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## **Sanctuary cities as a global positioning strategy. The cases of Valencia and Saragossa (Spain)**

### **Las ciudades santuario como una estrategia para situarse en el mundo. Los casos de Valencia y Zaragoza (España)**

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#### **Abstract**

This case study seeks to define and compare the actions proposed by the local councils of Valencia and Saragossa, two Spanish cities declared 'sanctuary' status. Its time frame begins in 2015, a key year in the Mediterranean refugee crisis, in which the political landscape changed in both cities following the local elections. Thenceforth, their city councils have included budget items for refugee aid. In addition, they have issued institutional statements, launched awareness campaigns, collaborated with non-governmental organisations, joined city networks in solidarity with refugees and participated in international meetings and conferences. However, an analysis of the results suggests that these initiatives are dependent on political party strategies, rather than on a true sense of civic commitment. Despite being an effective strategy for positioning cities in the world with their own discourse, its implementation is subject to local political dynamics, which results in fragile proposals.

#### **Keywords**

Sanctuary cities; refugees; public diplomacy; Valencia; Saragossa; Aquarius

#### **Resumen**

Los objetivos de la presente investigación son conocer y comparar las acciones planteadas por los ayuntamientos de València y Zaragoza, dos poblaciones españolas declaradas 'ciudad refugio'. El periodo de análisis de este estudio de casos parte de 2015, año clave en la crisis de refugiados en el Mediterráneo, y en el que ambas poblaciones experimentaron un cambio político tras las elecciones municipales. Los consistorios incluyen a partir de ese año partidas presupuestarias para la ayuda al refugiado, realizan declaraciones institucionales, campañas de concienciación, colaboran con ONG, se integran en redes de municipios de solidaridad con los refugiados y participan en encuentros y jornadas internacionales. Sin embargo, el análisis de los resultados sugiere que estas apuestas dependen de estrategias de partido más que de un verdadero sentido de ciudad. A pesar de suponer una táctica eficaz para situar a las ciudades en el mundo, con un discurso autónomo, su implementación se encuentra sometida a las dinámicas políticas locales, lo que las convierte en propuestas frágiles.

#### **Palabras clave**

Ciudades santuario; refugiados; diplomacia pública; València; Zaragoza; Aquarius

## 1. Introduction

Over the past years there has been an important increase in migratory flows all over the world, thus putting immigration at the centre of public debate. This state of affairs has been exacerbated by the movement of people fleeing from armed conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. In 2018, it was estimated that there might be some 20 million refugees in the world, less than a third of those who could be regarded as having been forcibly displaced, who account for over 70 million (Hatton, 2020). In light of this situation, some cities have emerged as key players in attending to the needs of migrants or refugees. They are collectives that require a technical solution to their basic needs (healthcare, housing, education, social work, employment, etc.) which are usually met at a local level (Brandt, 2018). The aim is not to grant them citizenship, but to establish procedures that place the accent on dealing with the problem from a human rights perspective.

'Sanctuary cities' implement "policies and practices [that] generally serve the purpose of accommodating illegalized migrants and refugees in urban communities" (Bauder 2016: 174). Whatever involves facilitating "access to services for irregular migrants that are taken in spite of, and to a degree mitigating, restrictive national legal and policy frameworks" (Spencer and Delvino 2019: 27) is also called 'municipal activism'.

All over the world, it is mainly cities that are making the greatest efforts to attend to the needs arising from migratory flows, much more so than other administrative bodies (Oomen, 2019). Despite the fact that their degree of autonomy and decision-making capacity is not on par with their real level of responsibility for migrants, cities have assumed this role and are attempting to play it.

Thus, it is of great interest to analyse the specific actions proposed by cities declared 'sanctuaries' in different migratory contexts, specifically the Mediterranean refugee crisis (2015) which led different Spanish cities, like Valencia and Saragossa—both objects of study here—to take action.

Since the 1980s, in the United States the term 'sanctuary cities', which defines those cities that offer protection to illegal immigrants or asylum seekers, has gained popularity (Price, 2014: 15). Over 50 US cities currently call themselves 'welcoming cities' (Kim & Bozarth, 2020). The current state of affairs flies in the face of this philosophy, owing to the values that Trumpism has transmitted to the world and which have fostered populist, nationalist and chauvinistic discourses (Roy, 2019). Notwithstanding this, approximately 300 local administrations are currently refusing to collaborate with the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2020).

However, it is a global phenomenon. Cities like Barcelona, Amsterdam, The Hague and Toronto are adapting and innovating on their own sanctuary practices (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2020: 13). Berlin autonomously manages its own reception policies (Koca, 2019), while Ottawa has known how to involve civil society in order to achieve integration in the face of the state's neoliberal policies (Veronis, 2019). Collaboration between city councils and civil society is key to developing a policy that goes beyond the local, an aspect that Bazurli (2019) has highlighted in Barcelona and Milan.

On the other hand, the reception of migrants has given rise to messages relating reception policies to crime, which makes it difficult to maintain a calm debate on the issue (Gonzalez O'Brien et al., 2019). In point of fact, the rejection of immigration is one of the foundations on which the extreme-right movements emerging all around the world are based (Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Gallego, 2017; Edo et al., 2019; Hansen and Clemens, 2019; Hutchins and Halikiopoulou, 2019; Bialasiewicz and Stallone, 2020; Cheung-Blunden, 2020; Roupakias and Chletsos, 2020). This negative reaction to immigration is now a reality in a growing number of countries where, in some cases like Turkey, it has been discovered that hate speeches are being amplified via digital media (Erdogan-Ozturk e Isik Guler, 2020). As a result, civil society initiatives aimed at promoting transnational solidarity organisations have also proliferated (Kanellopoulos et al., 2020).

These situations are occurring in a context marked by globalisation, which has redefined cities as "strategic spaces for understanding critical tendencies in the reshaping of the social order" (Sassen, 2007: 129). Refuge or sanctuary cities disobey federal and state regulations. The practice of power allows either for aligning with the power of the state and international organisations or for active dissent in the form of political practices in opposition to state regulations, thus breaking with the unity of action as regards foreign policy.

This internal dissent of cities in opposition to the state first appeared in the United States during the Vietnam War. Deserters found refuge in the city of Berkeley, immersed in the counter-culture war and hippy culture at the time, active values of a city narrative far removed from the system of the Washington elites (Ridgley, 2008). As of the 1980s, several other cities, including San Francisco, would begin to play an active role in the reception of people displaced by the Central American wars, such as those in El Salvador and Guatemala (Price, 2014: 15).

This practice does not imply challenging national sovereignty, but involves the performance of a local political activity that has national or even international repercussions. Sanctuary cities combine three characteristics that make them relevant examples of the exercise of soft power (Artero, 2019a):

- They reflect social demands.
- They highlight the consequences of state migratory policy for local governments and institutions.
- They disagree with state foreign policy.

A close example is the sanctuary city of Milan, noteworthy because of the establishment of a "local state of emergency" in which the city's actions contrasted sharply with the state's narrative and policies, especially in the legal, discursive and political realms (Artero, 2019b: 148).

For Garcés and Eitel (2019), those cities declared sanctuaries want to be involved. They want to be able to express their views and to act. They challenge the state as to who can remain and under what conditions. They do so in their own jurisdictions, protecting those who the state wants to deport, thus creating a more inclusive concept of 'us' and welcoming those who are not legally under their authority, but who nonetheless are on their streets. These cities also act at an international level, creating networks of urban alliances and demanding a more important role in supranational decision-making.

This more active role coincides with the consolidation of a model of international relations in which soft power has become more relevant. The concept, coined by Nye (1990), involves the use of tools like diplomacy, the economy or culture to influence the rest of the political actors. This concept not only affects the way in which states act (Nye, 2004: 90). The use of soft power by cities has been prolifically studied over the past few years, owing to the fact that it has paved the way for a new type of city-to-city politics (Cull, 2017). It is currently being developed in diverse fields, such as healthcare (Acuto, Morissette and Tsouros, 2017), creativity (Dudek-Mańkowska and Grochowski, 2019) and culture (De Andrade and Forte dos Santos, 2020).

These characteristics, combined with the fact that increasingly more cities all over the world have decided to take this step, have converted this phenomenon into a relevant aspect for researching on the way in which it offers cities an opportunity to connect and participate at a global level; cities united by their rebel nature, by their way of infringing their own legal constraints and participating, with their own voice, in internationally relevant issues. In this case, by weaving translocal solidarity networks to combat human crises, like those triggered by the mass arrival of refugees in recent years (Heimann et al., 2019).

One of these international initiatives is the 'Solidarity Cities' project, in the framework of the EUROCITIES network, which highlights the political leadership of cities when addressing the refugee crisis in Europe. Promoted by Barcelona, Athens, Berlin and Amsterdam (2016), the network's intention is to transfer refugees directly from one city to another, at arm's length from state management (<https://ciutatrefugi.barcelona/es>). Previously, in 2015 the mayors/mayoresses of Barcelona, Paris, Lesbos and Lampedusa had appealed to the European governments to become involved in refugee affairs (The Local.com, 2015).

Cities have the potential to foster solidarity through both institutional alliances and basic demands for "the right to the city" (Vandevoordt and Verschraegen, 2019). However, the political category of sanctuary city or place of refuge has not been without criticism. The efficiency of sanctuary policies deserves a detailed analysis that avoids the appeal of a city label or brand without political content (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2020: 8).

Against this backdrop, the Spanish cities of Valencia <sup>[1]</sup> and Saragossa were declared 'sanctuary' status in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The experience of both cities offers an interesting opportunity for analysing differences and similarities in the way in which they have addressed an issue like the refugee crisis in which Europe is currently immersed. Valencia is also a city that has played an especially important role, given that it was the port in which the ships carrying the refugees from the *Aquarius*, a rescue ship for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean in fragile vessels, finally docked. In June 2018, the city received international coverage, after Italy and Malta had refused to allow the ship to enter its ports with 629 migrants on board and Spain had offered it the possibility of using the port of Valencia.

## 2. Methodology

The research objectives are to determine and compare the actions implemented by the local councils of the Spanish cities of Valencia and Saragossa from 2015 to 2019, on the basis of two research questions:

What type of actions did these city councils implement after being declared sanctuary cities? And was this decision reflected in their local budgets?

The time frame of this study begins in 2015, a key year in the context of the Mediterranean refugee crisis. In August of that year, the mayoress of Barcelona Ada Colau proposed creating a sanctuary city network, in which Valencia offered to participate from the word go (eldiario.es, 2015). Although it initially involved local councils governed by the so-called 'platforms for change', such as Guanyem (Let's Win), and political parties like Podemos, those of different political bents began to join the network, which demanded from the central government, then presided by Mariano Rajoy, greater solidarity and speed when reacting to the humanitarian emergency.

Valencia and Saragossa are two cities of a similar size, with 794,288 and 674,997 inhabitants, respectively, on 1 January 2019 (INE, 2019). They are both regional capitals (of the autonomous communities of Valencia and Aragon) which play an important role in the organisation of their respective territories. In 2015, both reflected the changing local political landscape in Spain. In both cases, the candidates of different left-wing coalitions (Compromís in Valencia and Zaragoza en Común in Saragossa) won the local elections, after other parties had been in power for years: the People's Party (hereinafter PP) in Valencia for 24 years and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (hereinafter PSOE) in Saragossa for 12 (four of which in coalition).

In view of the foregoing, it was decided to perform a case study. Of all the different techniques that this methodology employs documentary analysis was chosen. In relation to the research objectives, a review was performed on the press releases and reports available on the official websites of the local councils of Valencia and Saragossa for the purpose of enquiring into the institutional actions that they had implemented since 2015. The information obtained from this channel was then supplemented with local press reports.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Valencia**

Valencia was declared a sanctuary city by its local council in an ordinary meeting held on 25 September 2015. This decision was made following the local elections, held on 24 May of the same year, in which Joan Ribó, belonging to the party Compromís, was elected as the mayor, after reaching an agreement with the PSOE and València en Comú, thus bringing the uninterrupted mayoralty of Rita Barberá of the PP to an end after 24 years.

Valencia was declared a sanctuary city "in order to support the people attempting to reach the EU Member States after having to flee from the serious humanitarian crises (for political or economic reasons or because of war or the denial of their human rights) into which their countries of origin have been plunged". This initiative formed part of the international development cooperation policy that Valencia City Council had been implementing since 2015, with the creation of the Development Co-operation and Migration Department. On 30 June 2016, Valencia City Council's adherence to the Spanish Local Refugee Reception Network was approved. That same year, Valencia hosted the Euro-Mediterranean Meeting on Solidarity with Refugees (hereinafter SOLIMED), on which the city spent €61,793.38, according to the council.

The Development Co-operation and Migration Department was created in 2015 with the aim of addressing the global situation in the twenty-first century, which involved 'responsibilities' for municipalities: "There is a need to address the local consequences whose roots are in global inequalities: poverty, discrimination and exclusion, armed conflicts, unfair working conditions, the exploitation of natural resources ... " (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a). The department has since released institutional statements, including 'Valencia, Fair Trade City' (2018), and in support of Hebron (2019) and the Wilaya of Auserd: the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (2017) (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a).

The department has also presented manifestos on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, while also collaborating with the Zero Poverty Campaign on the International Day for the Elimination of Poverty each year since 2015 (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2020b). In the 2017 edition, Ribó highlighted the local council's commitment to the objectives of Zero Poverty: "Working for social justice from the local world to contribute to change the global world. Whereby for us development co-operation is a fundamental line in order that the relations between the countries of the world should be based on other links that are not merely commercial or economic, but also humane" (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020b). The mayor expressed these demands at the Mayors' Summit of the Milan Pact, a few days before Valencia hosted the 3rd Global Mayors' Forum (GMF) (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a). Along these lines, in 2019 the 'Valencia for Global Justice' campaign was launched with the aim of raising

the citizenry's awareness and encouraging more bodies, associations and people to get involved in the construction of a fairer city and world (Viu València, 2019).

In 2016, the mayor of Valencia participated in the 'Solidacities' meeting at the seat of the European Parliament in Brussels, accompanied by Roberto Jaramillo, the then counsellor for development co-operation and migration. In his speech, Ribó stressed "the shame that I have felt for months as a Europeanist due to the silence and neglect of the institutions and to the agreement with Turkey, a violation of all the guiding principles of Europe" (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a).

On a yearly basis, Valencia City Council, through its Development Co-operation and Migration Department, launches a call for international development co-operation projects aimed at non-governmental development organisations (hereinafter NGOs) for funding actions that contribute to forge stronger ties between Valencia and poor countries and to promote the defence of human rights, among other objectives. The Municipal Co-operation Council and the Development Co-operation and Migration Service were created in 2016 and 2017, respectively. The Development Co-operation Programme promotes actions aimed at southern countries, including economic and technical co-operation, municipal co-operation and humanitarian action and emergencies (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a).

In 2018, the 1st Development Co-operation and Solidarity Plan was drafted (Iborra, 2018) for the purpose of strengthening the commitment of the citizenry of Valencia to southern peoples and local governments. This plan marked the beginning of a stage in the local council's support for development co-operation employing new tools, which help to make more consensual strategic decisions in the long term, with the aim of gaining deeper insights into the social impact of the solidarity actions carried out by the co-operation agents present and active in the city. In this connection, the evolution of the contributions of the local council considered as official development assistance (ODA) can be divided into three clearly defined periods in relation to the goal of a budget commitment of 0.7 per cent (Iborra, 2018):

- First period. Corresponding to the implementation and consolidation of the council's co-operation policy from 1995 to 2011.

- Second period. The rolling back of the co-operation policy from 2012 to 2015. In 2012, it was all but eliminated, with only two projects barely accounting for 0.005 per cent of the municipal budget and, in the following years, with contributions ranging from 0.03 to 0.07 per cent. During this period, no calls were launched in 2012 or 2013. According to the information provided by Valencia City Council, in accordance with the regulations governing transparency, access to information and good governance, there was no specific municipal budget item for refugee aid in 2015.

In September 2015, when the local council changed hands following the elections in May of that year, an item of €200,000 was approved for the reception and support of the refugees arriving in Valencia after fleeing from the Middle Eastern conflict. The budget item was deducted from that of international relations (Elperiodic.com, 2015).

- Third period. Beginning in 2016, it corresponds to a stage in which the co-operation policy was recuperated and revamped. That same year, the first budget involving a notable increase with respect to the previous period was approved, with 0.18 per cent being devoted to co-operation. In 2017, this budget item accounted for 0.23 per cent of the total (€1,927,455.63). In 2018, the budget items for refugee aid and development co-operation were increased to over €3.5 million. And in the 2019 budget, €3,709,236.53 were devoted to the two items, accounting for 0.43 per cent of the total (€849.22 million).

### **'Our city, your refuge'**

'Our city, your refuge' is a local project run by three prominent non-governmental organisations (hereinafter NGOs) in the field of development aid: ACCEM, the Refugee Aid Commission (hereinafter CEAR-PV) and the Spanish Red Cross, specialising in attending to the needs of asylum seekers and refugees (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a). Since Valencia was declared a sanctuary city in September 2015, the three organisations have striven to improve the integration of refugees in the city, with information and awareness raising campaigns, asylum-seeker and refugee training courses for local government workers, and the management of economic aid for covering the basic needs and preliminary reception of refugees with their temporary accommodation in hostels and shelters (<http://lanostraciutatelteurefugi.com>).

In February 2018, ACCEM, CEAR-PV and the Spanish Red Cross took stock of the first two years of the project. One of their conclusions was that the three organisations had 484 reception places. Rima Said, ACCEM's technician, stated that, since Valencia had been declared a sanctuary city, "We have noticed the local government's intention to do something irrespective of what is being done in Europe." As to the support

that refugees receive in Valencia, Said underscored the economic aid, allowing them to cover their basic needs. For its part, the city is also working to create a space in which refugees can make their opinions known to the rest of the population. "Our aim is to raise the citizenry's awareness," she added. Furthermore, local government workers are being given asylum-seeker and refugee training courses (Cadena Ser, 2018).

Three months later, ACCEM, CEAR-PV and the Spanish Red Cross launched the 'Valencia, sanctuary city 2018' campaign, promoted by the local council, for the purpose of raising the awareness of the citizenry and involving them in the commitment to guarantee that refugees have the same rights as the rest of the population (*La Vanguardia*, 2018a). Under the slogan, 'With your involvement we will share the same rights', the campaign formed part of other international activities carried out during the same month in the context of the celebration of the World Refugee Day on 20 June. In this campaign, a symbolic image of the citizenry of Valencia appealed to the responsibility of the city's inhabitants so as to guarantee the basic rights of refugees, "such as decently paid jobs, rented accommodation, access to education, healthcare and social services, protection and justice" (Ayuntamiento València, 2020a). The three NGOs placed the spotlight on the 1,429 requests for international protection received by the Aliens Office of Valencia in 2017, a 40.9 per cent year-on-year increase, according to the figures released by the city council. At the end of May 2018, the council granted the 'Our city, your refuge' programme a subsidy of €200,000 (*Levante-EMV*, 2018).

Another refugee support initiative was the 'RefugiArte' campaign (2017). This consisted in an exhibition of works of art donated by artists and creators from all over the Valencian community, the proceeds of whose sale went towards supporting organisations working with refugees (*Viu Valencia*, 2017). In addition to the exhibition, the campaign included transversal actions, such as theatre, music, dance, poetry and performances. Jaramillo, the then counsellor of development co-operation and migration, claimed that the initiative was "yet another clear demonstration that the solidarity of Valencian society is way above that of the administrations, especially the central government". Jaramillo precisely regretted the lack of information provided by the central government on the refugees arriving in the city: "They do not work with us, they are keeping us completely in the dark, and I believe that this should be repeated over and over again: We want to collaborate so that these people can come to our city, we want to form part of the solution and not of the problem, and whenever organised civil society puts forward proposals in this respect, Valencia City Council will be there to support them" (*Viu Valencia*, 2017).

On 12 June 2018, the city council hung a poster on the city hall's balcony in which Valencia was vindicated as a 'sanctuary city', after the Sánchez government had authorised the reception of the 629 migrants on board the ship *Aquarius*. The mayor of Valencia had offered the city as a refuge a week before, after consulting the matter with Ximo Puig and Mónica Oltra, the president and vice-president of the Valencian regional government, respectively (Ayuntamiento de València, 2020a).

The poster featured the slogan, 'Valencia, Sanctuary City', together with the hashtag #volem acollir! (We want to receive). This poster had already been hung on the balcony of the city hall in September 2017 on the occasion of a nationwide action to demand that the central government comply with the refugee quota to which it had committed itself. The mayor tweeted a photo of the poster and highlighted the work of social organisations for being "essential for the reception of the refugees on board the *Aquarius*". Ribó also thanked CEAR-PV, the Red Cross, ACNUR, Cáritas, the Cepaim foundation and other organisations and individuals "willing to help at all times" (EFE, 2018).

### **The arrival of the *Aquarius* refugees**

The three ships carrying the 629 refugees rescued from the ship *Aquarius* in the Central Mediterranean arrived in the port of Valencia on Sunday, 17 June 2018, after an eight-day voyage following the refusal of Italy and Malta to allow them to disembark (RTVE, 2018). The refugees arrived after President Pedro Sánchez had issued instructions that Spain should fulfil "its international obligations vis-à-vis humanitarian crises" and both Valencia City Council and the regional government declared the city and the Valencian community as a whole 'a place of reception'. Coming from 31 countries (the majority from African states like Sudan, Algeria, Eritrea and Nigeria, and to a lesser extent from Asian ones like Afghanistan and Pakistan), the refugees' arrival was the first phase of reception and integration (Ayuntamiento de València, 2018).

The 'Mediterranean Hope' operation, involving 2,300 people including healthcare and social workers, lawyers and members of the security forces, received an enormous amount of media coverage, with the presence of 700 accredited journalists from 140 media outlets. The 11-hour operation was co-ordinated by three administrations and humanitarian action organisations, with the Red Cross at the forefront. It also relied on a large number of volunteers, "committed citizens who demonstrated their solidarity and support",

who were thanked for showing "our city at its best", according to the press release issued by the 'Our city, your refuge' project (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2018).

"Valencia has taught the world a lesson. Today, the city associated with corruption in the past has made a historical gesture of solidarity by receiving the migrants of the *Aquarius*," the headline in *La Vanguardia* claimed. The city had been converted "into the paradigm of solidarity, humanity and protection of human rights. This has been sufficient to shake the public conscience in a Europe contaminated by populisms and where there has been much resistance and many refusals to rescue people in the Mediterranean, the same sea in which immigrants die each day. Valencia and the *Aquarius* will thus remain associated with a humanitarian action that both Malta and Italy refused to carry out" (*La Vanguardia*, 2018b).

Three years before, Valencia City Council and the regional government of Valencia had attempted to open 'a humanitarian sea corridor', offering to charter a ship belonging to the company Balearia and to send it to Lesbos to rescue over 1,000 refugees. "It was a clear attempt to underscore the new approach being taken by the government of Valencia, after years of the PP in power." The Spanish government led by Mariano Rajoy rejected the initiative, but the groundwork served as a dress rehearsal for an emergency rescue operation like the one carried out to receive the *Aquarius* refugees (*La Vanguardia*, 2018b).

This initiative was proposed in 2015 after the impact caused by the publication of photographs of the lifeless body of Aylan, the Syrian boy who had drowned in the Mediterranean. "The people of Valencia empathise with the suffering of others. Accordingly, 11 autonomous communities have signed this manifesto led by the Valencian Community," the mayor of Valencia recalled in an interview for RFI (2018). "We asked Mariano Rajoy, the then president of the Spanish government, to become involved in the reception of people. But he did not allow it."

In 2019, the mayor of Valencia yet again offered to receive the ship *Open Arms* of the Spanish NGO Proactiva, which was sailing with 121 immigrants on board, all rescued in the Mediterranean. Ribó announced that, together with the Valencian regional government, he was going to request the central government, with jurisdiction in the matter, to allow the ship to dock in the city's port. In the event that the central government gave its authorisation, an operation similar to that involving the *Aquarius* would have been carried out. However, on this occasion the option of docking in Valencia was ruled out due to the state of refugees, who had begun to suffer from post-traumatic stress after six days on board the ship, "caused by their experience in the terrible Libyan detention camps". The ship was waiting for a reply from the European Commission to disembark in Italy or Malta (*Levante-EMV*, 2019).

### 3.2. Saragossa

In 2015, the lawyer Pedro Santistevé was elected as the mayor of Saragossa after heading the list of candidates fielded by Zaragoza en Común (hereinafter ZEC), an amalgam of many left-wing parties and coalitions and citizens. Santistevé was able to occupy the post thanks to an agreement between the nine councillors of ZEC, the six belonging to the PSOE and the two representing the Chunta Aragonesista. This brought the 12-year mayoralty of Juan Alberto Belloch (PSOE) to an end and was the first time since 1979 that the city's mayor or mayoress belonged to a party other than the PSOE or the PP.

Despite the fact that only one paragraph of Santistevé's (2015) inaugural address referred to development co-operation, the city council's stance on international policy soon became clear to all. On 1 July, the PP of Saragossa criticised the new council for hanging the Greek flag on the balcony of the city hall (Civieta, 2015). To this would be subsequently added those of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Palestine. The council thus demonstrated the city's commitment to solidarity. A few months after the local elections, the new council also announced its intention to become a sanctuary city (Orfín, 2015).

The activities relating to this commitment became clear almost immediately. In November, Luisa Broto, the vice-mayoress and the councillor of social rights of Saragossa City Council, received Raquel Marfí, the executive director of the Spanish branch of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2015a).

After its election, the new council implemented several work lines. On the one hand, it attempted to forge alliances with those NGOs working in the field of development co-operation (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2015b) and to place municipal resources at their disposal for attending to the migrants arriving in the city. And, on the other, Saragossa joined national and international networks of like-minded cities. This second work line also led to the consolidation of Saragossa as a benchmark city as regards policies of this sort, insofar as it helped it to gain national and international visibility.

In October 2016, the mayor Santistevé attended a seminar at the European Parliament in which he explained the measures that had been taken in Saragossa to attend to the needs of refugees, as well as participating in the 'Solidacities' meeting, together with representatives of different European cities including Paris, Stockholm, Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2016a). In November of that same year, he requested the direct management of the reception of refugees at the SOLIMED held in Valencia, which was attended by over 200 people from 18 countries (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2016b).

A few weeks afterwards, the mayor visited Valencia where he participated in the 'Europe: Refugees Are Our Brothers and Sisters' meeting, together with the representatives of other Spanish cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Malaga (Lasmarías, 2016). At the meeting, he signed the European Covenant of Mayors (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2016c), which some 70 cities endorsed.

This commitment also implied taking the initiative along with other cities when decrying the actions of other institutions. Thus, in September 2017 Saragossa attended the Congress of Deputies to criticise the management of European funds earmarked for migrant and refugee aid and integration (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2017a).

This commitment to refugees was symbolically renewed in June 2017, when the council adopted, with the abstention of the PP, a motion in which the city's role as a sanctuary was underscored. The central government was also urged to opt out of all those agreements, covenants or action proposals that did not respect the international right to asylum and international human rights conventions (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2017b).

The city also offered itself as a place of refuge in some of the most dramatic episodes resulting from the Mediterranean refugee crisis, as in the case of the *Aquarius* in 2018. At that moment, even Jorge Azcón, the then spokesperson of the PP for Saragossa City Council (currently the city's mayor), expressed his willingness to "attend to the needs of the greatest number of people possible" (Sánchez Borroy, 2018).

Also in 2018, the city council awarded the *Open Arms*, the rescue ship operating in the Mediterranean, the 'Star of Europe', in commemoration of Europe Day (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2018a).

Therefore, during ZEC's four-year term in office gestures towards the plight of refugees abounded, converting the city into a proactive agent in the national and international public debate on the issue.

The local elections held in May 2019 led to political change in Saragossa. The new political landscape characterised by a majority of right-wing parties resulted in Jorge Azcón being elected as mayor, with the support of Ciudadanos and VOX.

In his inaugural address, the new mayor did not make any reference either to development co-operation or to migrants who currently account for 14 per cent of the population of Saragossa (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2019a: 10), 4 per cent more than the national average (INE, 2019). Although he did indeed refer to the city's international promotion, but linking it to issues like the economy and tourism (Azcón, 2019). A few weeks after occupying his new post and in light of the news arriving from Italy in relation to the situation of the *Open Arms*, the mayor announced that Saragossa would offer its support, "as it has always done", to the responsible administrations managing the situation (EFE, 2019). He thus shifted the responsibility onto the shoulders of other institutions (the central government and the regional government of Aragon), leaving the city to play a secondary support role. This contrasted with the much more proactive attitude characterising the previous administration, with plenty of public advocacy and actions at different levels, in which the city's commitment was evinced.

In September of that same year, ZEC tabled a motion in which the city was requested to reaffirm its commitment to its sanctuary city status, which was embodied in three specific proposals: (1) that the city of Saragossa should reaffirm its commitment to its sanctuary city status, making resources available and anticipating the problems that might arise as regards the needs of asylum seekers and refugees; (2) that the 'Saragossa: host city' programme be adequately staffed, increasing the number of social workers and engaging experienced social educators to offer people adequate attention; and (3) that the central government be urged to establish the means for reaching agreements with local administrations, with the aim of receiving refugees, following the same procedures as those existing between the Secretary of State for Immigration and Migration and social bodies and NGOs.

Only Points 1 and 3 of the motion were adopted with the votes in favour of the PSOE, ZEC and Podemos and the abstention of the PP and Ciudadanos (Point 1) and the votes in favour of the PSOE, ZEC, Podemos, the PP and Ciudadanos and the abstention of VOX (Point 3). Point 2, which involved the largest outlay, was rejected with the votes of the PP, Ciudadanos and VOX against its adoption (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2019b). The change in the political landscape had ultimately affected gestures and commitments.



## Budget commitments

In 2015, Saragossa City Council's budget did not include any specific item for refugee aid. And it was precisely then when the refugee crisis in Europe and the Mediterranean peaked (ACNUR, 2015), as well as coinciding with the local elections that would bring about an unprecedented political change in the city.

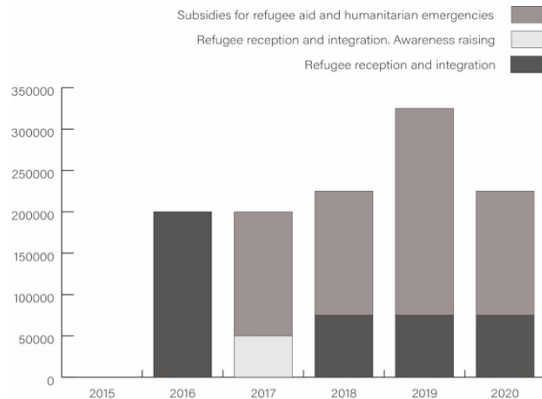
After the city council had joined the sanctuary city network, the 2016 budget included for the first time an item for the 'Reception and integration of refugees', amounting to €200,000 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2016d). The following year, this was maintained (€200,000), although now divided into two different items: 'Reception and integration of refugees and awareness raising' (€50,000) and 'Subsidies for the reception of refugees and humanitarian emergencies' (€150,000) (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2017c).

In 2018, the total amount was increased slightly to €225,000: 'Reception and integration of refugees' (€75,000) and 'Subsidies for the reception of refugees and humanitarian emergencies' (€150,000) (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2018b).

However, it was in 2019, in the last budget to be presented by the city council before the local elections, when the largest amount was devoted to these two items, namely €325,000: 'Reception and integration of refugees' (€75,000) and 'Subsidies for the reception of refugees and humanitarian emergencies' (€250,000) (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2019c).

After the change in government in 2019, spending in this regard was reduced by €25,000 to its previous level, viz., €225,000: 'Reception and integration of refugees' (€75,000) and 'Subsidies for the reception of refugees and humanitarian emergencies' (€150,000) (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2020).

**Graph 1. Evolution of the budget items for refugee aid approved by Saragossa City Council**



Source: Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza. Own elaboration.

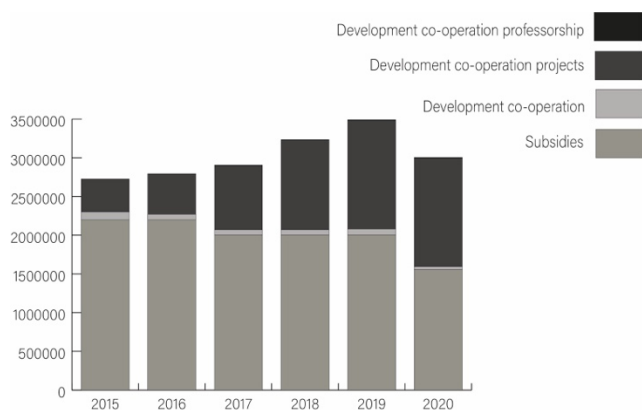
Beyond symbolic issues, gestures and conveying the city's message, at least during the first year of management by the government team of the right-wing parties (the PP and Ciudadanos, with the external support of VOX) the budget items for refugee aid remained at a level similar to that of the last years of the ZEC government. In point of fact, they were the same as in 2018 and higher than in 2016 and 2017.

Considering specific budget items for development co-operation and attending to the migrant population, it is also possible to observe an interesting evolution in the past few years, above all in 2020.

In 2015, there were several budget items for co-operation (development co-operation, development co-operation subsidies and development co-operation projects) amounting to €2,725,000 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2015c). The amount devoted to these three budget items was first increased in 2016, totalling €2,795,000 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2016d). In the following years, they continued to increase, including as of 2017 a small item (€10,000) for the development co-operation professorship created in collaboration with the University of Saragossa. Thus, in 2017 a total of €2,905,000 were devoted to these items (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2017c), in 2018, €3,235,000 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2018b) and, during the last year of ZEC's term in office, €3,490,000 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2019b). On this occasion, it was only a draft budget, since the final accounts were not subsequently approved by all the parties with representation on the council.

As to the budget items for development co-operation, the change in government also led to the first cuts after four years of increases, with €3,005,000 being devoted to them. Nonetheless, this figure was higher than that in the first two years of the previous government (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2020).

**Graph 2. Evolution of the budget items for development co-operation approved by Saragossa City Council**



Source: Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza. Own elaboration.

These cuts contrasted with the upward trend of the municipal budget which, in 2020, totalled over €800 million, representing a 6.41 per cent increase with respect to that approved in 2018 (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2020; 2019c). The cuts were introduced in the final vote on the budget during the council meeting, insofar as the government team had initially announced that the draft budget envisaged an increase of nearly 10 per cent in the item for development co-operation (Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2019d).

Therefore, it is still early days to assess whether or not the change in government has had an important impact on the city council's budgetary policy, unlike what has occurred in its public statements in which it is indeed possible to observe an evident change in tack.

To conclude the analysis of the city of Saragossa, during the summer of 2020 the eviction of a family of Syrian refugees was made public, which demonstrates the vulnerable situation of this collective, despite the existing programmes and resources (Bayona, 2020).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

In the past few years, Valencia and Saragossa have implemented different actions after being declared sanctuary cities.

In Valencia, the Development Co-operation and Migration Department has issued institutional statements and manifestos and launched awareness raising campaigns, as well as collaborating with those NGOs linked to development co-operation. Valencia's official status as a sanctuary city is underpinned by a specific project, 'Our city, your refuge', implemented through the NGOs ACCEM, CEAR-PV and the Spanish Red Cross. The city council has joined municipal solidarity networks supporting refugees and participated in international meetings and seminars. With respect to the second research question, the expenditure on the budget items for development co-operation and refugee aid has increased since 2015, when there was no specific item in this regard.

The implementation of this refugee aid strategy is linked to the political change in Valencia City Council, following 24 years of government by the PP (1991-2015). It was precisely in 2015 when there was the first clash with the central government, after the local and regional administrations offered to participate in the rescue of thousands of refugees stranded on Lesbos. The discord caused by the central government's refusal to support the initiative helped to forge an image of Valencia as a 'rebel' city.

The arrival of the *Aquarius* refugees in the port of Valencia was possible thanks to an agreement with the central government, led by Sánchez at the time. However, the same understanding between both administrations would not be reached a year later when Valencia yet again offered to receive the *Open Arms*, another ship with refugees. The socialist government was unwilling to challenge EU migratory policies. As Artero (2019b) notes, European cities have shown themselves to be in favour of an alternative to the current restrictions on the free movement of asylum seekers and refugees in the European Union.

In the case of Saragossa, the political change in 2015 led to the city's inclusion in international city networks committed to receiving refugees. Actions were varied throughout ZEC's term in office (2015-2019), positioning the city among those adopting a more active role in this respect.

This commitment was reflected in the municipal budget which, as of 2016, began to include specific items for the reception of refugees. The expenditure on both these and other items for development co-operation increased notably up until 2019, the last year before the local elections. In this last case, however, all was in vain because the budget was not approved in the council meeting.

Since the arrival of a new government in 2019, comprising centre-right parties (the PP and Ciudadanos), with the external support of VOX, there has been a change in strategy. On the one hand, the city council has ceased to promote the city as a sanctuary for refugees, while the budget items for their reception have suffered their first cuts.

Both cities have followed a similar path as regards communication campaigns, institutional statements, collaboration with NGOs and participation in national and international city networks, while designing similar budget items for development co-operation, which include refugee aid.

The experiences of Valencia and Saragossa show that the policies relating to the reception of refugees and development co-operation adopted by these cities have been linked to the changes in their political landscapes. These have offered them the chance to place themselves on the international map, as evidenced by Valencia's reception of the *Aquarius* refugees and Saragossa's active participation in Spanish and European forums over the past years. Both cities have made the most of this opportunity to assume an autonomous role with respect to other (regional or state) institutions and have created their own city networks.

The results of our analysis suggest that the decision of a city to become a 'sanctuary city' is associated with party strategies, which distance it from being a 'city' issue that is reflected in a social consensus, in spite of the fact that their status as 'sanctuaries' offers them the chance to promote themselves on the international stage.

Owing to the fact that it is a case study, neither can our results be extrapolated to other cities that do not share the particularities of our two objects of study, nor is it possible to determine a sanctuary city model. Research has focused on the actions of city councils from an official perspective, without enquiring into the reaction of the refugees themselves or the local media coverage of such initiatives, all of which are limitations that should be remedied in future studies. After this preliminary approach, on the one hand, it is essential to determine the efficiency of the measures adopted by sanctuary cities based on the views of the refugees themselves on the aid that they have received and how their problems have been addressed. On the other, it would be necessary to determine whether or not these initiatives have had an impact on Spaniards, namely, whether or not the people of Valencia and Saragossa are now aware that they are living in a sanctuary city and all that it entails.

Additionally, the question is whether measures of this type, in addition to offering cities an opportunity to gain greater visibility, can be understood as city or party policies by all the political stakeholders, since if they are not perceived in the same way by all the special interest groups, they will be undermined. An eventual political change can lead to expenditure on these measures being cut totally or partially, (as occurred in Valencia between 2011 and 2015 and in Saragossa in 2020), and a less important role in the design of reception strategies, when not an ancillary one to other institutions.

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## Notes

In March 2016, Valencia City Council declared that the city's official name should appear in Valencian, by virtue of the Regulation of the Use and Normalisation of the Valencian language. This measure was ratified by the Valencian regional government in 2017 (Decree 16/2017, of 10 February, of the Council, by virtue of which the change in the designation of the municipality of Valencia to that of València, exclusively in the Valencian language, is approved).

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