

WELCOME EU MOBILE CITIZENS 2016!

EMBRACING PART 2 & 3 OF THE LOCAL WELCOME POLICIES FOR EU MOBILE CITIZENS PROJECT.



The transnational staff of the 'local welcoming policies for EU mobile citizens' would like to start this newsletter by wishing you all the very best for 2016! This new year marks the end of the first part of our project: the research phase. In this newsletter you can read an interview with Gregg Bucken-Knapp, Alexandra Bousiou and Andrea Spehar from Gothenburg University about the most important findings of their comparative report which you all received on December 15th.

But we will start this newsletter in Amsterdam as the transnational coordinating city. We open with a portrait of 'Taalhuis Amsterdam' (language house Amsterdam), in which we interview owner Angeliki Papastamatiou and her colleagues and students about their experiences on migrating to Amsterdam. Transnational coordinator Koen Faber (who left the project in September) reflects on his time coordinating the project and tells us which elements and good practices he would like to implement into the welcome policies of the municipality.

However, it is also time to look ahead. We have an exciting year in front of us in which every city will develop and implement good practices into their own policies. Brussels will kick-off the new year with an interesting thematic conference in Molenbeek, during which participants will take on the role of a (EU) migrant arriving in Brussels

experiencing local Flemish welcome policies. Liesbeth Sacré, individual counsellor of migrants at the Agency of Integration and Civic Integration, gives us a first glimpse into the program.

Last but not least we will hear about the process evaluation of the entire project. Local Amsterdam researchers from Inholland University reveal their first findings about the level of cooperation between the partners this year.



TAALHUIS AMSTERDAM

A SMALL CULTURAL MELTING POT IN THE CITY CENTER



Willemijn's classroom

The stairs creak under my footsteps, sometimes I have to duck a little in this old, beautiful building in the heart of the city center. It's around 7:30 pm on a Tuesday night in December when I enter the small classroom of Dutch language teacher Willemijn Koning. It's already dark outside which makes the room even more cozy. In the dim lights four students are sitting around the table, their homework in front of them. They smile shyly when I introduce myself in Dutch. "Can I stay a little bit and interview you?" Lazaros nods "natuurlijk" (of course). I try adapting the same manner of speech as Willemijn: very clear and not too fast. The students are in Willemijn's intermediate class. I'm impressed that they are able to follow my fast talking (I immediately forgot my good intentions to speak slower). How did they experience Amsterdam when they just arrived? Their answers are short. Panagiotis: "Fine, people are nice." Olivia: "Yes, very nice."

Because I don't want to interrupt the class for too long I also interview three other EU migrants, now Amsterdammers, who are part of Taalhuis Amsterdam (Language House Amsterdam). Angeliki Papastamatiou, owner and teacher, arrived in the Netherlands 23 years ago. Raluca Sabau migrated to the Netherlands in 2010 from Romania. And finally Emilia Salerno from Sicily, who arrived in Amsterdam 2 years ago.



Angeliki & Emilia

I meet Angeliki and Emilia around the corner of Willemijn's class in an even smaller room with different languages and countries all around us. A variety of alphabets, maps from all over and many books surround us in the pleasant room.

Emilia's reason to come to Amsterdam is simple: "Love! My boyfriend was studying for his PhD in Amsterdam already, so I followed him." Emilia is now enrolled in a master's program at VU University and teaches Italian language at Taalhuis Amsterdam. "We want to stay here as long as possible. We have had good experiences living here." But although Emilia loves living in Amsterdam, it was very hard in the beginning. "Can I be totally honest? The first year was hard. I was depressed. I didn't have a job, a goal, I spent most of my days at home." Emilia tries to find work at her own level - she has a master in ancient Roman History - but that turns out to be very difficult. "I tried to find work as a teacher or researcher or at a museum."



Raluca at Myrte's home

This is something Raluca recognizes. I interview her in Myrte Jansen's home (co-owner of Taalhuis Amsterdam), where she just had a private Dutch lesson. "It is not easy to find work for me, but in



music that's never easy." Raluca studied classical piano and now works at a bakery also because she has an injury and cannot play. "I like food and cooking so for now this is great. I think I can find a job in music when I'm able to play again, but it will be difficult."

Raluca and Emilia are both positive regarding the amount of practical information they were able to find when arriving in Amsterdam. Emilia: "I had a lot of help from my boyfriend of course, but also I found a lot of information in specific Facebook groups." Raluca: "The *I Amsterdam* website helped me a lot. There is a lot of useful information about how things work in Amsterdam on this site." The students of Willemijn are also enthusiastic about the *I Amsterdam* website. Lazaros: "I could find important info on this website." Olivia: "It's a very organized website. Easy to understand." Teacher and Taalhuis owner Angeliki also speaks highly about the online information the municipality has made available, although she does notice it's primarily focused on higher educated migrants: "I see that my students' first need, when they arrive here, is to find information about how everything works in Amsterdam. *I Amsterdam* is a very helpful website for them."

This year Emilia also went to a 'Welcome in Amsterdam' event. The municipality organizes several of these events a year for EU migrants, to give them practical information and to acquaint them with the city. "It was very handy and I also met new people." However, Emilia is the only person interviewed at Taalhuis Amsterdam that knew about the event. Raluca: "it's sounds great, I'm sorry that I haven't heard about it." Emilia only found out about the event after already living in Amsterdam for one year: "I received an email, but a friend of mine who registered at the same time as me did not receive an email. Maybe the municipality can make sure they mail everyone and also communicate this event in certain Facebook groups." This is also the tip Emilia has for the municipality, organizing many of these and other events for newcomers to meet each other. Angeliki agrees with Emilia: "the municipality could organize more events for EU migrants to meet each other. A lot of different organizations are

already organizing all kinds of stuff, but it's fragmented and focused on their own groups."

Raluca thinks free language courses for everybody could also help: "A friend of mine who lives in The Hague told me about free language courses for everybody. That would be great." Angeliki finally points out that she still sometimes feels like a foreigner when communicating with the municipality by phone or at the front desk. "When they hear my name they treat me differently. I am an Amsterdammer. I've been here for so long."

In Willemijn's class it's Olivia's turn to read her homework out loud. She has written about her activities of the past week. The other students are listening closely. Willemijn nods enthusiastically and corrects when necessary. I leave these new Amsterdammers in their cozy classroom. When I quietly move down the squeaky stairs I hear them all laughing. It's a nice sound to keep me warm while I bike home in the cold December night.



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LOOKING BACK WITH KOEN FABER



Koen Faber at his new workplace

Together with Ed Klute of Mira Media, Koen Faber of the municipality of Amsterdam, was the initiator of the ‘local welcome EU policies for EU Migrants’ project. He left the project a few months ago for another interesting job opportunity within the municipality. His time away from the project makes him an excellent candidate to look back on the research phase.

Why did you initiate the project?

“I was working on the EU migrants file for some years within the municipality of Amsterdam. So I was working on this important European theme daily, but I had never worked on a big European project. Ed contacted me about the possibilities of this project and I saw the learning opportunities immediately.”

What did you hope the revenue of this project would be?

“There has been a continuous arrival of EU migrants since 2004. We have been developing welcome policies for this specific group since that time. I was hoping to learn good practices from other comparable North-West European cities. Especially because in the Netherlands there is no other big city which is comparable to Amsterdam.”

You have been the projects transnational coordinator for most of the research phase. Where there any outcomes of the Amsterdam report that surprised you?

“Well, I was surprised that the report together with the yearly Amsterdam Poverty Monitor shows that especially migrants from Bulgaria have so much

difficulty finding their way and joining in the city. You see this particularly in their housing and disposable income. However, there is also a group of Bulgarians that is highly educated and very successful. This is a constant struggle as a policy maker. You want be careful in how you frame people. There are big differences between migrants from the same country. In Amsterdam it is maybe more a question of differences between lower and higher educated EU migrants.”

Something that the Amsterdam report shows is that the municipality of Amsterdam has difficulty reaching these lower educated migrants. Why is that so difficult?

“This is not only a migrant problem. We have difficulties as a big municipality reaching vulnerable groups in general. What we see specifically in the case of vulnerable migrants is that some of them want to stay out of our sight. It’s almost impossible to reach them. But this is an important question for us. How can we reach them? But also, is it our responsibility?”

One of the recommendations for this specific gap in the report is to set up an information point for EU migrants specifically...

“Yes, a great idea. We been trying to develop such an information point for a few years. There was some debate about it because we already have an expat center and the immigration office. However there is definitely a gap between those two. We have tried to fill this gap with online information, but that’s clearly not enough. We need a physical information point as we have seen in other countries. We are now researching within the municipality how we can make this happen.”

What other findings in the report attracted your attention?

“The importance of learning the native language. This was not new to me, but the report shows again how important this is. We already offer free language courses for migrants who cannot afford it. It is a possibility to offer free courses to everyone. However, you don’t want to spend tax money on people who can afford a course themselves. On the other hand the report shows again that it can be a stimulant to learn the



language. This is also an example of a case in which Amsterdam can learn something of the other participating cities.”

Wat do you hope this project will bring the participating cities?

“I think EU migration is a very good thing in general. We learn from each other. We expand our boundaries. I hope that newcomers feel that they are Amsterdammers. My hope is that we can make sure that history will not repeat itself in forming new groups of minorities in Amsterdam that don’t feel part of the city. Research has shown that the first phase of settling in a new country is very important in the way newcomers attach themselves to their new home. That is something I hope the municipality can learn from this project: how our policy can be shaped to connect newcomers as fast as possible to Amsterdam society.”

MUNICIPALITIES: BROADEN YOUR SCOPE!

It’s the day after the first draft of the comparative research has been emailed to all the partners when we skype with Gothenburg. After a few rings the happy faces of the entire University of Gothenburg team appear. Nicely positioned next to each other in clear view: associate professor Gregg Bucken-Knapp and researchers Andrea Spehar and Alexandra Bousiou.



Gregg, Andrea & Alexandra on skype

As coordinators of the research part of the ‘local welcome policies for EU-migrants’ project they have developed the methodology, the framework, and guidelines for the local researchers. In a short amount of time they also combined all the local research reports into an excellent comparative

study with interesting conclusions. Today we explore those conclusions during our Skype-interview.

What were the most important conclusions after comparing all the reports?

Alexandra: “I think the most important thing is to see the correlation between the framing of EU migrants as a group and its need in the different cities. And to see how the framing actually effects the different policies in place.”

Gregg: “What we see in each of the cities is a very selective problem definition of EU migrants. They are a very broad, diverse group. What we see is that municipal authorities and the civil society actors they network with tend to engage, by and large, a very select view of those migrants that differs from city to city. We find that very interesting, because that means that there are diverse groups that are outside the scope of current policies. In some cities that are those who are perhaps more vulnerable, while in other cities it’s perhaps those who are less vulnerable. Each group has differential needs and different demands that they like to place on city and civil society and we think that those needs should be met.”

How could municipalities broaden their scope?

Gregg: “We outlined a set of factors that we think cities need to keep in mind in order to move away from this successively narrow problem definition. Firstly, there are these cognitive locks where they have this previous understandings of what constitutes a migration challenge and it is very understandable that they take this previous understanding and they apply it to a new situation. Even though the new situation might be comprised of different people who require different types of solutions. So they really need to reflect on that.”

Can you give an example?

Gregg: “Gothenburg would be a good example. Sweden has a bulk of very well developed integration policies for migrants focused on refugees and particularly on refugees who are coming from enormously precarious situations. Administrative authorities have comparably less developed services and less of an appreciation for



people who are much established in terms of education and already established on the labor market. And that's something that needs to be developed."

The Gothenburg research team discerns two other possible solutions for local governments to broaden their scope in the conclusion of their comparative report. Firstly, they stipulate the influence of media framing regarding EU migrants and advise municipal politicians and administrators to continue supplementing their information regarding EU migrants with material from other sources that might offer a different perspective. Also they recommend cities to adopt a more proactive communications policy regarding the dynamics associated with EU migration.

Secondly, they urge the local governments to think about their urban branding policies. The research team wants to encourage the cities to explore the relationship between the welcome policies currently in place (and those not in place) and the overall branding objectives of their city in the light of other European cities.

During their study of the different welcome policies Andrea, Alexandra, and Gregg, encountered many good practices.

What are your favorite good practices?

Gregg: "There are so many!"

Alexandra: "Well, let's start with the concept of the 'one-stop-shop' of the International House Copenhagen. The fact that they manage to bring all kinds of services that one needs in one place even though it's only for the people that have a legal status already, the fact that there was a political will to bring all these authorities in one place is really a good practice!"

Andrea: "It's so difficult, because there are so many different groups of EU mobile citizens. So we also need different kinds of responses and coordination within the cities. A better cooperation with for example trade unions could make a difference in reaching more (also vulnerable) groups of migrants."

Gregg: "Also a very concrete good practice we see in Gothenburg for those vulnerable migrants who are trying to locate work, Crossroads provides

enormous assistance. Because if you are vulnerable and homeless and you apply for a job, one of the challenges you face is that you cannot give an address. Crossroads will try and determine if these migrants will be successful on the labor market when they apply for jobs and they can use Crossroads a their place of residence. It's a small concrete thing that is actually quite important!"

WELCOME TO BRUSSELS!



Imagine arriving in Brussels to discover that you do not need to learn only one foreign language, but two! It's the reality for many EU migrants that decide to migrate to Brussels. Most jobs in the Belgian capital require efficient use of both Dutch and French. Liesbeth Sacré, individual counsellor of migrants at the Agency of Integration and Civic Integration, notices that still many migrants are surprised when they discover this fact: "However, you do see that once they realize learning two languages is necessary to find a job that most of them take on the challenge and learn both languages."

The other surprise for many migrants is the complicated political and bureaucratic structure in Belgium. There are 3 communities (Flemish, French, German), each with their own government and parliament and 3 regions (Flemish, Brussels, Walloon), also each with their own government and parliament. And Brussels has 19 communes. Liesbeth: "It is difficult for migrants to find their way in the bureaucracy of Brussels. Also, the desk officers who are responsible for the registration of new migrants do not have time to give other information for example about our social



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orientation courses or language courses. The waiting lines are always very long and go on outside city hall. They have to be as efficient as possible.” However, paradoxically the registration is a great moment to give practical information to migrants. “We are now developing a ‘Welcome map’ with practical information and locations which the desk officers can just hand out after registration.”

Also several Flemish organizations concerned with civic integration are now part of the Agency of Integration and Civic Integration. Liesbeth explains: “This makes it a lot easier for migrants to find their way and for us to help them. In Brussels we have offices in four municipalities: in Molenbeek, Anderlecht, Schaarbeek and Brussels. The office in Brussels is located within *Huis van het Nederlands* (House of the Dutch language) where newcomers can follow Dutch courses.”

The Agency of Integration and Civic Integration does not have specific policies directed at EU migrants.



Liesbeth Sacré

As an individual counsellor Liesbeth guides around 120 migrants through their first months in Brussels. “They are assigned to me while they follow a social orientation course and a Dutch language course. I can help them with individual problems, especially the problems that they are not comfortable discussing in their courses.” This individual counselling has been working very well for years. “Some newcomers do not need a lot of help from me, but some of them I see quite a lot and I can help them with their specific problems. For example, because we get to know them a little bit over time we sometimes see that a person is not ready to work yet, because of past experiences. We can make sure they get the proper care first.”

This individual counselling is also something Liesbeth and her colleagues want us to experience at the conference in the third week of January. “The whole conference will be interactive. We want you to experience our welcoming policies. You will follow part of a social orientation course, you will get individual counselling and we will have a tour through Molenbeek showing you the integration landscape of Brussels.”

I CANNOT LEAVE THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE BEFORE I...

Six different European cities. Policy makers, coordinators, researchers, students and communication experts. There are a lot of people involved in a big European project such as ‘local welcome policies for EU migrants’. That is why an evaluation of the project is very important. Have the goals been met as formulated at the start of the project?

Mira Media asked the research department of Creative Business at Inholland University in Amsterdam to execute the project evaluation.

Professor Joke Hermes, associate professor Koos Zwaan and lecturers Christa de Graaf and Marion Bruls have just finished their first round of interviews with the project partners. They will research the communication and cooperation between the partners to see if the most important goal is met: the creation of a network between the different cities so that good practices can be exchanged and lessons can be learned about local welcome policies for EU migrants.

Associate professor Koos Zwaan gives us their first results: “Most respondents are very enthusiastic about the good practices they heard about in other cities. It is very informative to exchange experiences with colleagues in the same field.” Also the coordination of Mira Media is widely appreciated: “The partners all see the experience Ed Klute and Spyros Papastamatiou have with coordinating such a big project. It runs quite smoothly.”

Communication wise most respondents do see room for improvement Koos explains. “All the respondents expressed a need for more time to



connect on individual levels at the conferences. The workshops and lectures are very interesting, but it leaves little room for informal get-togethers.” For most partners this project is something they work on, on top of their ‘normal’ duties. “They are very involved in the project, but in day-to-day life it is something extra. They feel the need to exchange experiences on a more individual level during the physical meetings.” This will be even more important, because we are entering the second part of the project. The research phase of the project has been focused internally primarily. For the development and implementation phase more contact between the partners will be needed.

Koos, Joke, Christa and Marion will interview all the respondents again within half a year. They shared the first results with Ed en Spyros and now in this newsletter.



For the upcoming conference in Brussels Koos wants to share a tip from one of the respondents: “Give yourself some assignments before the conference, for example: I cannot leave this conference before I know ..., before I’ve spoken to...about... etc.”

So, dear participants, we have high expectations regarding the amount of individual networking at the Brussels conference next week. Have fun!

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