The Dynamic Relationship between Immigrant Politics and Urban Policymaking:

Protecting the rights of undocumented immigrants in Boston and Amsterdam

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Abstract

With the advancement of comparative studies within the field of immigrant politics at the local level, social scientists have attempted to understand the extent to which politico-institutional contexts influence the mobilization strategies of immigrants and their organizations. This article contributes to expanding understandings of how state structures, policies and discourses shape – and are being reshaped by – immigrant politics at the urban scale. It examines the advocacy work of immigrant organizations in their aim to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants in Boston (U.S.) and Amsterdam (the Netherlands). On the basis of this transatlantic comparative case study design, the article identifies combinations of several factors that have enabled tactics of legal change for undocumented immigrants. In both cities, immigrant organizations collaborate with other civic organizations, advocacy groups, and strategically selected politicians within city councils on local policy issues affecting undocumented immigrant communities. Yet, there are different divisions of labor and means of reasoning within these networks, depending on the historically developed relations between governmental officials and immigrant organizations, as well as the discretionary power that local governments have in formulating and implementing own policies. The study therefore draws attention to the dynamic nature of the interaction between immigrant politics and the local policymaking process.

Keywords

Immigrant politics; political opportunity structure; policy advocacy; undocumented immigrants; tactics
The last decades, social scientists in the field of immigration and socio-political movements have been occupied with the question what factors shape the mobilization of immigrant organizations in public debates, how this process eventuates in policies, and how differences between state levels can be explained. With the advancement of comparative analytical inquiry within this field, there is a strong tendency to test propositions about generalizable causal relationships among several variables. In cross-national comparison, this appears in the methodological procedure of juxtaposing distinctive national political systems and to test their effects upon mobilization practices. The notion of “political opportunity structure” has been advanced by several sociologists for this systematic analysis of how institutional contexts mediate the options and constraints for the mobilization of immigrant organizations at several governmental levels (e.g. Ireland, 1994; Giugni and Passy, 2004). The central tenet of this theoretical approach is that variations in opportunities which originate outside the mobilizing group from interactions with (relatively durable) political institutions are the most important determinants of variations in collective action (Koopmans, 1999: 99). Several scholars who draw on this theoretical framework have shown that cities highly depend on national models of integration and citizenship. As such, so goes the argument, “differences in types of incorporation regime linked to different conceptions of citizenship go a long way in explaining both national and local differences in the central characteristics of migrant mobilization and claims-making” (Koopmans, 2004: 467). Although Koopmans provides strong evidence that the local mobilization of immigrant organizations in public debates is predicated upon national naturalization laws, normative and moral values of national citizenship, and the level of centralization of policymaking processes, it is theoretically insufficient to conclude that actors involved in immigrant politics “may deviate from, or innovate within, such national repertoires, but [that] they generally do so within relatively narrow limits” (Koopmans, 2004: 467). From this approach, diverse outcomes are reduced to \textit{a posteriori} speculation of deviations from the dominant model. Bertossi and Duyvendak (2012: 244, emphasis added) state, however, that such models are constantly contradicted by political and legal actions at the local level: “[c]ontradictions cannot be merely viewed as ‘pathologies’ but are fully part of \textit{what must be explained}”.

In order to account for those diverse outcomes between cities, a Weber-inspired approach to comparative research may help. Instead of confining the research attention by
looking for parallelisms in values of two or more citizenship regimes to establish generalizable causal relations, a Weberian strategy takes different diverse outcomes across cases as the analytical starting point that “leads to hypotheses about combinations of temporally discrete causes” (Ragin and Zaret, 1983: 743). Hence, in order to expand and refine previous developed theories that make analytic generalization possible, it is important to also engage with theorists who have shown how the dynamic nature of immigrant politics influences stable systems, especially at the urban scale (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2013).

Therefore, the aim of this article is to understand how state structures, policies and discourses shape – and are being reshaped by – immigrant politics in cities. This study examines how immigrant organizations legitimate their rights claims in the public sphere by taking into account not only the institutional environment in which they operate, but also to understand how they interpret and reconstruct these structures through their strategies. To do so, it looks at the advocacy work of immigrant-led and immigrant-providing organizations (henceforth: immigrant organizations) in their aim to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants in Boston (U.S.) and Amsterdam (the Netherlands). On the basis of this transatlantic comparative case study design, it identifies intersections of several factors that have enabled strategies of legal change for undocumented immigrants. In both cities, immigrant organizations collaborate with other civic organizations, advocacy groups, and strategically selected politicians within city councils on policy issues affecting undocumented immigrant communities. Yet, there are different divisions of labor and means of reasoning in these networks, depending on the historically developed relations between governmental officials and immigrant organizations, as well as the discretionary power that local governments have in formulating and implementing own policies.

The article draws on Bousetta’s (2000) three-level institutional framework. Three features of Bousetta’s approach are particularly relevant: (1) it reinstates the role of immigrant actors, the institutional context in which they operate and their position within this context; it (2) incorporates the element of power in the mobilization strategies of immigrant actors through which a distinction can be made between organizational political and infra-political strategies; and, within this approach, (3) it stresses the dynamic nature of immigrant politics that evolves alongside its urban environment (Bousetta, 2000: 236). This framework allows the problematization of the effect of political institutions on the mobilization strategies of immigrant actors in an original way, without relegating the various forms to a unified causal relationship labeled as political opportunity structure.

The next section further elaborates on Bousetta’s institutional framework, together with associated sociological concepts that help to guide the empirical sections. The empirical sections represent the data of immigrant politics in Boston and Amsterdam. Both cities are situated in different national politico-institutional contexts but are both embedded in national citizenship regimes that have become more repressive. Focusing on the generic processes that
transcend the specificities of the two cases, this article is able to present the dialectic relationship between politico-institutional factors and the local mobilization strategies of immigrant organizations.

The National and Urban Contexts of Immigrant Politics

To understand how cities serve as propitious environments that enable immigrants to become legitimate voices in public debates and, subsequently, to engage with policies related to issues of equal rights and treatment, one must be aware that this process – broadly defined as (contentious) immigrant politics (Cf. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1996) – impinges on different models of administrative state organization. Nevertheless, to reverse the perspective of the political opportunity structure by starting from the idea that the variation in outcomes of immigrant politics is the result from the combination of several preconditions, may help to answer the central question: “What factors shape the political mobilization of immigrant organizations in cities and how do their strategies impact local immigrant policies?” In an attempt to delineate causally relevant factors based on theoretical assumptions, this article first considers the role of different state structures and, as a consequence, the institutional role assigned to actors at the urban scale to shape immigrant policies. By reinstating the strategies of immigrant organizations within this process, two new distinct levels of analysis emerge in addition to the sphere of the state’s political power; that of political organizational and infra-political practices. The three levels of analysis of Bousseta’s (2000) alternative institutional framework will be discussed below with reference to the U.S. and Dutch contexts.

The Context of State Structure and National Policies

The extent to which urban immigrant policies are shaped by the national context varies significantly between both sides of the Atlantic, depending on differences in state structures. This is the first analytical layer of Bousseta’s framework which he labels as the sphere of state’s political power. Despite the differences in state structures, however, the overarching national policy context concerning undocumented immigration is quite similar between both countries. Both the U.S. and the Netherlands have instituted immigration control measures at the national level that are explicitly exclusionary towards (undocumented) immigrants. Exclusion, expulsion and banishment are promulgated as necessary tools to secure the productive economy and the “national values and norms” of both countries, couched in claims about “making America great again” and “behave normal or leave”. Although the rhetoric of popular and prominent political leaders as Donald Trump and Mark Rutte represents the increasingly hostile political climate for immigrants that is presently unfolding, links between undocumented immigration, crime and security have already been manifested in national laws
since the 1990s. Especially with the implementation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, federal laws in the U.S. have sharply circumscribed the federal rights for undocumented immigrants, excluding them from Supplemental Security Income, Temporary Aid for Needy Families, nonemergency Medicaid, and many publicly funded state or local services (Varsayani, 2008: 889). Resounding PRWORA, the Dutch government implemented in 1998 the Linking Act which aimed, in a similar way, to bar undocumented immigrants from a wide array of public services, including education, public housing and health care. Regarding the enforcement of both national laws at the local scale, however, the countries seem to have followed a different road. Through the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), as will be discussed below, the U.S. federal government has sought collaboration with state and local governments to actively enforce PRWORA by surveilling the unauthorized stay of undocumented immigrants. Although the Linking Act obliges governmental actors to check whether their clients are lawful residents and thus entitled to certain benefits, “actively going after illegally residing immigrants without concrete indications, was not the road the [Dutch] government chose to pursue” (Van der Woude et al., 2014: 567). Despite the expansion of increasingly harsh national immigration laws in both contexts, the enforcement of these laws, as well as the discretionary power to provide alternative interpretations of them, differ between both countries.

The U.S., with a federalist system, is characterized by a high degree of separation between governmental actors at the federal, state and local level, these latter two having recently waded into the arena of immigrant regulation (Parlow, 2008: 376). Although state and local governments in the U.S. are constrained to write their own immigration laws in a context of exclusive federal control over immigration and citizenship, or more accurately, due to the right of the latter to preempt possible efforts of local governments, they have some authority in determining how existing federal immigration laws can be enforced within their jurisdictions. Generally, local governments can do so by relying on the states’ “home rule” that allows them to regulate local areas of concern. Especially after the implementation of IIRIRA, state and local governments have gained the possibility to be involved in federal immigration enforcement efforts by means Memorandums of Agreements that ignite collaborations between local governmental officials and federal agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In some localities, this has resulted in intensified efforts to verify the legal status of persons during daily law-enforcement activities of police officers (Kretsedemas, 2008). However, as lower-tier governments are not obliged to inform ICE about a person’s unauthorized presence, unless that individual has committed a crime, many cities have advanced pro-immigrant policy approaches that limit government employees from inquiring or disseminating information about the legal status of residents whom they encounter. When such ordinances are implemented to safeguard the safety, health and well-being of all residents, they can legitimately exist alongside the efforts of the federal citizenship regime to
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exclude undocumented immigrants (De Graauw, 2014: 314). Whereas several scholars have identified variables that explain the development of pro-immigrant ordinances at the local level, such as the pace of growth of the immigrant population in the receiving community (Walker and Leitner, 2011), less attention has been devoted to how immigrant organizations play a role within the formulation and implementation process of such local ordinances.

The variety in local interpretations of the enforcement of immigration laws in the Netherlands seems at first sight less extensive than in the U.S. (Caponio, 2010: 169). Indeed, Dutch cities which are embedded in a national “centralized consensus democracy” (Lijphart, 1968) do not have the authority in determining how immigration (-related) laws and policies can be enforced. Neither do they have much room for manoeuvre to devise policy programs independently from ministerial departments due to the Dutch system of fiscal centralism that expresses itself in meticulous budgeting through conditional national grants (Groenendijk, 1998). The first mentioned constrain in enforcing local interpretations of national policies became recently evident in a dispute between state secretary of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Raymond Knops, and the mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema. The latter argued that the adoption of a national law that prohibits wearing veils in public spaces does not accord with the norms and values of Amsterdam, and thus, that local police officers will not prioritize its enforcement. The former, in turn speaking for cabinet-Rutte III, argued that mayors in the Netherlands cannot provide a local interpretation of national laws. As professor Schilder argued: “This is a criminal law, and its enforcement is regulated by the State’s Attorney, not the mayor” (NRC, 2018).

Despite this difference in state structure concerning policymaking processes, Uitermark’s (2005) detailed theoretical analysis of central-local interdependencies of policymaking reveals that national governmental officials never impose directly their policy programs upon local actors. It is at the local level that problems are identified, where knowledge emerges, and direct interventions are undertaken. The central state, then, “can facilitate the distribution of locally produced rationalities and technologies of government by importing from some, and then exporting to more, localities certain discourses” (Uitermark, 2005: 153-154). From this perspective, city officials may develop local discourses that emerge directly from issues looming in the field of immigrant politics. Hence, the incorporation of the concept power relations between governmental and immigrant actors is essential to understand which discourses are considered as legitimate and become instantiated in local policies in both the U.S. and Dutch case. Bousseta’s second and third analytical layers elaborate on this dynamic interaction process.

The Urban Context: Organizational Political and Infra-Political Strategies
Departing from the central tenet that the discursive sphere from which policies originate is contingent upon asymmetrical power relations between actors and hence their capacity to influence the institutionalization of their worldview – i.e. their “work of representation” (Bourdieu, 1985) – the realm of open political contestation and cooperation between groups becomes the second important analytical layer to distinguish. Bousetta defines this level as the political organizational sphere. Here, participants in immigrant politics make public claims on governmental officials and assert their own identities – or those populations they claim to represent – as worthy and legitimate actors (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1996: 22). The question remains, however, why this political organizational sphere evolves along its urban nature. Nicholls and Uitermark (2013) have argued that cities are the places where newcomers first encounter groups which already have been established, therefore becoming vanguards in struggles for recognition of equal rights and treatment. When immigrants turn to their own networks to pool resources and exchange information, cities generate economies of scale for the development of connections between specialized networks, resulting in a situation in which resources become accessible to broader policy networks (Nicholls, 2008: 845).

The third layer of the proposed framework is the level of infra-political strategies. Whereas the political organizational sphere is analytically positioned at the intersection of the sphere of the state’s political power and that of where immigrant organizations develop discursive and policy networks, infra-political strategies are geared to increase power and control over these networks. This sphere can be considered as the underlying practices and discourses of resistance or the coordinated tactics of subordinate groups before they mobilize their claims in the political organizational sphere. It is precisely this sphere positioned outside the established spaces of institutionalized politics that animates those tactics: “[They] allude to the political as an immanent process – one that operates both at a distance from substantive theory on the one hand, and from the theatres (council rooms, parliaments, committee meetings, and so on) of everyday urban governance on the other” (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017: 7). In this sphere, “in-between” groups, such as undocumented immigrants without legal membership to the national community, assert their exclusion in the existing orders of the citizenship regime and challenge the associated legal meaning of citizenship itself, a practice labeled as “political subjectivization” (Rancière, 1992; Nicholls, 2013).

The objective of the delineation of the three spheres of analysis is first and foremost a way of showing the dynamic interaction and combination of temporally discrete causes that may lead to variance in immigrant politics between Boston and Amsterdam. The interaction of

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1 Note that this does not imply that these networks are exclusively organized on the basis of immigration status, ethnicity or race (although this might be the case), but that other principles may account for their inter-ethnic and -racial composition (see Rath and Roosblad, 2004). Based on the provided definition of immigrant politics, the principles of attention according to which immigrants mobilize are equal rights and treatment. Despite the contingent nature of these groups, groupness nevertheless constitutes the basis of collective political action (Nicholls, 2013).
the three levels of analysis that accounts for the variance across the cases are conceptualized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Conceptual model for the transatlantic comparative analysis of urban immigrant politics based on Bousetta’s three-level institutional framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State structure, <em>e.g.</em> federal vs. unitary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political organizational strategies, <em>e.g.</em> power relations between governmental and immigrant actors; “work of representation”; discursive struggles; development of broad policy networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infra-political strategies, <em>e.g.</em> underlying tactics of resistance; gaining control over network agenda and resources; “political subjectivization”</td>
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<th>Urban immigrant politics</th>
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<td>Claim-making and political mobilization of immigrants</td>
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<td>Formulation and implementation of immigrant policies concerning equal rights and treatment</td>
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**Case Study Selection and Description**

In order to investigate the anticipated differences in urban immigrant politics through the combinational effects of the three delineated analytical levels, this study discusses how immigrant organizations in Boston and Amsterdam mobilize themselves in their attempt to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants in local policies. Boston and Amsterdam have been selected because of their different location in national-political systems, but their similarity in the experience of sizeable influxes of immigrants in recent decades, as well as their situatedness in increasingly restrictive national citizenship regimes. Below, differences and similarities between the cities will be described concerning their immigrant population, socio-economic structure and political orientation. While it is expected that the differences are likely
to result in different opportunities and challenges for the formulation and implementation of immigrant policies, the descriptions function mainly as an illustration of both urban contexts.

As a midsize metropolitan with a continuous, yet recently changing history of immigration, Boston is a useful city in the U.S. to investigate. Boston ranks at number five in the highest share of immigrants of the total population among the twenty-three largest cities in the U.S. Due to Boston’s growing economy since the aftermath of the Great Recession, many immigrants have been pulled to the city. As of 2016, almost one third (27.6%) of Boston’s population was foreign-born; an increase of almost ten percent since 2000. The fastest growing immigrant communities in Boston are from Latin-America and Asia, which together account for almost 75% of Boston’s total immigrant population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Based on the 2016 American Community Survey, the Pew Research Center (2019) reports data on the undocumented immigrant population at the metro level. It has been estimated that 220,000 undocumented immigrants reside in the Greater Boston area: a population that ranks as the 12th highest among metropolitan areas throughout the U.S. Prior to 1980, Boston had a reputation for dealing poorly with racial-ethnic diversity and socio-economic inequalities that comes with it. Especially after a series of violent racial protests and riots stemming from the school busing crisis of the 1970s, many had come to associate the city with population divides and bigotry (Halter, 2007). This changed with the election of the liberal Thomas Menino as mayor in 1993. Facing significant income inequalities between Bostonians on the basis of race and ethnicity that had made national headlines, Menino stressed the importance to address ethnic-racial injustices and established several policy programs to increase affordable housing and provide better healthcare to minority groups. In the same decade, he established the Office of New Bostonians: one of the first City department in the nation to connect immigrant communities to City Hall. An emerging discourse in urban governance concerned the importance of ethnic communities and grassroot politics (Rougeau, 2015). This has not changed since the election of the incumbent liberal mayor Martin Walsh and his City Council led by twelve Democratic council men and women in 2014. Boston’s governance mode has been described as “populist” (DiGaetano and Strom, 2003) where politicians are usually inclined to include community groups in the policy formulation process. Hence, key players are politicians and community actors who seek to control the public and political agenda, whereby the development of public-private partnerships is a commonly used strategy.

Similar to Boston, Amsterdam, as the Netherlands’ largest city, has traditionally attracted a higher number of immigrants compared to the rest of the country. As of 2016, 29.2% of the population was foreign-born, and 51.7% of the population had a migration background; an increase of almost twenty-five and thirty-five percent since 2000 respectively (CBS, 2018). Immigrants (both first- and second-generation) from the former colonies and

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2 Data of 2016 will be used, as this is the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau.
Mediterranean countries who had been recruited under a guest worker scheme in the 1950s to mid-1970s (Nell and Rath, 2009), such as Suriname, the Antilles, Turkey and Morocco, together accounted for over forty-four percent of the immigrant population in Amsterdam (OIS Amsterdam, 2016). Based on detention data of undocumented immigrants of the Ministry of Justice and Security (2015), the number of this population was estimated to be 3,979, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 2,523 to 5,435 between July 2012 and July 2013. Most of the interviewed governmental officials assumed the last number to be correct, as the majority spoke of “over 5,000 undocumented immigrants in Amsterdam”. Similar to Boston, Amsterdam’s liberal political scene explains in part Amsterdam’s pro-immigrant policies over the past thirty years. City Council has long been dominated by the Labor Party (PvdA) which formed broad coalitions that left out extremes at the political spectrum. The present City Council (2018-2022), headed by the Green-Left party in coalition with the PvdA, Social Liberals (D66) and Democratic Socialists (SP), represents the left-wing progressive politics of the city. The governance mode of Amsterdam has been described as “consensual” (Alexander, 2003), whereby advisory committees and other means of collective political decision-making allow the co-optation of external elements into its governance structure.

Data and Methods

This cross-national comparative study is embedded in a qualitative research approach that has facilitated an in-depth exploration of immigrant politics within their local context using a variety of data resources and methods. The primary goal is not to generalize the findings to the universe of immigrant politics, but to use the case study data to extend and refine understanding of the determinants of political mobilization outcomes. Given the similarities and differences among the cases as outlined in the previous Sections, they are well suited for assessing the combinatorial effect of factors assumed to affect the realization of political interests on the part of immigrant organizations (Cf. Cress and Snow, 2000; Bloemraad, 2013).

The starting point of analysis is the delineation of the three described analytical levels through which immigrant politics have played out. Hence, the data gathering process in both Boston and Amsterdam started with semi-structured interviews with elected and appointed governmental officials and other local government employees to get an insight in the urban discourses on undocumented immigrants and the implemented policies. Through the derived empirical data, other actors involved in the political organizational and infra-political sphere – mainly external experts (e.g. members of advocacy groups and advisory committees), representatives and members of immigrant organizations – could be contacted. Snowball-sampling was used to realize a theoretical sample of external experts and immigrant actors who have been involved in the policy formulation and implementation process. Interview
questions with these actors focused on the internal structure of their organizations and queried their ideological motivations, objectives, successes and failures throughout the process of advocacy. In total, the empirical data consist of 38 semi-structured interviews and were conducted in people’s offices, at the university campus, in community centers and local cafes between September 2018 and May 2019. All interviews, which lasted between one and two and half hours, were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

Supplementing evidence of the interviews, the research also consists of attendance at meetings and events, many informal encounters and observations during nine months of fieldwork, as well as an analysis of relevant urban policy documents. Keyword searches on the websites of the municipalities and organizations yielded a number of documents, and several interviewees also suggested material.

**Politico-Institutional Contexts**

The pages that follow in this Section draw on both primary data with twelve elected and appointed officials and government employees, and secondary data derived from policy documents to provide an overview of the historically developed immigrant policy contexts in Boston and Amsterdam. The analysis is confined to those city ordinances and policy programs in which immigrant organizations have mobilized an organized interest and were able to influence the content and form of the institutionalized versions.

**Boston: The Legislative Creation of an Inclusive City**

In response to the excluding and repressive dimensions of the U.S. citizenship regime, the overall analysis of the interviews and documents indicates that the defining dimensions of equal treatment and rights come strong to the fore in the immigrant politics in Boston. The heated rhetoric and deep partisan divisions over undocumented immigration at the federal level find their discursive and institutional materialization at the local level. The federalist state structure of the U.S. creates a window of opportunity for localized, alternative interpretations of the national citizenship regime. City officials were keenly aware that Trump administration’s punitive approach to immigration, including the ending of Obama’s 2012 program Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), had made it increasingly difficult for undocumented immigrants to live according the equal standards as their native-born counterparts. The policy advisor of newly rebranded Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) described the work of the City office as follows:

A large chunk of our work is not so much developing city policies, right? We are developing programmatic city policy responses to federal policies which target by group, such as
developments within the DACA program, for example, or changes in immigrants who have received temporary legal status. When we create policy, I think that we try to make a blanket and then with the land courts identifying what the largest groups are in order to prioritize what kind of work has to be done. But a lot of our work are responses to federal policy decisions.

The outreach and community engagement coordinator of the same Office noted that this “responsive and reactive” work has created an imbalance between “responding to the things that are happening at the federal level and to really going back to the core mission, which is finding ways to advance the communities”. The last few years, the City of Boston has created an overarching immigration policy context that can be viewed as consisting of two main components, although comprehensive developments seem to be currently on hold since Trump’s inauguration. The City of Boston has established two hard policies that arise from ordinances which have formally binding forces. In 2014, the City Council passed, in accordance to Massachusetts law, the “Boston Trust Act” in which police officers are forbidden to detain immigrants on the basis of a civil immigration detainer request issued by ICE after they have become eligible for release from custody (City of Boston, 2014: 2). The legal force of this type of ordinance has been confirmed in the relatively recent court case Lunn v. Commonwealth that pended from April to July 2017. The decision of Massachusetts’ authorities to hold Lunn in State custody on the basis of a federal immigration detainer request, after he would otherwise have been released from his arrest of unarmed robbery, was dismissed as moot and in conflict in with the Massachusetts Constitution (see Justia US Law, 2017). After asking the policy advisor of the MOIA how this type of legislature reflects the City’s attitude toward undocumented immigrants, it became clear that the Act can be considered as a municipal tool to make it easier for all Bostonians, regardless of their status, to participate without fear in civic life and to interact with its official institutions:

I think that his Act has less to with what might be characterized as illegal immigrants ... We sort of serve all people who are foreign-born regardless of status ... The priority of this Act was to establish trust between immigrants and local law enforcement, the local police. The City of Boston has taken a formalized decision through this Act of not taking part in the federal program. You have to understand this Act as an official legal mechanism, for not doing so. Now, they [undocumented immigrants] can report crimes, so that they feel safe to report civil law violations ... And so that is a part of civic integration, that is being part of a community. We know that when everybody buys into our body politic, we have a better functioning society.

From this perspective to “ensuring that all residents feel included in Boston’s civic life”, as Mayor Walsh announced during the opening of the National Welcoming Week (City of Boston, 2016), the MOIA worked closely together with City Council President Wu and City
Councilor Zakim to establish a second ordinance. In 2016, the mayor signed the Language and Communication Access Act into law that requires all departments of the City of Boston to implement a communications access policy for residents who are limited in English proficiency. The director of the Language Access and Communication Program called the implementation of this Act “a really big victory to provide equitable access to City Hall”:

At the end of the day, for me as working for City Hall, what true equitable access to city services looks like is that every city agency thinks about serving all communities, not only one, not forgetting about the other and having it as an afterthought, but really, purposely, thinking about how we can make sure that they are accessible to everyone, regardless of what kind of status they have, where they come from, what language they speak.

The concrete form of both ordinances, as well as the underlying line of argumentation for their implementation, reject the documented-undocumented dichotomy that prevails in the enforcement efforts at the federal level. This ignores, according to the policy advisor of the MOIA, “the fact that immigration status itself consists of many grey areas where people might be in, and, “which is by no means a binary question of yes or no”. Boston’s policy context entails a move away from the federal government’s enforcement practices, while having made the first (albeit still prudent) legal and administrative steps to “bring the immigrant community, regardless of their legal status, in contact with the mainstream conversation about equity” (interview with the immigrant integration fellow at MOIA).

**Amsterdam: The Symbolic Creation of an Inclusive City**

The municipality of Amsterdam has constructed several policy programs and initiatives that connect directly to the policy arena of equal treatment and rights. Contrary to the Boston-case, however, this focus on citizenship rights cannot directly be understood as a “reactive” response to the policy framework that discourages undocumented immigration at the national level. Whereas every interviewed city official in Boston mentioned the need to mitigate the negative effects of the changing federal laws around DACA, Temporary Protected Status and public charge, only one of the interviewed officials of the municipality of Amsterdam mentioned the consequences of the national 1998 Linking Act as a reason to provide an alternative local interpretation of the national citizenship regime. Transcending the purely legal realm, city officials in Amsterdam mobilize the concept of urban citizenship in a more symbolic manner to denote “a common point of identification and a way of formulating shared norms and rules of conduct” (Hoekstra, 2017: 9). Indeed, as Councilor Groot Wassink wrote in his policy letter:

> I have noted that conversations with Amsterdammers about citizenship have a bonding function and contribute to a ‘sense of belonging’ … These conversations have the goal to
set values according to which we would like to live together in our city … This approach
aligns with the doctrine of a democratic city and democratic participation (Gemeente
Amsterdam, 2018a: 12).

This discursive celebration of shared values and norms can be understood as a reaction to the
purportedly ‘failed’ multicultural or group-based policy approach that the municipality
maintained itself in the 1970s and 1980s (Cf. Vermeulen, 2008). Whereas the municipality had
established an institutional structure consisting of structural subsidy funds and advisory boards
to connect immigrant organizations to City Hall, in 2013 it made the final decision to replace
the structural subsidies for single, project-based subsidies in its aim to “counteract the
undesired fact that organizations have become too dependent of governmental resources”
(Regioplan, 2016: 9). After asking the subsidy coordinator of the municipal Citizenship and
Diversity Office why this was considered as problematic, the official discourse on citizenship
became apparent:

In the 1970s and 1980s, we worked perfectly together with organizations. They took care of
their own groups and we subsidized that. They were allowed to do their own things within
their own, *quote unquote*, pillars. And right now, you observe friction. Right now, we do not
want that people do things in their own pillars. We want that they connect with each other
on the basis of their residency in Amsterdam … You observe that in the changes of our
subsidies as well. We support predominantly projects that connect different groups with
each other and that facilitate dialogue between them.

Within this overarching discourse of urban citizenship as a gesture of shared identification and
belonging, the municipality has developed two policy programs that apply specifically to
undocumented immigrants: the municipal ID card program (*Amsterdam Pas*) and twenty-four
hours shelter for refugees whose asylum claims have been dismissed. Both programs, as will be
shown below, are predicated on the assumption that belonging to the city should be a
universal, *symbolic*, right for all residents, without specifically addressing the decreasing, *legal*,
rights that the national government purveys to non-citizen residents.

On January 24, 2019, the chairman of Green-Left proposed the bench of Mayor and
Aldermen to submit an initiative proposal for a municipality ID-card, the *Amsterdam Pas*, to
City Council for a vote. The underlying idea of the *Amsterdam Pas* is to expand the services
included in the already existing *Stadspas* (City Card) to “all people who have a connection with
the city” (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019: 2). For the group undocumented Amsterdammers, as
the initiative proposal notes, should the possibility be provided to use the *Amsterdam Pas* as an
identification tool in order to “guarantee access to safety and health care” (Gemeente
Amsterdam, 2019: 2). Asking about the underlying rationale of this initiative proposal, the chairman stated:

We notice that a lot of people do not understand the importance of an identification card for undocumented immigrants. Other parties are afraid and ask: Are you going to provide people who reside in Amsterdam with a certain type of residence permit? Well, that’s is out of question, because we do not have the power to do so. But people do not understand how important it is to be able to identify yourself. It does not only provide a feeling of safety on a practical level, but also on a symbolic level: I am allowed to be here in this city. I might not be here legally, but I am a human-being with universal rights that needs access to basic city services (emphasis added).

In explaining why undocumented immigrants should be eligible for the Amsterdam Pas, other council members who supported the initiative proposal, especially those from smaller political parties as Bij1 and DENK, emphasized that symbolic identification with the city, rather than national citizenship, signals a universal right.

Within this dominant discourse, City Council also presented in its coalition agreement to provide twenty-four hours shelter for five-hundred refugees whose asylum claims have been dismissed. City Council made the decision to function as a pilot-municipality within the so-called National Alien Provision (LVV)-program, a national cooperation program between the national department Repatriation and Departure Services (DT&V) and the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), to provide not only twenty-four hours shelter but also guidance to this group. The underlying rationale, as the execution report of the municipality outlines, is to provide perspective for undocumented immigrants, whether it be a perspective on legal residence in the Netherlands, or in their home country. Active participation in an “inclusive city” (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018b: 27) is considered as the most important dimension of the perspective plan. Whereas the implemented Trust Act of the City of Boston blocks to a certain degree collaboration with the enforcement practices of the federal government, the municipality of Amsterdam works – in the absence of these interior immigration policing efforts – together with the DT&V and VNG to provide shelter for immigrants that have no legal residence permission in the Netherlands anymore. Despite the fact that “the national framework is very strict and centrally organized”, as a council member formulated it, the municipality did have some room for manoeuvre to provide a local flavor to the national LVV-program. As the chairman described at some length:

In the beginning, we were very reluctant to participate as a pilot-municipality in the LVV-program, because it has been initiated by a VVD- [largest conservative liberal party in the
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Netherlands] state secretary and he endorses the importance of repatriation rather than residence ... We were afraid that it would be very focused on: you can come in, but you have to collaborate to ensure repatriation. Or even worse: you can only get shelter when you collaborate with us to leave the country. So, we decided: we make our own plan first and afterwards we will negotiate with the state secretary. This execution plan involves several starting points, among which twenty-four hours shelter for at least one and a half years and intensive guidance throughout the process ... We started the negotiation on the basis of this plan, and he said: Yes, this is possible. So, right now, we get money from the national government to execute our own program, except for the people we also would like to provide shelter to, which are refugees with a Dublin-claim. The state secretary does not want to pay for this group, but we have our own money, luckily, to do so.

This description of the politico-institutional contexts concerning undocumented immigrants in Boston and Amsterdam highlights an important difference between both cases. Whereas the City of Boston has constructed formalized, legal mechanisms to counteract to a certain degree the efforts of the federal government to rise interior immigration policing, the municipality of Amsterdam has developed alternative, symbolic, interpretations of the national citizenship regime without specifically addressing its national legal foundations. Generally speaking, it could be concluded that Amsterdam has stronger relationships with the central state than Boston. Despite this strong local-central interdependency, however, Amsterdam City Council turned out to be in a relatively strong position to demand a local version of the national LVV-program that is more beneficial to undocumented immigrants and will help them to manage the tensions that might result from the national governmental wish of quick repatriation. Without local autonomy, however, the officials of the municipality of Amsterdam articulate their claims to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants in merely symbolic terms. The city officials in Boston, on the contrary, do not collaborate with federal governmental programs at all. The outreach and community engagement coordinator of the MOIA even noted: “It would be irony to receive money from the federal government to be giving out to our undocumented communities that are negatively affected due to federal laws and decisions. That is absolutely hilarious to me” (emphasis added). As the federal government pushes on efforts to increase its immigration enforcement powers, the City of Boston has distanced itself from the federal government both symbolically and legally by making use of their discretionary power to pass local regulations and ordinances. How these differences in local politico-institutional contexts impact, and are impacted by, the political organizational and infra-political strategies of immigrant organizations is what we will turn to next.

**Political Organizational and Infra-Political Strategies**
This Section draws on primary research with twenty-six immigrant organizations in Boston and Amsterdam. All the surveyed groups can be characterized as “multi-purpose hybrid organizations” (De Graauw, 2007: 11) that combine service provision with political advocacy. In analyzing the mechanisms at work in the relation between the political organizational and infra-political strategies of immigrant organizations and their policy impacts, this analysis focuses primarily on the latter function. Here, it is useful to draw on Foucault’s (1982: 789 - 790) theoretical concept of power as “a mode of action upon the actions of others” to “[steer] the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome”. A strategy, within this conceptualization, refers then to the means to obtain victory in a relational struggle. Whereas Foucault relates both concepts to the subjugating forces of governmental institutions, De Certeau (1984) has theorized that openings in panoptic procedures conveys hope for practices of resistance, or tactics. Tactics, which De Certeau approaches as the “art of the weak”, always operate in proximity, but against, the citizenship regime of exclusion and “[pin their hopes] on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power” (De Certau, 1984: 39). Nicholls (2013) has shown that tactics require intimidate knowledge of political institutions. As newly arrived undocumented immigrants are unlikely to possess this knowledge, tactics often entail the development of networks that are capable to translate the claims of undocumented immigrants into an effective – read: legitimate – counter-discourse that can change legal frameworks. Drawing on De Certeau, however, the development of the organizational strength of alliances does not only depend on their knowledge of the state structure, but also on the extent to which this very state structure itself allows room for manoeuvre of some actors instead of others. Based on the differences in state structures as outlined in the previous Section, the extent to which these networks have developed autonomous political organizational bases differs between Boston and Amsterdam.

**Boston: A Centrally Organized and Independent Network**

In Boston, advocacy programs, initiatives and legal campaigns by immigrant organizations are centralized organized through a large, state-wide, advocacy coalition that enjoys a near monopoly over the means of undocumented immigrant representation. This Coalition, located in Boston and representing more than 130 organizational member-organizations throughout Massachusetts, functions as an intermediate structure, connecting immigrant organizations and their constituencies to city officials in the political organizational sphere. The organizing director of the Coalition describes this intermediary function as “grass-tops”: “We are constantly in the middle. We are connected to elected officials who tend to be more conservative and we are connected to grass-roots organizations that tend to be more
progressive, or radical, in desired policy changes”. As an intermediary advocate, this Coalition represents the needs and interests of both their member-organizations and the more immediate immigrant clientele. Asking about the historical development of the centralized structure of the Coalition, the lead of integration projects explained:

Coalitions work here because our non-profits are so underresourced; they are struggling for funds, they are all, you know, really skimping. We might have similar missions and visions and different ways to carry that out, but I’ve worked in a few different non-profits and we only got things done working in broad-based coalitions ... The bottom line is that we are all so strapped for time and resources, that it’s, you know, an idea of working together by dividing into smaller committees.

Rather than criticizing the limited provision of monetary resources to the non-profit sector, every analyzed organization in Boston tended to characterize the networking responses they had developed since the push for the privatization of the American welfare state as an opportunity. Most of the organizations valued the creative networking responses as a means to show that undocumented immigrants are able to build their own successes as legitimate members of the society. None of the organizations criticized the federal government’s liberal \textit{laissez-faire} attitude that appeals to immigrants’ individual responsibilities and self-governing capacities to advance their socio-economic conditions and rights. If the context of limited federal governmental support for immigrant right issues has molded immigrant organizations into self-responsible acting agencies, it also appears to have augmented their capacity to sustain financially independent networks to find locally elected politicians in support of their proposals. As such, the director of legislative affairs of the Coalition explained in relation to the Boston Trust Act:

A little-known secret about the way that legislation and policies happen at the state and local level is that organizations that are experts in the field, such as ours, actually \textit{formulate} those policies and legislation and then find the right politician to help them pass. So, we actively reached out to Councilor Josh Zakim who filed the Trust Act and then we basically expanded that type of Trust-policy and created a bill at the state level, called the Safe Communities Act. This Act goes one step further and says: We don’t want to deputize local and state police as ICE agents. And we shouldn’t be holding people illegally in violation with the Fourth Amendment. So, the only thing it does, is uphold our Constitution (emphasis added).

In a similar way as the city officials, the majority of immigrant organizations makes use of legal arguments to criticize the current federal immigration enforcement practices, through which, in turn, they aim to realize a more inclusive local society. By naming the Constitutionally-granted obligations, both city officials and immigrant advocates highlight the role that state
and urban policies play in realizing equal personhood and rights for locally present persons (Cf. Wells, 2004). After the Massachusetts Senate approved Senator Jamie Eldridge’s amendment to the State budget that involves the key protections for undocumented immigrants as devised by the Coalition (among which the complete abolishment of collaboration between local police officers and ICE), the executive director replied: “At a time when our federal government is tearing families apart, tonight’s votes send a power message that in our Commonwealth, we value and welcome immigrants”.

Amsterdam: A Loosely Stitched and Dependent Network

In Amsterdam, the political organizational sphere is not centrally organized around a larger coalition of member organizations that acts independently of governmental resources at an intermediate level. Rather, it consists of related, but more fragmented, organizations that do not claim sole representation over the undocumented immigrant groups in the city. Three types of organizations can be distinguished: (1) an activist advocacy and squatter group that consciously rejects any form of governmental collaboration; (2) several independent faith-based organizations that offer direct support to undocumented immigrants in the form of shelter, food and legal advice; and (3) several professional non-profit organizations that combine advocacy work with support to undocumented immigrants on behalf of the municipality. Especially the latter, mimicking specific subcontractor types of the government, implement as dependent actors, rather than independent sectors, policy programs of governmental agencies (Habraken et al., 2013). The role of the Council for Refugees in the implementation of the LVV-program in Amsterdam is a case in point. As one of the largest organizations in the Netherlands that both advocates for the rights of undocumented immigrants and supports them in their legal procedures, the Amsterdam branch also executes the local version of the LVV-program as one of the “chain partners” of the municipality. Contrary to Kalir and Wissink’s (2016: 45) argument that organizations as the Council for Refugees are complicit in the national deportation regime – by “cleaning up the mess of the government that demands all their time at the expense of former practices of protest” – the manager of the juridical team undocumented migrants explained that the Amsterdam branch has contributed to a local version of the LVV-program that mitigates the focus on repatriation as set out by the national government. Asking the manager about the factors that have contributed to this local version, s/he let know that:

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3 The executive director of a large faith-based organization nuanced, quite agitated, this laudatory victory, explaining that Senator Eldridge has only been able to get the Safe Community Act added in as an amendment to the state budget. The House failed to pass the measure at the last session under opposition of the Republican Governor Baker, meaning that the bill will need veto-proof majorities in the upcoming sessions (The Tufts Daily, 2019).
One of the factors that has contributed, in my experience, is first and foremost the fact that we have been involved with a lot of other organizations. That the squatter group has been visibly present. That they have been supported by organizations, clubs, individual citizens, several collaboration structures, churches, [student-refugee] buddies, and larger NGOs as Amnesty International. Another factor is probably the political color of City Council. But given the fact that so many organizations have been involved, that has had a big impact on the political decision-making process in Amsterdam, at least ... to the extent to which that is possible. What can you achieve? We monitor, we express our concerns, we propose policy initiatives on the basis of our expertise and database of the clients we help. So, we have brought a lot of information to the surface. And people in City Council have used that information. In the first phase, that was done by council members who had been involved with undocumented immigrants themselves or had received our information. And right now, after the elections, those people have, for example, filed a motion, they have acquired other roles in the municipality and have been able to realize policy initiatives and proposals.

At the same time, however, the activist advocacy group, embodying the “early riser” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1996) position in the cycle of Amsterdam’s immigrant politics, expressed the concern that the consensus-based collaboration between the national and local government in the LVV-program would be increasingly controlled by the former. As a result, when organizations receive subsidies from both governmental levels, as the initiator of this group reasoned: “... they become encapsulated by governmental institutions through which they risk losing their own objectives. That is our main concern and the reason why we position ourselves outside the municipal subsidy regulations”. However, a student counsellor of a foundation for highly educated undocumented immigrants added to this story that this activist group can only maintain its governmental independence because “[their members] provide relatively few other services that can become contaminated because of the advocacy work that they are doing”. On the other hand, as s/he further elaborated: “Organizations with a broader array of [governmentally funded] services are more likely to damage established relations with the government when they speak up too much for the rights of undocumented. They become a thorn in the flesh”.

Elaborating on the finding that the interdependencies between the national and local government are weaker in the U.S. than in the Dutch context, it has also become clear that the interdependencies between the local government and immigrant organizations are weaker in the former context. The high mobilization capacity of the Coalition and its financial independence has allowed immigrant rights advocates in Boston to be involved in all steps of urban policymaking: from agenda setting to reaching out to supportive politicians and challenging legislation through advocacy. With the exception of the more activist organization in Amsterdam, all others finance their services to large extent by governmental resources,
which increases the power of the local government over the networks of immigrant organizations (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2013). As a consequence, organizations in Amsterdam are more likely to execute policy programs in such a way that they are compatible with the solutions introduced by governmental officials; a process labeled as “cooptation” by Warren et al. (1974). Demonstrating signs of consensus-based collaboration, it could be argued that “[immigrant] organizations in Amsterdam [do not only] regard the state as their primary source of financial support, [but also] as their source of legitimacy instead of their constituencies” (Habraken et al., 2013: 744). However, before jumping to conclusions, this empirical analysis has shown that the financial dependency of Dutch organizations does not unilaterally restrain their freedom to propose policy initiatives. Rather than being terminally co-opted, the objectives of immigrant organizations are dynamically mediated by the political process. Indeed, as argued by Foucault (1982: 788), the relationship of power between governmental officials and immigrant organizations can be the result of prior consent, “but it is not by nature the manifestation of consensus”. Faced with this relationship of power, a more circumscribed, but by no means restricted, field of infra-political strategies emerges. Whereas organizations in Boston capitalize on the larger institutional role assigned to both themselves and the strategically selected city officials to advance the rights of undocumented immigrants in an era of repressive citizenship regime measures, organizations in Amsterdam make use of temporal possibilities opened up by political changes within City Council to advance their policy initiatives and proposals by introducing their information, expertise and experience into the field of immigrant politics. Although these “ways of operating” – or tactics – differ between the cases depending on the overarching field that regulates them, organizations on both sides of the Atlantic “introduce into it a way of turning it into their advantage that obeys other rules and constitutes something like a second level interwoven into the first” (De Certeau, 1984: 30).

**Conclusion**

This article has explored the question what factors shape the political mobilization of immigrant organizations in Boston and Amsterdam, and how their strategies subsequently have impacted local immigrant policies. Making use of Bousetta’s (2000) institutional framework, this research has been allowed to retrieve the infra-political, or tactical, dimension of immigrant politics; a dimension often deprived from its explanatory power by scholars working within the tradition of the political opportunity structure. Without dismissing their claims, however, the relative extent to which structure and agency contribute to the variation in the realization of favorable local immigrant policies has been considered as a matter for empirical investigation (see Koopmans, 1999). With reference to the first mentioned causal factor, the political opportunity thesis becomes relevant as a theory when the empirical results
of the comparative case study, indeed, would have shown that the realization of collective interests on the part of immigrant organizations depends primarily on the available options arising from their interactions with institutional structures.

This article has shown that variations in state structures, and, consequently the role assigned to governmental officials to shape immigrant policies at the local scale, do not so much influence the realization of the collective interests of immigrant organizations, as it does influence the last mentioned causal factor – the way in which they devise their tactics and, as a corollary, formulate their right claims in the organizational political sphere. Embedded in a national context that holds a strong laissez-faire attitude towards community building, immigrant organizations in Boston are centrally organized in an overarching “grass-tops” Coalition that has been developed independently from governmental resources (Cf. Bloemraad, 2005). Making use of their relatively financial and political autonomy to find support for their policy initiatives, this Coalition has been involved with all steps of the construction of local pro-immigrant ordinances within a political field where city officials hold the administrative discretionary power to regulate the safety, health and well-being of all residents regardless citizenship status (De Graauw, 2014). As such, they capitalize on the discretionary power of competing government levels to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants (Wells, 2004). In Amsterdam, both the national and local government intervene stronger in the political organizational sphere, resulting in a more scattered infrastructure that consists of an activist advocacy group that rejects any form of governmental interference and larger professional organizations that combine advocacy work with governmental-funded services. These stronger state-civil society interdependencies narrow the opening for organizations to construct an autonomous base from which to influence immigrant policies as is the case in Boston. Drawing on Foucault’s (1984) conceptualization of power relations, however, it has become clear that despite the more limited options in the Dutch institutional structure to influence local immigrant policies, immigrant organizations do have some room for manoeuvre. Whereas organizations in Boston make use of legal arguments by capitalizing on the permanent institutional opportunities presented, in Amsterdam they accept the temporal political chance offerings within in City Council and take recourse to symbolic arguments to convince governmental officials to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants. Taking these tactics seriously, it has become clear that organizations in Boston and Amsterdam are able to “produce sentences that remain unpredictable with the space ordered by the organizing techniques of [repressive citizenship regimes] – they circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order” (De Certau, 1984: 34).

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