Austerity urbanism and the promise of immigrant-and refugee-centered urban revitalization in the U.S. Rust Belt

Yolande Pottie-Sherman

Geography, Memorial University, St. John's, Canada

Please address all correspondence to Yolande Pottie-Sherman at ypottiesherm@mun.ca

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Recent research in urban studies emphasizes the unevenness of local responses to immigration in the United States, and the emergence of economic development-focused inclusionary policies in the Rust Belt as an understudied register of local activism. Scholars also highlight the pronounced impact of austerity urbanism – the deepening of neoliberal urbanism – in Rust Belt cities following the 2007-08 financial crisis, and note the potential for austerity urbanism to produce progressive local activism on immigrant rights. To date, austerity has not been examined as a socio-economic and political dimension shaping local activism on immigration. This article examines this relationship through an analysis of the economic revitalization narratives within the Welcoming Economies Global Network, a regional consortium of inclusionary initiatives. Through in-depth interviews with representatives of member organizations, document analysis, and participation observation, my findings underscore the incongruities and compromises encompassed by welcoming coalitions operating in the age of austerity. Some local actors are motivated by an economic growth agenda, but affirm inclusionary values towards immigrants and refugees to substantiate their programs. Other local actors are motivated by a social justice agenda, but cite the economic benefits of immigration to garner support from other factions.

Keywords: immigrants; refugees; austerity urbanism; Rust Belt; United States; policy; discourse; neighborhoods; revitalization; property vacancy; global cities

Introduction

Cities across the United States have emerged as distinct players in the politics of immigration. Considerable scholarship examines the responses to immigration in new destinations that have emerged in the Midwest, South, and Great Plains (Godziak and Martin, 2005; Hall, 2013; Katz, Creighton, Amsterdam, & Chowkwanyun, 2010; Lichter and Johnson 2009; Massey 2008; Winders, 2013; Wright & Ellis, 2000). Research in urban geography emphasizes the unevenness of these responses and the role of regional identities and national networks in diverging policy trajectories (Parks,

2014; Walker, 2015; Walker & Leitner, 2011). While some cities have adopted official welcoming stances towards immigrants – including Atlanta and Tucson, or, like Portland, have joined the Sanctuary Cities movement – others including Hazleton, Pennsylvania, and Riverside, New Jersey instituted anti-immigrant ordinances (Gilbert, 2009; Steil & Ridgley, 2012; Varsanyi, 2010).

A third register of responses has not been the focus of much scholarly attention to date. These are the economic "development-oriented inclusionary" initiatives (Filomeno, 2015) that have recently emerged in the "former immigrant gateways" and "low immigration metros" of the U.S. Rust Belt, which do not otherwise attract significant immigration (Pew, 2015; Ray & Morse, 2004; Singer, 2004; 2011). Initiatives of this type promote welcoming as an economic development strategy (although not exclusively), including the Welcoming Economies (WE) Global Network (a regional economic-development consortium); non-profits such as Global Detroit (2010), Vibrant Pittsburgh (2010), Global Cleveland (2011), and St. Louis Mosaic (2012); and municipal or county government programs such as the Louisville Office for Globalization (2011), Welcome Dayton (2012), One Macomb (2012), Cincinnati Immigrant Friendly Taskforce (2014), Detroit Immigration Taskforce (2014), Welcome Toledo-Lucas County (2014), and Welcoming Pittsburgh (2015).

This article considers these local responses to immigration from the perspective of two recent developments in urban studies: Filomeno's (2015) application of Caglar and Glick-Schiller's (2010) concept of "downscaled" cities to the study of local policy activism on immigration; and, urban geographic research on "austerity urbanism" in the Rust Belt (Donald, Glasmeier, Gray, & Lobao, 2014; Hackworth, 2015; Peck, 2012). The former development suggests that Rust Belt cities that have been downscaled – disempowered – by neoliberal restructuring may pursue "development-oriented

inclusionary" policies as a repositioning strategy (Filomeno, 2015; Caglar & Glick-Schiller, 2010, 190). Lacking access to all forms of capital, downscaled cities may view international migrants as crucial agents for reclaiming global city status. Indicators of neoliberalism in these inclusionary initiatives include the embrace of diversity branding as a strategy for inter-urban competition, and the framing of migrants as entrepreneurial (and self-sufficient) and connected to global markets.

The latter development suggests that as contexts of "austerity urbanism," the rationale and capacity for policy activism on immigration in Rust Belt cities may differ substantially from other immigrant gateways. Austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012, 2) describes the deepening of neoliberal urbanism after the 2007-08 financial crisis, as mounting local debt ratios prompted new agendas of "enforced or extreme economy." Indicators of austerity urbanism include deep public sector cuts; a forced reliance on tournament financing, grant seeking, and financially hollow branding initiatives (Donald et al., 2014; Peck, 2012; Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2013); and, in Rust Belt cities in particular, "rightsizing" plans to scale back city infrastructure in the hopes of restoring growth (Hackworth, 2015a; 2015b; Rosenman & Walker, 2015; Schilling & Logan, 2008). Migration scholars note the post-crisis rise of anti-migrant hostility alongside a heightened urgency in the framing of immigrants and refugees as economic and demographic resources (Darling, 2016; Lowe, Richmond, & Shields, 2017). While Mayer (2013; 2016) suggests that austerity urbanism may also produce progressive local activism around immigrant rights, to date, austerity has not been examined as a socio-economic and political dimension shaping local activism on immigration.

This article considers the relationship between downscaling, austerity urbanism, and immigration activism in the Rust Belt. My objectives are three-fold: to determine how "development-inclusionary" coalitions frame immigrants and refugees in this

region; to investigate how these initiatives are entangled with other austerity-related policy objectives; and, to examine the strategies employed by actors with various agendas within this network. To make these contributions, I analyzed media and policy documents surrounding the Welcoming Economies (WE) Global Network, undertook participant observation at two WE Network conventions in 2015 and 2016, and conducted in-depth interviews with member initiatives in nine Rust Belt cities in Kentucky, New York, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The WE Network is a 20-member regional consortium "working to tap into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants" (weglobalnetwork.org). However, the agendas and values of its members vary and the interviews provide a more complex understanding of their motives.

My findings underscore the incongruities and compromises encompassed by welcoming coalitions operating upon deepening neoliberal terrain. Some local actors are motivated by an economic growth agenda, but affirm inclusionary values towards immigrants and refugees to substantiate their programs. Other local actors are motivated by a social justice agenda, but cite the economic benefits of immigration to garner support from other factions. This paper is organized as follows: after establishing the conceptual framework, I present the findings in three sections, corresponding to the three aforementioned research objectives. This article concludes with a discussion calling for more attention to the ways in which immigrants and refugees are framed as solutions to large systemic problems, and the need for more empirical research on the substantive nature of local inclusionary initiatives.

Subnational Responses to Immigration

Local responses to immigration in the United States are highly uneven (Varsanyi, 2010; Walker, 2015; Walker & Leitner, 2011). In 2011, Walker and Leitner found 370 local

policies aimed at undocumented immigrants alone. More than one hundred cities and counties have joined Welcoming America, a national network of non-profit organizations promoting immigrant integration (Welcoming America, 2016). At the same time, other jurisdictions have adopted policies designed to exclude the undocumented, for example, by penalizing employers who hire undocumented workers (Steil & Ridgley, 2012).

One starting point to explaining the emergence of this local politics of immigration in the U.S. is that new destinations are reacting to new population influxes, including undocumented immigrants (Walker, 2015; Wells, 2004; Varsanyi, 2008; Furuseth, Smith, & Mcdaniel, 2014). Further, in a neoliberal policy landscape, while the federal government controls immigration, it has offloaded service provision responsibilities onto the State and municipal levels (Coleman, 2007; Parks, 2014; Varsanyi, 2010; Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010). Light (2006, 11) suggests that in some cases, local anti-immigrant activism has emerged as a reaction to this "fiscal mismatch" between increasing welfare obligations and declining tax revenue. At the same time, localities have become increasingly involved in immigration enforcement measures like 287g, which links local police departments to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Shahani & Greene, 2009; Nguyen & Gill, 2015). The failure of federal immigration reform has also spurred new tensions, which are evident in protracted legal disputes between the States and the U.S. Supreme Court (Ellis, 2006; Steil & Vasi, 2014, 1105).

Geographers have been quick to emphasize the regional asymmetries among these local responses to immigration. Walker and Leitner (2011,165) find that places with an entrenched "understanding of the American nation and their locality as primarily white places" tend to adopt exclusionary ordinances. In the South, for

example, with its distinct histories of racial segregation, 90 percent of the measures enacted were exclusionary. In contrast, 74 and 57 percent of regulations in the Northeast and Midwest, respectively, were exclusionary, while there was an even split in the West. Within metropolitan areas, suburbs tend to adopt restrictive statutes, while core cities enact welcoming ones, a pattern, which, according to the researchers, owes to the latter's more prolonged familiarity with "racial and economic diversity" (Walker and Leitner 2011, 161). More recently, Walker's (2015) comparison of diverging policies in suburban Chicago draws attention to the role that national organizations play in establishing this patchwork of policy trajectories. As he explains

> In turn, national organizations have engaged in a politics of networking to identify communities where the immigration issue is salient and push local policy agendas. Localities then draw from place-based imaginaries of both local and national belonging to engage in this politics of scale and facilitate or confront the networked politics of immigration introduced by these activist groups. (Walker 2015:2)

But while researchers have explored the role of context in local policy responses to immigration, Rust Belt cities that struggle with persistent population and economic decline and receive few newcomers have not been the focus of much migration scholarship.

This gap is significant because, as Filomeno (2015) recently highlights, many Rust Belt cities – Baltimore, Cleveland, Dayton, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh – are adopting "development-oriented inclusionary" welcoming policies on immigration. According to Filomeno, these responses represent a distinct type of local immigration activism in 'downscaled cities (Caglar & Glick-Schiller, 2010) that have been disadvantaged in the neoliberal urban hierarchy and are seeking to 'upscale' their status and influence. Filomeno's case study of Baltimore reveals that city boosters framed Hispanic in-migration as crucial to addressing its shrinking tax base and population.

This drive converged in an ethnically bifurcated context with sustained Democratic partisanship, where the local immigrant population also sought upward mobility.

While this work is an important step, further interrogation of the socio-economic and political dimensions of development-inclusionary policies emerging *across* the Rust Belt is needed. The harnessing of immigration-related diversity as an economic growth tool is a well-established feature of neoliberal entrepreneurialism (Florida, 2002; Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2015; Leslie & Hunt, 2013; McCann, 2013; McCann, Roy, & Ward, 2013; Pottie-Sherman, 2013a; 2013b). But migrant-led revitalization only became a pronounced trend in the policy agendas of Rust Belt metros as they struggled to recover from the Great Recession that unfolded across from December 2007 to June 2009 (Ellis, Wright, & Townley, 2014). The evolving nature of neoliberal urbanism in the last decade is central to understanding this wave of inclusionary activism in the Rust Belt.

Austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012) distinguishes the post-recession deepening of the neoliberal urban agenda from previous neoliberal forms of governance (Davidson & Ward, 2014; Donald et al., 2014; Hackworth, 2015a). The concept originally described the austerity imperative prompted by the structural fiscal gaps that American cities faced after the 2008 Wall Street collapse[1] (Peck, 2012). As access to credit shrivelled, and property tax revenues declined, local governments were forced to reduce deficits 'at any cost,' including by cutting services essential to the neoliberal apparatus. General indicators of austerity urbanism include acute deficit crises (Davidson & Ward, 2014), new rounds of privatization and retrenchment (Rosenman & Walker, 2015), and

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[1] While the austerity urbanism scholarship focused originally on the American crisis (Davidson & Ward, 2014; Hackworth 2015a; Tabb, 2014), an emerging literature examines austerity urbanism in the UK and Europe (Darling, 2016; Davies & Blanco, 2017; Mayer, 2016; Pollio, 2016).

increased dependence by local governments on "placebo" urban growth strategies and precarious revenue sources (Donald et al., 2014; Peck, 2012). These findings suggest that inclusionary activism under an austerity agenda is subject to extreme economy, and may thus function as a placebo for other substantive supports for immigrants and refugees. Yet, other scholars emphasize the emergence of progressive activism at the local level, including on immigrant rights, in response to austerity urbanism (Mayer, 2013; 2016). To date, however, the relationship between the latter and the local welcoming movement in the U.S. remains unexplored.

Austerity urbanism provides a useful frame for differentiating the Rust Belt from other contexts of migrant reception because as Peck (2012, 629) notes, "cities are where austerity bites, but never equally." The Great Recession had a destructive impact on Rust Belt cities because deindustrialization's "long downturn" coupled with successive rounds of neoliberal rollbacks had already crippled local governments across the region (Ohanian, 2014; Peck, 2012, 630). Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and St. Louis experienced sustained recessions in the early 1990s, and again in the early 2000s, joined by Louisville and Cincinnati. Detroit was in its third downturn since 1990 before the national peak of the recession in September of 2008 (Arias, Gascon, & Rapach, 2016, 100). In the wake of the financial crisis, Rust Belt metros teetered on the edge of – or in the case of Detroit, fell into – insolvency, and had little choice but to launch new rounds of punishing retrenchment. Commentators noted that the recession underscored a "deepening" rift between the Rust Belt and U.S. "knowledge-based" urban economies (Florida, 2009). In the wake of the crisis, their growth coalitions increasingly pointed to migrants as key to "injecting life into the Rust Belt" (Wainer, 2013).

As a lens, austerity urbanism also helps to examine how pro-immigration activism is entangled with other systemic issues facing Rust Belt cities, including

population decline, concentrated poverty, and residential abandonment – all major foci of the literature on austerity in the Rust Belt. Many Rust Belt metros have adopted "rightsizing" plans to rescale city infrastructure to fit smaller tax bases, often by targeting abandoned property through urban greening projects, demolition, and land banking (Akers, 2013; Hackworth, 2015a; Rosenman & Walker, 2015; Walker, 2016). Scholars emphasize that rightsizing plans in the Rust Belt reinforce residential exclusion, while maintaining flexibility should market conditions once again become favourable (Hackworth, 2015). This finding is pertinent for development-inclusionary policies in the Rust Belt, which increasingly promote refugee resettlement as a solution to vacant property (WE Global Network, 2016). Proponents of this model note that despite their small foreign born populations, many Rust Belt metros have significant refugee populations because of the presence local non-profit organizations (Forrest & Brown, 2014; Mott, 2010; Singer & Wilson, 2006). This property rehabilitation movement suggests a convergence of interests between voluntary organizations serving refugees (volags) and local growth coalitions seeking to reinvigorate local property markets. Thus, austerity urbanism also helps to interrogate the shifting forms of resistance to neoliberal governance, and the compromises that local welcoming coalitions may entail (Mayor, 2015).

In summary, the literature on local responses to immigration in the U.S. emphasizes the role of immigration settlement patterns, regional histories, national networks, and neoliberal upscaling as important factors shaping inclusionary urban policy trajectories. While the recent development-oriented inclusionary activism in the Rust Belt reflects the upscaling imperative as noted by Filomeno (2015), the evolving nature of neoliberal urbanism suggests that this regional welcoming movement is also shaped by an austerity imperative. This article contributes to the literature on local

responses to immigration by considering how urban austerity shapes the welcoming movement in and across the Rust Belt.

Methods

To trace the factors that lead Rust Belt cities to pursue development-inclusionary immigration initiatives, I adopted a three-tiered methodological approach. First, I analyzed relevant policy documents surrounding the Welcoming Economies Global Network and its eighteen core member organizations. These documents included mission statements, reports, web pages and blog posts, and other promotional material surrounding each initiative. The initiatives range in mandate, scope, governance structure, and budget. Global Detroit, Vibrant Pittsburgh, and Global Cleveland are non-profit corporations (5013[c][3]) and operate separately from the municipal and county governments. In contrast, the City of Dayton's Human Rights Commission Department houses the Welcome Dayton initiative, which now acts as a formal framework for municipal activities. Several of the more recent organizations, including Welcoming Pittsburgh and the Cincinnati Mayor's Taskforce on Immigration were in the process of determining where the projects would be housed at the time of analysis.

Second, I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with stakeholders, ranging in length from 25 to 70 minutes. In total, stakeholders from nine cities are represented by these interviews: three in Pittsburgh, two each in Cincinnati and Cleveland, and one each in Dayton, Toledo, St. Louis, Louisville, Detroit, and Buffalo. The goal of these interviews was to explore the rationale, depth, and breadth of the welcoming initiatives. These interviews also examined how relevant actors ascribe meaning to immigration and interpret immigration discourses.

Third, to examine the regional mobility of urban immigration strategies, I undertook participant observation of two three-day WE Global Network conventions

held in Dayton in July of 2015 and in Philadelphia in October of 2016. Participant observation allowed me to examine the situatedness of social behavior. Through this lens, people are viewed as "knowledgeable subjects" whose actions and behaviors are representative of complex systems of meaning and processes (Cloke, 2004, 169). The goal of observing this convention was to capture not only what various policy actors "say they do and why" but also "what they are seen to do and say to others about this" (Cloke, 2004, 169).

Development-Inclusionary Framings of Immigration in the Rust Belt

Recent development-inclusionary initiatives in the Rust Belt reflect an intensification of the neoliberal framing of immigrants as economic and demographic assets. At one level, these stances reflect the "upscaling" imperative to revive the 'Rust Belt' label and reposition it as a diverse, global region, worthy of investment. The WE Global Network's (hereafter, WE) official tagline is "Leading Rust Belt Immigrant Innovation." Its foundational documents position "skilled" immigrants as the antidote to structural economic crisis. The 2010 Global Detroit study served as the impetus for the creation of Global Detroit and later, WE, and lays out the case for immigration as a path for Rust Belt cities. The 100-page report describes immigrants as "economic catalysts," attributing the success of contemporary centers of American innovation, like Silicon Valley, to their immigrant communities, citing the proportion of foreign born among recent Nobel Prize winners. According to the report, since immigrants were at "the source of early 20th century Midwestern innovation," supporting Michigan's "Arab-American, Indian-American, Eastern European, Latino, and Asian-American" populations is therefore, is the pathway to economic rebirth. As the report notes, immigrants will allow "Detroit to reclaim its place among the world's thriving multi-national global cities" (Global Detroit, 2010, 102). While high skilled immigrants are

the primary focus of the WE Global Network, its organizational documents and associated media coverage routinely references the contributions of "working class" immigrants and refugees (Tobocman, 2015) and many of its members take a broad approach. Referencing the impact of Somali Bantu and Bhutanese refugees, one participant explained, "They are spending. It's all part of the picture."

The discourse of the "immigrant advantage" (Kolker, 2014) aligns well with the narrative of the Rust Belt as a region cast aside by globalization. One initiative-representative in Pittsburgh explained that without attracting new immigrants, Pittsburgh would "get left behind, kind of like in the eighties when the steel mills didn't move fast enough." Cleveland's stakeholders take cues from a 2013 report entitled *From Balkanized Cleveland to Global Cleveland*. The report opens with the following premise:

> Cleveland didn't decline because industry left. Cleveland didn't decline because people left. Vacant houses are not Cleveland's cross to bear. Cleveland's ultimate problem is that it is cut off from the global flow of people and ideas. Cleveland needs to be more tapped into the world. (Piiparinenen & Russell, 2013, 3)

Here, Piiparininen and Russell construct vacancy as the result of desertion by global markets, despite the foreclosure crisis' connection to broader financial and property markets. By connecting vacancy to globalization, the authors position immigrants as a 'fix all' solution to all manner of urban woes: as homeowners and tax payers that will address high vacancy rates, shrinking populations, and dwindling tax bases; as small business owners that will revitalize urban commercial districts; and as high tech entrepreneurs that will address stagnant innovation and create jobs. And, the role of these consultants is important because, as one stakeholder admitted, Piiparinen's word "is almost like gospel to them."

Thus, proponents of WE Global view immigration as the avenue to restoring lost global connections. Many of its members promote the mantras that "to immigrate is an entrepreneurial act" (Robert, cited in Herman & Smith, 2009) and that "today's immigrants arrive *ready made* to perform in a knowledge-based, global economy" [my emphasis] (Herman & Smith, 2009, xviii; cited in Tobocman, 2010). These descriptions of newcomers frame them as 'off-the-rack' tools for economic recovery that require little to no investment in austere times. In other words, for innovation *just add immigrants*. According to this gospel, immigrants are more entrepreneurial, hard working, and likely to start businesses than their native-born counterparts. The secret for struggling cities, advise these consultants, is to use the power of immigrant entrepreneurialism to pull them out of the clutches of economic decline.

But, of course, to attract the "best and brightest," a city has to be not only welcoming, but also more welcoming than its competitors. Hence, the announcement by Cincinnati's Mayor that he plans to make Cincinnati the most "immigrant-friendly city in America." This impetus in competitive repositioning stems from the perception, according to another participant, that one of the many reasons Cincinnati fails to attract newcomers is simply that other cities are "doing it [welcoming] better." The welcoming project, via the Mayor's Taskforce on Immigration, casts a broad lens on migration, referencing working class immigrants, refugees, undocumented immigrants, victims of human trafficking, as well as foreign investors, and international students (Task Force on Immigration, 2017). Other project directors described their cities as embroiled in a high stakes inter-urban competition for particular foreign-born workers. "If you're not welcoming our newcomers, they'll go somewhere else," explained one stakeholder in Michigan, referencing the labor market barriers facing foreign-trained health care

professionals in the region. "And they will thrive," she continued, "they will add to the economy and we lose."

Rebranding a city as "immigrant friendly" requires "consistent messaging" at multiple scales (interview, 2015). Compared to large reception cities like Miami, Los Angeles, or New York, contemporary American narratives about immigration do not include the Rust Belt cities. "We're not traditionally seen as a place for immigrants, explained one participant in Toledo, Ohio, "I think that…[this perception] has worked against us for a long time." In order to build a coherent "immigrant friendly" brand, stakeholders have pursued partnerships with national organizations such as Welcoming America. Welcoming America is a national non-profit organization, through which cities and counties can secure a designation by carrying out a three stage welcoming process. According to a participant in Cleveland, joining the growing patchwork of WA-designated localities is important because it "brings attention to your city" (interview, 2015).

These imaging endeavors are not only outward focused, but also sell immigration to city residents. Welcoming initiatives cannot succeed without public support. But project proponents are tasked with building consensus that immigration is positive in communities that may have limited experience with newcomers, and in some cases, are openly hostile to them. In order to avoid public backlash and smooth over resistance, project boosters craft narratives about their city's immigrant past. These overtures attempt to drum up emotional responses – the "we feelings" described by Logan and Molotch (1987, 62) – about a city's past, present, and future.

WE Global members strategically leverage nostalgia for their city's European immigrant heritage in order to encourage support for new immigrant communities. For example, the Welcome Dayton plan recommends that its welcoming campaign focus on

the city's "immigrant past," encourages campaigners to "cull" "through the history of Dayton to show that this is a natural part of our heritage" (2010, 7, 18), and highlights current immigrant groups in Dayton from "Russia, India, Turkey, Philippines, and Mexico" (welcomedayton.org). As one stakeholder explained, these activities are part of shifting the "culture of the city," to have the public buying in, "saying, yes, that's who we are as Daytonians. We're a welcoming community" (interview, 2015). Other projects, including Welcoming Toledo-Lucas County similarly emphasize their region's "migration and immigrant heritage" (WE Global, 2016).

These projects target the cities' brands and also their identities. The challenge in Pittsburgh, according to one stakeholder is that the city has become "disconnected" from its immigrant past because of its more recent history of out-migration. As the stakeholder explains, "for so long all these people left…[…] either folks who identify as white Pittsburghers or the black American community." Pittsburgh's welcoming initiative encourages residents to re-identify with their "immigrant roots." Their 2015 Welcoming Pittsburgh plan opens with a statement from the Mayor urging "fellow Pittsburghers" that immigration is "part of [their] DNA." "It's who we are," he advocates in the opening message to his constituents (Peduto, 2015). Elsewhere the document reflects on Pittsburgh's industrial history, emphasizing that this history was "built upon the backs" and "sweat" of European immigrants who labored in its mills and mines (Peduto, cited in Welcoming Pittsburgh, 2015, 5).

Of course, the ultimate challenge for project proponents is getting their initiatives off the ground with very few (if any) resources. The following statement illustrates this problem for cities seeking to implement welcoming programs:

No money, no budget, no staff. […] I have an intern who's doing a fabulous job but I'm going to lose her…[…] We pay her 25% of her salary…so I pay maybe two and a half grand or whatever…[…] So I need help, we need help, we need

> bodies. I could have a whole department. We could be doing so much more…[…]
> So that's probably the biggest challenge for me is not having a budget. I do have
> you know, [project name] goodies and pens and things like that because you have
> to able to market yourself. And so I tapped into our marketing budget and try to
> steal as much as possible. I mean, like a few thousand dollars to go buy pens or a
> little folder with [project name] on it.

Program leaders piece resources together, leveraging in-kind commitments and internship positions shared with other departments or other local institutions.

These strategies – diversity branding, inter-city competition, the focus on entrepreneurial qualities of immigrants and their connection to global markets (albeit with limited funding) – are all consistent expressions of neoliberalism in downscaled cities. Directing immigrants and refugees towards residential property abandonment, however, uniquely entangles these projects with other austerity urbanism-related policy objectives.

Immigrants and Refugees: The New "Vacant Property Solution"!

In October of 2016, the WE Global Network and the Fiscal Policy Institute launched a 'Landbank Tool' that promotes immigrants as agents of abandoned property rehabilitation in the Rust Belt. This tool stemmed from a May 2015 meeting of officials from nine U.S. land banks who shared best practices within a policy model, entitled: "Immigrants: the Vacant Property Solution" (Tobocman, 2015). The interactive tool shows the immigrant households eligible to purchase abandoned homes in twenty-three cities in the Northeast and Midwest. The tool defines immigrant households as those one foreign-born adult, including both immigrants, refugees, and undocumented persons living in these metro areas. The report emphasizes that, in all but five of these cities, immigrant households are disproportionately eligible to purchase distressed homes, assuming a purchase price of $50,000 and a conservative cost to income ratio of twenty-

seven percent. In Detroit, for example, immigrants account for six percent of total households but eight percent of eligible homebuyers. Yet, urges the report, this market remains largely untapped due to immigrants' lack of credit history, down payment, and access to mortgages for distressed properties (WE Global, 2016, 10).

In addition to promoting skilled immigrants as the tools of economic revitalization, this policy model positions refugee resettlement as a solution to neighborhood disinvestment in the Rust Belt. This strategy has roots in Dayton, Ohio, where the city's "Green and Gold" economic development strategy encourages refugees to occupy abandoned homes on the North Side, envisioning them as "partners to help reimage" Dayton (Sorrell, 2015). Dayton's strategy targets the Ahiska Turkish refugee community in particular, who the U.S. Government began resettling in 2006. After six Ahiska Turkish refugee families from the Ukraine were resettled in Dayton, cheap property and opportunities in trucking made Dayton attractive to other members of this diaspora who were resettled elsewhere in the U.S. Upon acquiring the titles to abandoned properties through Montgomery County's Real Estate Acquisition Process (REAP), Dayton now markets those properties directly to its growing Ahiska Turkish community – many of whom relocate from other parts of the country (Housel, Saxen, Wahlrab, 2016; Newsom, 2015).

The promotion of refugees as neighborhood revitalizers in Dayton enjoyed considerable success and media attention. There are now three thousand Ahiska Turks living in Dayton, who have rehabilitated five hundred buildings in Old North Dayton and Riverside (Newsom, 2015). In 2013, the *New York Times* attributed North Dayton's transformation from "post-apocalyptic landscape of vacant gutted houses," to "white picket fences, new roofs and freshly painted porches" as evidence of a "brisk urban renewal led by immigrants" (Preston, 2013). At the WE Global Convention (2015), a

Dayton city planner advised the audience of a 'how to' panel on mobilizing immigrants and refugees for neighborhood revitalization: "initiate foreclosure and do direct marketing to Ahiska Turks. They self-finance the upgrades and have renovated 300 homes."

Such interventions also target other vacant city property. Since 2010, Dayton's "Vacant to Vibrant" project has earmarked land for urban agriculture. While securing new uses for vacant lots, the project also seeks to address the "well-being of Dayton urban Middle-Eastern families through access to, preparation, and consumption of locally grown produce" (Bergefurd, Mills-Wosniak, & Nye, 2015). At the 2015 WE Convention, a Dayton city planner explained to the audience that pairing immigrants and refugees with community gardens on city property is a "win win" strategy. While the new residents gain access to fresh produce that "they normally couldn't get," the city reduces its maintenance costs. As he put it bluntly, "that's great because it's less that we have to mow."

Seeing the success of "refugee-rehabs" in Old North Dayton, other cities have adopted the model. Ohio State legislation has allowed county's with populations greater than 60,000 to form land banks since 2010. In Toledo-Lucas County, the newly formed county land bank — Lucas County Land Revitalization Corporation (LRC) — spearheaded the county's welcoming project in order to drive the market for its reclaimed and rehabilitated vacant properties. The LRC approached refugee resettlement organizations with a proposal to match refugees with abandoned homes in Lucas County. One participant described the LRC's logic as follows: "they were interested in looking at ways to create more end users for a lot of the vacant and reclaimed properties they were acquiring in the core neighborhoods" (interview, 2015). This participant continued: "you know, only so many people need side yards for their

homes or urban gardens or want to take on mowing responsibilities for those vacant or abandoned properties in their neighborhoods."

Local rentiers gain by welcoming newcomers into weak housing markets with high rates of abandonment. Cleveland, for example, has 13-14,000 unoccupied, vacant structures (Rosenman & Walker, 2015) and median home sales in some neighborhoods remain as low as twenty five percent of their 2000 levels (Ford, 2016). It receives 500 to 700 refugees annually, predominantly from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia. Word has spread among property owners that renting to refugee families is 'good business' in high vacancy areas. As one observer explained, "American landlords love refugee tenants" because the "resettlement process ends […] with a signature on a lease" (Clark, 2015). If refugee tenants move out unexpectedly, resettlement organizations often help the landlords fill the unit or may pay the rent to maintain access to it (Darrow, 2015). One property investor in Cleveland explains for example that this "dependable flow of new [refugee] tenants" from Iraq, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo allows him to purchase additional properties, and to "bring two new rental apartments onto the market per month" (Clark, 2015).

In Cleveland, each of the city's three refugee serving organizations are also directly or indirectly involved in purchasing homes from the Cuyahoga County Land Bank (CLB) (interview, 2015).[2] For example, through the 'Discovering Home' program, the land bank donates foreclosed properties to the International Services Centre (ISC), a refugee resettlement organization. The ISC and land bank split the cost

[2] Catholic Charities has purchased properties directly from the Cuyahoga County Land Bank. Another agency rents homes for refugees from a construction company who purchases foreclosed homes from the CLB for under $8000. The developer now has 40 rental units, within which 80 percent of tenants are refugees. Sometimes the homes are renovated partially by refugee labor (Clark, 2015).

of the renovations, funded partially from corporate donations and rent paid by refugees.

After rehabilitating the properties, the ISC rents them to refugee clients. The following

statement by a CLB representative illustrates the underlying logic of this arrangement:

> At the land bank we make it real simple. Our primary goal is to create a situation
> where we can get property back into *productive use*. I think its fair to say, at the
> International Services Centre, their primary goal is to create *productive citizens*,
> and we felt with the marriage of those two interests, we could only have success.
> (Robertson, Cuyahoga Land Bank, 14 December 2011 [my emphasis])

From the CLB's perspective, partnering with refugee service providers is strategic.

Land banks want new residents, but need them to move to specific areas of the city.

Refugees rent the apartments that resettlement agencies secure for them, and therefore

their housing location choices are constrained initially by the resettlement process.

Immigrants, on the other hand, often choose to move to the suburbs, defying inner city

revitalization schemes.

In Cleveland, this strategy of matching refugees and vacant property has now

culminated in the "Dream Village" partnership, a project to match refugees with 200

abandoned properties surrounding the Thomas Jefferson International School on West

46th Street. The refugee resettlement agencies are working with the land bank to reclaim

abandoned properties surrounding the school. The properties will only be sold to

investors who have been "vetted" by the refugee resettlement agencies and have

"agreed to only rent to refugees" (interview, 2015). The Dream Village branding

incentivizes landlords and property investors to work with refugee service providers,

while the land bank puts refugees to work as productive citizens restoring value to

abandoned property.

Strategies of Subnational Movements

Finally, this research underscores the competing agendas and concessions that welcoming coalitions encompass in the Rust Belt, including the strategic alignment between the social justice and urban growth agendas. Project proponents view themselves as key players in the scalar politics of immigration in the U.S., framing the welcome movement as a response to stalled federal immigration reform. One participant in Cincinnati explained: "until immigration reform takes place, you know, cities have kinda taken it upon themselves to become more welcoming." For Ohio cities especially, welcoming projects are reactions to exclusionary state politics. Ohio was one of the twenty-four Republican-led States to challenge Obama's Executive Actions on immigration (DAPA and DACA) that granted temporary reprieve from deportation to the children of undocumented immigrants. A Dayton stakeholder speculated about adoption of welcoming initiatives in Ohio cities:

> I think part of it is that aspect of waiting on immigration reform and being able to do things at a local level…[…] you know, people want to be on the right side of history [laughter] while other continue to not be. So you know, I think that it's interesting how cities are responding, because in terms of, there's a clash there as well, so really thinking about how are you strategic in this work and how are you able to leverage it further. (interview, 2015)

This alignment also reflects a calculated framing of immigrant welcoming as the "smart thing to do," rather than the right thing to do (interview, 2015). For example according to a Cincinnati participant, their strategy has been to "move the conversation about diversity inclusion off of the social equity platform and to talk about it from the business imperative perspective" (interview, 2015). This narrative manoeuvre targets resistance to immigration among the business community.

Along these lines, several stakeholders I interviewed stressed the importance of having an economic impact assessment to get a "foot in the door" for their welcoming projects.

> We each commissioned independent refugee economic impact studies and used those studies to sell to other people. That's how we were able to get this subsidy…[…] I never would have gotten through the door if it wasn't for the councilman and me holding this report in my hand saying look, I have proof that refugees give back to the community 10 to 1. Huge return on investment. (interview, 2015)

Data is crucial for political buy-in. Almost all of the welcoming initiatives included in this project had embarked on data-gathering exercises. "I think our challenge is to continue to communicate the data…[…] so that's why we've been diligently working with [coalition of business leaders] so we can get some real localized data around our local foreign born population," explained another project representative.

Several participants explained that the welcoming brand itself provided the leverage required to unlock funding from various external sources.

> Technically, [our city] is not a welcoming city under the Welcoming America umbrella…[…] I think when you do that…[…] that not only brings attention to your city, but it brings potential possible funding. If you are under this umbrella, you can go for grants together…[…] I believe you're more likely to get funded for certain grants if you have these welcoming initiatives in place (interview, 2015).

The welcoming designations are important because they add leverage to grant applications for other projects. As this participant put it, the office of resettlement would not "just hand over" money to a city that was "known not to be welcoming," and had no coordinated network (interview, 2015).

Concluding Discussion

As cities have become more active players in the politics of immigration in the United States, scholars have been increasingly concerned with their role in the governance of immigration and integration. Across a landscape of uneven municipal policy responses, Rust Belt cities have emerged at the forefront of economic development-centred immigration initiatives, coordinated by the Welcoming Economies Global Network. This article situates the WE Global Network (and its members), within recent calls for attention to development-inclusionary initiatives as an understudied third register of local responses to immigration (Filomeno, 2015). It also considers how these initiatives are enmeshed with austerity urbanist agendas in Rust Belt cities.

I have argued here that the Rust Belt welcoming movement reveals the incongruities and complexities that welcoming coalitions encompass across an intensified neoliberal landscape. On one hand, actors motivated by an urban growth agenda frame immigrants as crucial to soldering broken links between Rust Belt city- and global -economies. Immigrants are seen as pivotal to restoring or achieving global city status by tapping into flows of capital, people, and innovation. These projects are being embraced with such rapidity in part because they dovetail with the recent revival of the Rust Belt mythos as a former industrial heartland abandoned by globalization but resilient in spirit. By mobilizing refugees as solutions to residential abandonment, development-inclusionary practices are becoming increasingly entangled with the "austerity machine" (Donald et al., 2014): the land banks, real estate investors and rehabilitators, and others who aim to restore growth to weakened property markets. Growth-oriented actors appeal to narratives about the Rust Belt's immigration legacy, including a nostalgic association of immigrant labour in "sweat and steel," in order to substantiate their agendas.

On the other hand, other actors within these coalitions are motivated by a social justice agenda – supporting and advocating for migrant and refugee rights (including housing market discrimination – but promote the economic benefits of welcoming immigrants and refugees in order to reach the business community, local rentiers, and city officials. The former actors recognize that substantive welcoming requires a focus on social justice, combatting racism and discrimination, and tackling affordable housing, yet strategically frame refugees as "smart" solutions in order to leverage private sector interests.

Across this regional patchwork of local responses, there are success stories like Dayton, where refugees have restored value to foreclosed property and where welcoming has also been founded in a social justice framework (Housel et al., 2016). But, refugees are also settled in landscapes of extreme poverty and racial segregation, where, on top of barriers to labor market participation and social integration (including language acquisition, housing affordability), they are vulnerable to abuse by landlords who extract rents but do not meet housing codes (see Mandak, 2015). The desire to sell immigration and refugee resettlement as a positive force in Rust Belt cities may translate into a tendency to dismissal of evidence that could damage the welcoming brand. As one Pittsburgh participant put it: "I've been in two meetings in the past 24 hours with the mayor and in both meetings I felt like I was with a whole group of people who made it their life's work to say things are good when they may not be" (interview, 2015).

This trend is vitally relevant to the broader question of immigrant incorporation as "laissez faire" market-led incorporation strategies become increasingly pervasive. Scholars have rightly raised serious questions about the appearance of laissez-faire diversity management strategies at the expense of national policies such as

multiculturalism that have, despite their flaws, entrenched equality and the legal

protection of minority interests (Collins & Friesen, 2011; Ley, 2013). The linking of

self-employment and integration is problematic given the potential for already-

marginalized immigrants and refugees to become trapped in low skill sectors with

limited prospects for growth (Pecoud, 2002). The implication that newcomers can pull

themselves – and entire Rust Belt cities – up by their 'bootstraps' places the onus for

integration on the individual, relieving the state from this responsibility.

This policy model extends across the U.S. and Europe. In 2014, for example,

Syracuse, New York's Mayor Stephanie Miner, for example, referenced Lazarus' "The

New Colossus" in her letter to President Obama on migrant children. Minor emphasized

Syracuse's legacy of welcoming the "huddled masses" and implored Obama to send

detained "migrant children awaiting deportation" to Syracuse, where they could be

housed in vacant convents (Knauss, 2014). Though unsuccessful, this plan reveals the

paradoxes involved in municipal immigration politics – Miner plays to nostalgia for

immigration in the U.S. to garner support for a detention center that would restore

productivity to property. Similar projects are underway in European cities and regions,

including Friedland, a former East German town where Syrian refugees have been

welcomed as a way to fill apartments left vacant by out-migration and an aging

population (Nicholas, 2015). Underlying these humanitarian efforts is an underlying

expectation that immigrants and refugees will cure shrinking cities. Future research

could examine and compare the compromises entailed within these welcoming

coalitions in the Rust Belt and similar projects in other jurisdictions.

Moving forward, there is also a need for scholars to study the implementation of

welcoming policies and programs at the local level, and to examine their substantive

nature and trajectory in metropolitan contexts over time. I used membership in the WE

Global Network as the key mechanism for selecting cases: as a proxy for the implicit endorsement of development-inclusionary local action. This approach allowed me to examine the diverse set of interests within the WE Global Network, but has limitations in that it precludes broader analysis of other progressive movements operating in tandem, such as the Cities for Citizenship and Cities for Action movement. This approach also does not analyse the impacts on the populations targeted by the policies, or the responses of existing residents to the initiatives. Future research should delve more deeply into these linkages and impacts.

Finally, while this article calls attention to the ways in which inclusionary narratives in the Rust Belt place the burden of revitalization on immigrants and refugees, I acknowledge that there are far worse alternatives in the landscape of urban responses to immigration. Data collection for this project took place from April 2014 until the last WE Global Network convention in Philadelphia in October of 2016. Several weeks before the U.S. presidential election, the tone of the convention was hopeful, despite the exclusionary immigration rhetoric promoted by the Trump campaign. The inauguration of Donald Trump in January of 2017, and his administration's subsequent Executive Orders on immigration, has raised the stakes of local activism on immigration immeasurably, including the importance of WE Global and its members. Nonetheless, it remains important to acknowledge that welcoming projects, even if producing positive results, are not silver bullets for systemic economic decline.

Acknowledgements

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