rarely in two countries or more (Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021; Flamant et al., 2020; Van Breugel, 2020). These comparisons are important to understand the relational character of migration reception and inclusion policymaking, and avoid "methodological localism" (Filomeno, 2016). Smaller cities are neither inactive locally nor absent from city networks internationally. But the relative weight of their involvement and the drivers explaining them remain unclear.

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3 | METHODOLOGY

The present study combines a quantitative study of nodal cities and a field study of one case study to shed a new light on both the intensity of their engagement in city networks, and to the drivers and constraints they face in their endeavor. The quantitative exploration provides a general overview of the place and role of small and medium cities in the realm of migration-related city networks. But it is also an important preliminary step to identify and characterize a "pathway case" of ordinary city.

The quantitative investigations rely on a desk-based collection of information regarding 64 migration-related TCNs in the world. The collection was undertaken between 2018 and 2020 and includes information about the date of creation, source of funding, members and activities. It was enriched with geolocalization and population data found on *worldcities*. Our include information on nearly 4000 cities members of the listed city networks. In order to understand the processes at stake, we have narrowed down our sample to "nodal cities", that is, cities as cities belonging to two or more networks. We have identified a subsample of 698 nodal cities. We use nodal cities as a proxy for cities that display a high level of involvement in the domain of migrations. TCNs form an interconnected ecosystem of municipalities around the world. Nodal cities are central to this interconnectivity.[5] The statistical treatment, network analysis and visualization have been processed with the freewares Qgis and R (dplyr, igraph and ggraph packages).

Second, we selected the case of Amadora, where we conducted a qualitative case study between April 2021 to December 2022. This intensive case study serves as a "pathway case" (Gerring, 2007). Amadora is part of four different migration-related TCNs. The case study aims to clarify the motivations of ordinary cities that participate in various TCNs (we make the hypothesis that it brings visibility, legitimacy and money), the way policies circulate (we hypothesize that policies circulate via the use of depoliticized "best practices") and the effect on the local agenda on migration integration (we hypothesize that localities may innovate).

For these effects, we have analyzed a series of policy papers edited by the municipality or by related stakeholders, namely: the Municipal Plan for the Integration of Immigrants, the welcoming guide for migrant persons, and strategic plans of the Social Council of the municipality of Amadora; governmental documents produced by the High Commission for Migrations in Portugal such as the methodological guide for the writing of municipal plans, or the manual "promotion of interculturalism and local integration"; and international manuals such as the Intercultural Cities (ICC) anti-rumor guide, and the URBACT webpage and online documents detailing the two networks directed by Amadora. The analysis of these documents was completed with 28 interviews in Portuguese, English and Spanish with the mayor of Amadora, municipal agents including the director in charge of migration matters, or the municipal advisor in charge of international cooperation, civil society representatives, as well as with experts in the TCN URBACT and ICC, and scholars who are brought in for their expertize on migration matters. Finally we have made observations during events, including the closing event of URBACT Rumourless cities, or the intercultural festival in Amadora.

4 | THE PLACE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED CITIES AMONG NODAL CITIES

According to our research, the most connected city is Barcelona with 14 memberships, but the vast majority only participates in two or three TCNs (see Figure 2 below). As most migration-related networks in the world are based in Europe or North America (a third of the networks of

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the database are European ones), it is not surprising that most nodal cities are located in these regions of the world. After Barcelona, the higher tier of nodal cities includes Berlin, Dublin, Madrid and Montreal: these localities are active in 10 city networks or more. Figure 1, that shows the connectedness of nodal cities, confirms the centrality of European municipalities.

This ranking, based on a quantitative estimate of involvement in city networks, does not, however, prejudge their relative importance within this international ecosystem. The European cities are in fact located in an area which is already highly interconnected. The connections they provide are therefore often redundant. Conversely, other nodal cities have the particularity of linking regions that are not well connected. They are therefore the less visible keystones that enable the formation of this ecosystem. An intermediation indicator (betweenness) makes it possible to highlight them. On each continent, certain cities serve as intercontinental bridges linking cities of their region with other networks in different parts of the world. It is the case of Barcelona and London in Europe, Montreal and Mexico in North America, Belo Horizonte or Buenos Aires in Latin America, Cairo, or Nouakchott in Africa.

One may therefore distinguish regional and global nodal cities, according to the scope of interconnections they foster. Regional ones bridge localities that are part of the same region in the world while global ones maintain connections across continents.

In such a configuration, small and medium sized cities remain invisible. But their relative weight becomes obvious when one investigates the lesser connected cities, being part of two or three networks only.

Figure 2 shows the importance of small and medium -sized cities in this landscape. The focus on large cities in the scholarship has overshadowed their presence, as if they were tacitly regarded as passive foot soldiers in the cue of leading metropoles. These smaller urban centers (from 50.000 to 500.000) form the largest share of the members of these inter-city organizations.

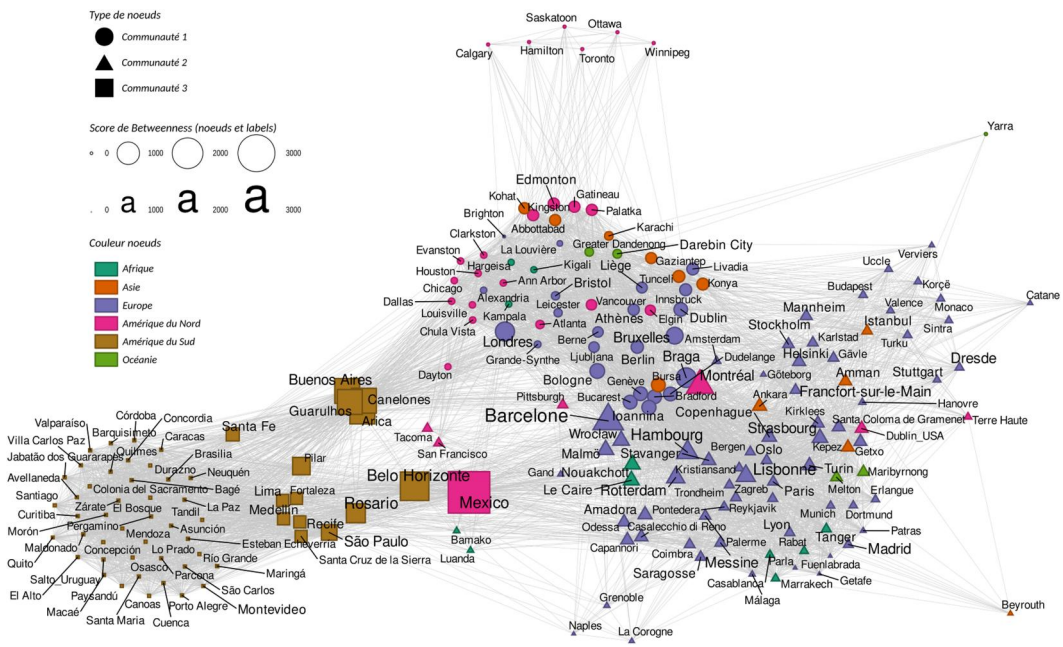

FIGURE 1 Nodal cities connectedness in the world: A global overview. *Source*: Authors, Database on migration-related city networks, design: Grégoire le Campion, 2022.

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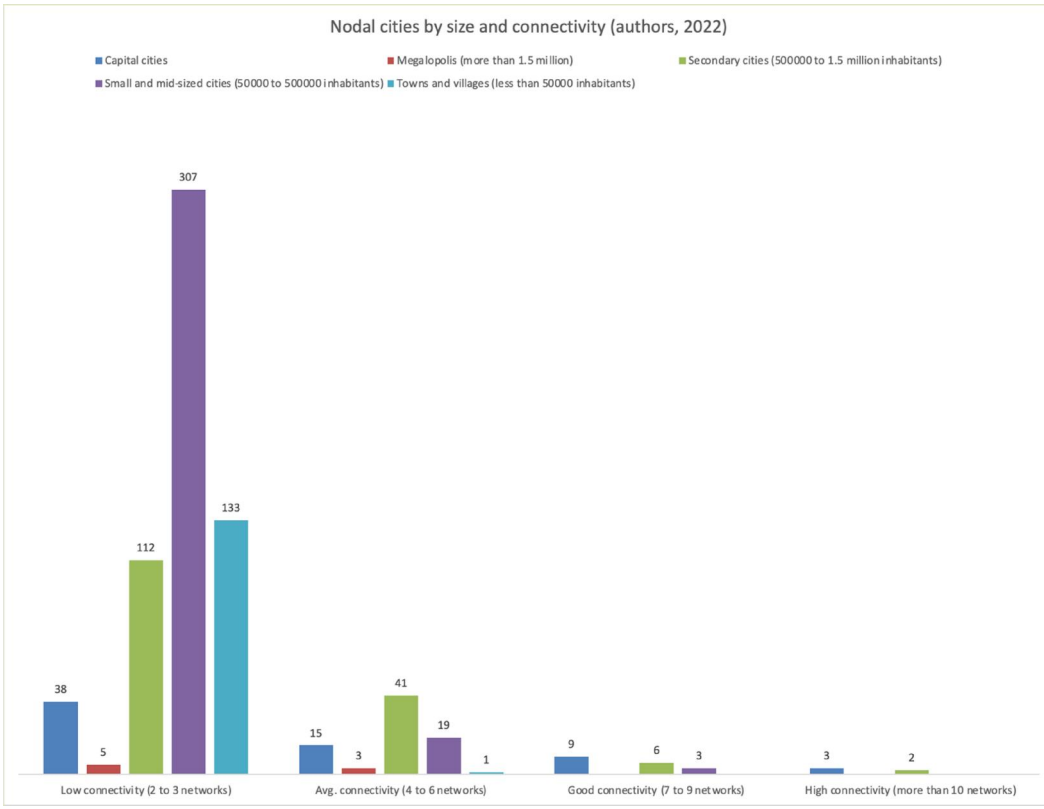

FIGURE 2 Nodal cities by size and connectivity. *Source*: Authors, Database on migration-related city networks. Design: Authors (2022).

In the database we use for this paper, they constitute 47% of the cities who are part of migration-related city networks worldwide. They mostly are present among the least connected cities, that is, cities maintaining 2 to 3 memberships. And they are mostly nodal cities with regional connections that are hardly present in global arenas. What drives their presence is less clear. This study focuses on one "pathway case study" (Gerring, 2007) to unbox the motives behind their involvement. We have chosen to focus on the municipality of Amadora in Portugal.

5 | THE CASE OF AMADORA

Portugal is a centralized country where migration and integration are part of the state domain of competence. Portugal has, for long, been a country of departure. The end of the dictatorship and the independence of former Portuguese colonies in the 1970s incurred a shift, and immigration increased in Portugal. It was only in the 1990s that migration flows from non-Portuguese speaking countries elicited a state response: new immigration laws were voted in the 1990s and early 2000s (1993, 1998 and 2001). The first contours of an integration policy were fashioned even later, in the late 2000s. Despite this late start, Portugal quickly encouraged the involvement of local authorities, and this in line with the delegation of other domains of public action.

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Amadora is a peri-urban city of the Lisbon metropolitan area, and the residence of 171,500 persons in 2021 (INE, 2021), 15.5% of whom are immigrants (Portada, 2022). Amadora nowadays ranks #17/308 in terms of its share of foreign population. Most of Amadora's immigrant population comes from Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Angola, India, São Tomé e Principe, Romania and Ukraine. Amadora has always been a gateway locality: first for Portuguese rural migrants in the 1950s, to post-colonial migrants in the 1970s and 1980s, and, more recently, for immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia. In 1979, its demographic growth was such that it obtained the status of city, and the administrative capacities coming with it. At that period, and to this day, the socialist party took over the communist party as the leading group of the council. Contrarily to the neighboring Lisbon, it attracts very few European migrants, or tourists and visitors. Yet the city has been a site for a prolific academic production over the last years, as it is (in)famous for substantial housing issues, racism toward Black residents, and police violence (Alves, 2019; Raposo et al., 2019; Raposo & Varela, 2017; Varela et al., 2018).

The choice of Amadora is also driven by its involvement in four city networks versed into migration issues: one of them is a national network, C4i (cities for integration) and three of them are European networks, the URBACT-funded rumourless cities project, ICC supported by the Council of Europe and Arrival Cities also supported by URBACT. One can see with Figure 3 that Amadora, albeit members of 4 networks (see Figure 3), is not an international broker connecting various continents, but rather a regional, mainly European, nodal city. Through the ICC, and also through a series of twin city agreements with South American and African cities with a diasporic link with Amadora (interview with the assistant to the municipal councilor, November 2021, Amadora), the city maintains some relations outside of Europe. But in general, one can say that Amadora is nested in a community of cities that are already densely interconnected.

5.1 | Europeanization of Amadora integration policy: A timeline

As evoked above, the Portuguese government did not adopt any integration plan before 2007. From the 2010s on, the governmental agency in charge of migration, integration, refugee, as well as interculturalism—the High Commission for Migrations (ACM hereafter)—carries out a benchmarking operation to assess the measures in place locally for the integration of migrants' residents. Twenty-two studies, on 22 Portuguese cities, funded by the European Integration Fund and entitled *Collection Portugal Immigrant* were published in 2011. Following this benchmark exercise, it encouraged the definition of municipal plans for integration, again with the support of EU funds (European Integration Fund and then Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund). Yet the funding of the activities listed in the plan, as we will see in the sections below, is not provided by the State and it is up to each locality to find appropriate funds, either internally, or through external sources. Following these diagnoses, and with a high incentive from the European Commission to address integration at the city level (interview with the former High Commissioner for Migrations, September 2022, Lisbon), the ACM issued a call for municipalities to prepare Municipal Plans for the Integration of Immigrants, and this with the last available funds of the European Integration Fund. The 19 volunteering municipalities follow a methodology and a template elaborated by the ACM. The ACM also creates an index, and a national network of municipalities "friends of migration and diversity".

Against this national background, Amadora started to consolidate its immigrant integration policy from 2011 on. In 2011, the city became part of the group of 19 Portuguese municipalities

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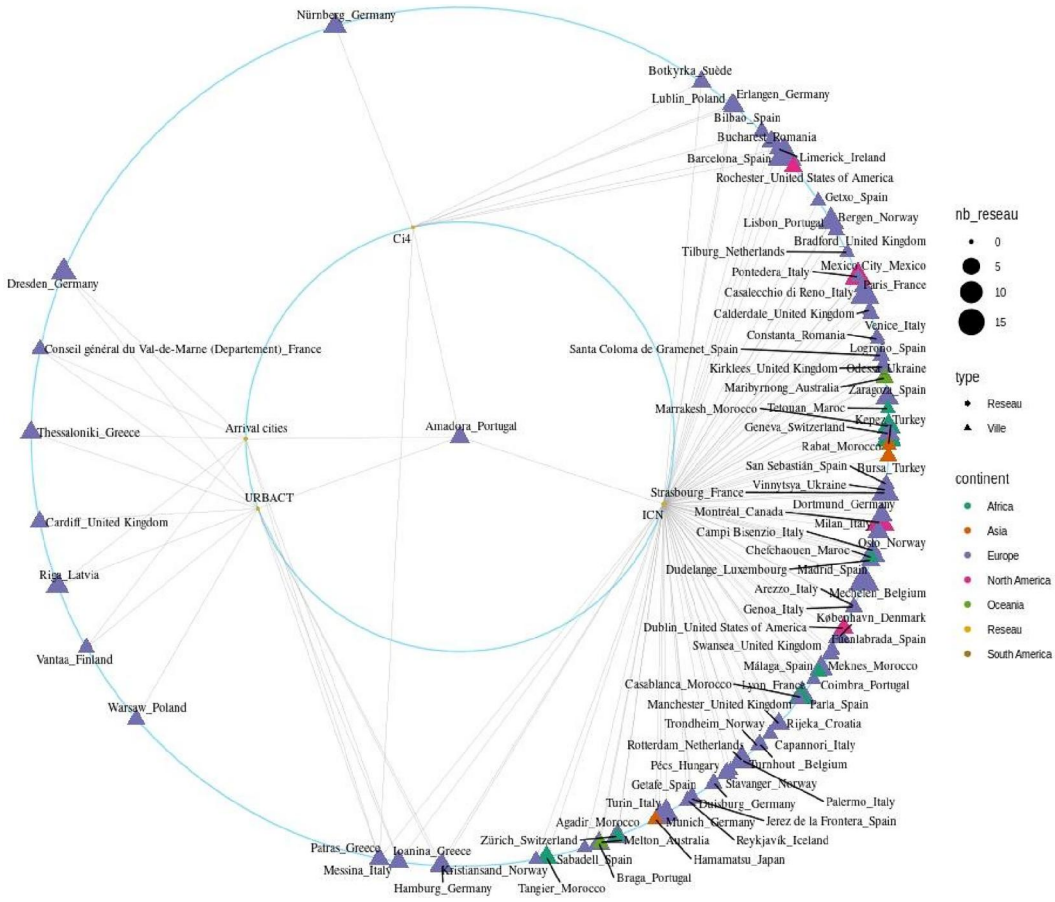

FIGURE 3 Amadora and its four networks. *Source*: Authors, Database on migration-related city networks. Design, Grégoire Le Campion 2022.

funded by the ACM to design an integration plan and incorporated the "friends of migration and diversity" network. Interestingly, Amadora's policy framework was reviewed by ICC, a city network sponsored by the Council of Europe and promoting intercultural policies around the world. It did not take part in the benchmarking exercise solicited by the ACM, and prioritized a ranking method detached from the national context. This is one of the first involvement of Amadora in migration-related European networks.

During this period, the municipality of Amadora also joined a first European program: the 2014–2015 C4i-Communication for Integration funded by the Council of Europe and the European Integration Fund. The 11 partners formed the C4i network (see Figure 3). Their aim was to draw on Barcelona's intercultural policy and more specifically on the "anti-rumor methodology". Building on this experience, Amadora joined other European city networks: the URBACT-funded network "Arrival cities" from 2015 to 2018, and the URBACT Rumourless cities transfer network, from 2018 to 2021 (see Figure 3). Since 2021, Amadora is also part of the Portuguese ICC[6] (see Figure 3). Within these networks, Amadora became a champion of the anti-rumor policy model, promoting the Barcelona-born methodology in various national and international circles. City officials organize online workshops and webinars explaining the rumourless model. An interview with the director of the social intervention division (June 2021,

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online) suggests that Amadora has sporadically participated in other networks for training purposes, such as the "equal cities", but we have not found information on the municipal websites, nor on the networks' platforms to corroborate this information. Secondary sources show that Amadora was also part of the AMIF-funded EPIC platform to improve the integration of migrants at the local level from 2020 to 2023,[7] together with 5 other cities and Civil Society Organizations, but when asked, the municipality never commented on it.

5.2 | The motives of Amadora involvement and the limits of its strategy

What are the motivations for city officials to invest time and resources in these network activities? Interviews undertaken with the municipality and its local partners point to two salient motives. The first one is money. Although limited, it enables the city to coordinate a range of (existing for most) activities and consolidate its integration and intercultural policy. This funding is usually for pilot projects, with the hope that municipalities will include them in their annual budget later on. As a consequence, Amadora has built a project-based integration policy. This is not an exceptional situation: we should recall that Portugal is heavily dependent on EU funding, in a range of domains.[8]

As the director of the social intervention division argues (June 2021, online).

> We think it's important to have a more comprehensive approach. Beyond the funding. We have actions that we can't fund, so these are opportunities for external funding. And we like to experience new things, and we like to innovate. For this, you need external funding. Amadora adopted a lot of concepts, practices, that often we can't apply because the funding ends, and there is no condition to keep on with the actions. Portugal is much poorer than other European countries. We have to be more creative. We rely on a very limited quantity of structures and money. We have to adapt the resources that we have.

The director of the social intervention division is in charge of the implementation of Amadora Municipal Plan for the Integration of Immigrants, together with the Special Projects division. She explains that the participation in TNCs financed the organization of transnational meetings and field visits to other cities (June 2021, online). In addition to municipal representatives, several local organizations could also benefit from these hands-on visits, in Germany, Greece and England (interview with Pressley Ridge representative, July 2021, online; interview with representative of the association for Community Intervention, Social Development, and Health (AJPAS), July 2021, Amadora; interview with the director of the association of social solidarity of the Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood (ASSACM), July 2021, Amadora), but not all costs were paid by the networks. The director of ASSACM told us that travels were paid by the association itself. For Ruth Essex, URBACT network coordinator interviewed online (August 2021), the transfer of funds serves to get a coordinator in place, and some little project money. In that sense, the resources are pooled toward the same municipal agenda on integration.

Yet, interviews conducted between 2021 and 2022 with representatives and activists of civil society organizations in Amadora shows the limit of this funding strategy. The persons involved

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on the ground testify that few of the monies transferred through these TCNs reach them. At the centro social 6 de maio (interview, June 2021, Amadora), we are told that the communication campaign linked to the "anti-rumor methodology" "is not geared toward the immigrant community, but toward residents. The anti-rumor was about deconstructing prejudice (e.g., that the immigrants do not contribute...), and that was for the public at large." The representative of the organization Pressley Ridge in Amadora explains that:

> "when URBACT meetings are organized, civil society representatives join at their own expense. The municipality pushed for a proactive attitude from the partners, with regular meetings, and a commitment to develop activities. So one has to find time to participate in URBACT. A budget should be provided, so that they won't require this extra from institutions. Especially because there is no fixed budget in the organisation" (July 2021).

In that sense, Amadora has adopted for its migration and integration policy the same project-based funding logic. None of its local partners are provided with stable funding: their time spent in these meetings is not an eligible cost that can be refunded.

The second salient motives driving Amadora involvement in city networks is peer learning on issues related to migrant integration both at the local level—as consortiums of partners are required to obtain EU funding—and at the international level. To what extent does the knowledge gained in these networks affect the actual city integration policy? The analysis of the 2018 Municipal Plan for Integration Immigrants, a document that compiles all activities supported by the municipality on this matter provides some evidence. The municipality has used this benchmarking study to set new goals. And some activities listed in the Plan are linked to URBACT.

Some aspects of the policy models and management techniques learned in the framework of TCN activities are transferred on the ground. But, our investigations show that most transfers happen the other way: most "good practices" presented to other partnering cities refer to activities initiated by local actors without them being informed of TCN activities and do not receive funding from the networks. At the final event of URBACT Rumourless city organized online on May 19, 2021, Elisa Moreira, a teacher at a local school, is invited to share a series of e-books edited by students, including artistic practices relating to diversity issues. We flipped through all the e-books available online[9] and could not find any funding mention of URBACT nor of the municipal division for social intervention. We also went through all activities that were promoted under the "anti-rumor" methodology from 2014 to 2021, to find out that Amadora put the label of the anti-rumor methodology on a range of existing activities just because of a loose relationship with the question of diversity. Similarly, yearly events of the city such as the Amadora comic book festival, the city run, school projects... etc, become part of the list of anti-rumor activities based on the distribution of a few t-shirts or dissemination/communication.

The administration of these projects shows the extent to which project-based funding has become an accepted management strategy: the URBACT activities, for instance, are led by the "Local Council of Social Action" or "social network", itself part of the social intervention department, with the supervision of the "special projects' office" of the municipality. All these activities are listed under the Municipal Plan for Integration of Immigrants. They are, in their majority, initiatives of the Civil Society, not funded by the municipality nor the TCNs.

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5.3 | The rumourless methodology as a platform for Amadora's city diplomacy

Amadora's urban diplomacy is linked to one initiative in particular: the anti-rumor methodology. Developed from 2008 onward as one dimension of the overall intercultural strategy of Barcelona, the anti-rumor methodology is an expert policy product, based on the works on intercultural mediation undertaken by the Spanish anthropologist Carlos Giménez Romero, and the Quebec "Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles" chaired by Gérard Bouchart and Charles Taylor (2008). Interestingly, Giménez Romero has also been active at ACM in the 2010s when Pedro Calado was High Commissioner. In an interview with him (September 2022, Lisbon), Calado recalls the shift from diversity to interculturality—a moment when Giménez Romero was promoting training on intercultural mediation. In 2011, one of the two instigators of the Barcelona municipal initiative, Dani de Torres, left the municipality. He became an expert at the Council of Europe, as well as the director of the Spanish Network of ICC (RECI). With the support of the Open Society Foundation, RECI "exported" the anti-rumor strategy to four other Spanish cities. The project became a flagship initiative promoted by the Council of Europe and its city network, ICC.

Amadora became a partner of the first European project based on the anti-rumor: the c4i Communication for Integration Project[10] (see Figure 3). For de Torres, interviewed in January 2022, it was the first time that the initiative was translated into a methodology meant to be replicated in European cities. A manual was edited, based on a previous version written in Catalan. The publication of this manual illustrates the role of experts in translating local initiatives into replicable methodologies: "Policy consultants, for example, make a business out of abstracting certain elements, or 'lessons', from specific policy contexts, molding them into a persuasive story and then remolding that story to fit the needs and aspirations of their clients elsewhere" (McCann & Ward, 2013, p. 10). The anti-rumor methodology is broken down into a series of three phases: (1) a diagnosis of existing local perceptions about immigrants and immigration—the so-called rumors -; (2) the establishment of a network of local anti-rumor agents; and (3) a series of activities inserted in a municipal intercultural policy (Interview with Dani de Torres, January 2022, online). Amadora representatives were acquainted with this methodology in the framework of the c4i network. When the latter ended, the methodology formed the basis of a new URBACT network, called Arrival Cities (2015–2018).[11] For Ruth Essex, interviewed in August online, the participation in URBACT was a way for Amadora to rejuvenate part of the work done before. And Amadora became the head of URBACT Rumourless cities (2018–2021).[12] Its leadership is not only based on the skills acquired by its officials in this domain, but also, from the networks' point of view, being headed by a smaller city is a valuable addition. In August 2021, the URBACT network coordinator Ruth Essex, who has been involved in the "Rumourless cities" network, mentioned the added-value of the leadership of smaller cities:

> I think it is very valuable to have cities leading things that are kind of real places. Because Lisbon city is quite unique in a way. [...] It's very specific: it's not very transferable as a place. But there are lots of places, municipalities across Europe that are kind of the size of Amadora. They are not particularly famous. They aren't tourist destinations. They are not places a lot of people move to because they'd like living there. But they are kind of real places so I think it's very good that they have some sort of prominence, because there is a lot to learn from them, that is maybe more transferable, than if you are in a city that already has a lot of advantages.

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Through its European involvement, the Portuguese city became the champion of a policy model it did not initiate. Its involvement is entirely based on the promotion and diffusion of this policy, through "conferences, seminars, workshops, guest lectures, fact-finding field trips, site visits, walking tours and informal dinners" (McCann & Ward, 2012, p. 9). But it gained a leadership role among European TCNs by putting forward its experience of "ordinary" (real) city.

5.4 | Effects on the local agenda on migration integration

Low budget and intense communication: the participation of Amadora in TCNs appears as more symbolic than practical (Caponio, 2018). When interrogated, local partners told us that they have found TCNs brought a new narrative of immigration, where the presence of migrant peoples is considered an asset rather than a burden, and have enabled them to have more progressive debates, away from the influence of the Church and its charity-oriented frames - the Church being an important donor in Portugal in the sphere of migration (interview with Raizes representative, July 2021, online). But they also all asserted that everything had previously been done in Amadora, and the TCNs had just given them the possibility to collaborate and to know better who was doing what.

In that sense, the involvement of Amadora in TCNs brought little innovation and changes in the working culture. For the representative of AJPAS (July 2021, Amadora), even though they were urged to be more inclusive, the absence of immigrants in the so-called "participatory process" appeared as an issue. An interview with a scholar well acquainted with Amadora seems to point to a recurring absence. She recalls the investiture of the new (and current mayor) who claimed a "Amadora for all" while only two black persons sat in the audience.

In that sense, participation in TCNs remains a façade. For Ruth Essex (August 2021, online), cities are motivated precisely because it can improve their *status*: "To push the focus, the priority agenda at home. And get a bit of acknowledgment. URBACT is not about financing projects. There are other bodies that do that". The coordinator of ICC in Portugal told us a similar thing in an interview online in October 2021. For her, it is about strategic positioning and the marketing of the city. Taking first the example of Lisbon, she said that "interculturality is a strategic tool for tourism". She also affirmed that with the gentrification in Lisbon, with tourism, and after the crisis, one cannot ignore the "other flip of the coin. Migration and minorities are impacted by these changes". As for Amadora, "They could do much better than what they are doing".

For an activist in the field of housing, interviewed in April 2022, efforts by Amadora to push an integration and intercultural agenda is to "maintain an official profile". She said that "The money goes through ACM, to the municipality, but doesn't reach the targeted communities." Contrarily to Clarke (2012), we believe that these integration policies have political effects. These symbolic, soft policies (which circulate along the different networks) are producing novel forms of management. Technocratic evidence-based policymaking is a way for Amadora to legitimize its actions in the domain of migration and interculturalism, to show its control over the issue, through actions that occur either superficially in the city, or in other cities of Europe.

More concerning, in the case of Amadora, its involvement in the four networks and its concomitant commitment through the Municipal Plan for the Integration of Immigrants are to be understood in the context of the broader demographic transformations of the city, and of an increase in real estate prices. Amadora is "whitening", and its immigration-related policy is not foreign to the urban development processes happening. A scholar interviewed in May 2021 in

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Lisbon insisted on the consequences of the high prices of housing (as important as in Porto for 2020), the overcrowding of houses, or the lack of suitable housing to absorb newcomers, especially the less privileged. For the responsible of the census in Amadora (interviewed in May 2021), the center of Amadora, once called "Luanda" became whiter, younger, with more students, and new shops. An expert who wished to remain anonymous affirmed that the mayor of Amadora sees in an intercultural policy a potential for socio-economic diversification, at a cost for the African residents who are pushed even further away. As an activist interviewed (April 2022, Lisbon) put it: "They want to clean their image of periphery and "become a city". That's recent. And they don't want to re-house racialized populations, they'd rather have them out".

6 | CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have argued for a closer analysis of urban diplomacy engagement among small and mid-sized cities. Our aim is to shed light on the importance of a phenomenon that has received little scholarly attention. The quantitative survey of migration-related city networks shows that they constitute half of all cities involved in migration-related TCNs, and more than a quarter of "nodal" cities. The quantitative analysis reveals their connectivity, and their importance in sustaining an ecosystem for urban diplomacy. Their relative invisibility in research does not parallel their importance in European-cities relations. Over the last couple of decades, an evolution of the legal (European treaties and policies) and institutional contexts (the development of networks of cities), but also the dissemination of support mechanisms such as benchmarking tools, toolboxes and handbooks, trainings and replicable methodologies, and policy papers, have facilitated for "ordinary cities" the access to international arenas. In that sense, accessing a TCN can be done at a lower cost than it used to be some decades ago. It also enables new forms of city diplomacy, as it creates new modalities of cooperation. Amadora, and other smaller cities it cooperates with, have joined networks that are funded by European programs such as c4i, or URBACT.

Drawing on this quantitative analysis of nodal cities, a field study of the participation of Amadora in TCNs, has enabled us to address three other questions.

The first one relates to the motivations of smaller cities spending time and resources in intercity mobilisations. We formulated the hypothesis that visibility, legitimacy and funding were important motives for these cities to endorse an urban diplomacy agenda. Here, the case of Amadora is enlightening as it shows the extent to which Amadora leverages its participation in multiple networks to reposition itself among other Portuguese cities (with the national ICC network), but also as an interlocutor of the main government agency dealing with migration matters, the ACM. Amadora is now seen in European city networks as a leader spearheading an intercultural agenda. In that sense, local integration policies and participation in TCNs are tailored to foster an urban diplomacy agenda, but also as a national branding strategy.

The search for funding is another key driver. The scarcity of state funding available to cities, combined with an urge to take action in the domain of integration appears explains city engagement. However, our investigations show that the recourse to EU funds to offset the paucity of available means creates a dependency toward external funding. The participation in TCNs goes hand in hand with other European financing mechanisms the city's actors have adopted. The integration policies and related activities of Amadora therefore follow a project-based logic with little sustainability. Combined with the fact that more and more European projects favor communication activities rather than structural changes, the money that actually

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makes its way to local associations and the targeted population is very low. Moreover, municipal authorities heavily instrumentalizes voluntary and community initiatives to show case the city's ability to carry on with integration-related activities. In that sense, the analysis of the motives of smaller cities also shows their difficulty in shaping a sustainable policy for the integration of immigrant people.

The second question refers to the role of smaller cities in the circulation of (innovative) policy models. The quantitative analysis shows their potential as a regional hub for the circulation of policies. Amadora corresponds more to a regional nodal city, as it is mostly connected to European cities (and loosely with African and Asian cities through ICC or its twin city-program). Amadora is widely acknowledged as a champion of the Barcelona-born anti-rumor methodology. It has been an active promoter of the program in various networks: the c4i project, two international networks reaching 13 new partner cities, and the national ICC network in Portugal. However, a qualitative assessment of this dissemination role shows that Amadora falls short of circulating innovative policies. In fact, most of its engagement enhanced the work of a few agents based in Barcelona in the 2010s, a work that was then "neutralized" and rendered "anti-political" through an easily replicable methodology and trainings.

The last question addressed in this paper is the one of the actual effects of small cities diplomacy on local policies. Research on large cities shows that these effects are largely symbolic (Caponio, 2018). But others argue that smaller cities constitute a more favorable environment for the internalization of policy models. In Amadora, the qualitative analysis shows ambivalent effects. On the one hand, respondents point to the improvement of the debate on migration brought by the methodology, moving away from charity oriented narratives of the Church. Likewise, the city adapted new management techniques such as benchmarking. But, on the other hand, little has been done to change the working culture of civil society organizations. As a respondent argues: everything was done before, it just became systematized. Indeed, the multiple involvement in European TCNs have had little effect locally as they mainly translate into diagnoses—a "paper trail" (Ahmed, 2019) - with little enforcement. In addition, the project-based funding logic does not really enable pilot projects to become sustainable. Civil society representatives have pointed out the lack of real engagement of the municipality on the one hand; and on the other hand, an actual disengagement in issues such as housing or political representation, two domains where Portugal in general, and Amadora in particular, rank low when it comes to migrant integration. Even more concerning, it seems that the internationalization of migration policies in Amadora is a façade, while the local authorities hope for a change of demography that will ultimately dilute the relative share of the migrant population. The growing presence of ordinary cities in the international arenas occurs at a times of scarce funding sources, in a context where communication and branding is more important than actual outcomes. Against this background, the migration agenda of Amadora fosters its diplomatic engagement, not the contrary.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria;

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educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data is not available at the moment.

ENDNOTES

[1] This claim is already present in the founding declaration of the network, the Barcelona declaration, in 1989.

[2] https://integratingcities.eu/.

[3] https://www.inclucities.eu/.

[4] See for instance: https://www.embrace-project.com, https://epicamif.eu/partners/, https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/mc2cm, https://mile-project.eu, and more.

[5] It is worth noting that international organizations such as the European Union, UN agencies or the Council of Europe are another key player fostering global interconnections. They sponsor the creation and functioning of these networks. It is particularly so in the Global South where few of these TCNs are spontaneous creations (Lacroix, 2021). The study of international organizations in this process is out of the remit of this paper.

[6] The Portuguese Intercultural Cities Network includes Albufeira, Amadora, Beja, Braga, Cascais, Coimbra, Famalicão, Lisboa, Loures, Oeiras, Portimão, Santa Maria da Feira, Setubal, Vila Verde and Viseu.

[7] See https://epicamif.eu/epic-project/.

[8] See for instance the news piece published in Feburary 2022 which shows that Portugal is the EU country with the highest dependency of EU funds for investment, available at: https://expresso.pt/economia/2022-02-07-Portugal-e-em-toda-a-UE-o-pais-que-mais-depende-dos-fundos-comunitarios-para-investir-8352db25.

[9] E-moções, available at: https://aeamadoraoeste.edu.pt/index.php/livro.

[10] C4i includes Amadora, Barcelona, Bilbao, Botkyrka, Erlangen, Limerick, Loures, Lublin, Nuremberg, Patras, and Sabadell.

[11] Arrival cities includes Amadora, Dresden, Messina, Oldenburg, Patras, Riga, Thessaloniki, Val-de-Marne, Vantaa and Roquetas de Mar.

[12] Rumourless cities includes Amadora, Alba Iulia, Cardiff, Hamburg, Messina and Warsaw.

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