

## Summary

Set against the backdrop of municipalities experiencing unequal access to political, financial, and cognitive resources, this following PhD dissertation examines how cities, characterised by different degrees of capacity, capabilities and social capital engage with city networks to address migration-related phenomena and provide practical solutions. By drawing from policy transfer, Europeanisation, transnational governance, and migration-related city network scholarships, it sheds light on how differently big, medium and small cities profit from opportunities provided by networks. “*Instances of policy knowledge exchange*” - multi-actorial, multi-dimensional and multi-purpose operational frameworks in which migration-related city networks and municipalities are engaged in a process of policy knowledge exchange - are advanced as a heuristic analytical tool that pinches together the dynamic interrelation between network-driven knowledge circulation and local adaptation processes. Through this lens, the author explores how different levels of policy capacity affect, on the one hand, the strategies networks deploy to foster policy transfer, and the use of tools provided to municipalities for policy knowledge ‘domestication’. On the other, it dig into domestication by scrutinising the modalities through which politicians, administrative officers, brokers and intermediaries translate such strategies and tools in practices to address local challenges. In particular, this dissertation focuses specifically on the wicked issue of local integration policies. Methodologically, the thesis adopts a qualitative multiple-case study approach supported by qualitative process tracing on four Italian municipalities - namely, Bologna, Turin, Settimo Torinese, and Capaci - selected on the basis of their various degrees of policy capacity and engagement in migration-related city networks. Data collection encompasses 37 semi-structured interviews and an extensive analysis of more than a hundred documentary sources.

Main findings reveal that high-capacity municipalities can more autonomously exploit knowledge exchanges, adapting them to local needs and more autonomously trigger institutional changes. Bologna's engagement in ECCAR's 10-Point Action Plan against Racism demonstrates how strong political leadership, organisational restructuring, and strategic use of European funding can entrench knowledge-based policy innovation. Turin's adherence to UNHCR's Charter for Integration highlights how political continuity, entrepreneuriality of officials, and multi-actorial coordination can buoy transformative capacity, albeit moderated by political-administrative dynamics. In contrast, lower-capacity municipalities seems to rely heavily on intermediaries and external support, and often struggle to implement enduring organisational transformations due to weak networks and personalisation. Through its participation in Eurocities' CONNECTION project, Settimo Torinese illuminates the role of intermediary organisations (ANCI Piedmont) in facilitating policy knowledge exchange and overcoming capacity constraints. Capaci's involvement in CEMR's *IncluCities* project showcases the challenges faced by small towns with minimal policy capacity and how the policy-driven intervention of external entities (AICCRE) can mitigate barriers to institutional innovation. Different modalities of intermediation are therefore identified, with more policy-oriented strategies overcoming technical capacity building in fostering policy and organisational transformation. Participation in migration-related city networks is therefore not passive; even resource-constrained municipalities exhibit agency, strategically leveraging knowledge exchanges and social capital for local innovation.

The thesis concludes that a multi-speed Europe of municipalities is emerging, where disparities in access to knowledge and resources persist, risking the marginalisation of smaller towns despite their growing role in the demographic development of the EU and their centrality in the management of migrant integration. It recommends that policymakers and city network secretariats develop tailored strategies and tools to sustain capacity (and agency) building in leastly-resourced municipalities. It encourages the academic community to deepen investigations into the political economy of inter-municipal knowledge exchange and to support creating communities of practice, laboratories, and other initiatives to bridge research and practice in local policymaking. Ultimately, it offers theoretical and empirical advancements of the existing research by enriching the understanding of how policy capacity mediates knowledge exchanges and, if strategically used, to free their transformative potential in the field of migration and integration policy and governance.