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# The City and International Migrants



CITY-MAKING:  
SPACE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

# THE CITY AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

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# International migrants and Zagreb

*“The city is both a medium and an outcome of human agency, including the agency of transnational migrants, their networks, and their projects.”<sup>1</sup>*

This publication investigates the creation and transformation of Zagreb by international immigration to the city. Among the city's residents, who we conceive of as city-makers, are individuals who have moved to the city from abroad.<sup>2</sup> We have focused on middle class migrants who have come to live in Zagreb for longer or shorter periods of time.<sup>3</sup>

For the last few years, migrant studies have focused on the relationship between migrants and their place of immigration. This type of research emphasizes the incorporation of migrants into the urban landscape and their role in transforming and repositioning cities within global hierarchies of power.<sup>4</sup> This research question has inspired our study of migrants in Zagreb. We were interested in what meanings of the city migrants construct, how they actively contribute to urban life, and what potential they have for processes of urban transformation.

Information about international migrants in Zagreb was gathered within both public and private contexts through informal conversations and meetings, during visits to their businesses, and through studies of the Facebook groups *Expats in Zagreb [Official]* and *Internationals Living*

*in Zagreb*, the *Unique Zagreb* web portal,<sup>5</sup> and several blogs written by migrants in Zagreb as well as media reports. We received key information from around thirty migrants through extensive, semi-structured interviews mostly conducted in English about their motivations for migrating to Zagreb, their life and work in the city, their visions of the city, and so on.

Our interlocutors were students and professors on academic exchanges, managers and their partners, diplomats, small- and medium-scale entrepreneurs, family migrants (people who moved for family reasons or romantic relationships). They were also people from the Croatian diaspora who came to Zagreb out of a sense of belonging or to join a local partner as well as to learn Croatian and/or in search of adventure. Most of our interlocutors are young adults between the ages of 20 and 40 with a university education (or who are in the process of completing one), and who range in profession from computer engineers, web designers, marketing experts, and business people to language instructors, journalists, and artists. Despite being of similar generations and levels of education, they can be considered a “super-diverse” group of individuals,<sup>6</sup> and our research was conducted with respect to this heterogeneity. The intersection of various interrelated variables within each individual situation has resulted in a variety of migrant experiences, knowledge gained from experience, and ways of becoming incorporated into Zagreb. When these variables overlapped, similar experiences emerged.

The migrants come from a variety of countries, both within the EU (Germany, Austria, France, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Belgium), and outside it (Ukraine, the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Grenada, Venezuela, Argentina, Japan, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire, Australia,

South Africa, Peru, and Sri Lanka). For the most part, all of them have had considerable experience with mobility, and they have changed their place of residence several times throughout the course of their lives. The amount of time they had lived in Zagreb at the time of our interviews ranged from a few months to up to ten years, and their time in the city has been based on various legal statuses (depending on if they were of Croatian descent, they came as family migrants, they came to start a business, they came as students, etc.).

Migrants' reasons for coming, how they become acquainted with the city, and the length of time they live in the city are important for their relationship to it. Students on international exchanges lasting a few months get to know the places where students gather, both in the city center and outside it. Diplomats, corporate managers, and their partners or those accompanying them are in other areas. They move about different places that are defined by where they live and work. Some of them live somewhat apart from the local population and socialize in specific niches and social networks like the International Women's Club and diplomatic milieus. If migrants have families, Zagreb reveals itself to them from the viewpoint of parks, children's playgrounds, and safety. Some invest effort in learning Croatian, most frequently at Croaticum (The Centre for Croatian as a Second and Foreign Language, located at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb). While there, they create long-term connections and friendships. Some of them observed shortcomings in cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity in the city and the lack of information and activities in English. They compensate for this through social networks of foreigners living in the city. Migrants who value entrepreneurship become very well acquainted with the economic aspects of life in Zagreb and Croatia.

Their comments are more ambivalent than others – similarly to other migrants, they are very pleased with certain characteristics of Zagreb, but they are also extremely critical of the possibilities and conditions for doing business and how closed the system is to foreign investment. Sometimes their lives in Zagreb are dominated by unsuccessful attempts to find employment or recognition of their expertise and international experience, so some migrants end up leaving the city and the country as a result.

Our interlocutors' images and impressions of the city have been sorted into three analytical sets. They deal with certain attributes of the city that were recurring in our conversations with the migrants. The first set deals with the city's materiality and aesthetics, the second focuses on the city's character and atmosphere, and the third captures its potential and transformation.

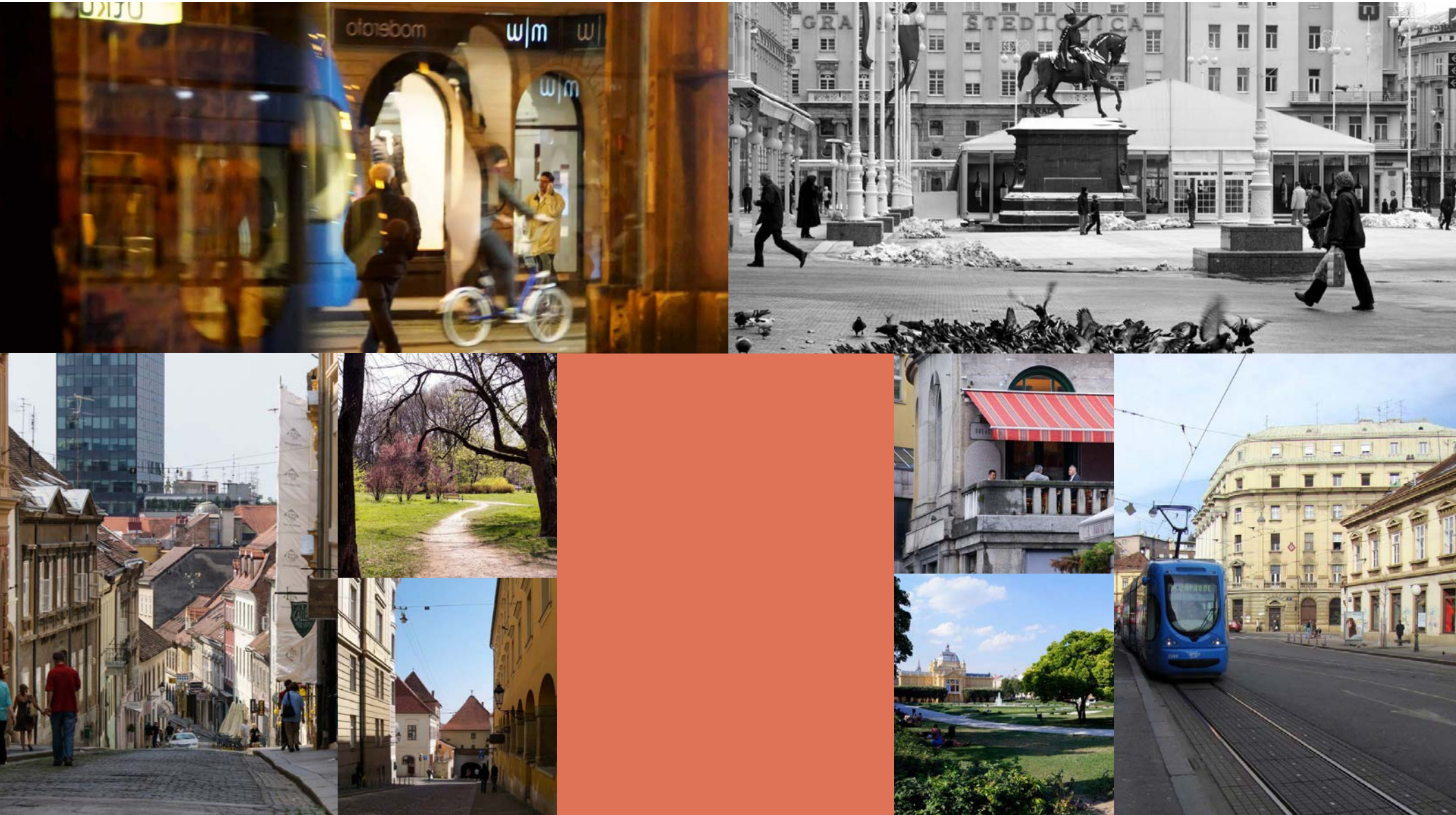
Within the category of *Zagreb's materiality and aesthetics*, we talk about migrants' spatial practices, how they make use of urban spaces, and how they experience the city. Within this framework, we tried to map out the spatial coordinates of their use of the city, locations in the city they find appealing and the urban vistas they see as being specific to Zagreb.

In the second category, we focused on how migrants describe *the city's character and atmosphere*. In contrast to how they spoke of Zagreb's materiality, when our interlocutors enumerated their favorite or important Zagreb locations where they spend their free time and those connected to where they live or work, the narratives of Zagreb's character and atmosphere seemed at first to be much more elusive and harder to put into words. However, our interlocutors found numerous ways to describe how they saw Zagreb and which attributes they attached to it.



Finally, the third analytical set dealt with *potential and transformation*. Here we tried to understand what kinds of potential and which positive changes migrants recognized in contemporary Zagreb and which of these they themselves wanted to be active drivers of or participants in.

The people we met during this study revealed to us their migrant stories and shared with us their perceptions of Zagreb and Croatia. Our conversations were interesting and lively exchanges of experience and understanding of Croatia and of Zagreb in particular.



# Migrants construct meanings of the city

## Shifting meanings of the city

International migrants ascribe an array of meanings to the city. They create these meanings in their encounters with the city's materiality and aesthetics,<sup>7</sup> as well as with its inhabitants. Migrants create specific meanings and images of the city through their actions and activities in the city depending on their background, previous places of residence, social identity, age, and reasons for coming to Zagreb and remaining there. The city is also illustrated by and filled with meanings both in relation to and in contrast with other places and cities in which these people have lived. Migrants may have more perspectives of Zagreb, both parallel and successive. They develop, change, and deepen over time, depending on personal interests, desires, and abilities to invest in the city and society. Thus, the city's image and meanings are dynamic rather than static. The more the connection to the city deepens, and the more experience within it is acquired, the more the focus changes in respect to perspectives of the city. Starting from an "empty space"<sup>8</sup> that does not tell immigrants much and with which it is difficult to make contact, the city acquires some positive signs and becomes an acceptable place to live. One of our interlocutors had this to say about the city:

*It is not probably the most interesting city I would say. I wasn't impressed with it. Then we went to Istria. I was like, if I can have this an hour and a half from Zagreb – it was beautiful! I saw Istria, and I was like, okay. I feel like now I realize that there are some nice things to see. To be able to live in a capital, and with only a two hour drive you are already seeing the sea and the diversity of Istria. The border with Italy is not far. Slovenia is there. Vienna, and all these places. And I was okay – that is very interesting.*  
(Khan)

Another interlocutor had left his own country because it was unsafe and suffering from social problems and came to Croatia, a country which had not been his first choice. Upon his arrival, he remembers asking himself where he had ended up, and then, just a few days later, he went to the city center. He then began getting to know the city on foot. And even today, as a photographer this is how he searches for appealing motifs to shoot. Over time, the more he got to know the city and its people, the more he began to feel at home. Now after living in Zagreb for two and a half years, he thinks he has a better understanding of its people. He has become very familiar with current political and social events as well as with the city itself. Similar experiences of gradually getting to know the city, which are important for creating a feeling of belonging in the city, also appear in statements from other migrants.

Spending a long time in a part of the city where one lives and works creates a micro-local perspective and a sense of comfort, thus demonstrating how both migrant and non-migrant populations in the city live *locally*.<sup>9</sup> In addition to their place of residence, usually located in the wider center (or, for diplomats and the better off, on the mountain slopes north of the city), migrants get to know the heart of the city best. They get to know other parts if they offer possibilities for recreation or opportunities to socialize.

*So, it's a pleasant city. It took me a very short time to feel comfortable, to feel at home, safe, whatever that means. My home is where I feel comfortable. Good food, good people, good atmosphere, nice places where I feel comfortable. I had that kind of energetic flash, or whatever you can call it, once I crossed Britanac [another name for Britanski Square, located near the center], because this is really moj kvart [my neighborhood]. (Antonio)*

*I would say [that Zagreb is] home I think. When I went to Vienna, and I came back, I was in the tram, I was like, finally, I'm finally in my Zagreb, in my old tram which I actually like. (Ivana)*

One immigrant, who had arrived in winter, said he felt horrible being surrounded by “gray Zagreb façades covered in graffiti”, looking around apartments in the Lower Town (part of the historical center) filled with “old-fashioned and heavy” furniture “that my grandmother would have had”, and first glimpsing the “challenges” of socializing and entrepreneurship. He felt inadequate and projected that feeling onto the “cold and arrogant” locals, and claimed they were less prepared to accept newcomers than those living in San Francisco or London. After a year, those feelings gave way to ones of satisfaction, acceptance, familiarity with the place and its people, and acceptance of his surroundings. Allegedly at the same time, the locals’ relationship to him also changed. This interlocutor claims that today, two years after his arrival, he is “completely transparent” to the locals, meaning he is invisible despite belonging to a visible and very small group of immigrants due to his African origin.

*When I came here, I felt out of place. Now that I am living [here], I wouldn't say that I feel at home, but it [the city] definitely was growing on me. It was a process. It grew on me after a year. [...] Now I like it and I've started to like it more and more. And I think that if I stayed here more and more,*

*it would keep growing on me. And I would probably feel more and more comfortable. [...] People were pretty cold in the beginning. I was a bit out of place at the beginning, and I was thinking to myself – because I felt that people maybe think that I am out of place. I was almost paranoid – people must be thinking, “What is this guy doing here?” But that's really how it was at the beginning. Nowadays I think that I am so much a part of the neighborhood, and they know me at the pekara [bakery], they know me – that it is written on my forehead: “I am from this neighborhood.” So, the reaction of the people I am with is different. I look so comfortable. I probably project an image of someone who is much more comfortable here. (Khan)*

This demonstrates both a clear process of inserting meaning into the place where one lives and an interlacing of personal perspectives and states with the city's materiality, which at first had not left a positive impression. This migrant had projected his own feelings, which had arisen from his discontent with an unplanned and somewhat reluctant relocation from San Francisco to Zagreb, onto the city and its population. He read the city and its residents from a specific viewpoint, which at the beginning he construed as both uninteresting and unlikeable. After some time, he rented a comfortable, modern apartment in the wider center, made some friends, got to know the city both on foot and by public transportation, found an appealing urban niche, and adjusted his needs to the rhythm of the city and what it had to offer. He felt *from* a place rather than *from outside*.

The synergy of the individual and a place's materiality and their fluctuating relationship is present among all immigrants, and develops mostly in a positive direction. One interlocutor said comfortably, “After some time you start loving the place where you're living. It's home.” Immigrants intending to stay in Zagreb long-term particularly



appreciate when they feel they are being recognized and treated as “*naš*”, or “one of ours”, through small privileges and recognition of their habits. At the same time, this is a sign they belong, meaning they have been successfully incorporated into city spaces and social networks. One of our interlocutors said about a bar he used to go to:

*And it is very small, but it is just a whiskey bar. And they have a great whiskey selection. Whiskey and cigars. When we go there, my friends or something, we like to sit there. [...] And since I've been there too often I already know people. It feels like home... It is not like: "Hello, Sir!" It is more like: "Eee, di si?" – "Pa tu sam!" [colloquial, informal greetings] Now you go someplace, and you feel at home. And they already know what is my favorite whiskey. The last time they had only a little in the bottle, and they put it aside because they knew I was coming. That is what I was missing in Paris and Berlin, because it is sooo anonymous. (Gustavo)*

We noticed that migrants' conceptions of the city are created in relation to other cities they have lived in. Sometimes the city's reference points are implicit, and sometimes they are more explicit and point to differences between Zagreb and London, Kiev, Kharkiv, Cairo, Vienna, Abidjan, Sarajevo, Paris, Riga, Cordoba and San Juan (Argentina), Caracas, Kraków, Nazca (Peru), Johannesburg, Sydney, some American cities, etc.

## Materiality and aesthetics

The city's appearance, materiality, and aesthetics are outcomes of political decisions, economic interests, and cultural dominations. The city is “materialized and built power”,<sup>10</sup> a work, an *oeuvre*.<sup>11</sup> Migrants' images of the city are the consequence of “processes of inscribing” the city, of “a type of reading experience” that individuals inscribe into the city when encountering it.<sup>12</sup>

International migrants primarily notice the historical architecture, green spaces, public transportation, and possibilities for getting around on foot. They point out the well-connected public transportation system, and especially the trams as a means of transportation specific to Zagreb. Also, in Zagreb it is possible to walk around the city center as well as the wider areas outside it. All of this makes it possible for migrants living outside the immediate city center to easily deal with distances, and they find having a car unnecessary. Some migrants get around by bicycle, and they mention that the cycling infrastructure has improved considerably over the years.

Furthermore, without exception, Zagreb is portrayed in a positive light through its parks and other greenery. Regardless of the differences between them, for most migrants Jarun and Bundek (parks with lakes), Maksimir (a large park), Medvednica (the mountain north of the center), smaller parks, and children's playgrounds are favorite places for recreational activities and spending free time. Each type of green area is used, whether it is a representative park in the city center or an unattractive children's playground somewhere outside the center. Some of those who live on the slopes of Medvednica or in Britanski Square will explore paths heading toward the city and discover along the way that Zagreb is a city of stairs.

The historical architecture from the Austro-Hungarian period is commonly part of migrants' images of the city. This points out the limits of their movements in the city, their orientation toward the central Lower Town streets, and their familiarity with the immediate center at the expense of other parts of the city. However, those who are familiar with other parts of the city, or even live outside the center, also emphasize Zagreb's "charm" as "an old European city". Thus, it is possible to say that Zagreb's specific materiality originating in the late Austro-Hungarian era imposes itself as a central place in migrants' images of the city. It exists beyond specific encounters with it. References to Vienna are also made by those who do not originate from Austria, and expressions of admiration for the city's "European beauty" are made by migrants who originate from outside Europe or from Eastern Europe. Depending on where they come from, some comment specifically on the "chaos" in some of the newer parts of the city, which demonstrates a construction of an image of the city at the intersection of its materiality and migrants' own perspectives.





*And there is nothing more beautiful than to be for the first time at the train station and look at Zagreb. Because the airport doesn't really give a good image of Zagreb. It was beautiful, beautiful! Wooow! And I thought, "There's gonna be much more of that." (Gustavo)*



*For me, Zrinjevac Park is important. I used to go there with my son, almost daily, and in front of Zrinjevac there used to be a park for kids and I played there with him. And I also took him to the end of Opatovina Park – there's a park for kids there. I would take him there to the park. We would play football in the grass, or sit on the grass in Zrinjevac. In Zrinjevac they're doing so many nice things. There's tango Thursdays and Sundays. I love to walk there. (Gustavo)*



*But I think the fact that you preserved a lot of green makes your city charming. (Steven)*

*It's very charming. It's old Europe, old nineteenth century Europe. If you imagine what Vienna is like, Zagreb is what you imagine; topographically, a very interesting place, right at foot of a mountain, with a river on the other side. It is extremely pleasant and livable. (Nicholas)*

*We like the character and the charm that an old city brings to the new, and you have your new, obviously. And you need the new to support your new industry and the things that come in, but you've been sensitive about your heritage. And you preserve the quite magnificent architecture here. The cathedral's beautiful, you have other beautiful churches. That's not lost on us. Your parks are beautiful. Is it [the architect Hermann] Bollé that did a lot of this? (Steven)*

*It's got that beauty about it. I love the architecture. The crumbling facades are beautiful. I feel it's like Croatia, this beautiful thing that's falling apart. Old architecture, old world churches up past Gornji grad [the Upper Town]. It's just beautiful. I've always walked up to Gornji grad. It's very quiet, old, could be doing more with it. (Michael)*



*There is nothing like Zagreb. But Croatia, well, there's nothing like it either. Zagreb, just Croatia has that beauty almost nowhere else in Europe has. The weather, the design. (Michael)*

*The best thing in Zagreb is the tramway system. (Theresa)*

*Human scaled, as I said before. That is, you can do many things walking. Back then, I walked, that's why I know quite a few stube [stairs]. So, it's a pleasant city. (Antonio)*

*One of the things I was thinking about was how much I love being able to walk to everything and have so many cultural things so close by. (Catherine)*



*When I was still just a tourist, my first feeling [was] a real feeling of Vienna, a real feeling of those old European cities. That's what I have now in the Upper Town [part of the historical center]. (Tetiana)*

*We find the city very walkable. (Steven)*

*Maybe I still need to get a bit used to the streets and all of that. Because Argentina in general, and especially San Juan, when you see the city on a map, on a map it's like a square, perfect. [...] Quadrants. It looks like you're playing chess. And here it's a little chaotic. And also, for example, when you're going down Radnička cesta [a main road], and then it's not Radnička any more, it's Heinzelova Street, and then it's not Heinzelova, it's some other street. That's very strange for us. (Agustín)*

*Medvednica, the nature park right outside of Zagreb. I love to go hiking there. The forest is so quiet and peaceful. (Marie-Ferréole)*

*I find she is neither Balkan, nor of a former Empire. Neither East, nor West. She is just Zagreb. (Michael)*

*It's a nice little town. [...] It's easy to commute, everything is within 15–20 minutes. (Constantine)*





## Character and atmosphere

The attributes of character and urban atmosphere are predominantly connected to the city's size: Zagreb is "small", "cozy", and "intimate". It is perceived as laid-back, slow, and safe – meanings that are usually attributed to small places and the past. The essence of some of these attributes are perhaps best expressed through international migrants' comments about how the locals drink coffee. After the initial surprise at the local residents' habit of slowly and repeatedly consuming coffee, they came to understand that it is not about satisfying biological needs; it's about social activities, which could also include closing business deals.

Zagreb is experienced as a "bourgeois" city. This perception refers to a specific type of Zagreb culture that migrants contrast with dense and chaotic African cities, to the different "soul" of a city with an Ottoman inheritance, or to the disorder of South American cities. There are also nostalgic perceptions of the city as a "jewel" unsullied by tourism or, due to poor promotion, an image of a "mysterious" place with "hidden treasures" that has the power to surprise. "Slow" and "sleepy" are sometimes interpreted as also being frozen in time and lagging behind in some aspects of modern cities.

In the eyes of international migrants, Zagreb is overflowing with ambivalence and contrast: simultaneously "quiet and bustling", "a small-big village" that is big enough to allow for anonymity, but at the same time small enough to establish a feeling of intimacy, which, as was previously mentioned, is an important element for incorporating migrants into the city. Zagreb thus combines various worlds and takes "the best of both worlds", which primarily means the hustle and bustle of a metropolis on the one hand and the peacefulness of a village on the other. Thus, we can

conclude that Zagreb is a capital city without the hallmarks of a capital city. In short, it cannot be reduced to just one characteristic attributed to it, and it cannot be classified under simple, straightforward attributes. A young man from South Africa poignantly remarked, "It's just Zagreb!"



*It's a small town. It's my small town.*  
(Gustavo)

*I feel comfortable in Zagreb. It feels like home.* (Gustavo)

*It's like a small town, but you have everything. That's what I like a lot. Also, it's clean. And everything is in order. From my view, people respect the street, the city. I like that a lot.*  
(Ivana)

*Beautiful city. I mean, I'm saying this because I was in Rome, and I was like, "Oh, I miss my Zagreb."*  
(Fiorella)





*I really did fall in love with this city. It's small and it has a lot of soul in it.*  
(Brian)

*Cozy, safe, totally enjoyable, you can do whatever you want, so many attractions.* (Karolina)

*Zagreb's like a little-big village.* (Michael)



*It's nice, relaxed. Nice people. Easy to transit.* (Daniel)

*Relaxing city, people are relaxed.* (Marie-Ferréole)

*I love public transport. In my country, you need a car for everything. And the fact that I don't need a car in Zagreb, that I can walk everywhere, that I can walk safely... Zagreb is very safe. And I was happy that I can live in the center.*  
(Gustavo)



*It's safe, it's nice to see women on their own at night, then you know it's safe. London's not safe. [...] In London, there is more pressure, more contact with people. Zagreb has all you want in it, but if you are quite active socially, you will quickly cover all the main spots. There are good sides and bad sides. Here, you become familiar with the people, places. In London, the pace is much quicker, the changes...* (Constantine)

*That's the nice thing about Croatia, you can find lots of events, and they are free. [...] That's a good thing. Everything is close. You can go to more than one event in one day. And they're free or really cheap.* (Fiorella)

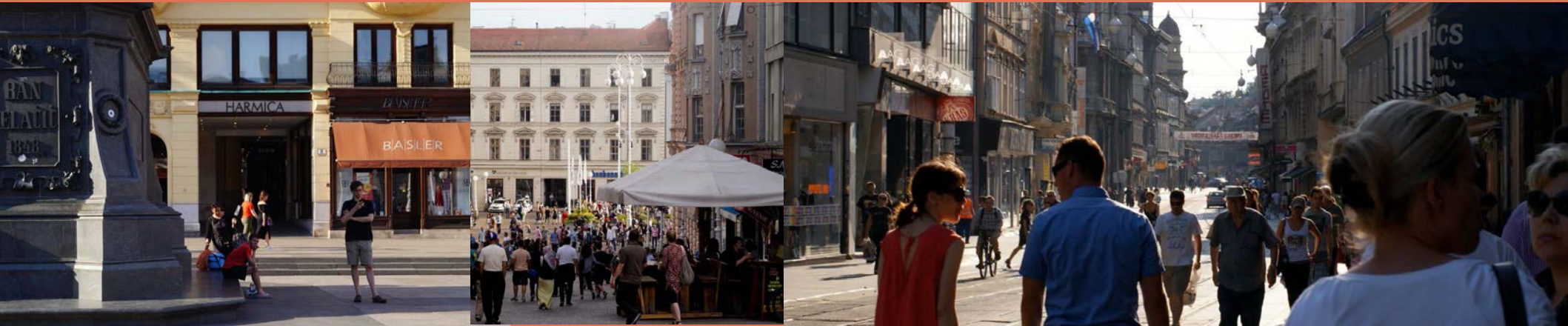
*I like that it's a small city, because now Vienna is even too big for me. Since it's small, I get the feeling people socialize more. And go for coffee. [...] And this atmosphere, this is where I can see that people socialize more, talk with their neighbors, and talk with the women at marketplaces.*  
(Lucia)

*It's like one of those giant university campuses in United States, so it's large enough that you can still be anonymous, but it's small enough that it's manageable. So you know where everything is, but there is always, every single day there is variety. And that's the way I still feel. It's a great environment.* (Nicholas)

*I am so happy that Zagreb is still a jewel that has not been polluted by tourists. It does not have well-promoted sights. But it does have numerous hidden treasures. Despite being the capital, the city is cozy, nice, safe, and slow. (Tetiana)*

*The kind of things that make Zagreb also so loveable is that you sometimes land in interesting places, even in, down on Bogovićeve [Street], Gajeva [Street] in the pedestrian zone. (Antonio)*

*Zagreb, and Croatia, is a sleeping beauty. (Michael)*



*So when we came here, we really liked the city, it was one of the main reasons why we stayed. I can walk one way and not see anybody, but then walk in another direction and see thousands of people. That is the beauty, the best of both words: it's quiet and it's busy. (Brian)*

*I feel very much at home. I feel that Zagreb is a reasonably safe city to be in. I am now quite familiar with much of Zagreb and its surrounding area, I feel comfortable getting around. (Steven)*

*Zagreb is a small city, and even though Zagrepčani [Zagreb residents] think it's very stressful, they don't know what it's like to be stressed out in the city. I mean in Caracas we have six to seven million people, and it's a huge city, and the traffic is chaos, it's dangerous, and every day it's a new battle going outside. It is very relaxed, the life here in Zagreb, and in Croatia in general. (Daniel)*

*In Abidjan, there is charm in its chaos! Zagreb is so pretty and clean and nice. I miss this organized chaos. There is more soul in Sarajevo, for me, when I was walking in the city. So here I think it is very bourgeois, very you know... Everything is about this Austro-Hungarian thing. Here you have this Austro-Hungarian [influence], and in Sarajevo you have this Ottoman [influence]. (Khan)*

*Zagreb is a city that has culture. It has, how should I put it, atmosphere. (Tajna)*



## Potential and transformation

Migrants' experiences of Zagreb refer less to the city's modernity and potential. As has been already demonstrated, their conceptions of the city are predominantly embedded in the past: they perceive it as a city of the past that is slow to change. Migrants' evaluations depend on what they came to the city to do or what they would like to do. Those who have planned to engage or are already engaged in some form of entrepreneurship, and who come from busy, dynamic metropolises in the western part of the world are critical of what is supposedly a favorite local commentary on some of their ideas and suggestions: "*Polako, polako*" (Slowly, slowly).

Others have accepted the traditional character of the city and its residents as something positive but would like to bring about change, and they see possibilities for entrepreneurship through their own engagement in change and innovation. Some interlocutors have recognized the branding of the city as a tourist destination and the consequent restructuring of the hospitality sector as possibilities for developing their own businesses. Migrants in Zagreb can therefore be considered potential actors in repositioning the city within international city-scales. International migrants and Croatians with international experience are at the forefront of the expanding "ethnic" food scene (e.g. Korean, Sri Lankan, Argentine, Indian, Middle Eastern, and French cuisine), and the promotion of "street food" restaurants and craft beer production. Some have even opened small retail stores selling goods and spices from various countries or different continents (e.g. stores with Asian, African, Ukrainian, Turkish food, etc.). Among them is Tetiana, an owner of a restaurant business (see below), who realized that the time was ripe to act because there was an untapped economic niche and

the city was undergoing extensive changes due to the city authorities' efforts to develop the tourist industry. An example from Daniel, another interlocutor, demonstrates different positioning trends. Daniel and a friend have developed a project to bring Croatian foodstuffs, those that are "the best of our land",<sup>33</sup> onto the world market, and they see the Croatian diaspora as their primary customer base. Thus, Daniel wants to send into the world those products from Zagreb that are not easily found abroad.

Those who have lived in Zagreb longer (i.e., those who have spent several years in the city and know it well) have noticed changes. The negative being small stores and businesses closing, and the positive being the more diverse food scene. Gustavo, an IT specialist and developer of new applications for managing various systems, has been a keen observer and participant in city life for over five years. At one time he himself was part of a network of international exchange students, and he can confirm that in just a few years a hostel and bar scene has developed to meet these students' wants and needs. International students were, in his view, also active in the expanding need for information technology and social networks. Gustavo has a range of ideas connected to reconstructing post-industrial Zagreb. He thinks, for example, that the city's economy should not be based on tourism alone. Instead there should be consideration of possibilities for attracting technological capital.<sup>34</sup> All of our interlocutors with entrepreneurial ideas agreed that for this to succeed, the Croatian economy needs to be free of crippling taxes, be based on knowledge and skills rather than connections, and be open to new ideas. Also, young people should not be discriminated against.

International migrants are thus engaged or wish to be engaged as agents of economic and social changes and see the possibility to make their own

contribution to a favorable moment in Zagreb's repositioning on the international scene. Such engagement is a result of their understanding of the political, legal, and economic system, and of society and culture. But it is also a result of good education and an affective relationship toward the city where they say they have found "home", where they feel like "*domaći*" (locals), and in which they plan to stay long-term. However, due to the structural obstacles previously mentioned, some were forced to close their businesses and leave Croatia.

*For example, Vienna and London are already at the top of the food scene, but Croatia still isn't. And when it starts trending, that's the best situation to be in, better than if you're there where the market's already saturated. And we still have a lot of concepts that don't exist there. I know what concepts are out there as well as in Ukraine, and so I can apply them.* (Tetiana)



*I tried to engage socially, to see what could I do. That was the problem at the time [2011] because everything is in Croatian.* (Gustavo)

*So you have the potential, you have the people, you have everything, but you're choking them!* (Gustavo)

*This country has got so much potential. And they [the Croatians] want to argue about something stupid.* (Michael)

*It moves. It's like a spiral. It moves. Places, locals, I mean, appeared and disappeared. If you go anywhere, you see what there is and then you come back a month after and half of the businesses have disappeared, have been replaced, mostly by bakeries or coffee places.* (Antonio)

*I think there is a lot of potential.* (Hani)

*I see that we're in the right place at the right time. Right now, Croatian tourism is going phenomenally well. I follow all the statistics. I follow the number of tourists each year, and the numbers by place. The new airport. And they all show a strong upward trend.* (Tetiana)

*It's becoming more and more cosmopolitan. That's what I've experienced. [...] Zagreb has meant a lot to me for my professional experience. And that it's now becoming more and more cosmopolitan. And it's just gotten started. That means a lot. It means that now is really the time to be here.* (Hani)

## Individual stories

Included below are five stories from our interlocutors, some of whom still live in Zagreb, and some have left. Each story shows an individual experience with finding a place in the Zagreb environment and the individual's investment in society. What these stories have in common is that they show the perceptions the interlocutors had about Zagreb before they moved and the experiences of the city they created while living in it. Apart from that, the stories also illustrate a changing image of Zagreb, and demonstrate how dynamic the meaning of the city is.

### Theresa: It's all about the international

Theresa, an Egyptian, is a computer engineer, graphic designer, and author of several books and documentaries. She married a Croatian and moved to Zagreb in July 2014.<sup>15</sup> In "this peaceful city", which she loves living in even though she finds the winters too long and cold, she created the artistic project "of her dreams" while at the same time attempting to get to know the city better and "become a local". Despite successfully completing the first level at Croaticum, Theresa's language skills were not enough to connect with people and the city. Unsatisfied with the information about the city available in English, she began investigating on her own, and started publishing her observations about events, activities, and possibilities the city had to offer on her own web portal called *Unique Zagreb*. The name of the portal encompasses Theresa's personal feeling of being different and her search for specific, unique, and international aspects of city life, as well as for a "different" Zagreb than what was offered in the standard brochures and tourist information. There, among other

things, she has written about a Korean and Brazilian restaurant (which has since closed), a Chinese tea house, stores selling Middle Eastern and Asian foods and spices, and local stores selling vintage items and "unique" gifts with the Glagolitic alphabet. She compiled a short, practical guide of the city, which is available on her web portal and on *Expats in Zagreb [Official]* and *Unique Zagreb Expats*, the two Facebook groups she administers. She is also active on the *Meetup* app, and organizes exploratory photography tours of the city, cooking classes and social events involving food, visits to restaurants, and movie screenings, in which a small number of people, primarily migrants and Croatians with international experience, participate.

We asked Theresa to select some photographs of places she feels connected to or that have somehow marked her three years spent in Zagreb. Some of these are presented below along with her commentary. Her selection included photographs of the following: a Chinese tea house, a French restaurant, a vegetarian restaurant and a festival of vegetarian food, making "*licitari*" (traditional, ornamental gingerbread figures) at the Zagreb Ethnographic Museum, a cinema, and the Zagreb Film Festival, Jarun, a tunnel under Sljeme (Medvednica's highest peak), Ban Jelačić Square (the main square in the city center) and the Hreljić flea market. Her selection (of which only a few photos are presented here due to space limitations) shows that, as an avid investigator of interesting and different ideas, she was searching through Zagreb for international content and events, rather than for just what was local. To a certain extent, this was a consequence of being unable to communicate in Croatian. Theresa's search for what was "unique" in Zagreb was primarily a search for international content, for alternatives to what was local or national, and for the international "landscape"<sup>16</sup> that characterizes the world's capitals and megacities where she and other immigrants in Zagreb previously lived.



This urban niche is where Theresa created her “unique Zagreb”, which is simultaneously local and international. It is made up of local knowledge and artifacts as well as international aspects through which migrants recreate experiences from the far-away places where they had previously lived. At the same time, it is also a field of familiarity and understanding when meeting people with migration experience, whether they are Croatians or foreigners, and provides refuge from the Croatian linguistic surroundings.



### THE SQUARE

Yes, this is the most important place for me in Zagreb, the city center, the main square. It's so beautiful, the buildings, and also the trams are part of the composition. And everything happens in the main square. Like, we always find a concert, a festival, a market, something is always happening there! Also, there are some cinemas nearby. And we usually also take a walk around the shops, there are lots of cafés and restaurants. [...] My favorite place. And also, it's like, I don't know, so special. It's not like any main square in any other country. I feel like I'm traveling into the past when I go to this area. It's still not so crowded and the old architecture is still there. It's not like other countries.

### CINEMA

The cinema is like... I've never gone to the cinema as much as I do in Zagreb. It seems like, you know, nothing much is happening for English speakers in Zagreb and we always go to the cinema. And usually the films I want to watch, as you can see, not a lot of people are interested in them.

### FLEA MARKET

*I'm addicted to flea markets, and I like to go to them in every country because you see the history of the country at the flea market. I like the things. I also like to take things and renovate them. And I can tell you that the flea market here is not as good as those in other countries. It's expensive; it doesn't have a lot of variety. And the one in Britanski Square is also very expensive, lots of antiques. And I'm looking for things other than antiques. Like daily life stuff.*



### A FRENCH RESTAURANT

*This is the French store. This was so... also another discovery in Zagreb. French cuisine. I'm sorry, but it's all about the international.*

### PARKS

*Yes, it's just green and yellow! So Jarun and Maksimir and all the green places are also a big part of my life here. Every weekend usually we go to Jarun because it's nearby. And when we want a change, we go to Maksimir. Or Sljeme also. [...] We just go for a walk, we take photos, we enjoy the outdoors.*

*Interviewer: Are you a nature lover?*

*Before I came to Zagreb I wasn't, but I learned to love the outdoors as there are lots of parks here. [...] We don't have parks in Egypt at all! We don't have green in Egypt!*

## *Tetiana: Ideal for living, tough for business*

Tetiana is from Ukraine. She was a marketing specialist and owner of a PR agency in Kharkiv. Together with her husband, Andrii, a co-owner of furniture showroom in Ukraine, she began creating a plan to move to Croatia and “open a restaurant network with incredible and delicious cuisine”.<sup>17</sup> The reason for relocating was the economic crisis in Ukraine, and these spirited travelers’ idea to start a “new life” in Croatia resulted from a visit in 2009 when they “fell in love” with the country. Croatia also had other comparative advantages like, for example, the “closeness” of its traditions, mentality, and language to their homeland. The sea also made the country attractive to them. After deciding to relocate, Tetiana and Andrii left nothing to chance. They met with around a dozen Russian and Ukrainian families who had emigrated to Croatia to ask about business possibilities and the positive and negative sides of life in Croatia. They all gave them the same answer: “The country is ideal for living. It’s ecological, clean, quiet, and safe. The air, the water... beautiful, wonderful. A little tough for business.” This, however, did not discourage them, since the unstable economic situation in Ukraine had made them accustomed to business-related difficulties. “After Ukraine, for us nothing is difficult”, said Tetiana. Further investigation into the Croatian hospitality sector and the habits of the local population led Tetiana to conclude that a short tourist season meant it would be better to not open a restaurant on Mljet, an island in the Adriatic where they had originally wanted to live, but to open one in Zagreb instead. They discovered “an untapped market niche” and “room for innovation and growth” in the form of a “modern bistro” with “interesting, casual food” which would be different from traditional cuisine and habits.

With a great deal of self-confidence, decisiveness, organization, and enthusiasm, Tetiana began to make her ideas a reality. She and her husband began learning Croatian and Italian. They then invested in acquiring their new profession. They completed a course in Restaurant Management in Ukraine and attended a seminar at the Kul IN Culinary Institute in Sisak, Croatia. They graduated from ALMA la Scuola Internazionale di Cucina Italiana, an Italian culinary academy in Parma, and interned at a one-star Michelin restaurant in Apulia. Finally, armed with cultural and economic capital and in synergy with a local company, they opened a restaurant in Zagreb in September 2016. Since she and her husband were foreigners, Tetiana felt that cooperation with a local entrepreneur would be the best way to start doing business.

*It’s really difficult for foreigners to start a business in Croatia. That’s the only thing I don’t like about Croatia. Every country, every European country is very good for business and investment. If someone arrives with money, everyone opens their doors, except in Croatia. Croatia has made everything difficult. For every foreigner hired, you have to also take on some Croatians.*

*It’s not easy for foreigners. They have to work a lot more to gain the kind of trust Croatians have for one another. For a foreigner to achieve the same results, they have to work two or three times harder than a Croatian would.*

By the end of the year, the restaurant had appeared on several lists of the best restaurants in Zagreb. Tetiana saw her chance in doing it “differently”. She had plans to expand the business, educate chefs, and introduce managerial skills and operating standards in future enterprises. During our conversation, she demonstrated genuine enthusiasm and faith in success, which also exudes from her blog. At the same time, she was delighted with Zagreb.



Tetiana felt the “good vibrations in the city” and had a feeling of “old European cities” on her first visit to Zagreb, even though at the time she knew nothing about it. For her, as it is with other migrants, Zagreb has the ideal combination of liveliness and quiet, and of a small place and a big city.

*At the same time, it's really peaceful. After Kharkiv, which has two million people, 700,000 is a wonderful number. At one point, it's a living metropolis. Theaters and all these concerts, a wonderful social life. And peaceful. This combination, the city is balanced and has all the signs of a capital city and a European metropolis. But at the same time, it's full of green spaces, Jarun, parks, you sometimes feel... We live in Cmrok [a neighborhood in the northern part of the city]. Wonderful. Green and beautiful. That's why this combination of a city for me is one of the best in Europe.*

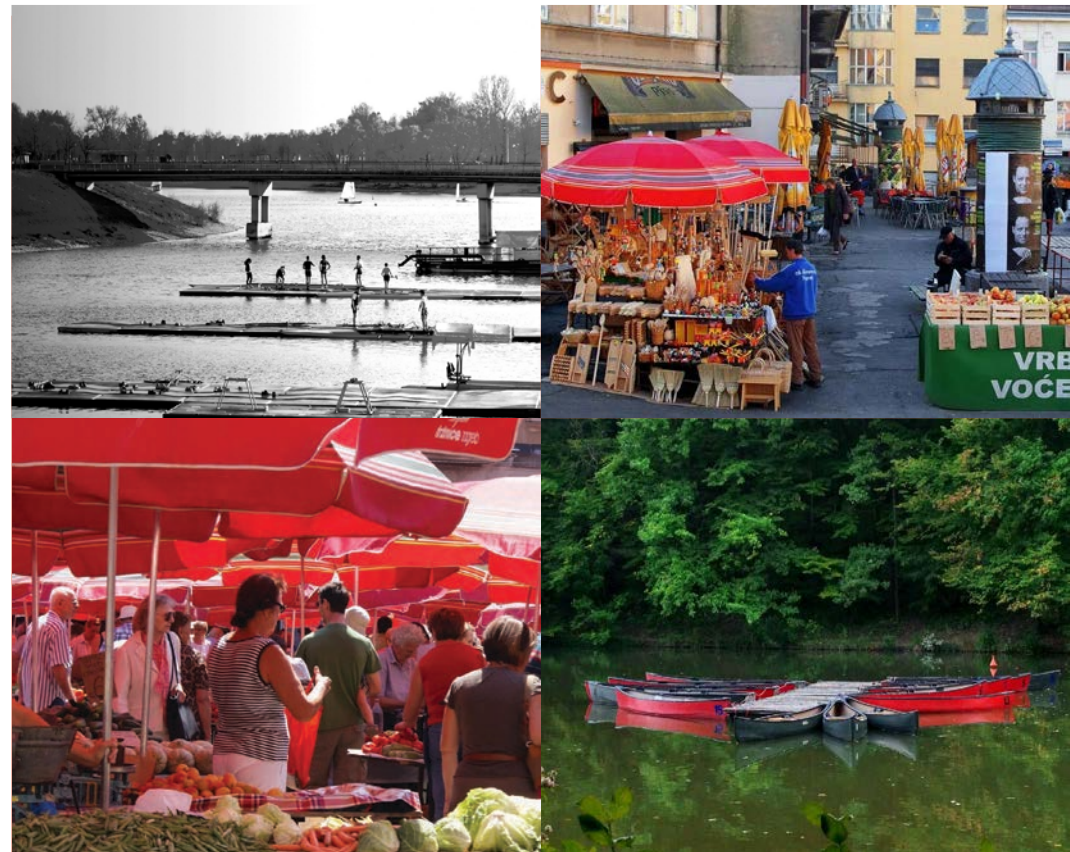
*And it's a combination where the ecology is like it is at the seaside, in a small town, but life is like that of a large city. You've got everything at the same time.*

Along with Zagreb's positive sides like safety, which other migrants also see, Tetiana also mentions its ecological advantages, like clean air and water, which contrast with her home country. It is amazing for her that in “the center of a capital city” of a European country, it is possible to “swim in clear, beautiful water” in Jarun.

*We don't know what it's like to drink from the tap. And here one of my greatest pleasures is to drink water from the tap. For me, it's a symbol of why I'm here. Yes, and the air. I felt the different air in the first month – there was a difference. Because of the industry, the air in Kharkiv is polluted. And here, a metropolis, a capital city, and wonderful, clean air. [...] I can say that there is a phenomenal combination of everything in one metropolis. And so we're happy that in the end we chose Zagreb.*

*We realized that this is one of the best places to live.*

This would seem to be a successful immigration story, both in terms of business and in terms of other aspects of integration in Zagreb, and even in the aspect of emotional integration, which in the classic migration literature is usually considered the last and most difficult stage to achieve.<sup>18</sup> Tetiana loved living in Zagreb and had been fully engaged in preparing to move and start a business, but despite all that she was still forced to close the restaurant. The warnings from her fellow countrymen and women that Croatia was “tough for business” were confirmed. In this



case, it can be assumed the “threats” to economic activities in Zagreb and Croatia identified in a study by the Economic Institute turned out to be real. These are, among others, overly high taxes and social contributions, the sensitivity of economic activities to recession, insufficient incentives from the state,<sup>19</sup> and the fact that, in this case, Tetiana and her husband were foreigners, for whom the “threats” to successful business are greater due to the significant demands made on foreigners wanting to establish a trading company or sole proprietorship.<sup>20</sup>

### *Karolina: Expanding horizons*

Karolina is Polish and a student at Jagiellonian University in Kraków.<sup>21</sup> She attended the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb twice during the spring semesters of 2016 and 2017 as part of the Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (CEEPUS).<sup>22</sup> These two residencies at the University of Zagreb were in addition to several other study abroad trips in other European countries, which included Czechia, Slovakia, and Spain. Karolina laughed as she explained how she made full use of the possibilities for student exchange, meaning she spent the maximum number of months abroad that were allowed. She explained that her choice of Zagreb as a study abroad destination was the result of the university being one of those participating in CEEPUS, and of her own imaginations of what kind of climate and way of life would await her there. During her second time in Zagreb from March to June 2017, she conducted research for her Master’s thesis, which dealt with perceptions and manifestations of Latin American culture in Zagreb.

As an exchange student, Karolina was able to stay in a student dorm, had subsidized meals in student cafeterias, and other student rights

and obligations at her host university. Due to, among other things, her extensive previous experience with student exchange programs, she did not run into administrative or other types of problems during her time in Zagreb. The only difficulty she faced was the lack of courses available that were taught in English, which resulted in professors organizing individual classes for her. She decided not to enroll in Croatian language classes due to the short amount of time she spent in Croatia, and because classes at Croaticum had already begun by the time she arrived in Zagreb.

Karolina described her position regarding her understanding of Croatian in an interesting manner. The fact that she did not speak Croatian definitely had an impact on her life as a student – it decreased her contribution to the educational process at lectures and seminars, pushed her toward more intensive personal communication with her professors, and resulted in her missing out on getting to know her fellow students and socializing with them. But Karolina also connected her lack of Croatian language skills with everyday communication and compared her stay in Zagreb with her previous ones in Czechia and Slovakia, where she understood the language. She realized that in some way she was even glad that she did not understand the language because she was removed from everyday problems and negativities, and during her second stay in Zagreb when she better understood the language, she noticed that she experienced people in Croatia in a different way and found similarities with Poles.

During her time in Zagreb, Karolina became very well acquainted with the city. She had “fallen in love” with it in the Upper Town, where she enjoyed her favorite view, and her experiences of the city are connected to many different places. She mentioned Jarun; the Croatian National Theater and the greenery around it; the Hendrix Bridge, which helped



orient her when she returned to the dorm; Ban Jelačić Square; Ritam grada, a downtown club on Gajeva Street; Ilica, a street that starts from the main square; Kralj Tomislav Square at the main train station, which was a reminder of the first time she arrived in Zagreb; and also her host faculty, her student dorm, and the student cafeterias.

*I love that it is a capital, but it doesn't feel like it's a capital. I love that it is cozy. You walk through the streets and you meet the same people.*

Karolina was delighted with the wide selection of events in Zagreb, many of which were free. She had some interesting reflections on her position as a temporary resident of the city, in that she was more relaxed and had fewer obligations than she did in her hometown, which was different from the position of permanent residents: "For us it's amazing, but for you..." Being "completely relaxed" allowed her to attend various happenings and events in the city.

As previously mentioned, Karolina conducted research for one of her classes and for her Master's thesis on perceptions of Latin American culture in Zagreb. Because of this, she became very well acquainted with the cuisine and cultural events in the city connected to Latin America. She gained a comprehensive view of what was available and of the construction and perception of Latin American culture in Zagreb by researching Zagreb dance schools, dance clubs, restaurants, cafés, festivals and various projects, and by speaking with individuals originating from Latin America but currently living in Zagreb and with those who had business ties to Latin America. Karolina used her time in Zagreb to complete her degree in American Studies at her home university in Kraków, and the research she conducted enabled her to become familiar in detail with a particular segment of city life.

Karolina studied in several European cities. Because she took full advantage of her opportunities for student mobility and positively evaluated those experiences, her story is an example that demonstrates the positive sides of student exchange.<sup>23</sup> Her desire to "expand her horizons", as she described her rich experience of studying in other





countries, also brought her to Zagreb, where institutional channels secured her a place to stay as well as other means of support. Through her own engagement, Karolina got to know Zagreb in general, as well as a specific cultural niche of city life. She accomplished this despite the barrier of insufficient instruction available in English; in fact, it may have even encouraged her because such intensive communication with her professors allowed her to devote herself completely to her own research. Ten days before her departure from Zagreb in June 2017, a possibility presented itself of returning again, this time for a job.

## *Agustín: Trams as an office*

Juan Agustín, a thirty-year-old Argentine from San Juan, arrived in Zagreb with his wife and daughter in March 2016.<sup>24</sup> Their primary motivation for moving was Agustín and his wife's feeling, especially after the birth of their daughter, that Argentina was not a safe enough country to live in. They are both dual citizens: Agustín has Italian and Argentine citizenship while his wife has Croatian and Argentine citizenship. This encouraged them to come to Croatia and made the administrative steps easier. They made the decision to move rather quickly after receiving a scholarship to learn Croatian, which neither of them spoke before they arrived. This is how Agustín summarized his positive view of making the decision to move, and of Zagreb, which gave them the peace and quiet that were important for the family life they wanted to have:

*Sometimes we miss – we as humankind – that moment when we say, “Yes, let's go. Why not? Let's go!”*

Even though they did not know much about Zagreb, or Croatia, before

they arrived, Agustín described the moving process as easy. The only negative thing he remembered was trying to deal with the office for foreigners at the Ministry of the Interior, and he thinks this should be worked on to make this first step for foreigners arriving in Croatia go more smoothly.

Agustín knows Zagreb well and can easily get around it. When remembering his first encounter with Zagreb, he points out that the peace and quiet in the very center of the city made a particularly big impression on him.

*Our first impression was very interesting. We arrived – it was a Sunday – at three in the afternoon we were at Ban Jelačić Square. And for us it was fascinating that there was so much peace and quiet. I thought to myself, “This is a capital city in Europe.” Before I came, I would have thought, “It'll be busy and all that”, but we came, and it was like... I couldn't believe it. I love, love silence. I love silence.*

He particularly appreciates peace and quiet. This is how he described Zagreb:

*Nice city, really nice. Peaceful. I think that Zagreb can breathe. There are so many public spaces and green spaces and that's nice. [...] I think the city works; it functions as a city.*

Agustín's favorite parts of the city are Prečko (a neighborhood in the western part of the city where they lived for a year), Petruševac (a neighborhood to the east where they live now), Bundek and Jarun, and the area between Maksimir and Sljeme. They try to spend as much time together as family, so their daily activities and movements around the city during the week and over the weekend are connected to their daughter. They regularly spend time outdoors, in parks, and at children's

playgrounds. These playgrounds are places where they interact with other parents, and Agustín also used them to explain how he felt welcome. The parents they saw every day at one of the playgrounds would use some phrases in Spanish, which he interpreted as their attempt to communicate with them and their daughter. At the same time, the intense effort Agustín put into learning Croatian is impressive, and after only a year and a half he speaks Croatian very well. Constant work on expanding one's vocabulary and complete confidence in the language prove to be important for life in Croatia.

As he rode the tram every day from his home in Prečko to his classes at Croaticum, Agustín came up with the idea of playing music in the trams. He is a trained musician and a sound engineer, and music had been a source of income for him in Argentina in addition to other work. He had been unable to bring any of his instruments with him to Croatia, and he missed music, so he decided to buy an ukulele and start practicing. First, he played in the trams connected to his Croatian classes, but later he decided to play at other times in different trams. Not having a steady job allowed him to set aside some of his time during the day for this.

*At the beginning, it was only when I went to Croaticum at the faculty. But when I saw the people really liked it, I began playing in the afternoon, too. That's how it started and it's a bit like a job. I'm always learning new songs and I practice every day. It's like a job to me. My office is in a tram.*

This helped Agustín to get to know the city and the tram lines very well and also to meet people, some of whom became friends. Apart from this, playing music brought him a certain amount of income. As Agustín commented, playing music in trams instead of on the street is not common, and he easily made use of the opportunity to offer tram riders a new experience. State and local television stations and internet



portals followed his performances. Media accounts also portrayed the somewhat broader stories of the reasons why his family decided to move to Zagreb, differences between Croatia and Argentina, learning Croatian, and so on. In addition to playing in trams daily, he also plays in some Zagreb restaurants and cafés.

The Zagreb trams are Agustín's "office", a place where he can do what he loves, entertain passengers, which he says is his biggest reward, and also earn some money. Although the professional life he had in Argentina has not continued in the form of steady work, he has found a way to create something from his love of music, which for him is "like a job". According to the reactions in the media and on his Facebook page, the public has in turn recognized his music and vivid personality, as well as the novelty he has brought to the Zagreb trams. For Agustín, the tram is a means for him to become acquainted with people and the city, while at the same time being a means for him to create his place within it.

### *Michael: The personal through the local*

Michael's father is English and his mother is Afrikaner. He grew up in Johannesburg as the only "white kid" in a black neighborhood, and during his life he was exposed to multiple cultures and races. Although he feels South African, he also feels like an international citizen and an avowed anti-racist. He does not want to be categorized as being part of one culture, and he talks with great enthusiasm about the South African leaders Nelson Mandela and Thabu Mbeki, under whose leadership the Republic of South Africa became united in a "spirit of cultural integration".<sup>25</sup>

When he came of age, he left home and moved to the United Kingdom, and after less than a year he arrived in Croatia as a result of an internet contact and his dissatisfaction with life in London. Before migrating to London, he thought of it as "the land of opportunity" in which he would stay for the rest of his life. In the end, for this eighteen-year-old "who was trying to find himself", the city was more like a lion's den. "Let's be honest – I don't know why I came here. Things happened that way", is how he concluded the story about the reasons that led him to come to Zagreb, a city he knew nothing about. He thinks life in Zagreb is inexpensive, even by South African standards. In Zagreb, he can live "a simple life" on the modest student funding available to him, and he spent a few months over the summer doing seasonal work on the coast. However, after three and a half years, the changing global economic situation, the impossibility of finding firm financial footing in Zagreb, his reluctance to return to South Africa, where he believes society is very much divided along class lines, and a new international (romantic) relationship led him to move to Latvia. He left Zagreb the same way he came: with very little luggage. He left with just two bags, a backpack, and a box of books.

When Michael arrived in Zagreb, he immediately signed up for Croatian classes at Croaticum and made some "strong friendships" with people who at the beginning helped him feel like less of a "permanent outsider". Friendships with other immigrants gave him a feeling of belonging. He claims that in Zagreb, or anywhere else mobile people go, they all share the common experience of being foreigners, being marked as outsiders, and living lives in "a large number of cultures and languages". From this experience comes an "unspoken mutual understanding" and "an inexplicable bond among expats". These contacts became for Michael, as they did for other immigrants, his first refuge in Zagreb.

Michael did not remain just within the international circles of people who live somewhat apart from the local population, although he did maintain a connection with them throughout his time in Zagreb. Work introduced him to the locals, among whom he developed a feeling of local incorporation. Michael began to sense this only when he felt accepted into the local work environment. Above all, familiarity with the basics of the language was important for understanding the culture and history, or in other words, the world of the local inhabitants. Once the locals accepted him, Michael realized that he needed to cast off his "South African culture" and "become Croatian".

Seasonal work in the tourism industry one summer marked the moment of change and local integration.

*Summer 2014 was the first time in my entire life that a culture accepted me. I was an islander for those three months. It's when I became Croatian. Michael fell away, and people called me Mikel. My Croatian itself alters drastically. [...] I'm everyday interacting with Croatians, rakija [brandy] is part of my life, having these fights over stupid things, listening, talking to the elders of the community. But also it was the first time that Croatians united behind me when it felt like a foreigner would come. I felt this kind of unification: "Mi smo Hrvati" [We are Croatians], my boss told me, "All foreigners are not to be trusted." I said, "What about me?" He said, "You don't count. You're one of us." I was culturally a part of a place, which was indicative of the understanding of the language, culture, history, everything... Like this time the tide was just too strong. I let it wash over me and it changed my life forever. That was a process over a year. [...] I also felt better about myself because people were accepting me. I've never felt that, but this time I did. It was based on a culture.*

Michael enjoyed drinking beer, plum brandy, or coffee with his buddies and griping about things because they "just wanted to whinge". He felt happy because he was "being allowed to play a game" he had never been allowed to play before. By this he wanted to say that never before had he felt accepted into a community because his life experience up until then had led him to believe that he would always be an outsider no matter where he went. He was too South African for the British, too British for the Afrikaners, white within the black population, and also a foreigner in Zagreb, especially during the first few months. He had always been different and unincorporated. This event changed his life "forever". He went from being a social outcast and a loner to becoming part of a community; a society he lived in accepted him and he was no longer a foreigner. This also changed his understanding of Croatia. "Everything related to Croatia began to make sense once I was no longer a foreigner, but *naš*", said Michael.

This gradual better understanding of new surroundings and incorporation into society are two sides of the same process of creating meaning within the context of migration. This has been present among other interlocutors. But for Michael, this process had an additional meaning because it also marked his coming of age. Michael's migration to Croatia coincided with a specific phase in his life cycle.<sup>26</sup> The moment of migration became a turning point in his personal development. Since Michael's move to Zagreb had been completely unplanned, it was just a coincidence that this happened in Croatia. Michael's story shows how the age of migrants, or rather the phase of their life cycle they are in (along with nationality, ethno-cultural characteristics, religion, education, why they came, legal status, and gender) is an important factor in their experiences as migrants.<sup>27</sup> The story also shows the role of the place they migrate to in the incorporation process, or rather the interactive



relationship between migrant and location. For Michael, Croatia – and more specifically, Dalmatia – was easy to “blend in” because it had familiar characteristics for him.

*As it gets a bit hot, we're a bit lazy, working under the blistering sun, in the shade we lounge. No Dalmatian walks quickly, coffees all day, we all get to whinge about the tourists, laganini [slang for taking it easy]...*

During our conversation, Michael reflected a great deal on his experiences, on Zagreb, and on Croatia. He compared his own youthful search with the city's efforts to create its own identity. While he has found his own identity by living in Zagreb, the city has yet to succeed in finding its own.

*I have a blog and I've done speeches about Croatia and I always put Croatia as a girl in her teens and she doesn't know how she fits [together]. Zagreb especially, she has so many elements in her and I understand that; she's looking for something to piece them all together. [...] She has a very weird energy: communist buildings, modern skyscrapers, ancient Europe up there in the Old Town, all these converging elements which I truly understand. I felt that in Croatia it was the first time that a city understood me.*

Even though for him the relationship was not over, Michael left Zagreb and Croatia. Mobile, unencumbered by baggage, firm plans, or a predetermined shape for his life, everywhere a foreigner (except in Croatia!), Michael left Riga after a year and moved to Bucharest. He represents a modern incarnation of the historical figure of vagabond – a dangerous figure for onetime authorities, who dodges connections, control, and framing.<sup>28</sup> However, his reflections on Zagreb would seem to point to the possibility of making connections and putting down roots that could be long lasting if the economic circumstances had allowed for it.





# Migrants and city-making

International migrants *make the city* and their place in it in a variety of ways. Their individual stories of migration are diverse, but they reveal a similar experience of encounters with the city and becoming incorporated into city life. Zagreb's materiality and aesthetics, its character and atmosphere, and its potential and transformation are the three perspectives we have singled out as the hub of migrant experiences there.

Some of the Zagreb locations that are important for our interlocutors often coincide with places in the city also associated with tourism (streets, squares, buildings, parks, and cultural institutions), while some of the attributes migrants use to describe Zagreb coincide with those on which the city would like to build its appeal for tourists.<sup>29</sup> Migrants, however, take this one step further. For them, Zagreb is not just an attractive tourist destination but also a place to live in, either temporarily or long-term. It is a place they gradually become better acquainted with and eventually become highly familiar with some of its aspects. They put effort into learning Croatian and into getting to know and understand the society. They also encounter everyday problems that go beyond a tourist visit. Due to their experience with life in other countries, migrants implicitly or explicitly compare Zagreb with other cities, and recognize Zagreb's positive characteristics which encouraged them to move or

have reinforced their belief that this is a city they would like to build a life in. At the same time, those who are critical of certain aspects of city life (primarily the economic aspects) demonstrate by their own examples what needs to be done to make the process of migrants' incorporation easier and that business ideas should not be constrained by high taxes and adverse regulations.

As users of Zagreb's public spaces and cultural activities, migrants are often satisfied with the availability of various content. Some of them, however, are not just users of what is available, but are themselves creators of new content. The fact that they were not able to fully take advantage of what was available due to inadequate knowledge of Croatian and the lack of information in English inspired some of them to organize new events on their own. Similarly, they became engaged in and offered various kinds of information in English in Facebook groups and on webpages.

International migrants make up a small part of the population in Zagreb. Over the last ten years, the number of people moving to Zagreb from abroad did not exceed 3000 until 2016.<sup>30</sup> Considering the current development in the number of immigrants in Zagreb and other social and economic circumstances, like the unfavorable economic situation and the city's developmental problems, restrictive requirements for foreigners opening a business, and the lack of a state or city migration policy,<sup>31</sup> there most likely will not be a large influx of foreigners anytime soon. If Zagreb is to become more attractive on the map of international migration, efforts need to be made to change these conditions.

The migrants we spoke to are not recognized in public discourse or policies as a developmental potential for the city. While they may contemplate Zagreb as a desirable place to live and see within it potential

for transformations, we would argue that their potential as agents of city-making has not been recognized at either the municipal or the state level.



<sup>1</sup> Michael Peter Smith and John Eade, "Transnational Ties. Cities, Migrations, and Identities", in *Transnational Ties. Cities, Migrations, and Identities*, eds. Michael Peter Smith and John Eade (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Annually, not many people move to Zagreb from abroad. Over the last ten years the number was generally between two and three thousand, apart from two years when it was lower. In 2016, 3300 people settled in Zagreb. See: *Statistical Yearbook of the City of Zagreb for 2017* (Zagreb: City of Zagreb, City Office for Strategic Planning and Development of the City, Division for Strategic Information and Research, Department of Statistics, 2017), [https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/statistika/Book\\_ZG%20Ljetopis%202017\\_ENG\\_final.pdf](https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/statistika/Book_ZG%20Ljetopis%202017_ENG_final.pdf); *Migration of Population of Republic of Croatia, 2016* (Zagreb: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 21 July 2017), [https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/publication/2017/07-01-02\\_01\\_2017.htm](https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2017/07-01-02_01_2017.htm). We can interpret from these trends that Zagreb is not high on the list of destinations for international migrants.

<sup>3</sup> This publication draws from our article, "Zagreb očima međunarodnih migranata. Značenja, potencijali i (re)skaliranja grada" [Zagreb through the Eyes of International Migrants. Meanings, Potentials and (Re)scaling of the City], *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 29 (2017): 251–277.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies. Migrant Incorporation and City Scale", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 177–202.; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar, *Locating Migration. Rescaling Cities and Migrants* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2011).; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar, "Locating Migrant Pathways of Economic Emplacement. Thinking beyond the Ethnic Lens", *Ethnicities* 13, no. 4 (2013): 494–514.; Lars Meier, ed., *Migrant Professionals in the City. Local Encounters, Identities and Inequalities* (New York, London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.uniquezagreb.com>; a portal founded by Theresa Khalil, whose story will appear later.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and Its Implications", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024–1054.

<sup>7</sup> Lars Frers and Lars Meier, "Encountering Urban Places – Visual and Material Performances in the City", in *Encountering Urban Places. Visual and Material Performances in the City*, eds. Lars Frers and Lars Meier (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 1–7.

<sup>8</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Valentina Gulin Zrnić, *Kvartovska spika. Značenja grada i urbani lokalizmi u Novom Zagrebu* [Talk of the Neighbourhood. Meanings of City and Urban Localisms in Novi Zagreb] (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Lars Frers and Lars Meier, "Encountering Urban Places – Visual and Material Performances in the City", in *Encountering Urban Places. Visual and Material Performances in the City*, eds. Lars Frers and Lars Meier (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Henri Lefebvre in Lars Frers and Lars Meier, "Encountering Urban Places – Visual and Material Performances in the City", in *Encountering Urban Places. Visual and Material Performances in the City*, eds. Lars Frers and Lars Meier (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 1–7.

<sup>12</sup> Lars Meier, "Working in the Skyline – Images and Everyday Action", in *Encountering Urban Places. Visual and Material Performances in the City*, eds. Lars Frers and Lars Meier (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 120.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/croatiagourmet/>.

<sup>14</sup> This has been mentioned in the guidelines for the city's economic development written by the Economic Institute, Zagreb: *Polazne osnove za izradu Strategije razvoja Urbane aglomeracije Zagreb – gospodarski aspekti* (Zagreb: Ekonomski institut, Zagreb, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Information about this interlocutor was gathered from her website ([www.theresakhalil.com](http://www.theresakhalil.com)), the web portal *Unique Zagreb* (<http://www.uniquezagreb.com>), and her personal Facebook page, during several events she organized and from an interview held in March 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Information was gathered during an interview with Tetiana on February 15, 2017 and from her blog (<http://www.ostrogliad.com.ua/en/>), where she documented her business and life plans as well as her move to Zagreb. The conversation was conducted in Croatian, which she speaks very well, while her blog is written in English.

<sup>18</sup> Hartmut Esser, *Aspekte der Wanderungssoziologie. Assimilation und Integration von Wanderern, ethnischen Gruppen und Minderheiten* (Darmstadt, Neuwied: Luchterhand Verlag, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> *Polazne osnove za izradu Strategije razvoja Urbane aglomeracije Zagreb – gospodarski aspekti* (Zagreb: Ekonomski institut, Zagreb, 2016), 175.

<sup>20</sup> See: *Zakon o strancima* [Foreigners Act] (*NN 130/2011*, [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2011\\_11\\_130\\_2600.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2011_11_130_2600.html); *NN 74/2013*, [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013\\_06\\_74\\_1475.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2013_06_74_1475.html)). For example, Article 78 of the Act stipulates that when opening a trading company or sole proprietorship, foreigners and nationals of countries outside the European Union must employ a certain number of Croatian nationals. Our interlocutors often referred to this regulation as well as high taxes when talking about restrictive conditions for opening a business.

<sup>21</sup> Information was collected during an interview with Karolina in June 2017 and through e-mail correspondence.

<sup>22</sup> See: <http://www.ceepus.info>.

<sup>23</sup> Even though Karolina's evaluations are positive, we do not want to state that academic mobility programs are a priori positive projects. We advocate a critical approach to academic mobility, which would also take into account its downsides.

<sup>24</sup> Information was gathered during a conversation conducted in Croatian with Agustín in June 2017, from his Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/juanagustinlopezmusic/>), and from media accounts.

<sup>25</sup> A several-hour conversation with Michael was carried out just before he left Zagreb in February 2016. The conversation was continued on Facebook, and we used his blog, *Life on the Foreign Side* to tell his story (<http://lifeontheforeignside.blogspot.hr/>).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Peggy Levitt, "The Ties That Change. Relations to the Ancestral Home over the Life Cycle", in *The Changing Face of Home. The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*, eds. Peggy Levitt and Mary C. Waters (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 123–144.



<sup>27</sup> Cf. Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and Its Implications", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024–1054.

<sup>28</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity", in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage, 1996), 18–36.

<sup>29</sup> See: <http://www.infozagreb.hr/about-zagreb/zagreb-today&lang=en> (accessed 15 October 2017).

<sup>30</sup> *Statistical Yearbook of the City of Zagreb for 2017* (Zagreb: City of Zagreb, City Office for Strategic Planning and Development of the City, Division for Strategic Information and Research, Department of Statistics, 2017), [https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/statistika/Book\\_ZG%20Ljetopis%202017\\_ENG\\_final.pdf](https://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/statistika/Book_ZG%20Ljetopis%202017_ENG_final.pdf); *Migration of Population of Republic of Croatia, 2016* (Zagreb: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 21 July 2017), [https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/publication/2017/07-01-02\\_01\\_2017.htm](https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2017/07-01-02_01_2017.htm).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the city's problems with development, see: *Polazne osnove za izradu Strategije razvoja Urbane aglomeracije Zagreb – gospodarski aspekti* (Zagreb: Ekonomski institut, Zagreb, 2016), 76. The migration policy at the state level expired in 2015: *Migracijska politika Republike Hrvatske za razdoblje 2013. – 2015. godine* (NN 27/2013, [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2013\\_03\\_27\\_456.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2013_03_27_456.html)). The city's migration policy was not a part of the city's blueprint for urban development in 2017: *Nacrta Strategije razvoja Urbane aglomeracije Zagreb* (Zagreb: Grad Zagreb, Gradski ured za strategijsko planiranje i razvoj Grada, 2017), [http://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/strategijsko\\_planiranje/Nacrta%20Strategije.pdf](http://www.zagreb.hr/UserDocImages/arhiva/strategijsko_planiranje/Nacrta%20Strategije.pdf).

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