

Translating the nation through the sustainable, liveable city

The role of social media intermediaries in immigrant integration in Copenhagen

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Translating the nation through the sustainable, liveable city:

The role of social media intermediaries in immigrant integration in Copenhagen

Abstract

This article explores settled Western migrants whose digital content provides recent, mostly Western migrants in Copenhagen with local know-how and city-related information. This new type of informal integration intermediaries functions as an emerging digital component of wider urban integration industries that assist migrants' with settlement and social integration. We draw on the sociological theory of translation as a social, productive practice that constructs new meanings through selective interpretations and conceptualize the work of these bloggers as translation. Relying on the analysis of their blog and Instagram posts, and on interviews, this paper shows how their translations of the city, and through it Danishness, play a critical role in mediating narratives of "becoming local" (Buhr, 2018). Despite the differences between the bloggers' respective translations (including those afforded through blogs versus Instagram) and despite some critiques of lacking inclusion of socio-cultural difference in Denmark, these intermediaries ultimately reinforce for newcomers the expectations of the "green city citizen" (Winter, 2017) and integration into Danish culture and lifestyle. We argue that what makes their translations resonate is not only that social media itself allows them to perform their having become (almost)local, but also that they carefully use their personal reflections as migrants. At the same time, the fact that their personal experiences of the city have been shaped by their positionality as white migrants feeling very welcomed to, and even passing for locals in the city, curtails these bloggers' wider potential as informal intermediaries filling a gap within Copenhagen's urban integration industries.

Keywords

intermediary, integration industry, migration industry, social media, sustainable urbanism, liveability, Copenhagen

Introduction

Over the past decade Copenhagen has experienced a major reputation boost on the global urban scene, becoming celebrated and repeatedly ranked as one of the world's most, if not *the* most liveable, sustainable cities. The current rise of the city's fame can be traced back several decades to a shift to the human-scale urbanism and an ambitious pursuit of environmentally sustainable policies. The increased professional and political appeal of Danish urbanism represented by Copenhagen has its parallel in the massive appeal of the city as a tourist destination, and especially as a place to live. The population growth pace has increased significantly over the past ten years with the net addition of 1,000 new residents every year. A significant number of new residents are newcomers, especially from abroad. In a contradistinction to the 1980s and 1990s, these migrants come mostly from the EU countries, and/or most of them are highly-skilled and educated, or pursuing higher education. Many of these immigrants are presumably attracted to what is promoted as at once a "metropolis for people" (Københavns Kommuneplanstrategi, 2019: 13) and a "trendy, vibrant and sustainable metropolis, offering high living standards, work-life balance and opportunities for the entire family" (Copenhagen Capacity, nd).

This increased popularity of Copenhagen, and Denmark more broadly, as an immigrant destination unfolds against the country's strong focus on the immigrant integration agenda¹. While it was in particular a broad public perception of a "failed

¹ The term of integration as a social scientific concept is contested due to its widespread and problematic uptake as a social concept in the context of the rise of integrationist agenda (for the distinction see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). We, however, decided to use it in this paper for ease of inter-legibility, while using it interchangeable with settlement-assistance or -easing to signal our referring to the broader migrant settlement process.

integration” on part of the immigrants and refugees from the 1980s and 1990s that spurred this discursive, legislative and policy turn, it now affects all newcomers. Immigrants now thus face calls to embrace Danishness as well as an increasingly restricted access to residency and citizenship (Jensen et al., 2017), tied to an array of expanded national integration policies (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2012). Since the passing of the Integration Act in 1999 the responsibility for the implementation of these policies rests with municipalities. Cities and urban-based, especially non-profit actors have always played a decisive role in assisting migrants with settlement. But the integrationist turn, adopted in the last twenty decades across much Europe, has expanded in particular the array of for-profit providers of integration services. These are a part and parcel of the growth of commercialization of wider migration-pertaining services over the past decades, as highlighted by the migration industries literature. In Denmark likewise municipalities often partner with private companies (Jensen, 2018), or completely outsource concrete integration tasks to private enterprises and non-profit organizations. These formal integration intermediaries work, however, primarily with refugees and those joining their spouses, both almost exclusively non-Western migrants. Those arriving on employment and education visa, predominantly Western migrants, receive less assistance and thus rely more on networks and social media for navigating Danish society².

This article focuses on specifically social media-based intermediaries by examining Western migrant bloggers in Copenhagen who write to a predominantly Western migrant audience. By sharing their knowledge and know-how about the city these bloggers function as an emerging, informal digital component of wider immigrant

² Although there is evidence from for example Canada that non-Western migrants likewise draw on social media for such support (Zaher, 2020).

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integration industries in Copenhagen that work to assist these migrants with their social integration. Drawing on the sociological theory of translation as a social, productive practice that constructs new meanings through selective interpretations (Sapiro, 2014) we conceptualize their work as translation. Proposing that the bloggers' translations of the city, and through it Danishness, play a critical role in mediating narratives of "becoming local" (Buhr, 2018), we analyze how these translations relate to dominant framings of the city as the paragon of sustainable, liveable urbanism. Throughout, we also pay attention to the bloggers' own navigations of how they interpret and assemble the city digitally for the newcomers in their content. We argue that what makes their translations resonate is not only that social media itself allows them to perform widely their having become (almost)local, but also that they carefully use their own personal reflections as migrants. Before turning to the analysis of their translations, the article first discusses recent migration industries research to highlight the relative neglect of integration-assisting labor, concluding the section with our conceptualization of the particular type of such labor examined in this paper as translation. This is followed by a background section on migrant population and integration industries in Copenhagen, and methodology.

Migration industries and integration-assisting labor as translation

In migration research migrants' social networks and their sharing of information about migration logistics but also about places of settlement had long been seen as playing a deciding role in the facilitation of transnational mobility. Research on migration industries emerged initially to highlight instead the crucial but neglected role of

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commercial, business-oriented actors, such as coyotes or labor recruiters (Salt and Steiner, 1997; Hernández-León, 2005; Sørensen and Gameltoft-Hansen, 2013). Yet, as Jones and Sha (2020) point out in a recent review, the dualistic framework of for-profit migration industries versus the non-capitalist social networks, is highly problematic. This is so because the practices of migrant-service providers are complex and fluid (ibid), as very clear also from the case of our bloggers. Namely, often only some types of work intermediaries do are commodified, while others are expended "for free". The free labor is likewise not always expended with a clear intention of future commodification, nor is there a clear progression, from first providing free services only to commercialize them later. This is especially common for established migrants who become themselves migration intermediaries (Žabko et al., 2017).

Finally, while clearly commercial actors might have been given most focus on migration studies research until now, many not primarily commercial and even non-profit actors become enrolled within the broader economic landscape of migrant-providing services, often unintentionally (Juul, this issue). As Cranston and her colleagues argued recently (2018; but see also Spener, 2009), focus on labor expended in the mediation of migration rather than the orientation to profit then provides a more productive avenue to understand the role of migration industries in the "middle-space of migration" (Collins, 2021: 867). This paper draws on their suggestion and focuses less on the commercial aspects and more on the kind of work migration intermediaries actually do.

The existing migration industries research has richly examined the mobility-initiating and facilitating labor, often times in relation to migrant labor recruitment or human smuggling (Gammeltof-Hansen and Sørensen, 2013; van Liempt, 2018), as well

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as prevention and control of mobility (Menz, 2013; Sørensen, 2018). More recently, formerly neglected (see eg Groutsis et al., 2015) industries' work catering to highly skilled professionals (Harvey et al., 2017; Cranston, 2017) and the super-rich (Koh and Wissink, 2018; Koh this issue) have gained attention. This latter research does showcase new types of work, such as enticing migrants (Spaan and Van Naerssen, 2018; Beech, 2018) or growing the migration market through creating knowledge on migration and migrants (Cranston, 2018). Yet despite the general awareness of different phases of migratory process that different actors intervene in (van den Broek et al., 2015), the types of labor "easing adaptation" (Garapich, 2008: 735) remain neglected by migration industries scholars, with the exceptions of channeling of migrants into particular labor (Harvey and Groutsis, 2012; Groutsis et al., 2015) or housing (Zaban, this issue; Bernt et al., this issue) markets. That in fact industries "facilitating the integration of migrants" remain the very last mentioned in the most recent, comprehensive overview of the field is telling here (Jones and Sha, 2020).

Yet migrants in many destinations are now assisted in other areas of their settlement than housing or employment by an increasing array of novel actors and services, some of whom target migrants specifically as "an important and highly profitable type of consumer" (Garapich, 2008: 737). While some of them are engaged full-time with settlement- and integration-related labor, for other providers migrants are a secondary clientele pursued as a business-enhancement strategy. They range from very functional, and most likely clearly profit-oriented provision of legal services connected to immigration and naturalization law, or trade in goods from migrants' countries of origin to those related more to social life in the new setting (eg Spaan 1994). Sometimes, as Garapich (2008) points out, providers become integration

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intermediaries unexpectedly, at least in the outset of their practice. This is a point that, as we discuss in the first empirical section, certainly resonates with our bloggers' and their digital presence beginnings.

Sharing of information and interpretation of the new socio-cultural context that assist migrants with the navigation of their everyday life in the new places has always been a part and parcel of an exchange provided informally through one's personal social networks or more formally through immigrant press. Today much of it unfolds in the digital sphere. Although migrant fora and other digital venues have grown rapidly as central places for exchange of information in the last decade, especially amongst the skilled migrants, they have so far eschewed researchers' sustained attention (Harvey et al., 2017). Yet the role of such digital venues is important not only in terms of their impacts on individual migrants' settlement trajectories, but also on cities as migrant destinations. If for example, as Tseng (1997: 279 in Jones and Sha, 2020) points out, immigration consultancies sometimes encourage outmigration options by "emphasizing negative local factors", informal, but also professional digital intermediaries can likewise through their sharing of local settlement-related information shape destination reputations and increase, or decrease, attractiveness of certain global destinations (Harvey and Groutsis, 2015).

The arrival of social media and user-content-driven platforms of Web2.0 has especially widened the number of such venues and potential contributors. It has likewise positioned advantageously private individuals to become leading sources of information about immigrant destinations for a large audience. Established migrants are often times best-positioned to do this kind of work as their own process of integration had entailed "becoming local" (Buhr, 2018). Examined from the everyday spatial perspective, this

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process presupposes an acquisition of “an urban know-how” for the navigation of a new city, if simply for “the practical aspects of carrying a life locally” (Buhr, 2018: 315).

This involves for example not just having learnt about transportation options and routes in the city but also eventually acquiring an embodied, habitual level of knowing for example the fastest or nicest pathways of the city depending on one’s need. It is this kind of know-how that intermediaries like our bloggers draw on in their work producing content for their blogs and Instagram profiles.

In this article we find it productive to conceptualize their work as translation. Replacing older concepts such as diffusion (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016), the sociological concept of translation is increasingly made recourse to in order to understand how ideas and models are communicated and portrayed between different contexts (Sapiro, 2014). It highlights the active modification of an object or idea as it travels across time, space or audience. "The fundamental notion of translation theory" (Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016: 239) is precisely the acknowledgment that "a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place or another point in time is to construct it anew" (Czarniawska and Sevon, 2005: 8 in Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016: 246). Each translation is then "a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication" (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002: xxi), and thus a power relation, involving always a certain degree of violence (Gimpel and Thisted, 2007). It is inherently an interpretive, performative and thus a productive practice (Sapiro, 2014), rather than simply offering re-production or code-switching (Risku, 2002). Scaled up, translation "is the mechanism by which the social and natural worlds progressively take form" (Callon 1986: 224). While some see social media, and in particular Instagram, as enforcing certain conformity (eg Schep, 2017 in

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Boy and Uitermark, 2020), in Scandinavian and Latourian conceptualization every translation is unique, producing a "continuous transformation" of the world (Latour, 1986: 268 in Wæraas and Nielsen, 2016: 238).

This understanding of translation as a thoroughly social practice likewise highlights institutional and individual agency behind the circulation of ideas (Sapiro, 2014). Translators, previously supposedly neutral and invisible agents, are now approached as visible decision makers, constructing meanings and new realities (Risku, 2002). Yet, as Callon stresses (1986) not all translations count equally since only some translators become seen and designated as legitimate spokesmen. Such spokes/wo/men are akin to Prunč's (2007) "translator-priests", who - unlike their polar opposite in Prunč's terminology, the marginalized "translator-pariah" - occupy the central position in the field with a number of competing agents. This article analyzes precisely such translator-priest(esse)s of Copenhagen – and through it Denmark - by focusing on the most prominent migrant bloggers of the city. The following section discusses the city of Copenhagen as a city of migrants and its landscape of integration intermediaries in order to situate and contextualize the work of these bloggers.

Migrant Copenhagen and its integration industries

While the bloggers analyzed here cover content that is not not only about the city but to some extent also more broadly about Danishness, they do so through their focus on Copenhagen. This reflects not only their own but also other migrants' actual geographies of settlement in Denmark. The municipality and the adjacent municipalities on the western border of Copenhagen have been long the most popular places of settlement for

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migrants in the country. As a result, the capital is the largest and most culturally diverse municipality in the country with 26% of its residents being immigrants or their descendants as opposed to 14% nationally³. This population has a variety of backgrounds, reflecting different migration flows to Denmark after WWII. These include the so-called guest-workers from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia from the 1960s who brought spouses and families after 1973, asylum seekers from the 1980s and the 1990s, especially from Somalia, Lebanon, and Bosnia, and, as mentioned in the introduction, mostly professional migrants of the last two decades coming from the EU, but also India and China. While the proportion of non-Western migrants and their descendants in the city (15% of) stands at about a double of the national average (Status på Kbh, 2021: 25), Western migrants also settle primarily in or around Copenhagen. More than just loose designations, Western and non-Western migrants (and their descendants) are the most important categories of official population statistics related to integration in Denmark. These statistics serve as a basis of a sweeping public problematization of non-Western migrants as such as having problems with integration due to their lower labor market participation (especially for women), disproportionately high criminality and reliance on welfare. Western migrants, on the other hand, are exceedingly rarely problematized in public discourse, except in cases of international university graduates leaving the country without having paid back student loans.

This split is reflected also in the politics of integration, including at the municipal scale. While some, mirroring the popular discourse, see the municipality as "a pioneering municipality and a role-model for other municipalities with respect to

³ This percentage is higher (up to 41%) in two of the smaller municipalities within the broader metropolitan region that lie west of the actual municipality of Copenhagen. The diversity of population is however larger in Copenhagen itself (Københavns Kommune, nd).

diversity" (Andersen et al., 2014: 4), the city's politics largely follows the national politics (Emilsson, 2015). As noted in the introduction, in the last two decades the integration policies previously directed only at refugees widened their target population and expanded massively in scope. While free, multi-year Danish language courses are available to all migrants, the integration contract signed upon the reception of temporary residency permit and outlining 1-5 year long integration program is only mandatory for non-EU citizens⁴ coming for other reasons than employment or study (Shapiro and Jørgensen, 2021). Since the focus of integration policies has been increasingly on getting migrants into employment as soon as possible so that they reach economic self-sufficiency, the main integration actors have become either private businesses or training centers with whom the municipality collaborates. Another crucial type of city-based actor are, due to the focus on the Danish language, language schools. Finally, more because of need rather than any official policy, some existing charities have expanded their services to marginalized migrant population (Juul, this issue). If many of the actors are then previously existing companies or non-profits not originally established to work on migration-related issues they have since become enrolled in integration-assisting labor.

At the same time, Copenhagen's integration infrastructures include newly established actors. New non-profit organizations tend to cater to those outside of the official purview of integration policies or refugees needing legal assistance to fight their cases. Individually, many social workers have become integration mentors that are assigned to migrants who are under the integration contract, providing guidance focused on achieving economic self-sufficiency. The city's main official actor, the *International*

⁴ While this includes de facto also some of the Western migrants, the proportion of non-EU Western migrants who move to Denmark because of reasons other than employment or study is negligible.

house, is municipality's public-private partnership. It started as a one-stop administrative provider of services related to the official paperwork, eventually adding referrals to language courses, private relocation or "spouse-care" companies. It has always focused on the privileged migrants, reflected in its framing of its targeted clientele as "international talent" in process of "relocation". It is this type of migrants, and especially those moving with their families, that the bloggers in this article address themselves to primarily. At the same time, they fill a gap in this urban integration infrastructure by sharing more informal, often tacit knowledge and everyday know-how about the city and its everyday socio-cultural life.

Methodology: Researching *expat* bloggers

In what follows, we analyze two of the established, full-time bloggers that have been over the past several years named as amongst the most influential or interesting *expat*⁵ and/or Copenhagen bloggers to follow on a variety of fora such as spottedbylocals.dk or expatfocus.dk⁶. We selected specifically The Dejlige Days⁷ (DD), run by a British woman, and Oregon Girl around the World (OG), run by an American woman, as individual bloggers purposefully engaging with Copenhagen, and through it Danishness,

⁵ Before we move on to discuss our findings, we want to add a critical note on our choice of terminology. In calling these two migrant *expats* we follow both their own and websites' descriptions of them. We do so despite the fact that the category of *expat*, or *expatriate*, is a deeply problematic one. Far from being a neutral term, the category is deployed in everyday life in order to extricate oneself from a usually racialized picture of a low-skilled, burdensome (im)migrant, and to instead highlight oneself as an educated, highly-skilled and most likely temporary foreign sojourner (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2020). With our reflexive use of *expat*, complemented by a self-critical reflection on this term by the bloggers themselves, we hope to avoid the complicity that plagued previous academic studies on *expats* in the depoliticized institutionalization of the term.

⁶ We focus on the English-language production due to both our linguistic capacities and the fact that full-time bloggers blogging from small countries like Denmark and seeking a broad audience do so in English.

⁷ The expression mixes Danish word for lovely (*dejlige*) with English *days lovely*.

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from the perspective of Western migrants. We decided against including those bloggers who might focus on the city but without a migrant perspective or those with a narrow focus on restaurant and food culture or fashion due to our explicit interest in the broader urban translations by migrants-turned-intermediaries. Moreover, the similar background of both bloggers as middle-aged, white, anglophone women who have been residing in Copenhagen for an extended period of time (11 and 7 years respectively) with their families following their husbands' professional relocations, enabled us epistemologically to examine and understand the existing differences in their practice more in-depth than an inclusion of bloggers with widely divergent positionalities would allow for.

Our interest in understanding these bloggers' translations and their perspectives on their blogging work led us to rely on a variety of data: texts and images posted on the blogs and Instagram respectively relating to Copenhagen and Danishness between January 2017 and July 2020, complemented by individual semi-structured interviews. While both DD and OG had been active before 2017 we decided to start our analysis of the content in 2017 when both appeared amongst the top-rated (*expat*) bloggers of Copenhagen. The interviews with the bloggers, each lasting between one and two hours, included open questions about the beginnings of blogs, thematic development of content and platform presence, and challenges of blogging. Transcripts underwent thematic analysis based on the coding categories related to our focus on bloggers' labor as translators. In terms of the bloggers' content we analyzed blog posts, which are focused on texts and are produced usually twice a month as well as the images from Instagram posts, whose frequency is at least double that of the written posts on the blogs. Blog texts and Instagram images were open-coded in order to map and then analyze further

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thematic foci and their treatments by both bloggers. While both DD and OG are present on other social media platforms, we decided to focus – in addition to the original blogs – on Instagram since our preliminary research indicated that this image-oriented platform was preferred by them, something confirmed also in the interviews. This is unsurprising insofar as blogging communities more generally shifted in the last few years to Instagram, which has due to its explosive growth become a prime marketing space, where more than half of its half a billion daily users follow brands and public accounts, like those of our bloggers. The next section, divided into four sub-sections, examines their work of translating the city to newcomers, with the first one elucidating blogger's emergence as integration intermediaries in the first place.

Translating the nation through the city

From expats to integration intermediaries

The everyday, spatial aspect of “becoming local” (Buhr, 2018) is apparent in the kind of urban know-how that *expat* bloggers share via their digital content after having accumulated it over the years in the city. OG in particular articulated explicitly how having lived in the city long-term resident enables her the position as a legitimate translator of her know-how, insisting: “I mean I’ll never be Danish but am I a Copenhagener, I think I am. I mean, almost 7 years, it gives me a bit of credibility”.

That their migrant experiences of having had to learn a new city in a new country are decisive for their ability to be effective translators is clear from beginnings of their blogging practice. Both blogs namely developed from personal sharing with families and friends of lessons and learnings involved in moving abroad for the first time in their lives. OG started her blog after finding Facebook less of an appropriate

outlet for her increasingly longer posts, in which she reflected on the socio-cultural differences encountered in Copenhagen. This initial “sharing and working through those differences” helped her achieve “a kind of catharsis”, and became crucial for her own self-integration. She further developed her blogging as a more intentional and professional practice to minimize her isolation in the city, including by creating her own network- and community, socially and professionally. DD likewise switched from time-intensive emailing about her experiences to a personal blog. But it was in fact while having to live in Berlin for a year before returning to Copenhagen, and experiencing migrant isolation anew, that her blogging became more professionalized and directed specifically at the “*expat* mom community” with whom she shared her findings about places and activities in the city for non-German speaking new migrant mothers.

Professionalization of the blogging practice has led to a certain capitalization on the urban know-how bloggers share. As is the case for most bloggers, DD rarely earns money from her blog but uses it as a portfolio, on the back of which she gets hired to do writing jobs, for example on sustainability in Copenhagen. Likewise, the blog, and its long duration, gives her credibility to offer individualized relocation services focused especially on the everyday life adaptation that professional relocation companies, such as those partnering with the *International house*, do not provide. And while OG tried monetizing her blog she abandoned such an attempt after a short-lived experience, having led her to what she described as “inauthentic” blogging.

These bloggers thus resemble other migrants who seek to capitalize, especially financially, on their knowledge and become migration intermediaries providing migration- and integration-related information and services (Hernandez-Leon, 2013). But despite some frustration with contemporary expectations of provision of free online

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advice and information, their persistence in blogging about the city, its life and local culture is not primarily related to monetization. While such disposition is certainly enabled by their families' socio-economic positionality, it also more broadly reflects how veteran migrants-turned-intermediaries maintain multi-sided motivations for their migration-mediating practices (Jones and Sha, 2020), including those related to their personal and social wellbeing

(Kerulis et al., 2020). Regardless of the shifting motivations, the blogs arose out of the bloggers' processing of their own migrant experiences of "becoming local". Sharing the interpretations resulting from such processing on social media, which always act at least to some extent "as stages for the expression of status" (Boy and Uitermark, 2020: 5), allows now also for the bloggers' performing this acquired localness to the wider audience (eg. Larsen and, Sandby, 2014). We address next the main foci of this performed localness.

Copenhagen as the sustainable, liveable, and (still) Danish city

The Copenhagen that OG and DD assemble in the digital lifeworld through their deliberate selection of topics and foci is first and foremost a city that is both shaped by and enabling further sustainable and liveable lifestyle. While in interviews both bloggers cited their personal interest in sustainability as long-standing – whether as manifested in previous work for environmental NGOs (DD) or spouse's career in the renewable energy (OG) – the solidification of the overarching framing of sustainable, liveable urbanism in their blogs in recent years has likely been spurred also by the general popularity and city's long-term official international promotion of this framing (Simpson, 2018; Anderberg and Clark, 2013). Of most relevance here is, however, the

fact that such framing also speaks to the rising significance of lifestyle in the integration of professional migrants in Denmark, and presumably also more broadly.

Especially sustainable mobilities feature in both bloggers' digital content both as a backbone of the city's sustainable urbanism and a key feature of everyday life. While this includes highlighting the expansiveness, ease of use and coolness of anything from public transportation to electric car-sharing schemes, cycling plays the most prominent role here. A celebratory portrayal of the city as an extremely successful "city of cyclists" on its way to "the world's best city for cycling" (Gössling, 2013: 196) is not surprising given its match with the city's own self-image, as well as the fact that over half of the daily trips in the city are made by bike. Yet such portrayal obscures not only the fact that the car continues to play a dominant role in the city's policy, planning and in everyday life of a large segment of the population (Freudendahl-Pedersen, 2015), but also challenges with the inclusion of migrants into the local biking culture.

Beyond the availability of green mobilities, the bloggers, and especially DD, present the city as offering an increasing variety of everyday infrastructures for environmentally sustainable lifestyle. DD regularly shares posts about how to secondhand-shop, recycle one's own clothes and toys, navigate municipality's refuse and recycling system, or reduce one's single-use plastics through recourse to bulk shops, while mapping and showcasing for the readers concrete locations and establishments around the city. Broader socio-political contextualization is often included in such posts, especially on the blog, so that for example DD's featuring of *We Food*, the country's first supermarket selling surplus food, was accompanied by her discussion of the political attention to the reduction of food waste in the city. These

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elements of the sustainable lifestyle are thus presented not only as easily pursued - given the infrastructure - by the locals but worthy of adopting by others as well.

Finally, while not explicitly presented as such, liveability could be seen as a frame for the social aspect of sustainability in bloggers' translations. A defining feature of Copenhagen's urban lifestyle to be internalized and appreciated by newcomers, visitors and potential migrants alike, it becomes conveyed by the bloggers especially through the city's built environment as being constructed to "human scale", walkable and cyclable, and abounding with open, carefully planned and designed public spaces. Furthermore, the bloggers tie this materiality to being underwritten by a broader Danish embrace of slow pace of everyday life, strong seasonality and rhythmicity, rejection of encroachment of work life into other spheres of life, and availability of free or very affordable, simple and family-friendly leisure activities.

Images play a crucial role in this celebratory aspect of translations. OG's repeated specific visualizations of bicycles (an ordinary-looking, lonesome bike or two resting against a typical Copenhagen façade) and cyclists (in an (almost) empty bike-lane) produce a romanticized framing of bike-centricity as smoothly functioning, cool and unequivocally good. Likewise, her street-level photographs of never crowded city spaces, shaped by the understated Danish interior and exterior design, visualize human-scale urbanism as aesthetically pleasing. Such images matter greatly in signaling to readers which places in the city and which ways of being a Copenhagener to become attuned to. After all, images have come to have more agency than ever in the contemporary conditions of an increasing visualization of everyday life (Boy and Uitermark, 2017), with digital ones especially possessing an increasing "affective capacity" to produce "atmospheric place images" (Degen et al., 2017: 7).

If Copenhagen is presented by the bloggers as an example of potentially globally attractive sustainable, liveable urbanism, it continues to be simultaneously a place of venerated Danish national traditions, centered, from the bloggers' perspective, strongly on food. Interestingly, OG and DD eschew drawing attention to the city's globally acclaimed restaurants or the New Nordic cuisine these restaurants helped brand (Ooi and Pedersen, 2017). Instead, they focus on explaining the importance of the Danish food culture as a critical element of the broader culture newcomers need to become familiar with. They provide guidance to the revered food traditions, such as Danish ryebread-based *smørrebrød* lunch, and elucidate how particular dishes are understood as cornerstones of the Danish identity. At the same time this traditional food culture is portrayed as anchored in specific places in the city, from classic *smørrebrød* eateries to the iconic silverware and jewelry royal designer house of Georg Jensen, with its yearly display of highly-anticipated exhibits of Christmas dinner settings. Even though the traditional Danish food is not known as health food, bloggers' translations convey a sense of Copenhagen as a city providing also for healthy food lifestyles. But more broadly, the centrality of the non-healthy Danish food items, including rich and often seasonal pastries, is presented, if implicitly, as existing both within a broader culture of moderation that is Danishness, and as tempered by the active everyday lifestyle. With the resulting slimness of Copenhageners' as a representative of good health, the aesthetic of the city itself is dovetailed by the aesthetic of its people.

Overall, through the celebratory portrayal of the city as the international leader of sustainable, liveable urbanism, one that still maintains its quirky local traditions, DD and OG perform their own credentials as migrants integrated into the enlightened, sustainable, yet still Danish lifestyle of the city. In doing so they also act as key

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spokespeople for this lifestyle and its appeal to current and/or potential migrants. In this way, the blogs play an important role in the co-production of the expectations of the “green city citizen” (Winter, 2019) amongst newcomers to Copenhagen, speaking to the significance of social media narratives in signposting aspirational lifestyles (Jensen, 1996 in Degen et al., 2017). Yet, as the next section shows, while sharing in overall tenor, OG’s and DD’s translations also diverge.

Diverging translations

One of the three main drivers of difference between the two bloggers’ translations are their own interests, connected in part to their educational and professional backgrounds. OG’s degree in art leads her content-wise to the aesthetic, design, architectural history and material culture-related aspects of the city. It is also behind her consistently stronger focus on communicating via professional-quality photography, which despite her attempt to strike a balance between “curating a photograph” and not wanting “it to be perfection”, as stressed in the interview, does contribute an especially strong aspirational, celebratory tone to her translation. This is only underwritten by the fact that her blog had taken shape at least in part as a travel blog that tend to be generally more image-dominated. The focus DD puts into text-based sharing of information reflects on the other hand her educational background, experience and interest in PR and written communication, and her self-understanding as primarily a writer. In combination with her positioning herself as a relocation guide this leads her to stress more information-transfer-focused translations.

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The divergent emphases are shaped by the intended audience, as hinted at above, but also by those actually engaging with the content. The appraisal of the shared content by others is of course central to social media sharing (Boy and Uitermark, 2020). Yet this appraisal is often difficult to navigate for the bloggers, especially if the more superficial forms of engagements such as likes contradict more substantive engagements through commentaries and especially specific requests for content. Thus DD is for example often interested in more substantive stories that speak to more progressive politics, as evident through her bringing attention at times to new alternative or non-mainstream places in the city, tied to a particular social niche or a progressive community. Yet with her successful self-profiling as a relocation guide she finds herself appreciated and asked for very specific practical posts, such as a guide to the complex offerings of seasonal outerwear for the Copenhagen climate or navigation of the bus system. Similarly, while OG might be interested in sharing insider tips and getting her audience to see the city in a new, deeper way, as a professional blogger she has to consider that it has been especially her posts on *expat* difficulties with cultural adaptation that have been amongst most popular.

Finally, it is also bloggers' country of origin that shapes their translations. While the term *expat* might connote cosmopolitanism, national identity plays often an important role in *expatriates'* composite identities (van Bochove and Engbersen, 2013). This is evident for both bloggers examined here. Their national background has provided their basic frame of reference, especially since both OG and DD are novices to life abroad. The "contrast and compare" approach, that both of them highlighted in our interviews as shaping especially their early practice when explaining for example the medical or school system in their posts, is the most explicit example of the relevance of

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this frame. But its influence is palpable also in their more recent blogging, potentially also reinforced by their targeting of and previous connections with nationally specific audiences.

For OG as an American for example the extreme car-centricity of life in all but few US cities provides for an additional factor – besides the wider popular discourses – that leads her to a persistent documentation of the possibility of car-free urban and cycling and walking-focused life in Copenhagen. Likewise, her translations of most Danish practices and traditions focus on explaining the centrality of the role of a set collective, rather rooted aspects of social life for Danes vis-à-vis the frame of the American culture centered on the role of the individual, mobility and openness. In her blog posts addressing *hygge*, one of Denmark's top export articles recently, she for example goes beyond the easily commodifiable iconic image of feet in the knit socks on a table with a candlelight to explaining how *hygge* expresses "that communal sense of slowing down and focusing on being together in a comfortable place with your family or friends". Within the context of another post explicating why it is so notoriously difficult for immigrants to make Danish friends, she elaborates further:

Hygge happens with people you know. Well. To be more clear, hygge happens with people where there is a close connection. And for a Dane, it doesn't happen in a huge gathering of people that they just met or haven't known for very long.

In case of DD it is primarily her frequent critical mentions of gentrification of a number of neighborhoods she had witnessed over her 12 years in Copenhagen that make her British frame of reference stand out. For example, in one of them she describes the impending signs of this process, such as closing of old local retail and hospitality establishments in favor of new, higher-end or hipster ones, as the "Waitrose effect",

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referencing here the UK high-end grocery chain that tends to be a telling sign of such processes in the UK cities. In another post, DD urges her readers to think about their practices as consumers of urban services and their potential contribution to gentrification-fueled displacement, while comparing Copenhagen, for now favorably, to the urban condition in the UK:

The issue of displacement is one which should not be ignored. The cycle keeps going until all the city areas are the same, with the same types of coffee shops, bakeries and restaurants, same types of people with the same affluence and the city is only for well off people. Copenhagen is a long way off becoming as homogenised as some towns and cities in the UK but the writing is on the wall. I've said it before but every Krone you spend is a vote for the kind of city you want to live in.

DD's experience of the UK cities' extensive privatization of public spaces is also clearly present when she commends Copenhagen on having maintained free public space access in the most desirable areas, including in the redeveloped areas along the waterfront. When she expresses hope that such a tradition of "democratisation of spaces" continues, she does so against an understanding of a slow erosion of such a tradition in her home country.

Finally, both bloggers amend the conventional narratives of Copenhagen urbanism through highlighting the issue of socio-cultural diversity and difference, something generally missing in such narratives. It is not that their portrayals include a strong sense of how the city has been thoroughly changed through immigration over the past fifty years. Besides the occasional glimpses of the actual multiculturalism of the city and more common presentations of city's eateries owned and operated by immigrants, it

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is the "typical" Danish and *københavnsk* elements of culture relating to the old, white and culturally Christian Denmark that permeate their enactments of the city. But both of them do comment on the lack of inclusive attitudes and accommodation of difference in Denmark, critiquing for example the new metro line advertisements for misrepresenting city's residents as not including any non-white or poor people (DD) or the potentially racist undersides of *hygge* (OG). This, at least in part, reflects their anglophone experiences with culturally and racially diversified societies 'back home'. Yet it is also their family experiences with international schools in Copenhagen that have reinforced their awareness of their privileged migrant position in Denmark as "hidden *expat(s)*" (OG). DD reflected explicitly during our interview on the limitations that experiencing city from such a perspective has for her translations of the city:

What I would love to see and I don't think it exists is a blog written by an Indian person living here....that would be a very interesting perspective to have because a lot of the parents of the kids in my son's school come from India and a lot of the challenges that they encounter are very different from the challenges to those that white Europeans encounter. But I don't want to write about that cause that's not my lived experience, so I can't say this is how it is for the Indians.

As we have outlined here, each blogger's experiences of "becoming local" as well as their broader sensibilities, interests and motivations personalize their respective translations, highlighting their ability as translators to produce and perform their own particular interpretations (Sapiro, 2014; Risku, 2002). Despite these, however, neither blogger examined here is positioned to contribute to a robust diversification of Copenhagen's framing, that most likely necessitates a perspective on the city as

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experienced by racialized or socio-economically marginalized others, not feeling so welcome in the city. In the final segment we consider another decisive factor contributing to omissions and limitations of their translations, namely the platforms themselves.

Digital platform limitations of translations

It is clear that what differentiates bloggers from other integration actors providing similar services is that their blogs reflect a personally experienced, embodied know-how of the city. Yet both bloggers are also very much aware how much they as individuals are present in the blogs. They both have developed a practice of shaping their content as not being *about* them but about being presented *through* them and their experience. Such a navigation, a part of the broader balancing act that both bloggers engage in, provides challenges, not least because of the platforms they produce their content for and share it on.

For OG this act includes in the first place striking a balance between choosing content that is timely while also having a long-term relevance, as well as a balance between posts sharing “random little things” of *her* city with those presenting more “iconic spots”. The difficulty of this navigation is related especially to the Instagram whose format encourages a speedy scrolling-driven consumption of pictures, often about current happenings, and where some level of iconicity is needed to place the account instantaneously. In DD’s case it involves especially a careful consideration of her more critical pieces, as she explains in detail here:

I tend to write down ideas of things each month as the month goes by I pick from them, so a mix, something a bit more fun, something a bit more thought-provoking. So, it's a

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balance act, because I don't want to get preachy, I don't want get *too* niche...I see something and then just write about it, get really fired up, and..... and sometimes I get angry and I think do I write an angry post, but most of those are still in the draft box, cause I think....can I actually write about something I'm angry about but in a positive way. And sometimes, I simply can't. (original emphasis)

Without running an explicitly activist account and instead approaching her blog as a pathway to relocation-related jobs, DD's potential for the inclusion of more critical, or "angry " posts is thus limited. This is, again, especially though not exclusively so in case of IG with its self-promotion as a feel-good, positive and non-political platform. It is not surprising that especially IG has been pointed to as the platform inadvertently contributing to gentrification processes world-wide through boosting the image of previously marginalized neighborhoods with romantic imagery of their hipness and edginess (Boy and Uitermark, 2017). And while DD is aware of how the quickened pace of news and disconcerting urban change is enabled through social media, her investment in this digital media landscape seems to preclude a critical self-reflection of her own potential contributions to it, despite her critical sensibilities.

Crucially, these critical sensibilities make their way into translations produced primarily for blogs as spaces shaped by bloggers and dominated by their texts. Blog posts can be very long, allowing for more complex handling of a topic than even the longest caption under the IG image allows for. Yet engagement with long blog posts presumably lags behind the massively popular IG. Additionally, IG's focus on images coded through hashtags is especially prone to reductionism and objectification, resulting in for example OG's IG translations of *hygge* centering on its material-cultural aspects rather than socio-cultural norms like those of her blog posts. Similarly, the blog format

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allows her for example, in her discussion, titled “cultural assimilation in a bike lane”, to go beyond the celebratory image of the city of cyclists and hint at stress and anxiety related to biking in crowded, rush-hour lane along the aggressively-riding old-time commuters. But unglamorous images of masses of fallen over or damaged and abandoned bikes, the "predictable byproduct" of the city's successful biking culture (Larsen and Christensen, 2015: 922) that are ubiquitous in the city, are missing in her portfolio, presumably too uncool for IG.

It is of course not only platforms that limit more nuanced and critical translations. After all, whether on blogs or IG, bloggers stay clear of some crucial issues, even if they are central to themes frequently discussed. Given their focus on food, the lack of any discussion in their content we examined about how pork-based traditional Danish foods had become a focal point of the prominent right-wing discourse about failed immigrant integration (Karrebæk, 2012) is, for example, striking. While this might be due simply to a certain avoidance of engaging with controversial topics, the lack of attention, by both bloggers, given to the increasing housing inaffordability in the city might have different roots. It namely challenges foundationally the overarching portrayal of Copenhagen as not only a sustainable but also liveable city, available to all.

Conclusion

In this article we examined two migrant bloggers who, as digital and social media intermediaries, are an emerging but a growing component of a densifying “ensemble” (Hernández- León 2008, 2013) of integration-assisting intermediaries that make up integration industries in contemporary migrant destinations. We have focused on their

work through which they assist migrants in their everyday social and cultural adaptation and settlement by helping them to get to know and understand the city. Conceptualizing this work as a translation of bloggers' own local know-how, we have argued that it is important to attend to as it contributes to the shaping of the expectations and normative milieu within or towards which migrants come to orient themselves.

Expat bloggers' translations shape migrants' expectations potentially more powerfully than those of formal, institutional integration intermediaries because they rely upon their own everyday engagements with and in the city to mediate integration into its physical and sociocultural fabric. The readers are taken alongside the bloggers as they perform through their digital content their having "become local" (Buhr, 2018) by showcasing their accumulated urban know-how of urban infrastructure, culture and social life. While performing their self-integration in this way, they not only translate the city for readers, but also participate in a co-production of expectations about what it means to live as a Copenhagener aimed at the newcomers to the city. Thus while readers can feel seen as individuals also going through the process of learning a new place, they can at the same time feel inspired by these bloggers' having become locals. All of this is very unlike the didactic and formal sharing and translation of local culture offered by formal integration actors, like integration mentors or Danish language schools.

While each of the *expat* bloggers produces their own assemblage of a translation of everyday Copenhagen, that includes at times also critical perspectives on the local culture, they overall tend to both draw on and amplify the broader political and popular portrayal of Copenhagen as the pinnacle of sustainable, livable urbanism. Echoing contemporary appeal of Copenhagen and Denmark in popular Western media, both the city and the Danish society, as represented through its capital, are portrayed as

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something to fit into, or at least to aspire to and emulate. This reflects these white Western bloggers' experiences as migrants readily embraced by the Danish society, perceived more as internationals or *expats* than migrants per se, whose presence in and appreciation of Denmark reinforces the local self-understanding of Denmark, and especially Copenhagen, as a progressive place.

Future research will most certainly need to address the methodologically challenging issue of when and in which ways different migrants draw on, engage with and themselves interpret various translations of cities and local cultures offered to them through such informal digital integration actors. But there remains in the first place the question of who tends to get to occupy the positions of credible translators and reach what kinds of audiences. While the bloggers examined in this article do fill a certain gap in the existing integration infrastructure in Copenhagen, there remains a spectrum of voices, perspectives and stories untold for the diversity of migrants to the city. With the rationality of "micro-competitive platform capitalism" (Meged and Christensen, 2017: 203) having permeated also social media, there seems to be theoretically a potential for a quick growth of such minor, neglected voices that could pluralize portrayals and framings of urban cultures and migrant integration. At the same time, the current dominance of quick-paced, image-focused social-media-turned-marketing-place platforms like Instagram, with its promotion of "smooth aesthetic(s)" (Boy and Uitermark, 2017: 616) and decidedly non-critical stories, does not bode well for aspiring translators seeking to lay bare for example blindspots of celebratory narratives of Copenhagen's urbanism.

Importantly, such digitally circulating translations by informal actors reach more than migrants or even tourists, having broader impacts on cities. Especially those shared

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with the world through Instagram are, through the use of appropriate hashtags and other tools, consumed and further shared more widely by all those interested in contemporary urbanisms, or as in this case, specifically liveability, sustainability or simply current Copenhagen-philias. It is here that such translations can come to palpably dovetail cities' official promotions unfolding through for example accounts run by public relations companies. If they achieve enough of a resonance in digital lifeworlds they can certainly increase cities' reputations as attractive, increasing pool of migrants interested in that location, as has likely been the case in the last five to ten years in Copenhagen. Both migration and urban studies will benefit from further research examining the precise role digital storytelling, provided by a rising number of digital intermediaries that translate local urban and national contexts online, plays in migrant decision-making processes.

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