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De-bordering policies at the city scale: strategies for building resilience in Barcelona's migration governance

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Abstract

This article bridges the fields of urban politics, migration governance and border studies by exploring Barcelona as a case study. It raises a first critical question about what happens to so-called borderlands when "borders" move to other scales, such as cities that are not usually categorized as "border cities". Within this framing debate, this study explores two fundamental questions: (1) how border practices at the state level shape constrained relations between cities and migrants, and (2) how cities map de-bordering policies to resolve such constraints, which we conceptualise as an example of 'urban resilience'. The aim is to provide a focus that brings the analytical category of "urban resilience", recently proposed within the emerging debate on the "local turn" in migration studies, to bear on issues directly related to the social impacts of state bordering processes on urban systems. The article then argues that urban justice principles drive most cities to initiate resilient de-bordering policies, and can be seen as a distinctive normative factor underpinning urban resilience when applied to migration governance. After laying the groundwork for this theoretical framework and its application to the city of Barcelona, the final section briefly outlines the potential of this new and crucial critical area of migration research. This will provide yet another opportunity to highlight that we are likely to enter an era in which cities will increasingly become sovereign geopolitical entities within and beyond the traditional hierarchical reach of their own states.

Keywords: Barcelona, Bordering politics, De-bordering policies, Migration, Urban justice, Urban governance urban resilience

Introduction: framing the debate on de-bordering politics at the city scale

This article bridges the fields of urban politics, migration governance and border studies by exploring Barcelona as a case study. It raises a first critical question about what happens to so-called borderlands when "borders" move to other scales, such as cities that are not usually categorized as "border cities." Within this framing debate, this study explores two fundamental questions: (1) how border politics at the state level shape constrained relations between cities and migrants, and (2) how cities map de-bordering policies to resolve such constraints, which we conceptualise as an example of 'urban resilience'. The aim is to provide a focus that brings the analytical category of "urban resilience", recently

proposed within the emerging debate on the "local turn" in migration studies (Zapata-Barrero, 2023), to bear on issues directly related to the social impacts of state bordering processes on urban systems. The article then argues that urban justice principles drive most cities to initiate resilient strategies of de-bordering policies, and can be seen as a distinctive normative factor underpinning urban resilience when applied to migration governance.

In this context, resilience building is understood as a policy strategy for the empowerment of cities and the development of urban capacities and learning to manage the spectrum of uncertainties, hazards and risks associated with border-related stresses. Resilient cities look for ways to address pressures on their legal, institutional and policy infrastructures, with associated social impacts in terms of widening inequalities and undemocratic power relations. Resilience-building begins when cities include border-related stressors in their own agendas and then begin to think strategically about how to respond to these pressures by creating de-bordering policies. Urban resilience then describes a stressful environment that cities must face alone, in spite cities do not feel they are responsible. Within this theoretical framework, the article argues that at the city level, state border policies act as an external threat, and these efforts to rebuild cohesion according to urban justice principles act as a normative driver of urban resilience.

After laying the groundwork for this theoretical framework and its application to the city of Barcelona, the final section briefly outlines the potential of this new and crucial critical area of urban politics. This will provide yet another opportunity to highlight that we are likely to enter an era in which cities will increasingly become sovereign geopolitical entities within and beyond the traditional hierarchical reach of their own states.

The theoretical background: a multi-scalar understanding of the de-bordering processes and city sovereignty reconsidered

A consolidated literature on bordering and re-bordering already exists (Brunet-Jailly, 2011; Paasi, 2012; Wastl-Walter, 2016), but, in comparison, there is a still under-researched area on de-bordering. These three research tracks are different heuristic angles of analysis in border studies (Wastl-Walter, 2016; Cooper & Tinning, 2019). Taken literally, "de-bordering" means processes of opening borders by removing existing restrictions. Symbolically it can also refer to tearing up legal, political, social barriers that have been placed by upper power.

Border studies generally uses "border" in two main senses. As a borderland separating two sovereign states, which may coincide with the geographical territory or not, as it happens in the debate of externalisation of borders in migration studies, where borders of one state may be in the borderline of the other state separated by continents and sea (van Munster & Sterkx, 2006; Zaiotti, 2018; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019). But the current debate is on identifying the multiple border spaces within and beyond the states's territory (Andersen et al., 2016; Kolossov & Scott, 2013). In border studies there is today a major shift towards a much more symbolic and vernacular meaning of "border" (Cooper et al., 2016). This involves that borders may be scattered through society, in every-day life (Jones & Johnson, 2016). Inequality, legal status, discrimination, racism, exclusion, power relations, social class can be contextual frameworks that can be analysed through

the border lens. In fact, it is this "spheres of meanings" that make border studies so multi-diffuse.

Alongside this fuzzy meaning, and following the inspiring literature on scale thinking (Brenner, 2001; Marston & Smith, 2001) border-presence can be multi-scalar (Laine, 2016), from states to regions and cities. This may allow to connect the geographical/territorial meaning with the symbolic/vernacular meaning. The fact is that states are the main actors of the (re-)bordering process, but other level of governments such as cities are often forced to manage the effects of such state politics in their societal systems. This entails that we may consider (re-)bordering process in the legal, social, and political aspects, which are vital both for migrants and cities. The primary framework of this article is how local (re)bordering processes affect the interactions between cities and migrants. Some preliminary questions are: How do state's (re-)bordering processes affect urban migration governance capacities? And, how do cities establish "de-bordering" strategies? As a premise, these de-bordering mechanisms are interpreted as resilience strategies, and the normative basis that legitimises these strategies as a particular application of urban justice.

In empirical terms, the local authorities may follow state border dictates in a rigid form, and then accept the limits of migrant rights' inclusion/exclusion established by the state, or not. This leads to two contrasting approaches to urban migration governance, which scholars name differently depending on their field and positionality. It is important to analyse these approaches properly with reference to Williamson's (2018) three city models: proactive, reactive, and inactive. The debate in America seems to be more developed than that of Europe, largely because of the intricate federal system which is often described as a "multi-layered jurisdictional patchwork" (Varsanyi et al., 2012). Political scientists and constitutionalists have focussed on the growth of state preemption laws in reaction to local policy innovations (Riverstone-Niewell, 2017; Fowler & Witt, 2019), which have even led to "city-state ideological incongruencies of municipal pre-emption," a term coined recently by Barber and Dynes (2023). Depending on whether we adopt a state perspective or interpret the empirical pattern "seeing like a city" (Magnusson, 2011), the conceptualisation may differ, known respectively as city deviation (Blizzard & Johnson, 2020) or local activism (Varsanyi, 2010). The purpose of this article is to scrutinise this pattern, viewing these empirical trends 'like a city', borrowing the inspirational lens of Amin and Thrift (2017).

Against this background, this article examines the case when cities decide to adopt proactive migration policies, which in most cases presuppose the 'deconstruction' of what the state has politically 'constructed' in terms of (re)bordering processes. The literature, both European and from the United States (Williamson, 2018; Hillmann & Samers, 2023), which has looked at the factors that explain why cities choose the proactive path and others decide to do nothing or even react against it, has usually identified factors related to ideology (left-wing cities tend to be more proactive than right-wing city governments), demographic dynamics (places with a faster growing foreign-born population are more likely to consider or pass restrictive ordinances, especially when immigration is of national importance), city administrative capacity (having or not having resources to deal with migration challenges), geographical proximity (proximity to the border influences more restrictive policies), and other factors related to perceptions

of ethnic threat, such as unemployment rates, crime; and even mayoral commitment, which is a finding in the European urban landscape, taking into account Barcelona with the left-wing government and Palermo in Sicily or Izmir in Türkiye (Orlando et al., 2020).

In particular, this article seeks to understand the place of the normative grounds of these pro-active paths, as in the case of city officials pursuing ideals of urban justice, and even their claims against the bordering politics of the state. For instance, this is currently happening in several cities receiving refugees and rescue boats in the Mediterranean, or cities creating welcoming networks with other cities (Caponio, 2022), or supporting NGO's initiatives, as it is the case of the Charter of Lampedusa (2014) and the Charter of Palermo (2015). In fact much of the new categories of cities directly or indirectly related to migration governance, such as sanctuary cities, welcoming cities, refugee cities, solidarity cities, are different frames of a same city pattern: urban pro-active resilience and de-bordering practices. This perspective is being today a focus of great concern by an emerging literature embracing the "local turn" proclaimed in migration studies (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017) or the "new localism" trend according to leading urban researchers (Katz & Nowak, 2018). The new pattern is that, in the legally and politically constrained environment in which cities normally operate, most urban systems are increasing their governance capacities' claim through new narratives and practices, most often embracing human rights devices of Global urban justice (Oomen & Grigolo, 2016). This study is interested in exploring this sovereignty-building process through examining de-bordering strategies and under the particular frame of urban resilience.

Echoing R. Schragger's City Power (2016), urban resilience precisely reflects the crucial tension between what cities should do (sovereignty) and what cities can do (constraints), which is at the core of the category of urban resilience. We can even say that it assumes a claim for more local sovereign identity politics (Davis & de Duren, 2011). This also belong to a critical trend in urban studies which consider city empowering processes as a direct consequence of the increasing state bordering pressure towards city migration governance. This article can then be framed within this critical debate on rebel cities (Hatherley, 2012) and urban resistance (Filipcevic Cordes, 2017), and the fighting of most cities to frame their own view of urban justice and the right to the city (Harvey, 2015; Harvey & Potter, 2009), where cities become centre of de-bordering power for the benefit of those that have been expelled by state bordering practices.

The conceptual lens: urban resilience and migration governance capacity

In the light of the theoretical background described above, the specific starting point of this article is that state (re-)bordering politics often provokes stress at the city level and creates a logic of inclusion and exclusion, when some migrants manage to enter the territory but are immediately expelled at different degrees from the societal system. This scenario often forces most local authorities to turn towards micro-politics and policy engineering, since these state (re-)bordering processes often challenges urban governance capacities, sometimes for humanitarian reasons or simply pragmatic ones since migrants are here to stay, whatever their socio-legal status. But the legitimacy can also come from the same society, who claim more cohesion and stability. Local authorities must reach a policy/social equilibrium between migrants' exclusion environment and

some part of their population that may interpret these policies towards "others" as contravening their everyday routines as a society. These "hard cases" are viewed as multi-layered stressors for local authorities, since institutionally they cannot ignore migrants vulnerable situation despite knowing they are outcomes of upper- level power processes. For most cities these state's (re-)bordering processes breaks their sense of justice towards migrants, and most local authorities in such situations are forced to enter into resilience strategies, looking at narratives and practices that most of the time go beyond their own policies' scope and legal/political constrained system of governance. The effort to (re-)establish urban justice is what is at the core of the resilience concept, which is here considered as a driver of current de-bordering processes.

The numerous literature's reviews on urban resilience (Galderisi, 2014; Meerow et al., 2016; Burayido et al., 2020) deal with topics such as climate change, natural disasters, including terrorism, poverty, and even revolutionary movements. But immigration, as a social stressor for cities, has not been investigated in depth, despite being a determining global phenomenon for the future of cities (Author's own, 2023). The main stressors of urban systems are the uncertainties surrounding a particular social environment, in addition to the system of constraints in a multilevel hierarchy within a system of government. In addition, the main focus of much of the scholarly debate is on resilience building processes (how to build resilient policies) and drivers (what factors trigger resilience), rather than normative motivations of urban resilience, namely a deep sense of urban justice.

This article seeks then to is theorize urban resilience-building, whereby local actors push back against stresses placed on local institutions and social relations. Extended to the urban realm, there is a variety of conceptualizations of resilience in the literature. Economists have focused on 'bouncing back' after recession. Planners and people who study disasters tend to focus more on transformation through complex adaptation. Unlike in the case of a steel beam retaining its shape under stress or a self-equilibrating ecosystem, human governance systems operate through the purposive acts of individuals, who are normatively motivated; this is what makes urban resilience different in this migration governance context. This normative motivation lies at the core of urban migration governance.

The "resilience lens" has been recently proposed to bridge urban and migration critical studies (Author's own, 2023), based on the huge debate arising inside and outside disciplines (Yamagata & Maruyana, 2016; Wilkinson & Remøy, 2018; Burayido et al., 2020; Brantz & Sharma, 2020; Hamstead et al., 2021) and even a more policy-oriented discussion at the global level (OECD, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2015; European Commission, 2015; World Bank, 2016; IOM, 2017; 100 Resilient Cities, 2017). Recently, even the security approach has been applied at the local level in terms of urban resilience (Svitková, 2021). An overview shows that resilience practice is a way of analysing how capacity building absorbs external disturbances while maintaining its policy routines based on nonlinear dynamics, buffering capacity, self-organization (and self-regulation for ecosystems), and learning (Walker et al., 2012). As a boundary concept (Brand & Jax, 2007), it designates a perspective and a way of thinking how a system react to external pressures.

Inspired by the core debates around the concept (Biggs et al., 2016; Da Silva & Morera, 2014; MacKinnon, 2015), resilience building is understood as a policy strategy for

empowering cities and developing governance capacities in extreme situations where their own social system is threatened by external factors (state bordering policies in the case study of this article). It is also a learning process to govern with the spectrum of uncertainties, hazards and risks related to migration-related stresses that underpin existing social justice local politics. Resilient cities force to reconsider existing hierarchical structures of power relations between state and cities, specifically incorporating a core tension between state (re-)bordering processes and cities' de-bordering practices.

In the Barcelona fieldwork, most city policy officers assume that if nothing is done and cities leaves state bordering practices, the pressure that states are creating into their own urban social systems can create subjective/objective insecurity in the society and affects directly urban ecosystem and stability. These stressors can have many sources: institutional pressures or juridical and political limits, often coming from upper level of governments and the same multi-level structure of the state; social stresses, such as discrimination and racism, precariousness (unemployment, lack of income, poverty), legal status (refugees, undocumented, etc.,), age (unaccompanied children), gender (vulnerable women). The last pandemic COVID-19 even functioned as an accelerator of these current stressors (OECD, 2020), and in most cases it worsened the current vulnerable situations of most migrants (European Commission, 2020). One influential report pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation (100 Resilient Cities, 2017) illustrates the importance of re-conceptualizing the urban landscape to include the shocks and stresses of the twenty-first Century, as well as the need to build overall resilience that can ensure cities thrive amid the uncertainties of the years ahead.

Before properly developing all the theoretical potentialities of this approach, the priority now is to concentrate delineating the heuristic opportunities in bonding resilience strategy analysis with an urban justice normativity.

Urban justice: the normative driver of urban resilience and city de-bordering processes

The main interest of this study is to focus on those factors that are directly/indirectly by-products of State's bordering process. In this case, the article looks at specific situations where cities must deal with human and social situations generated by external factors originated by the state legislation and competence systems. The premise is then that building resilience governance is not an isolated practice, since it necessarily involves breaking current administrative and legal boundaries, and allow for a holistic and integrated urban approach, involving multi-level governance and multi-scalar relations with a multiplicity of public and private actors (Author's own, 2023).

This multi-scalar application of the (de-)bordering processes has not yet reached the local level. The initial claim is that cities seek to ensure at the societal level a peaceful and cohesive environment of urban governance, by empowering migrants with the "right to have rights", at the individual level.[1] Both levels of application most frequently adopt human rights devices of global urban justice (Oomen & Grigolo, 2016). This means that stressors

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[1] Arendt (1976, p. 298) summarised magisterially the precondition of human rights, those rights that belong to every person by virtue of existence, as the "right to have rights", interpreted by Benhabib (2011, chap. 2) as a direct challenge to nation-states monopoly of distribution of citizenship rights.

breaking routines at the local social system and then configuring a scenario of resilience, are directly related to these two levels of application (social and individual).

The core normative approach is that urban resilience is pushing cities towards new narratives and practices on de-bordering practices motivated by deep sense of equality, power sharing and human rights principles. In this case urban justice acts a normative foundation of city's resilience. The full argument can be formulated as follows: today there are some structural stressors and acute shocks that most cities must face, which are provoked by States (re)bordering processes, and that force most cities to follow de-bordering resilient strategies with the purpose to ensure urban justice of their own system and of the migrants that are placed outside the social and political system.

The Barcelona case study that will follow makes it clear how strong the principles of equality, human rights and cohesion are to justify resilient strategies and the decision of the majority of policy officials to embark on a de-bordering path. A recent work proposing the urban resilience lens for the study of urban migration governance (Author's own, 2023) strengthened the point that resilience as applied to urban migration governance should be linked to principles behind urban justice, such as the "the right to have rights" (Arendt, 1976), and closely related to the debate on the "right to the city" (Lefevre, 1968; Harvey & Potter, 2009). Critics have asserted that the urban resilience literature fails to address equity, power and justice issues (Vale, 2014; Ziervogel et al., 2017), probably because the mainstream use of the term has been in ecological context, not one of urban migration governance. The link between urban resilience and urban justice allow us to highlight the normative principles informing urban resilience to ensure that it is focused on growing and sustaining socially just, livable, and inclusive neighbourhoods. Efforts to achieve resilience should fight against exclusion from the mainstream, look at "grey zones" to ensure a minimum quality of life, and consolidate the defence of human rights and democratic/liberal values (Oomen et al., 2021). It should invite us to a critical view on the dominant modes of legality and state action (Harvey, 2015).

The concept of resilience is often used as a synonym for adaptation to an adverse environment, but it also suggests the capacity to transform this environment in less adverse or even positive ways. A gaping divide in the literature exists between reactive and conservative resilient thinkers and more proactive and transformative resilient analysts. These two dimensions have an empirical significance. In practice they do not need to be interpreted as being at odds, since urban migration governance always seeks to keep a certain equilibrium between stability and change (Pinheiro et al., 2022).

This distinction may depend on whether one sees resilience as a linear process (re-active meaning) or an accumulative process (pro-active meaning). For instance, the local authorities may follow state dictates in a rigid form and accept the limits on migrant rights' inclusion/exclusion established by the state, or not. In this case city officers can follow their inclination toward helping and being humanitarian and even resisting the state's claim-making around it's bordering and re-bordering agenda. This is illustrated by the case study of Barcelona that we would like to examine now.

Case study: Barcelona's resilient de-bordering policies

The city of Barcelona is a good example of de-bordering processes taking place at the city scale. The fact that Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia makes this urban system an interesting laboratory of urban resilience. Barcelona is recognised as being innovative in most of its migration/diversity policies by many international reports (for instance, OECD, 2018), and is currently following leading strategies related to welcoming policies and human rights principles of urban justice. Cohesion-making and empowering migrants with minimum "right to have rights" are the two the main principles shaping de-bordering resilient strategies.

Sources and methods

A desk review and seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with leading politicians, civil servants and expert advisors covering the full spectrum of migration policies (from reception, diversity and sectoral policies) under the second Colau administration (from 2019 to 2023).[2] The interviews first requested an overview of the main pressures that Barcelona city council encounters, but that they are by-products of State's bordering policies. Then, we navigated issue per issue and asked for innovative strategies to lower these pressures. This interview's focus worked well in provoking engaged information, mixing diagnosis with claim-making, and even justifying "city activism" (Lacroix, 2021) grounded on "resilient practices".

Following a participatory strategy and the ethical guidelines of a signed consent form, transcripts were done and shared with participants to validate (add/delete) information, before properly validating it. The desk analysis comprised the main official writings produced by the city council, most of them mentioned by participants. It also comprised the main issue-related scholarly production on Barcelona migration policies and newspapers commenting on issues and strategies (see all documents in the references section)

Framing the first findings within the theoretical-empirical framework

Barcelona is a clear example of how policy innovation related to de-bordering processes is closely linked to urban resilience, and how urban justice works as a normative principle to justify these practices. A relevant public actor (AG) made this clear from the beginning of the interview "I believe that the whole story revolves around Immigration Law and its impact on citizenship law. At the local level, we cannot afford to distinguish between the national and immigrant population because many services and the infrastructures of the city rely upon the taxes that all of them contribute with. For us, the main criterion is *who* lives in the city, *who* is a resident.".

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[2] The interviews were held between January to April 2021, and with an average of 1 h. It has followed ethical standards for the collection and protection of information established by the Institutional Committee for Ethical Review of Projects (CIREP-UPF). Access to transcripts upon formal request.
KG: Commissioner for Intercultural Dialogue and Religious Pluralism at Barcelona City Council (28/01/2021).
AG: Director of the Citizenship, Rights and Diversity Services Department at Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona City Council) (10/03/2021).
MS: Councillor for Citizenship Rights, Participation and Global Justice at Barcelona City Council (19/04/2021).
XC: Immigration and Refugee Services Director at Barcelona City Council (10/03/2021).
RS: Expert. Former responsible of Welcome policy at Barcelona City Council (2006-2020) (24/03/2021).
DT: Expert and Former Commissioner at the European Council for the Intercultural Cities Programme (2007–2011) and Current Director of Intercultural Cities (15/03/2021).
SF: Commissioner for Social Action at Barcelona City Council (18/03/2021).

There is a collective awareness of state pressure and a public recognition of the legitimacy of policy engineering and "imagination" to circumvent bordering restrictions, and keep the city's sense of justice in terms of human rights respect and ensuring peaceful coexistence.

In general, in addition to external (re-)bordering pressures, the main resilient psychology of policy officers is governed by time restrictions. They need to provide an effective answer to prevent the escalation of pressure both at the level of social system (cohesion-making) and at the level of the same vulnerability and exclusion of migrants. There is also an initial shared awareness of the link between knowledge needs as a tool for resilience prevention. For instance, one expert (DT) signalled that "we need segregation prevention policies to guarantee the city's cohesion." Therefore, the interviewed includes information-making as a key strategy: "in front of these topics, the most problematic issue is a lack of knowledge" (this statement is reinforced in Ara, 2019). This is clearly related to an atmosphere of uncertainty and at the same time a feeling of complexity of the situation, which are two parameters bonding urban resilience and urban justice.

There is also a shared concern on how to deal with the dichotomy between mainstreaming and specific policies' strategies. For instance, one former city responsible (RS) insisted that all these municipal policies are always devised trying to avoid excessive specificity and to work with what already exist and towards all people. Most often, innovation comes from the specificity policy corner. One example of how the internal resilience logic works in building a policy strategy is provided by a Councillor (MS) when he asserted: "We have many neighbours who are very integrated and who are actually part of the city's register ('padró'), access regularly the city's services and hold a health card, who enjoy a developed associative life and whose children attend school, but they cannot opt for job offers because they have not been properly legalised by the State administration". The development of innovative strategies through specific services to grant these migrant workers has been one relevant policy followed by *Barcelona Activa*. In 2020, 150 non-regular immigrants benefited from it.

There are also scarce economic, legal, political, and human resources that shape this resilient urban environment and threaten the city urban justice. An expert (RS) showed us, for instance, how bordering processes make cities resilient, and this time with clear spatial dimensions: "I would also add something that you have not mentioned, which is the arrival of immigrants through the coasts like the Canary Islands [island to the coast of Africa] and their later transfer to Barcelona and other cities where they find themselves abandoned and in irregular administrative status". This same case is referred by other public officer interviewed (MS), who incorporated an added information confirming how resilience and urban justice decisions are interlinked: "if we know that currently there is an immigration inflow in the Canary Islands or Andalucía [South of Spain], we can already expect it to reach Barcelona in three months. It is not simple at all for a system that has been designed to supply services in circumstances of stability, not of crisis".

This resilient psychology of public officers appears several times in the interviews. As an illustration, the same participant (MS) clarified: "the situation of uncertainty caused by immigration flows has a strong impact on our system and we often have to

make a big effort to find resources. We are also limited by contractual frameworks: bureaucracy is increasingly tedious and to make the modification you are often constrained by an end. We have several times overpassed these limits and we have been forced to make a new contract even if the former had not expired, because of a sudden immigration jump".

Together, the awareness of doing lobbying is always in the mind of policy makers and one widespread resilient strategy of Barcelona. One former responsible (RS) expressed it very clearly: "We do what we can… because there are issues that are determined by regulations. […] But in the end, the tools that are available to you depend on the legislative framework and here, there is no other choice but political work: reminders, awareness-raising, claim-making". This resilient strategy is a way to incorporate into the public agenda these constraints. But resilience is also a pro-active practice when the city defends "the right to have rights" of migrants, when they fight to provide migrants with the necessary documents to restore their "legality" in the eyes of the State.

The interviews also show as a mainstream pattern that there are at least four main areas at the top of their resilient agenda: inclusion of immigrants into the public administration or the "diversity gap", unaccompanied underage immigrants, irregular migrants, refugees. Most of these pressures are channelled under citizenship policy programmes, with a direct claim of including migrants within identity urban politics. In fact, these four stressors are also incorporated in the Barcelona Immigration Plan 2018–2021 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018a), which combines actions and claim-making, to carry out de-bordering policies. Interviews show us also that the main purpose of innovation is to maintain social cohesion in society (conviviality and peaceful coexistence). Some interviewees even insisted that "not doing anything is not only a breach of human rights and vulnerability, but also a matter of survival as social fabric" (SF).

This resilient mindset provides us with very important localizations of where the stressor operates. For instance, many interviewees often speak about the situation of some people as being in a "limbo" (for instance RS). This situation displays the dysfunction between policy structure and legality. It is always an unexpected, unforeseen and an unanticipated situation. This shows how strong the effects of the State's bordering process operate for people who manage to enter and become irregulars, or are waiting on an administrative resolution of their refugee request, or even become irregular while being regulars, as an induced situation (there is a special section pp. 29–30 in the current Plan 2018–2021). Becoming an irregular immigrant overnight and entering a limbo situation directly nurtures the resilience of local authorities moved by urban justice principles of cohesion-making and empowering minimal rights to migrants. Following this same rational, a director at the city council (XC) insisted: "think that if you are left outside the asylum procedure and fall into a situation of administrative irregularity, you end up on the streets and the State does not help you in any way. […] These people will not vanish from our city".

Local de-bordering processes may also suppose what the Commissioner for social action (SF) labelled as "deinstitutionalization processes", since entering in a limbo as it has been described may also imply being stigmatized: migrants are criminalized by bordering processes. The link between vulnerability and criminalization even reaches the unaccompanied minors.

But the main resilient strategy is definitively pro-active administrative registration or "empadronament". This ensures "the right to have rights". This is a very distinctive tool of the Spanish decentralized administration: the possibility to register administratively migrants independently of their legal status. The city council simply ranks administrative recognition before legal recognition. This is used as a powerful resource for the de-bordering process, and to implement what the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1967), the right to enjoy all its basic services and place environments despite legal bordering restrictions. In theoretical terms we can say it is a primary resilience tool, as it operates as a condition for other resilient sectoral policies (housing, education, work, for instance).

Main resilient areas directly related to the de-bordering processes

The empirical analysis allows us to identify four main resilient areas that call for de-bordering processes and that are grounded on resilience.

Inclusion of immigrants into the public administration or the "diversity gap": The legal system in Spain is strict. It does not let public administration incorporate migrants. According to the Basic Statute of the Public Servant [Estatuto Básico del Empleado Público, Art. 57, Law 7/2007] the access to public function (*función pública*) is exclusive to national citizens. This creates a real barrier to manage the "diversity gap" (Author's own, 2017) between the society and public institutions. Barcelona is fully aware of this bordering restriction. The data from the Council of Europe (2017) showed that this was one of its governance deficits. All the interviewed place this issue within their resilient agenda. The motto is "Public institutions must reflect Barcelona's society". One policy officer (SF) convincingly stated "I always insist on material conditions but also symbolic ones because no matter how many messages you send to society about diversity, if the institutions are essentially 'white' or if there is a lot of male power…!". We are thinking about the same public administration, services, or local police (*Guàrdia Urbana*), for instance. Here positive action towards migrants can be interpreted as de-bordering policies looking at alternative ways to reduce the diversity gap.

It is when speaking about this particular issue that the Commissioner for Intercultural Dialogue (KG) stated "Yes, as long as we do not change state laws, we must look for imaginative and proactive alternatives. Sometimes there are things we think that would not work and, in the end, they bear fruit", or even one director interviewed (AG) revealed: "You just need to be imaginative and innovative. And if you are discriminated against for your origins, then we can require your language abilities, or we can look for a way to certify your intercultural mediation skills". This involves that most of the strategies go through some light modifications of existing norms, including language and intercultural skill abilities as a condition for access, for instance. An expert and former local policy officer pictured the resilient environment with an international background: "It is said by the EU and Eurocities' charter: 'cities have to mirror the population that they serve'. In Barcelona, less than 1% of civil servants come from a 'diverse' background. This is unacceptable!".

a. *Unaccompanied underage immigrants:* A second stressor for the Barcelona City Council is the presence of unaccompanied underage migrants, basically males of Moroccan origin. It deals directly with children's human rights. This is not new, since

Barcelona has been facing with this for several years, but it has become a structural stressor with multi-level governance implications, since underage children are not strictly speaking among the competences of the city, but of the autonomous Government. The number reaching 18 years old, without regularizing their migration status, but losing protection, has duplicated these last few years (Aranda, 2018). There are also social and legal implications. The social arises because visibility creates social reluctance and even neighbourhood concentrations claiming more security in some streets and districts; and legal ones, since here the City Council is fully aware that they are dealing with children human rights protection. In drawing resilient strategies most policy makers are fully aware that they lack instruments and realise that "our Western societies are not prepared to host these unaccompanied children" (SF). Another policy relevant actor (RS) also highlighted that during the pandemic period, Barcelona has been faced with the unaccompanied minors that wander through the streets. The municipality realised that a new centre was needed to serve them and *Barcelona Actua*[3] volunteered to promote it.[4] The city gives them accommodation, but first they need to identify them on the street.

b. *Immigrants in administrative irregularity in its whole diversity of profiles and survival economic activities:* Probably, the main stressor for resilience strategies is the presence of immigrants with administrative irregularity. This is the most flagrant by-product of bordering policies that cities must face, especially those that have a large urban area, such as Barcelona. The city has recently implemented what policy officers and media call a "shock plan", with more than half million euros for actions designated for migrants in a state of irregularity (*El Periódico*, 2020). We are speaking of first stage irregular migrants that will never reach a regular status, but also on second stage irregulars, or migrants that were regular at some point of their migratory process but became irregulars. There is also a third way of becoming irregular, and this is the most frequent among Latin Americans who enjoy free-visa access. They usually come as tourists and after 90 days of staying they attain irregular status. These three avenues are directly related to bordering processes: you enter clandestinely, you enter as tourist or through induced irregularity because you lost your work contract, or you do not meet the residence conditions. Most enter in "survival economic activities", namely activities that are illegal or not welcome, like the everyday practices of migrant street peddlers—'manteros or top manta' movement, which has issued several resilient programmes (Ajuntament de Barcelona,) and a lot of press releases (for instance, Barcelona Notícies, 2019).

Apart from the specific strategy of pro-active registration of irregulars, some interviews also stand out on how to change the regulation criteria to include irregulars. For instance, the strategy seeking to provide work opportunities to irregular migrants through *Barcelona Activa*.[5] One director interviewed (AG) insisted on how this agency

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[3] Retrieved: https://www.barcelonactua.org/ca/activitats/refugiats-i-immigrants.

[4] The *Barcelona Actua Foundation* is a non-profit organization that begun in 2011 as a response to the great economic crisis, with the will to mobilize civil society, as well as to create strong ties between people in situations of vulnerability that need support and people who can offer support.

[5] Retrieved: https://www.barcelonactiva.cat/.

follows strategies to circumvent bordering barriers: "*Barcelona Activa* does not limit access to its programs to people with a residence permit and the employment plans of the city council that was established a couple of years ago, which is common in city councils in general. These programs allow them to decide what kind of profiles they hire".

At the innovative level, there is a government measure to prevent irregularity. It was the first time that a European municipality decided to tackle irregular immigrants through the strategy of active local registration in the city's records, granting them access to the municipal services and legal advice, and providing them with labour opportunities to "legalise" their situation, as a specific *Barcelona Activa* programme does (RS). This program called *Proper* was created in 2013 targeting the growing demand for a new profile of severely social service users affected by the economic crisis with a situation of long-term unemployment who deserve more preventive care, especially migrants in irregular situation. The program provides them with labour opportunities, but it is not public, this it to both "prevent social adverse reactions" and to avoid creating expectations and frustrations within the same irregular migrant community. The program expresses a political will to support a policy resilient de-bordering procedure (see the public report made by Sanz & Pardo, 2015). This follows other important government measures against sudden irregularity (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017a and press releases from Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017b). For this reason and given the large number of people in an irregular situation that is already present in many municipal programs (for instance: OPAI, SOAPI, SASSEP, see references) it was decided to know which people were potentially regularizable through a work permit. This political legalization of migrants is notably innovative. Moreover, there is an explicit two-level administrative procedure in place. To benefit from this program is not direct but also a derivative from any of these programs. What it is important of this specific policy scheme is that, as some interviewed (RS, DT) theorizes, it promotes a new category: the immigrant that can be "legalized" (*irregular regularitzable*) because they fulfil the criteria of a one-year-long job offer. This policy practice is then a direct resilient strategy seeking to set up a mechanism to regularize immigrants in irregular administrative status through public employment offers. *Barcelona Activa* has been recognized as a good practice by the International Labour Organization (ILO).[6]

The same director (AG) insisted that "[…] there are other matters that we cannot indefinitely avoid, like access to social aid or the basic income, which by the way excludes irregular immigrants. So, the city council tries to cover them with social services centres because 'the necessity will not fade away by looking away'. Overall, I would say that everything is related to Immigration Laws and the nationality criterion". The latest data from the City Council confirms that, despite the pandemic, the volume of assisted migrants remains (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021).

d. *Refugees:* Since half of the second decade of the twenty-first century, refugees have become a stressor for most European cities (Spencer, 2020). For Barcelona, they also occupy a top-rank position in its agenda. From the very beginning, Barcelona took an activist position enhancing "Barcelona, refugee city" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015a).

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[6] Retrieved: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/migmain.showPractice?p_lang=en&p_practice_id=182.

This government measure was later reviewed as a clear investment for cohesion-making and citizenship (Barcelona Ciutat Refugi, 2019), as well as for setting the premises for a Refugee city network called Solidarity cities. This initiative was also one of the most numerous street demonstrations in Europe,[7] showing its close alliance between the society and the city government. In this domain, Barcelona has taken a pro-active attitude creating innovative services and policies. In general, these policies seek to go beyond its usual competence limits (they do it because they want to do it, not because they are forced to do it), but also against some State bordering decisions that directly affect the city's urban justice principles. For instance, one interviewed (XC) stated that "recently, we have also stepped up into the issues of refugees from the Canary Islands. The City Council asked the State for competences to support all these guys within the Barcelona Refuge City programme. They are in a social services centre like that of *Barcelona Actua* that I have mentioned earlier, but we want it to become an established modus operandi in the future. So far, around 80 youngsters have benefited from it because many do not want to stay here and rather want to continue their journey to France or other places". Some of these policies/programmes/initiatives are more essential, and some are more capacity-building oriented, like the language and training issues, which may not be at first glance the first need but is equally important to find a job and get out of this vulnerability, as one expert (RS) highlighted. Barcelona's resilience therefore has an activist solidarity force together with clear de-bordering policies seeking to avoid extreme vulnerability. For instance, the law allows to apply for asylum or international protection and during the waiting period, between 2 or 3 years and a half, you are legal, but in a waiting limbo. The same former policy officer (RS) insisted that the central government has even accelerated their bordering policies and begun to deny asylum in 3 or 4 months and the number of people in extreme vulnerability has multiplied suddenly. Most of them end up on Barcelona's streets.

In this context, Barcelona is the first city of the State and one of the first in the EU to have a municipal programme attending refugees and asylum seekers who have either overpassed the state subsidies and accompaniment services and are not autonomous yet, or those people who simply have been excluded by the state programme.

The main responsible of this innovative service (MS) stated that "what we want to prove is that municipalities must get involved in the assistance of refugees and it must be done at different levels. I believe that the future of refugee support depends on the decentralisation of the system, which is also a way to foresee the expiration of state services, which would lead to a collapse of the system. This programme has been replicated elsewhere in Catalonia and the State". He is speaking about the innovative Nausica Programme,[8] which frames Barcelona as a Refugee City. This programme is relevant since it rescues those people that are left outside the State's support. This is a project that Barcelona began in 2016 with 20 or 30 users and now more than 130 refugees benefit from it today (RS and MS).[9] It has the purpose of supporting migrants that have

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[7] 160,000 people according to the local police, and 300,000 according to the organizers protested under the slogan 'Enough excuses. Welcome now!. See, among other news from 17 to 18 February 2017; Mouzo and Congostrina (2017), Vicens (2017).

[8] See the first evaluation in Ajuntament de Barcelona (2018b).

[9] This is confirmed in press releases. Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017c).

not yet achieved a degree of autonomy or integration in Barcelona after the expiration of the State's mechanism of accompaniment. And it provides them with housing and employment search assistance. Within their main missions, we can collect socio-occupational integration of refugees, providing tailored assistance, coordinating the provision of services and interventions across actors and incorporating refugees within the already existing Immigrant Care and Reception Directorate (Direcció d'Atenció i Acollida d'Immigrants). Overall, the Barcelona city Council is fully aware of the different pressures it must face to attend the different refugee profiles (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017d).

Concluding remarks: potentialities of the critical domain of urban politics and the cities as new geopolitical actors

By bridging urban politics, migration governance and border studies, we enter the core of a new field of analysis that can provide us with new insights to advance research on the "local turn" in migration studies. A final assessment of the potentialities of this critical area of urban politics is needed. These new trends provide yet another opportunity to highlight that we are likely to enter an era in which cities will increasingly become sovereign geopolitical entities within and beyond the traditional hierarchical reach of their own states. Urban resilience and urban justice are two interrelated categories of analysis that help to frame the current pattern of new urban de-bordering politics.

The state handles border politics while cities deal with overflow. I have collected various plans and deeds of Barcelona to define the ability of its city to recover quickly from difficulties, and the different ways used to achieve it. This may seem like a surface-level overview, since each aspect could be expanded and examined further. However, it should be clear to the reader that this is a preliminary finding, created to confirm that the theoretical framework and analysis are effective. But further analysis is required, and I will use this chance to address these methodological concepts and brief awareness in my conclusions.

This article critically establishes some premises to examine the effort of local authorities to provide immigrants and their social environment with a minimum threshold of the rights to have rights and the right to the city that have been undermined by state (re-)bordering politics. We are certainly entering an era of great disconformity for most cities not only on how States vulnerate human rights devices through their (re-)bordering politics. These new scenario challenges directly the traditional power hierarchies between states and cities, and call for rethinking new inter-governmental configurations.

Cities are deeply embedded in a web of institutional, economic, and political constraints which creates a set of complex contingencies in the process of governing (Peters & Pierre, 2012, p. 72). New global challenges, including international migration, often force most urban regimes to consider strategies within their governance system to increase their capacity-building and limited power to govern the different variants that affect their socio-political system. This pattern became more evident with the mass influx of Syrian refugees and it is now rising to the top of most urban agendas with new wave of refugees coming from Ukraine. This multi-layered pressure that we have identified by state's (re-)bordering practices is certainly not the only driver, but it has become a structural reality and regulative principle which determines cities' decision-making and

policy officials' criteria of urban justice. It also definitively shapes the future of the cities. We are probably at the beginning of this de-coupling process in state-city relations (Oomen, 2019; Scholten & Penninx, 2016), which posits a de-constructive process where cities begin to settle their own migration agenda often in tension with state narratives and regulations. These new patterns also highlight the critical call for deconcentration of power and decentralisation of decisions and resources, a call for more local sovereignty. These perspectives also illustrate the demand of cities to be recognised as national and global actors, and even as geopolitical entities. These new practices of sub-state governance, which challenge existing hierarchies and divisions of labour, are becoming the norm for most migratory cities and certainly require more in-depth and comparative analysis.

The fieldwork in Barcelona has allowed us to highlight several premises: (a) when uncertainty arises or routines are disrupted in an urban social system, we enter the domain of both urban justice and resilience; (b) state (re)bordering processes directly affect the urban ecosystem based on local urban justice devices; (c) urban justice applied at the city level is mainly understood in policy terms as cohesion-building (societal level) and "the right to have rights" (individual level); (d) "de-bordering" strategies, or the policies that seek to overcome the bordering barriers of the state, can be focused under the approach of resilience strategies.

This research is aware that taking a single case study has obvious methodological limitations in terms of generalization and replicability of patterns. Therefore, this study is exploratory and draws a research trend for further comparative (inter-regional) research. Fieldwork invites us to highlight how important it is to design shared commitments on resilience strategies with other actors. From a multilevel governance point of view, most current city alliances happen in a resilient environment and with urban justice purposes. For instance, in the case study of Barcelona, at a vertical level, with Catalonian government (Generalitat de Catalunya), but also with international organizations; and at horizontal levels, with other local administrations and civil society organizations, most of them within the same urban area. It is then relevant to further analyse these city alliances, as by-products of resilience practices that seek to enhance urban migration governance capacities.

There is also a need for some counterfactual thinking. This article may have presented a narrative in which the local community and its officials are the heroes, and the state, with its heavy hand, is the villain. This narrative is likely to create misleading perceptions of reality. We can probably imagine a scenario in which local authorities construct borders for migrants and their guiding state intervenes to de-border practices. It is quite plausible that some cities are reactive to migrants and restrict their rights, while others are proactive in welcoming them. This provides another ideal framework for comparative research. For example, while Sweden as a state adopts a proactive de-bordering approach to migration governance, cities within the country may have more reactive bordering strategies (Lidén & Nyhlén, 2022).

But the general pattern is the opposite: the state deals with border policy, while cities deal with overflow. I have collected various plans from Barcelona and information from interviews to define the city's ability to recover quickly from difficulties and the different ways in which this has been achieved. This may seem like a superficial overview, as

each aspect could be expanded and studied further. However, it should be clear to the reader that this is a preliminary finding, designed to confirm the validity of the theoretical framework linking bordering processes and urban resilience in migration governance. However, more detailed analysis is needed to test this conceptual effort.

In sum, urban resilience, urban justice and migration governance shape the contours of a promising focus for a critical and comparative analysis of the growing de-bordering practices of "rebel cities". This empirical pattern is not necessarily a specificity of the city of Barcelona, but an emerging epiphenomenon of the local turn and empowerment of cities with a deep sense of urban justice, as proclaimed by a variety of urban and migration studies.

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