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Research proposal [Part B1]
(Part B1 is evaluated in Step 1 and Step 2,
Part B2 is evaluated in Step 2 only)

Transparency in **Act**ion: Unlocking the Black Box of Freedom of Information Practices in Public Administrations

TRANSACT

Cover Page:

- Name of the Principal Investigator (PI): **Prof. Dr. Giovanni Esposito**
- PI's Host Institution for the project: **Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)**
- Proposal duration in months: **60 months**

Why do Freedom of Information (FOI) laws, despite widespread formal adoption, fail in practice to deliver on their promise of transparency? Public policy and administration scholars have addressed this question using input-output, power-based, and process-based models, but these models, despite important contributions, struggle to provide a comprehensive answer. They offer partial analyses that fail to capture the complexities of how FOI laws are implemented in practice. TRANSACT takes an innovative interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from existing models to develop a new practice-based model focusing on the day-to-day interactions between citizens and public officials. By investigating these interactions and their societal context, TRANSACT will provide a deeper understanding of why FOI laws succeed or fail across different settings. This approach is groundbreaking because it moves beyond the assumptions of established models to examine the practical realities faced by citizens seeking government-held information. To achieve this, TRANSACT adopts a transdisciplinary approach, conducting field experiments in multiple countries and partnering with civil society organizations to collect data directly from public administrations. This novel methodology captures both the individual behaviors of citizens and public officials, as well as broader societal factors affecting FOI implementation. The research is inherently complex, involving both micro-level behaviors and macro-level influences, and crosses boundaries between theory, practice, and academic disciplines. The PI is uniquely qualified to lead this project, with expertise in FOI research, transparency policy, and field experiments, supported by a strong international network of academics and practitioners. The project's outcomes will open new avenues of research into the individual and contextual factors affecting FOI implementation, providing evidence to policymakers to improve FOI systems globally.

Section a: *Extended Synopsis of the scientific proposal (max. 5 pages)*

1. The Underestimated Importance of FOI Laws in Practice

Freedom of Information (FOI) is a fundamental right recognized by the United Nations, crucial for ensuring government transparency. As a key democratic norm, FOI contributes to accountability and informed citizen participation in governance (Hood 2006; Piotrowski, 2007). It grants **citizens** and **civil society organizations** the right to access government-held information while obligating **public administration officials** to disclose such information. This has been further supported by Information and Communication Technologies (e.g. emails, digital platforms, cloud systems, social media), enabling scrutiny of government actions, monitoring of resource allocation, and holding leaders accountable (Margetts and John, 2024). FOI also empowers investigative journalism to expose corruption, inform the electorate, and safeguard democracy. By empowering citizens with knowledge, FOI supports informed decision-making and strengthens democratic governance by ensuring that public institutions remain open and responsive (Žuffová, 2020). For these reasons, FOI laws have been rapidly adopted worldwide as a cornerstone of democratic governance (Michener, 2011). However, despite widespread adoption, FOI laws frequently fail to achieve their intended outcomes. A significant **gap persists between formal compliance (de jure) and practical implementation (de facto)** in many jurisdictions. As Michener and Nichter (2022) note, "adopting regulation (de jure compliance) may not equate to responsiveness to citizens in practice (de facto compliance)". Research consistently shows that governments often fail to meet their FOI obligations, leading to poor outcomes and significant barriers to transparency (Michener et al., 2021). Instead of guaranteeing access, the implementation of FOI laws often leads to a **"black box"** effect, where processes for handling requests—how, by whom, and on what grounds decisions are made—remain opaque to the public.

The **primary goal of TRANSACT** is to explain why, despite their rapid worldwide adoption, FOI laws in practice often fail to deliver the promised transparency. TRANSACT aims to achieve this by adopting an innovative **interdisciplinary approach** that integrates insights from existing FOI research traditions into a more comprehensive conceptual framework. However, conceptual advancements alone are insufficient. Studying FOI implementation in practice presents significant empirical and methodological challenges, which TRANSACT will address through a **transdisciplinary approach** involving practitioner organizations in the research design and implementation. As the Principal Investigator (PI), I am **uniquely positioned to lead this project** due to my multidisciplinary background and extensive experience in public policy and administration research, particularly in FOI. My established network of academic and practitioner collaborators further ensures successful partnership-building and transdisciplinary project execution.

2. Beyond the State of the Art

2.1 Current Knowledge and Limitations in Existing Research Traditions

Despite important theoretical advancements among public policy scholars (Cucciniello et al., 2017; Porumbescu et al., 2022), the three dominant research traditions—rationalist, critical, and organizational—do not fully capture the complexities of FOI in practice.

Rationalist Tradition: Public policy scholars in political science and public administration have predominantly adopted a rationalist, linear perspective, viewing FOI laws as straightforward tools for achieving transparency (Heald, 2006). This approach assumes that the mere adoption of FOI legislation ensures transparency, relying on Weberian models of administration that depict bureaucrats as neutral, rule-following agents (Seibel, 2010). Such a simplistic **input-output** view ignores real-world complexities, such as bureaucratic discretion and power dynamics, leading to the flawed belief that legislative adoption alone guarantees effective governance.

Critical Tradition: Critical policy scholars respond by deconstructing the rationalist and linear assumptions, emphasizing the inherent **power dynamics** and limitations of FOI as an instrument for transparency (Hansen et al., 2015). They argue that, in practice, FOI laws are often a "decoy" used by elites to create an illusion of transparency while concealing actual power dynamics (Adams, 2018). However, this view risks "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" (Prusik, 2023). Despite flaws and the potential for manipulation, FOI laws remain crucial for journalists and civil society to expose government actions and hold power accountable.

Organizational Tradition: Meanwhile, public policy scholars in fields such as organizational sociology, public management, and economics have taken a non-linear view of FOI implementation, viewing it as a complex **process involving multiple actors with competing interests** (Heimstädt and Dobusch 2018). Relying on New Public Management models of public administration, they see bureaucrats as self-interested agents who disclose information only when it poses no personal risk (Cicatiello et al., 2024). However, this approach reduces FOI outcomes to simplistic, one-size-fits-all economic models, attributing failures solely to individual bureaucratic self-interest while overlooking the role of broader societal influences.

2.2 TRANSACT's Paradigm Shift from Existing Research Traditions

TRANSACT offers an innovative perspective by **rejecting the oversimplified, siloed views of FOI laws** as either inherently effective transparency tools (rationalist tradition) or mere symbolic gestures that sustain elite power (critical tradition). It also moves beyond one-size-fits-all economic explanations that attribute FOI failures solely to bureaucratic self-interest (organizational tradition). Instead, TRANSACT adopts an **interdisciplinary perspective**, integrating insights from these traditions to create a more comprehensive view. According to this perspective, while FOI laws can enhance transparency and public governance (rationalist tradition), their actual impact depends on how bureaucrats apply legal provisions and manage citizens' FOI requests (organizational tradition), as well as on broader structural social, economic, and political factors that either support or hinder transparency (critical tradition). Therefore, TRANSACT hypothesizes that the effectiveness of FOI laws depends on the complex interplay of multiple factors:

a) **Bureaucrats' FOI Practices**: Bureaucrats do not uniformly apply FOI legal provisions and exercise discretion in deciding whether to disclose or withhold information in real-world settings. TRANSACT will investigate the varied forms of bureaucratic practices, ranging from information disclosure to withholding.
b) **Citizens' FOI Requests**: Bureaucrats respond to FOI laws based on how citizens frame and submit their requests for access to government-held information. TRANSACT will explore how the nature and presentation of these requests influence bureaucratic practices of information disclosure and withholding.
c) **Societal Context**: The broader socio-political and economic context significantly affects the effectiveness of FOI implementation. TRANSACT will examine how these contextual factors influence bureaucratic decisions regarding information disclosure and withholding.

To comprehensively study the interplay of these factors, TRANSACT leverages the explanatory potential of practice-based theories of public policy, a theoretical stance that is fundamentally **different from existing input-output**, **power-based, and process-based models** of established research traditions. While practice-based theories have existed in political science for some time (Laws & Hajer, 2006), their significance in policy research has only recently gained recognition (Bartels, 2018). Practice-based theories provide a framework for understanding policymaking through the everyday activities of practitioners (Colebatch & Castles, 2023). Within this framework, TRANSACT conceptualizes FOI implementation as a lived social practice involving complex interactions between bureaucrats, citizens, and their societal context—distinct from existing models. This shift enables TRANSACT to develop a **novel practice-based model** of FOI implementation that contrasts fundamentally with existing models. The **central hypothesis** posits that FOI laws can fail to achieve the intended transparency due to (1) varied practices of bureaucrats, who can choose to disclose or withhold information, and (2) these practices being shaped by their interactions with citizens and societal contexts, which may either support or inhibit transparency outcomes. By gathering data at both the micro-level of bureaucrat-citizen interactions and the macro level of societal contexts, TRANSACT will provide a comprehensive analysis of how context-dependent interactions between bureaucrats and citizens shape FOI implementation, leading to either transparent or opaque outcomes.

3. TRANSACT's Groundbreaking Challanges

The goal of TRANSACT is to address the question of why, despite their rapid global adoption, FOI laws often fail to deliver the transparency they promise. To answer this, I argue for moving beyond traditional models and adopting a novel, practice-based approach that focuses on the real-life implementation of FOI laws. This paradigm shift introduces significant complexity, requiring the research team to tackle **groundbreaking challenges**. Specifically, the decision to adopt practice-based models forces TRANSACT to confront **unprecedented empirical and methodological problems** not previously addressed in FOI research.

3.1. Empirical and Methodological Problems Overlooked by Existing Traditions

A practice-based approach to FOI requires observing bureaucrat-citizen interactions in everyday settings, which presents a key challenge: avoiding the **Hawthorne effect**, where officials alter their behavior when aware they are being observed (Walby & Larsen, 2011). Rationalist and critical scholars have typically relied on statistical correlations or theoretical critiques, neglecting the detailed study of bureaucratic behavior. **Behavioral scholars within the organizational tradition** have tried to tackle this issue through **randomized field experiments**, which involve submitting FOI requests via email to public administrations, observing the responses, and occasionally modifying the content to assess impact. Using email as a routine communication method in citizen-bureaucrat interaction aims to create a sense of normalcy, thereby reducing the likelihood of altered behavior. However, these experiments face **ethical concerns**, such as avoiding deception and minimizing unjustified administrative burdens. To mitigate these concerns, some researchers have submitted requests as university-affiliated individuals, occasionally without disclosing institutional ties (Michener & Rodrigues, 2015), while others have requested non-controversial documents to avoid burdening public administrations (Cicatiello et al., 2024). **Despite these precautions, the approach remains problematic**. As Trautendorfer et al. (2024) demonstrated, the relevance of requested documents significantly affects the likelihood of disclosure. Furthermore, these studies often overlook typical FOI users, such as journalists and

advocacy groups, thereby raising concerns about the ecological validity of these experiments - i.e. the extent to which findings can generalize to real world, ensuring experimental conditions reflect everyday situations.

3.2 TRANSACT's Transdisciplinary Approach to Solve Existing Empirical and Methodological Problems

In the organizational FOI research tradition, the lack of real-world applicability is not considered problematic, as the focus remains on testing abstract, market-framed models of bureaucratic behavior. These models explore whether self-interested bureaucrats avoid responding to FOI requests they perceive as risky, with such assessments influenced by factors like the requester's social status (Lagunes & Pocasangre, 2018), gender (Michener & Rodrigues, 2015), or communication style (Cuillier, 2010). Conversely, **for TRANSACT, the failure to capture real-life FOI practices represents a critical empirical issue** directly affecting policymakers. This deficiency leaves policymakers without sufficient evidence to improve FOI's practical functioning. Existing methodologies often yield findings that are more theory-oriented than practice-oriented, thus failing to elucidate the "black box" of FOI practices in governance. TRANSACT addresses these challenges by **co-producing field experiment methodologies with civil society organizations**, involving practitioners as co-researchers. The research team will collaborate with non-professional researchers, such as journalists or transparency advocates (hereafter referred to as **citizen scientists**), in designing trials and administering FOI requests, thereby generating novel empirical data on real-life interactions with public bureaucrats. Consequently, TRANSACT will be both interdisciplinary and **transdisciplinary, transcending traditional boundaries by involving non-academic stakeholders and co-producing knowledge with them**. This approach shifts FOI research from controlled academic settings to real-world scenarios, **ensuring empirical data genuinely reflect FOI practices**. By focusing on policy-relevant FOI requests (alongside less controversial ones), TRANSACT guarantees ecological validity and relevance, accurately reflecting everyday FOI use. Furthermore, the research is integrated into the ongoing activities of partner organizations, avoiding deception while preserving **ethical standards** and data authenticity.

4. TRANSACT's Objectives

Against the outlined theoretical, methodological, and empirical considerations, TRANSACT has 3 objectives:

Theoretical Objective: To develop the first theoretical model conceptualizing FOI law implementation as a socially embedded practice. This model will explore how bureaucrats' decisions to disclose or withhold information are influenced by their interactions with citizens and the societal context.

Methodological Objective: To create and implement a novel methodological protocol for FOI research, enabling the co-production of field experiments with practitioners. This approach will allow the study of citizen-bureaucrat interactions in real-world settings, enhancing the depth and validity of FOI research.

Empirical Objective: To generate robust empirical evidence explaining why FOI laws fail in practice, addressing the gap between legal adoption and practical application. This involves gathering comprehensive data to understand discrepancies in FOI implementation across diverse countries.

5. Impact and Potential Breakthroughs

5.1 Scientific Impact: Theoretical, Methodological, and Empirical Breakthroughs

TRANSACT will make significant scientific contributions at three levels:

Theoretical Level: TRANSACT introduces an **interdisciplinary model** that explains FOI implementation through real-world interactions between bureaucrats, citizens, and societal contexts, offering a more integrated understanding of how FOI laws succeed or fail in practice.

Methodological Level: TRANSACT pioneers a **transdisciplinary field experiment approach**, co-produced with civil society organizations, addressing current research challenges and providing more relevant data for policymakers.

Empirical Level: TRANSACT conducts a cross-country study, compiling comprehensive data on government responses to FOI requests, identifying transparency barriers, and providing insights for future policy reforms.

5.2 Policy Impact: Informing FOI Reforms

TRANSACT aims to initiate a new public debate on improving FOI laws based on its findings. By gathering detailed micro-level and macro-level data on FOI implementation practices within public administrations, the project will identify two key barriers to transparency: (a) individual decisions made by bureaucrats, and (b) broader societal factors. From these insights, TRANSACT will recommend targeted policy interventions:

a) **Individual-Level Interventions**: Promote transparency by implementing training programs to foster a culture of transparency and encouraging stronger collaboration between public administration and civil society to minimize arbitrary decision-making.

b) **Structural Reforms**: Standardize FOI procedures and invest in strengthening administrative capacities through enhanced human resources and digital systems to efficiently process FOI requests.

These interventions will help bridge the gap between FOI laws and their practical application, fostering more transparent and democratic governance.

4.2.3 Impact on Research Group and PI's Career

TRANSACT will significantly benefit both the research group and the PI's career:

Capacity Building: TRANSACT will establish the research group as a leader in transparency studies, enhancing expertise in real-world FOI implementation. Team members will develop practical skills in field experiments, collaboration with civil society, and turning research into policy recommendations, strengthening the group's role as a key partner for evidence-based reforms.

PI Positioning: TRANSACT will position the PI as a leading expert in FOI and transparency policy. By advancing new methodologies and forming global partnerships, the PI will gain recognition, expanding influence in FOI debates and advisory positions at national and international levels.

Future Research: TRANSACT will lay the groundwork for future FOI research. The project's partnerships and insights will help secure further funding—such as ERC Consolidator Grants or Horizon Europe projects—extending its impact and advancing public administration and democratic governance.

5. Methodology

The aim of this project is to understand why FOI laws frequently fail to achieve their intended objective of fostering transparency. To address this issue, TRANSACT relies on its practice-based model to inform an international randomized field experiment involving 4 different countries.

Practice-Based Model**:** The empirical approach of TRANSACT directs the **collection and analysis of data using the following model**: $B_{0,1,2,3,4} = f(I_{a,b,c,d,e} C)$. In this model:

⇒ *Dependent Variable* (B) - *B*ureaucratic practices of information disclosure, assuming 5 distinct forms: no response (B_0), malicious refusal (B_1), adversarial refusal (B_2), partial disclosure (B_3), and full disclosure (B_4).
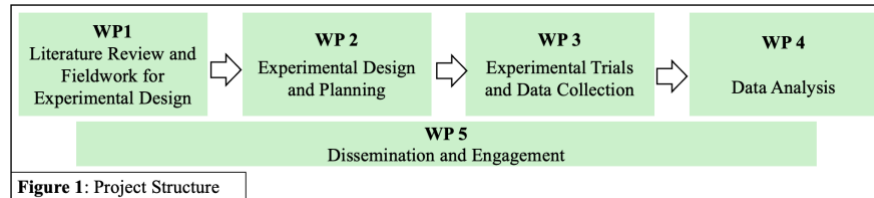
⇒ *Independent Variables* (I, C) - citizens' *I*dentities and strategies for filing FOI requests, and *C*ontextual factors: identity of the requester (I_a), gender of the requester (I_b) topic of the request (I_c), tone of the request (I_d), mention of FOI norms in request text (I_e) and socio-political and economic context (C).

Randomized Field Experiment**:** To explore how various factors influence bureaucratic responses to FOI requests, TRANSACT will conduct a **cross-country randomized field experiment**. This experiment systematically tests variations in key independent variables affecting transparency outcomes. In collaboration with citizen scientists, journalists, and officers from civil society organizations, the TRANSACT research team will submit FOI requests to municipal administrations across four selected countries. These countries will be chosen in consultation with practitioners to ensure both theoretical and practical relevance (Jensen et al., 2022). A scientific criterion that the TRANSACT team will propose to practitioners is to address gaps in FOI research by focusing on underexplored regions. Most previous FOI field experiments have centered on the US (Cuillier, 2010; Wagner, 2021), Latin America (Lagunes & Pocasangre, 2019; Michener & Rodrigues, 2015), and Western Europe (Cicatiello et al., 2024; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2019; Worthy et al., 2017), with limited research in Eastern Europe (Spáč et al., 2018) and none in Africa or Asia. TRANSACT aims to correct this imbalance by proposing practitioners to include Romania (Eastern Europe), Uganda (Africa), Japan (Asia), and Canada (North America), thus incorporating a range of administrative traditions for a diverse empirical setting. Bureaucratic responses to FOI requests will be observed to assess practices of information disclosure or withholding. The experiment involves independent variables representing specific aspects of the FOI request or the requester, and the different combinations of these variables constitute the treatments applied in the field experiment ($I_{a,b,c,d,e}$). These variables include requester identity across six categories: common citizen, lawyer, university researcher, civil society activist, and journalist. Each identity will be paired with male or female gender, resulting in 12 requester profiles. Additionally, FOI requests will vary based on topic sensitivity (sensitive vs. non-sensitive information), tone (formal vs. informal), and whether FOI norms are mentioned (included or excluded), resulting in 48 unique treatments per country (6 requester identities × 2 genders × 2 topics × 2 tones × 2 FOI mentions). A minimum of 200 trials will be conducted for each of the 48 treatment combinations, totaling 9,600 trials across four countries. Each participating municipality will be randomly assigned one of the 48 treatments, stratified by munipalities' population size to ensure comparability and reduce bias. The trials will generate 9,600 data points reflecting bureaucratic practices, categorized as no response (B_0), malicious refusal (B_1), adversarial refusal (B_2), partial disclosure (B_3), and full disclosure (B_4).

Contextual Analysis **:** Once the field experiment data are collected, the project will examine how socio-political and economic contexts (C) influence citizen-bureaucrat interactions. Inferential statistical methods will be employed to identify relational patterns between the experimental data on bureaucrat's FOI practicies within municipalities ($B_{0,1,2,3,4}$) and the contextual variables of these municipalities available in official statistical databases (e.g., median age, per capita income, unemployment rate, voter turnout, etc.).

6. TRANSACT's project structure

TRANSACT is organized into **five Work Packages** (WPs), with WP1 to WP4 following a logical sequence, while WP5 ensures dissemination and engagement throughout the project (Fig. 1). As PI, I will lead the **TRANSACT research team**, consisting of two PhD students and two postdoctoral researchers, ensuring each WP achieves its results within the 60-month project lifecycle.

Figure 1: Project Structure

WP1 – Literature Review and Fieldwork for Experimental Design (Months 1-12): WP1 establishes the foundation of TRANSACT through a systematic literature review (PhD1) and fieldwork with partner organizations (Postdoc1) to validate and potentially refine key variables for the experimental design. The main results include a validated theoretical model and a comparative analysis of FOI procedures across countries, which will inform the subsequent experimental design.

WP2 - Experimental Design and Planning (Months 13-24): WP2 focuses on designing field experiments (Postdoc1), preparing experimental materials (PhD1), and recruiting citizen scientists (PhD2). The results include a finalized experimental design ready for implementation, thoroughly prepared trial materials, and a fully trained group of citizen scientists equipped to execute the experiments.

WP3 - Experimental Trials and Data Collection (Months 25-44): WP3 involves executing the experimental trials across four countries, training citizen scientists (PhD1, PhD2), and collecting micro- and macro-level data (PhD1, PhD2, Postdoc2). The main results are the successful collection of data on bureaucratic responses to FOI requests, resulting in a detailed micro-level dataset of individual cases and a macro-level contextual dataset covering diverse administrative environments.

WP4 - Data Analysis (Months 45-56): WP4 involves analyzing the collected data using descriptive statistics (PhD1), inferential models (Postdoc2), and thematic analysis (PhD2,) to identify patterns in bureaucratic behavior and FOI responsiveness across countries. The results include comprehensive findings from each country, outlining the main drivers behind bureaucratic discretion and responsiveness, as well as comparative insights across all four countries highlighting the influence of contextual factors on FOI practices.

WP5 - Dissemination and Engagement (Months 1-60): WP5 is a transversal work package dedicated to the open-access dissemination of findings throughout the project lifecycle to both academic and non-academic audiences. The PI will lead these efforts by coordinating contributions from the research team.

7. Risks and PI's capacity to ensure feasibility

Conceptual risk: TRANSACT's main conceptual risk lies in its **ambitious interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach**. On the one hand, it aims to integrate elements from different research traditions despite their differing theoretical assumptions, which, if not cohesive, could undermine the project's innovation. To mitigate this, a systematic literature review at the project's outset will provide a solid foundation for the practice-based model. On the other hand, involving practitioners with limited research experience may affect data accessibility and quality. To address this, I will use a proven collaboration protocol from my previous pilot project (Esposito et al., 2024) to ensure effective and reliable data collection.

WP-specific risks: Each WP presents specific risks with corresponding mitigation strategies. For WP1, the challenge of building relationships with practitioners early in the project (high risk) will be mitigated by leveraging my existing partnerships (see support letters) and budgeting for practitioner remuneration. WP2's challenge of recruiting and training non-professional researchers across four countries (high risk) will be addressed by utilizing ongoing partnerships with local universities and offering per diems. WP3's risk of inconsistent trial administration across systems (high risk) will be managed by implementing governance practices from prior experiments. WP4's difficulty with large datasets (medium risk) will be mitigated through regular audits. WP5's risk of delayed dissemination (low risk) will be managed by adhering to a 3-step dissemination protocol to ensure timely results.

PI 's capacity: As PI of TRANSACT, I am well-qualified to lead this project due to my extensive experience in public policy and FOI research. I recently led a pilot project in Belgium (Esposito et al., 2024; Mabillard et al., 2024) that involved a randomized field experiment assessing FOI law implementation with a Belgian advocacy group and 37 non-professional researchers. This project established a co-production framework with FOI practitioners, which TRANSACT will refine for broader study. My involvement with the Global Conference on Transparency Research and Europe's Civic University Alliance has helped me build key partnerships with civil society groups, journalists, and universities in Romania and Uganda, which will be critical for TRANSACT's cross-country research. I have successfully managed several international projects, including an EU study on labor migration (Arda et al. 2019), demonstrating my ability to oversee interdisciplinary, cross-country collaboration. My editorial work and international workshop participation further highlight my leadership and expertise. Support from practitioner organizations (see Annex 2) affirms my ability to lead a project that advances academic knowledge while delivering practical policy recommendations.

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Section b: Curriculum vitae and Track Record (max. 4 pages)

PERSONAL DETAILS
- **Family name, First name:** ESPOSITO, Giovanni
- **ORCID:** 0000-0001-7141-9923
- **Nationalities:** Italian, Belgian
- **Date of Birth:** 25/01/1986
- **Address:** Rue de la Vallée 26, 1050, Bruxelles, Belgium
- **Languages:** Italian (Native Speaker), French (C2), English (C2), Greek (A1)

EDUCATION AND KEY QUALIFICATIONS
04/01/2014–12/06/2018: PhD in *Economics and Management* at HEC Liège Management School, University of Liège (Belgium) / Supervisor: Prof. François Pichault
15/01/2011–30/06/2011: Executive Master in *Public Law and Parliamentary Law* at School of Law, University of Florence (Italy)
01/09/2009–15/05/2010: Master's Degree in *Public Policies and Institutional Economics* at Departement of Human and Social Sciences, University of Naples "L'Orientale" (Italy)

CURRENT POSITIONS
01/10/2022 - Ongoing: Assistant Professor (non-tenured) of Public Policy and Administration at Department of Political Sciences, Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
01/10/2023 – Ongoing: Director of *Centre d'Etude des Politiques et de l'Administration Publique* (CEPAP), research unit on "Public Policies and Administration" of the Institute of Sociology at Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
02/09/2022 – Ongoing: Senior Research Associate at Smart City Institute of HEC Liège School of Management, University of Liège (Belgium)

PREVIOUS POSITIONS
02/01/2021 – 30/09/2022: Postdoctoral Researcher at IOB Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp (Belgium)
01/09/2019 – 31/08/2022: Postdoctoral Researcher at HEC Liège Management School, University of Liège (Belgium)
01/12/2018 – 31/08/2019: Postdoctoral Researcher at Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Naples "L'Orientale" (Italy)
04/01/2014 – 12/06/2018: Doctoral Researcher at HEC Liège Management School, University of Liège (Belgium)

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS
NON-FRIA Fellowship - *University of Liège, November 2013*
Awarded by the University of Liège's Sectoral Council for Research and Valorization in Human Sciences to conduct 4 years of doctoral research on the spread of New Public Management models across Europe.
Silvano Tosi Fellowship - *Senato della Repubblica Italiana (Italian Senate), September 2010*
Awarded the Silvano Tosi Fellowship to attend the 2011 Executive Master in Public Law and Parliamentary Law at the School of Law, organized by the University of Florence in collaboration with the Italian Senate.
Prize Ideas on the Move - *University of Naples SUN, April 2013*
Awarded for the best entrepreneurial idea in the field of "Non-profit and community action" for the project titled "Investing in the Social Value, Cultivating the Social Capital".
SOUL-FI Award - *Fiware Accelerator Programme, European Commission, June 2015*
Received funding under Round A of the Fiware Accelerator Programme for the project "CoRe – the Consumer Revolution", focusing on designing innovative web-based solutions to enhance market transparency.

SUPERVISIONS OF GRADUATE AND DOCTORAL STUDENTS
I have **supervised over 40 Master's theses** in public policy and administration at institutions such as the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), University of Liège, University of Antwerp, and University of Bergamo. Additionally, I am **co-supervising a PhD candidate** alongside Prof. Rogério Roque Amaro at ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon. Furthermore, I serve as a **member of the PhD committee** for two doctoral researchers at the ULB and the University of Rome La Sapienza.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

<u>Bachelor Level</u>
01/10/2023 – ongoing: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Department of Political Sciences (Belgium)
Course: Introduction to Public Policy and Public Administration (24 hours, given once per year)
15/02/2019 – 10/05/2019: Louvain School of Management, University of Louvain La Neuve (Belgium)
Course: Critical Management Studies (18 hours)

<u>Master Level</u>
01/10/2022 – ongoing: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Department of Political Sciences (Belgium)
Courses: - Innovations in Policy Evaluation (24 hours, given once per year)
              - Dynamics and Management of Change in Public Administration (24 hours, given once per year)

<u>PhD Level</u>
08/02/2022 – 21/06/2022: Doctoral School in Economics and Management, HEC Liège Management School, University of Liège (Belgium)
Course: Research Methods in Social Sciences (26 hours)
14/05/2021 – 21/05/2021: Doctoral School in Economics and Management, University of La Tuscia (Italy)
Course: Strategic Change Management (11 hours)

<u>Executive Education</u>
20/05/2024 – 21/05/2024: *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - Scuola Nazionale dell'Amministrazione* (tr. Italian Government's School of Public Admnistration)
Course: Organizing Strategic Foresight in Public Administrations (10 hours)
05/05/2021 – 15/09/2023: MCP Med TI, Professional Migration Training Institute of the International Center for Migration Policy Development (Malta)
Course: Strategic Policy Management (5 hours, given twice per year)

ORGANIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES
I served as a member of the local **organizing committee** for the **8th Global Conference on Transparency Research** at ULB's Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, Belgium, in May 2024. Additionally, I was part of the organizing committees for the *Journée d'étude "Évaluer les Politiques Publiques"*, which brought together the French-speaking Belgian network of public policy evaluation experts at ULB in June 2024, and the International Conference "Capturing the Counter Movement" at ULB in April 2023. I **chaired panels** at several major national and international conferences in transparency research and in public policy and administration. These include the 8th Global Conference on Transparency Research at ULB in May 2024, and the 5th and 6th International Conferences on Public Policy organized by the International Public Policy Association, held at Pompeu Fabra University, Spain, in July 2021, and Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada, in June 2023, respectively. Additionally, I chaired panels at the 35th, 36th, and 37th editions of the Conference of the Italian Society of Political Science, held at the University of Rome La Sapienza, University of Genova, and University of Trieste.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Director, CEPAP Research Center, Université libre de Bruxelles (September 2023 – Present)
Appointed Member, "BOSA - Policy and Support" Selection Committee for Top-Management Civil Servants in Belgium (2023 – Present) *(BOSA - Policy and Support is a Belgian Federal Public Administration)*
Acting Manager, International Academic Cooperation Agreement between the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and HEC Liège Management School, University of Liège (January 2014 – Present)
Elected Member, Academic Research Board, HEC Liège Management School, representing post-doctoral researchers (November 2020 – October 2022).

EDITORIAL ACTIVITIES
I have been actively involved in editorial activities, including serving as a **guest editor** for the *International Review of Administrative Sciences* and *Policy & Society*. Additionally, I act as a **referee** for numerous academic journals including *Public Management Review*, *Policy & Politics, International Journal of Public Administration International Review of Administrative Science*, *Government Information Quarterly*, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *Cities*, *Journal of Urban Technology*.

MEMBERSHIPS OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES
2018-ongoing: European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS)
2021-ongoing: International Public Policy Association (IPPA)
2021-ongoing: Italian Society of Political Science (SISP)

RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS

I have achieved several significant milestones that demonstrate my commitment to conducting high-quality and innovative research in **public policy and administration**. Since 2014, my work has spanned diverse areas—including New Public Management (NPM) reforms, the governance of complex public projects, and sustainable urban innovation—that, over the last three years, have increasingly focused on transparency and the practical functioning of **Freedom of Information** (FOI) laws. In 2014, I received the NON-FRIA fellowship from the University of Liège, which supported my doctoral research on the spread of **NPM models across European public sector organizations**. My thesis, defended in 2018, focused particularly on the application of these models to the **EU's governance of complex public infrastructure projects**, with a specific emphasis on the high-speed railway sector. Since then, I have published widely on NPM, its application in the railway sector, and the management of large infrastructure projects. Selected publications include:

NPM and Railway Sector Reforms

- Esposito, G., Ferlie, E., & Gaeta, G. L. (2018). "The European Public Sectors in the Age of Managerialism." *Politics*, 38(4), 480–499.
- Esposito, G., Cicatiello, L., & Ercolano, S. (2020). "Reforming Railways in the EU: An Empirical Assessment of Liberalisation Policies in the European Rail Freight Market." *Transportation Research Part A*, 132, 606-613.

Governance of Railway Projects

- Esposito, G., Terlizzi, A., & Crutzen, N. (2022). "Policy Narratives and Megaprojects: The Case of the Lyon-Turin High-Speed Railway." *Public Management Review*, 24(1), 55-79.
- Esposito, G., Felicetti, A., & Terlizzi, A. (2023). "Participatory Governance in Megaprojects: The Lyon-Turin High-Speed Railway." *Policy and Society*, 42(2), 259–73.
- Esposito, G., Terlizzi, A., & Pichault, F. (2024). "The Panopticon Reloaded: A Critical Analysis of Performance Management Systems in the Trans-European Transport Network Policy." *Environment and Planning C*, 42(3), 476-498.

These studies highlight that managing complex public projects, such as high-speed rail construction, requires coordinated efforts among a diverse range of stakeholders—public, private, and civil society. Success hinges on effective collaboration and **transparent information-sharing**, while failure often results from secrecy and poor communication between project promoters and civil society. Building on these findings, throughout 2021 and 2022, I organized and chaired panels at international conferences, including those of the International Public Policy Association and the Italian Society of Political Science, where I led scholarly discussions on the governance of complex megaprojects globally. In collaboration with Prof. Andrea Terlizzi (University of Florence), I selected prominent contributions from these panels to co-edit a special issue of *Policy & Society* focused on these topics. Below is the introduction to the special issue:

- Esposito, G., & Terlizzi, A. (2023). "Governing Wickedness in Megaprojects: Discursive and Institutional Perspectives." *Policy and Society*, 42(2), 131–47.

In my postdoctoral work, I focused on sustainable urban projects, emphasizing the **importance of transparent, multi-stakeholder collaboration** involving governments, civil society, and private companies for successful implementation. Selected recent publications include:

- Esposito, G., Terlizzi, A., Desdemoustier, J., Pichault, F., & Crutzen, N. (2024). "Smart City Development as Public Entrepreneurship: An In-Depth Case Study Based on Actor-Network Theory." *International Journal of Public Administration*. DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2024.2329672
- Galego, D., Esposito, G., & Crutzen, N. (2024). "Sustainable Urban Development: A Scoping Review of Barriers to Public Policy and Administration." *Public Policy and Administration*. DOI: 10.1177/09520767241266410

A key issue in my research has been the **failure of public projects due to lack of transparency**, leading to cost overruns and public distrust. **Citizens often face barriers to accessing vital information, and FOI requests are often delayed or heavily redacted**. This problem motivated my focus on FOI laws, which aim to guarantee citizen access to government information but frequently fall short in practice. To address this gap, I conducted a field experiment on FOI law implementation in Belgium, leading to the following publications:

- Esposito, G., Cicatiello, L., Mabillard, V., & Gaeta, G. L. (2024). " Toward a citizen science framework for public policy evaluation: Lessons from a field experiment on Freedom of Information laws in Belgium." *Evaluation*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13563890241270195
- Mabillard, V., Esposito, G., Cicatiello, L., Gaeta, G. L., & Pasquier, M. (2024). "Barriers to Freedom of Information: Insights from an Experiment in Belgium." *International Journal of Public Administration*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2024.2378329

These studies were conducted in collaboration with *Transparencia.be*, a Belgian advocacy organization in the transparency sector, and students from my masterclass on "Innovations in Policy Evaluation" at ULB. Students acted as citizen scientists, assessing the responsiveness of Belgian municipalities to FOI requests through a randomized experimental approach. This collaborative research gave students practical experience and produced valuable data on FOI effectiveness. I presented these findings and my approach to teaching transparency at the **Global Conference on Transparency Research** (GCTR) in May 2024, where I co-organized a panel on innovative methods for teaching transparency. Additionally, as one of the **local conference organizers**, I expanded my network with scholars and civil society representatives engaged in FOI research globally. Following this, I collaborated with GCTR scholars within the **EU's Civic University Alliance** to establish a network of universities and civil society organizations aimed at replicating my experimental study on Belgian FOI laws in other countries, where the actual implementation of these laws has yet to be assessed. This network includes Wits University (South Africa), Makerere University (Uganda), the University of Bucharest (Romania), and the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). **Supporting organizations** include Article19, Access Info Europe, the Federation for Innovation in Democracy, and Loitransparence.ch—all of which also support the TRANSACT project (see support letters in Annex 2). Building on my recent FOI research in Belgium, **TRANSACT is the next key step**. It will help me understand why FOI laws often fail to deliver promised transparency and provide the evidence needed to improve government accountability. Eight years after earning my PhD, the **ERC Starting Grant is a crucial opportunity** to further develop my career and expand my research on FOI laws at a larger scale, while fostering closer collaboration with civil society and government officials. This project will enhance our understanding of FOI, empower civil society to advocate for transparency, and ensure these laws truly serve citizens. Despite being an early-career scholar, my recent research agenda has garnered **exponential attention from the academic community**, reflected in an h-index of 14 and a total of 470 citations over the past three years. This upward trajectory highlights the growing impact of my contributions to public policy and administration. ERC funding will further amplify this momentum, providing essential support to advance my ongoing projects focused on enhancing transparency and implementing FOI laws, thereby driving significant advancements in democratic governance research.

PEER RECOGNITION AND INVITATIONS AS SPEAKER

- Invited speaker at the workshop *New Directions in Megaproject Research* organized by the University of Kassel and Bauhaus-Universität Weimar in Frankfurt am Main (Germany) from 17-19 September 2024, with a talk on "The Role of Discourses and Narratives for Megaproject Research and Implementation".
- Invited speaker at *Seminari di Politica VIII Ciclo*, a series of research seminars organized by the Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy) on 31 May 2024, with a talk on "Toward a citizen science framework for public policy evaluation: Lessons from a field experiment on Freedom of Information laws in Belgium".
- Invited speaker at the *EUROMED Migration V Peer-to-Peer Conference*, organized in Brussels (Belgium) by the International Center for Migration Policy Development from 31 May to 1 June 2023, with a talk on "Setting the Framework for a Labour Migration Policy in the Mediterranean Region: Youth, Gender, and Education".
- Invited speaker at the *Gainesville Project Management Meetup* organized by the University of Florida, Center of European Studies (USA) on 20 November 2021, with a talk on "Narratives and Institutions in Global Megaprojects".

RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout my career, I have actively engaged in research collaborations and capacity-building initiatives with international organizations across various policy sectors. In 2023, I contributed to the IMAG project under the **International Center for Migration Policy Development** (ICMPD), leading workshops to promote a Whole of Government Approach to Migration Policies in Iraq. That same year, as a training expert for ICMPD's MCP Med TI Project, I developed executive training for Jordanian migration practitioners. I also coordinated a research report on labor matching policies in the Mediterranean region for ICMPD's EuroMed IV Migration Project (2018-2019), which was later adopted by the **European Commission**. As a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Antwerp (2021-2022), I worked on the FASS-Food EU project focused on the governance of fair and sustainable food networks, in collaboration with the **World Fair Trade Organization-Europe** and the **Fair Trade Advocacy Office**. Prior to that, I was a postdoctoral researcher at HEC Liège Management School (2019-2022), focusing on smart city governance in the Wal-e-Cities project, funded by the **European Regional Development Fund**.