

Name of the MSC Fellow: Flavio Besana
Nationality: Italian
Host organization: Spatial Foresight
Country of the Host: Luxembourg
Project Acronym: Re-City
Project start and end date: 2019-2022
Type of MSC action, H2020: ITN

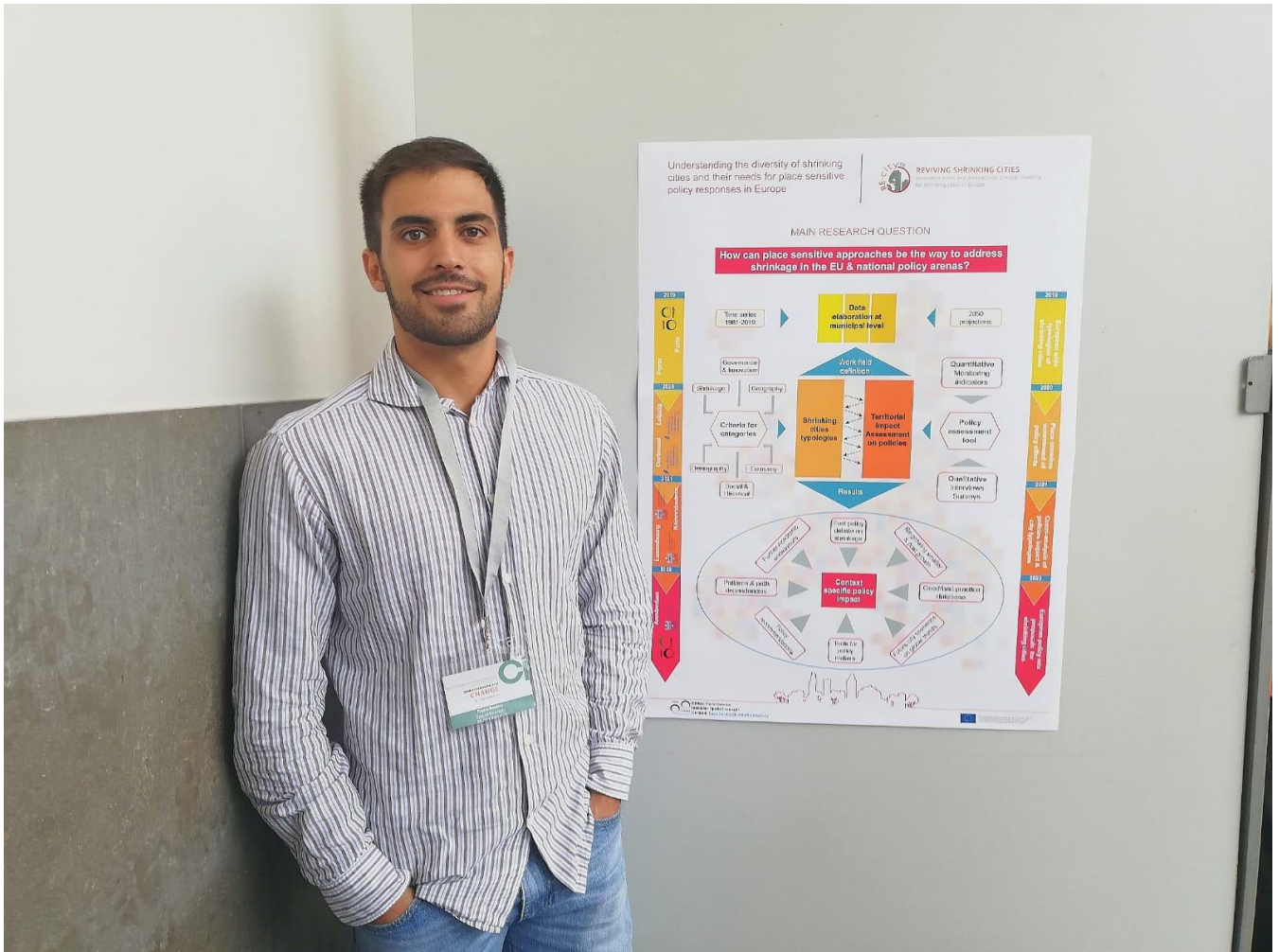


Image 1: ITN fellow Flavio Besana presenting the outline of the research project at the 2019 CITTA conference in Porto (19-20 September 2019).

Your story:

Project objectives and research field:

The aim of the project is to advance European-wide comparable knowledge on shrinking cities and provide insights on policy frameworks suitable for responding to demographic decline in various types of shrinking cities.

This involves the elaboration of a European-wide typology of shrinking cities including the mapping of population decline in different geographical and socio-economic contexts. It furthermore involves conducting territorial impact assessments of various EU policies to understand how they affect shrinking cities.

Tell us why your topic is important and/ or how it brings to advancement in your research field:

In the near future, many places in Europe will experience demographic and economic decline. Therefore, 'shrinking cities' is likely to become a concern for many politicians and public decision-makers.

Advancing the knowledge on shrinking cities and what characterises them will help to better understand how to address them in future policymaking.

Furthermore, improving the understanding of how various policies explicitly or implicitly affect shrinking cities is important. Although hardly any public policy addresses shrinking cities, various policies accelerate shrinking processes unintendedly. Some policies also hold potential to stop or at least cushion shrinking processes. To improve future policy-making and ensure that there is a future for all places in Europe, it is important to understand how policies affect shrinking cities. This knowledge can help to design more place-sensitive policies in future.

What are the benefits of participating in a MSC action?

Being part of an ITN is an excellent opportunity for pursuing my research goals and boosting my professional skills at the same time. This comes from the uniqueness of the ITN actions, which give you access to an extended network of experts in the field, that work both in university and private companies.

The very nature of ITN helps to mitigate the stereotype threat that research is driven only by scientific interest and does not always fit the knowledge needs of decision-makers in public authorities and private companies.

This dual perspective facilitates an overview of the implications of my work in the society at large, attributing to my research a powerful role in improving European citizen livability conditions.

Shrinking cities will become an increasing concern in some parts of Europe in the future and I think that this action has an extremely high potential in making sure that the issue will not be overlooked in EU, national and regional policies. Not only, the outcomes of this research project could have direct impacts on cities' revitalization but could also provide knowledge for more place sensitive policies.

Did you encounter any challenges during application/ implementation and did you get any help?

The application process ran very smoothly in my case, with very good timing and positive dialogue to find the best solution for me as a candidate.

The implementation is ongoing and no challenges have emerged so far, therefore no specific need to ask for help.

Why did you choose a widening country as a Host? What was the reason that convinced you? What is making you professionally happy here?

My decision to move to Luxembourg was driven by the features of the professional opportunity offered here at Spatial Foresight. The topic of research proposed, the working environment being directly linked to European policy processes, and the different expertise available at my host institution convinced me to take my chances and relocate in this very international country.

Luxembourg offers a truly dynamic professional environment that encourages fruitful exchanges on a daily basis. In any single working place, you will be sharing offices and task with a mix of nationalities, thus enriching the experience with different cultural and scientific approaches to the job.

Luxembourg's employment and working conditions are a perfect fit for young professionals, allowing for economic independence and empowering me to get involved with society beyond the working time.

The country status is currently in transition towards a new equilibrium and follows a growth paradigm; living this phase is full of opportunities. The country is young, vibrant, dynamic, and very well interconnected with the rest of Europe, being right at the heart of the Union.

Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/ tips can you give them?

I would strongly recommend anyone who is interested in pursuing a PhD programme to apply to an Innovative Training Network position. These programmes offer infinite possibilities for learning in different contexts and the mobility, intrinsic in the programme, allows you to experience different working lives over the course of the programme. You will experience a true feeling of empowerment in pursuing your career objectives.

My advice is to show in the application how passionate and how committed you would be to be involved in the ITN. The technical aspects of the research proposal are of course an essential element for your application to be considered, but my

impression is that they are also very interested in the person and his/her dedication, flexibility for changes and potential preparedness to work in different environments.