

“We Stretched the Rules”: How Street-Level Bureaucrats in Schools Shape Newcomers’ Access to Resources

Heike Hanhörster¹ and Cornelia Toppel²

¹ TU Berlin, Germany

² ILS Research gGmbH, Germany

Correspondence: Heike Hanhörster (h.hanhoerster@tu-berlin.de)

Submitted: 30 April 2024 **Accepted:** 19 August 2024 **Published:** 21 November 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Urban In/Formalities: How Arrival Infrastructures Shape Newcomers’ Access To Resources” edited by Heike Hanhörster (Technical University Berlin), Martina Bovo (IUAV University of Venice / Politecnico di Milano), Miriam Neßler (Technical University Berlin), and Susanne Wessendorf (Coventry University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i396>

Abstract

Schools play a crucial role for migrant families’ arrival processes. Educational guidelines, procedures, and requirements (such as admission waiting lists or school curricula) are translated into practices on the ground, with many school professionals acting as policy intermediaries shaping (in)formal policy-making and facilitating newcomers’ access to resources. Analysing the everyday work and practices of school bureaucrats can help better understand their formal and informal roles in migration governance and newcomers’ access to resources. Drawing on Lipsky’s (1980/2010) concept of street-level bureaucracy, this article looks at primary schools in Nordstadt, Dortmund (Germany). The schools are situated in a context with a long history of arrival and a high influx of newcomers in recent years. Participant observation and interviews with school staff (headteachers, teachers, and social workers) illustrate that the agency of street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) can involve more than just coping with inadequate resources: SLBs can go the extra mile, for example, “bending” curricula to suit circumstances. The article focuses on how school staff do not necessarily limit themselves to their standard tasks but expand their range of activities formally and sometimes quite informally, even though they are confronted with diverse demands and many work at the limits of their capacities. By analysing schools as arrival infrastructure through the lens of SLBs, this article contributes to a better understanding of how migrant newcomers’ needs and state requirements are mediated. While the embeddedness of SLBs in such macro-factors as the type of welfare regime or political culture and organisational settings is well described, their embeddedness at the city and especially the neighbourhood levels has been studied much less systematically. One enabling factor for SLBs’ commitment to contribute under (un)certain conditions to facilitating newcomers’ access to resources is their multiple embeddedness and particularly their local collaboration in an ecosystem of interconnected social infrastructures.

Keywords

arrival infrastructures; arrival neighbourhoods; informality; institutional change; schools; street-level bureaucrats

1. Introduction

Schools play a crucial role in the arrival processes of migrant families. Educational policies, official procedures, and requirements (e.g., for school admissions, curricula, or regulations on parental involvement) are implemented on the ground, with school staff (headteachers, teachers, and social workers) acting as policy intermediaries shaping policy-making and facilitating (or hindering) newcomers' access to resources. This relates not only to a child's access to education but also to the (as yet under-researched) role of schools as important arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al., 2019) and as first anchor points for newcomer families in terms of social networks and everyday support structures (Neal et al., 2016). Analysing the daily work and practices of school staff can thus help in better understanding newcomers' access to (arrival-related) resources.

Drawing on Lipsky's (1980/2010) concept of street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), the article focuses on primary schools in Nordstadt, a neighbourhood from Dortmund, Germany, with a long history of arrival and a continuing high influx of newcomers. Interviews with school staff at different organisational levels, such as headteachers, teachers, and social workers, illustrate that SLBs' agency can go far beyond just coping with inadequate resources and enforcing standard repertoires. Although these staff members face multiple and sometimes contradicting demands and often work at the limits of their capacities, they do not necessarily confine themselves to their job descriptions and standard tasks, but formally and sometimes more informally expand their range of activities (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017; Brodtkin, 2021; Zacka, 2017). Looking at the multiple embeddedness of SLBs in both an organisation's structure and the local (city, neighbourhood) ecosystem of interconnected social infrastructures (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024), our research goes beyond individual factors (Andreetta, 2022; Häggström et al., 2020), highlighting SLBs' embeddedness, especially at the neighbourhood level.

To better understand how (in)formal practices and routines of SLBs in schools are shaped by their embeddedness in organisationally and spatially bounded networks, we pose the following two research questions:

1. How does primary school staff (in)formally address the needs of newcomers while dealing with the lack of (educational) resources in their daily routines?
2. How does the multiple embeddedness of SLBs at different levels (in higher-level policies, in their own organisation, and also in the local ecosystem of arrival infrastructures) influence their routines, decisions, and (in)formal practices?

Our interviews illustrate the conditions under which SLBs (in)formally use their scope of discretion and can be perceived as agents of change beyond the "manage[ment of] diversity" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 604). With our analysis, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of horizontal and vertical forms of (welfare) brokering, as yet mainly described for street-level organisations (Ratzmann, 2023, p. 84). We argue that SLBs' role in schools is strongly shaped not only by their organisational embeddedness, but also by their collaboration

with other schools in the neighbourhood, as well as a shared ethos of infrastructuring arrival within a wider network of local stakeholders (such as counselling centres and NGOs). By shedding light on their multiple embeddedness, our study adds to research on SLBs' coping practices beyond the organisational perspective.

2. The Role of Schools and Their Staff in Shaping Newcomers' Access to Resources

This article contributes to analysing newcomers' access to resources through the lens of the educational system, addressing the role of primary schools in shaping this access and the increasing and diversifying demands to which school staff is exposed in arrival neighbourhoods (Section 2.1). We then turn to Lipsky's concept of SLBs and the question of how SLBs are responding to increasing workloads and changing demands (Section 2.2).

2.1. The Role of Arrival Neighbourhood Primary Schools

Primary schools in European countries are playing an increasingly important role in shaping local educational conditions. The decentralisation of responsibilities and the marketisation of education systems are part of a broader "neoliberal shift in education" observable in most national contexts, aimed at making education systems more efficient (Boterman & Ramos Lobato, 2022, p. 219). Despite being severely under-resourced, schools are increasingly being called upon to respond to social disadvantages faced by children and their families (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015, p. 175). Required to deliver services despite restricted resources, primary schools play a crucial but ambivalent role: Previous studies show how institutional norms and systemically embedded routines in the education sector contribute to inequalities (Jennings, 2010; Lewicki, 2022; Voyer, 2019). Oriented towards the white norm, these practices and routines can be understood as an "often implicit and subtle, yet a crucial part of institutional discrimination" (Ramos Lobato et al., 2023, p. 12). Radtke (2003, p. 8) points to "a central paradox [...]: They [primary schools] are conceptualized as mediators of inclusion into the relevant social systems, but at the same time they are exclusive themselves, in as far as they define their competence and refuse their services to certain individuals or even whole groups."

Especially in "arrival neighbourhoods" (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020), i.e., neighbourhoods with a high influx of immigrants and where newcomer families find their first foothold, primary schools have an important role to play. Responding to families' increasing and divergent needs, schools are embedded in an "ecosystem" of social infrastructures, understood as the horizontal and vertical interconnectedness of organisations, services, and practices able to facilitate or hinder access to societal resources (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024; see also Bovo, 2020). This definition refers not only to formal organisations and municipal services (such as schools, publicly funded counselling centres, libraries, etc.), but also to more informal, unpredictable, unstructured, and partly unruly practices (McFarlane, 2012, p. 91). Research points to the important role of individuals, often acting in accessible locations (Hans, 2023), in providing arrival-related information and negotiating formal and informal practices on a daily basis (Darling, 2017, p. 188). Importantly, relations between formal and informal practices are negotiable and changeable, with informal practices also occurring within formal (state) structures (McFarlane, 2012, p. 91). Indeed, during major crises like the recent Covid-19 pandemic, informal practices often fill gaps in official services (Brodin, 2021), in particular providing resources for vulnerable population groups (Fawaz, 2017, p. 111; Hans, 2023, p. 386). These moments of urban crisis have the potential not only to be turning points in contesting practices (McFarlane, 2012, p. 105), but also to build relationships and networks that remain viable beyond the crisis.

Understood as “arrival infrastructures” (Meeus et al., 2019), primary schools play a key role in the arrival processes of families. This role relates not only to children’s access to education, but also to schools serving as settings for the day-to-day social interactions of both parents and children (Børsch et al., 2021; Collins & Coleman, 2008, p. 282), as nodes of formal and non-formal support (Skovdal & Campbell, 2015, p. 176), and as settings for dealing with diversity and potentially transcending social distance (Neal et al., 2016). Thus, those working in primary schools can “enhance, channel or hinder how people gain a foothold in the city” (Meeus et al., 2019). However, schools in Germany often lack resources, such as sufficient and qualified teachers or social workers. The influx of refugees from Syria in 2015–2016 and again from Ukraine in 2022, as well as the consequences of the pandemic (e.g., learning gaps) are exacerbating the bottlenecks in access to education. Efficiency requirements on the one hand and increasing and conflicting demands on the other are intensifying pressure on school staff, leading to the question as to how school players are responding to the growing mismatch between limited resources and growing and divergent needs (in terms of language competences, traumatic experiences, family problems) and what role is played by their embeddedness in the local governance of arrival.

2.2. SLBs in Schools: More Than Just Coping?

According to Borrelli and Andreetta (2019, p. 2), the local governance of arrival and newcomers’ access to resources can be better understood by looking at the everyday work and practices of bureaucrats tasked with enforcing state laws and policies (Hollifield, 2004). SLBs are defined by Lipsky (1980/2010, p. 3) as frontliners who “interact with citizens in the course of their job and have discretion in exercising authority.” What characterises SLBs (for example, as frontliners working for a housing company, as police officers, or schoolteachers) is that they cannot do their jobs according to the rulebook due to lacking resources. Directly exposed to individual needs and emotions while at the same time supposed to enforce regulations, “street-level discretionary practices can be interpreted as responses to double-bind situations” (Perna, 2021, p. 4; see also Bierschenk, 2014, p. 239).

Those working in schools, such as social workers or teachers, act as SLBs translating policy into concrete action, for example, handling waiting lists or communicating with parents (Baviskar & Winter, 2017), with often serious implications for newcomers exposed to them (Bosworth, 2016). In their daily routines, SLBs in primary schools have to navigate between “partly contradicting explicit and implicit requirements and expectations” (Ramos Lobato et al., 2023, p. 3). This relates to conflicting expectations about offering “equal opportunities to all children and the demand to increasingly act in conformity with the market” (Ramos Lobato et al., 2023, p. 3). Dealing with these contradicting demands requires coping strategies from SLBs. In their daily practices and routines, SLBs thus have to interpret the rulebook, categorising clients as “deserving” or “undeserving” and thereby impacting their access to resources (Ratzmann, 2021).

Next to empirical research analysing SLBs’ practices from a restrictive gatekeeper perspective, a growing body of literature is looking at their function as enablers/facilitators of their clients’ access to resources (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017; Zacka, 2017). Street-level workers should be seen not only as “state-agents” acting only in response to rules and accountable to an authority but also as “citizen-agents” responding to their customers and guided by beliefs and norms about what is fair (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, p. 329). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2019, p. 2) point to the “double face of bureaucracy, as a form of domination and oppression as well as of protection and liberation.” Linking the literature on street-level

bureaucracy and ethical decision-making, Loyens and Maesschalck (2010, p. 73) point to the complex interplay of different factors relevant to SLBs that transcend the boundaries of their discretionary space. Across different disciplines, four dimensions of how SLBs deal with pressure are identified, namely individual (decision-maker) characteristics, organisational factors, client attributes, and extra-organisational factors (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 135; Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010, p. 72; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998). The latter includes a wide range of factors such as the wider community, laws, and regulations.

Through questioning existing structures and routines, through experimenting, and introducing alternative ways of doing things, SLBs can also act as potential agents of change, inducing diversity-oriented changes in their organisations. Unclear and ambivalent situations can also open up opportunities to introduce gradual institutional change through the “layering of new norms on top of or alongside pre-existing ones” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009, p. 16) and the “conversion of existing institutions to new goals, functions, or purposes” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009, pp. 17–18). The transformation of social service provision has shifted the focus from public bureaucracies to street-level organisations, including a wide range of (non)profit organisations (Brodkin, 2016).

One important influence at the micro-level are SLBs’ competencies, in particular their skills and knowledge, their values, sensemaking, and professional ethos (Häggström et al., 2020, p. 2; Jennings, 2010). Discussing their scope of discretion, the level of interaction with clients, and also their difficulties in maintaining a distance between themselves and their clients (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 147), Brodkin (2016, p. 446) argued: “Their judgments are essential to good policy delivery. But discretion also brings risks: It may be used in ways that advance some human services goals and undermine others.” Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a non-profit anti-poverty organisation in the US, Zacka (2017) argued that SLBs exercise a desirable discretionary power. Certain types of SLBs demonstrate care and kindness, and can be understood as “moral agents.” His typology, based on the moral disposition of SLBs, includes SLBs who act as “caregivers,” being responsive to clients and devoting time and energy to their needs. Perna (2021) differentiates between “high-level” and “low-level” bureaucrats. While teachers and social workers can be understood as “low-level” bureaucrats, headteachers act as “high-level bureaucrats.” Although the latter interact with families to a certain extent (e.g., handling waiting lists and admissions), they are more involved in wider educational networks where their practices are conditioned by their “sensemaking about the accountability” (Jennings, 2010, p. 229), as well as in contacts with colleagues outside their own organisation (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2019, p. 10; Perna, 2021).

In their study on teachers’ ethics of care in reaction to the increasing and divergent needs of newcomers, Häggström et al. (2020) show that a school’s social climate can restrict or even sanction any out-of-the-box thinking or action—or facilitate it. Indeed, while teachers may question their role and find new ways to support newly arrived migrants, a lack of internal support can create feelings of stress and sometimes guilt (Häggström et al., 2020, p. 4). Alongside a school’s social climate and concrete support structures, neighbourhood networks of civil society organisations play an important role, with Häggström et al. (2020, p. 5) identifying this “external support” as an important resource influencing SLBs’ stress resistance.

What is needed is, therefore, an analytical lens that “allows grasping the interconnections that exist between the micro-level of bureaucrats’ practices, the meso-level of the public organisation, and the macro-level of the wider institutional context” (Perna, 2021, p. 3). While the embeddedness of SLBs in collective macro-factors such as the type of welfare regime or political culture (Perelmiter, 2021) and organisational settings (Brodkin,

1990) is well described, their embeddedness at city and especially neighbourhood level has been studied much less systematically. Breidahl and Brodtkin (2023, p. 43) argue that the discretion of SLBs responds to structural conditions such as asylum management (for example, regarding the allocation of asylum seekers or the facilities used by asylum seekers), while Lotta and Marques (2019) highlight the importance of local SLB networks in their comparative analysis.

Building on this research, our article addresses different levels of embeddedness, identifying the network of arrival infrastructures in the neighbourhood as an important resource and explanation for the motivation of SLBs to go the extra mile.

3. Case Study and Methodology

3.1. Nordstadt, Dortmund, as an “Arrival Neighbourhood”

Our research focuses on Nordstadt, a neighbourhood in Dortmund, Germany. Nordstadt’s current arrival infrastructure has been shaped by different layers of migration from the 1960s onwards, with its already high population turnover becoming even more dynamic in recent decades. For example, the enlargement of the European Union and the granting of freedom of movement to Romanians and Bulgarians have acted as migration drivers. To date, 78% of the population features some kind of migration background (Stadt Dortmund, 2023a). With 15.5% of the population between 6 and 18 years old, Nordstadt is the youngest district of Dortmund. The most densely populated district in Dortmund (Stadt Dortmund, 2019, p. 17), Nordstadt is moreover characterised by a spatial concentration of poverty (Kurtenbach & Rosenberger, 2021, p. 44), with the share of inhabitants dependent on social security benefits (39%), more than twice as high as the city’s average (Stadt Dortmund, 2019, p. 115).

Due to these developments and features, Nordstadt has been subject to various political and administrative interventions, resulting in a dense landscape of support structures addressing newcomers from various backgrounds and forming an ecosystem of social infrastructures. Support structures are partly formal (like publicly funded migrant counselling), but also often take the shape of non-formal grassroots organisations or informal processes like seeking advice in a betting shop.

Nordstadt functions as an arrival neighbourhood for the entire city of Dortmund. The Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy (Stadt Dortmund, 2023b), which was initially developed to handle migration from Romania and Bulgaria induced by EU enlargement, outlines measures for structuring the arrival of different groups. Within this framework, the city council recognises schools as important arrival and resource access anchor points. However, the high share of young people is putting increasing pressure on child-related structures and services in the district. The lack of around 800 places in Dortmund schools in 2022 (Volmerich, 2022), but also of places in daycare facilities for children and paediatricians, is particularly hitting arrival neighbourhoods such as Nordstadt and the seven public primary schools situated there.

3.2. Ethnography to Explore SLB Practices

This article is based on 18 months of fieldwork in Dortmund-Nordstadt, studying norms, meanings, and practices of school staff in an arrival context. To embed SLB practices in the policy framework, an analysis of

policies and strategies related to migration, integration, and arrival preceded the on-site ethnographic fieldwork. Carried out between September 2021 and February 2023, the fieldwork comprised 44 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in schools, NGOs, and the city administration. In this article, we focus on 11 of these interviews, conducted with high-level and low-level (frontline) bureaucrats in the school context (see Table 1). While headteachers are regarded as high-level bureaucrats, social workers, and teachers are classically seen as frontline workers—“the furthest from the center of power, and the closest to the citizens” (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, p. 333). All interviews were transcribed and coded using the MaxQDA software. The code system was developed by discussing inductive and deductive codes within the research team (Campbell et al., 2013; Saldaña, 2021). In addition, interview memos were compiled after the interviews to capture impressions, interpretations, and non-recorded conversations. These were coded too. Interview guidelines for experts and arrival infrastructure providers were tailored to the specific organisation but included questions on policies and strategies on which their work is based, networking and collaboration as well as everyday work practices. Pseudonyms are used for the primary schools and respondents mentioned in this article. Quotations were translated from German to English and shortened by the authors.

Participant observation in the form of step-in-step-out ethnography (Madden, 2010, p. 79) was carried out in two primary schools. On one hand, this observation took place at the school gate where parents drop off

Table 1. Overview of the empirical material related to schools.

Institution	Empirical material
Rabbit School (primary school in Nordstadt)	Interview with headteacher Observation at the school gate and short conversations with parents Interview with two social workers and Roma mediator Interview with pre-school coordinator
Owl School (primary school in Nordstadt)	Interview with headteacher Observation at parents' cafe and school gate Interview with two social workers Short conversations with two social education workers
Fox School (primary school in Nordstadt)	Interview with teacher and Roma mediator Short conversation with the headteacher Observation in class
Faraway School (primary school in another district where pupils from Nordstadt are bused to)	Interview with social worker
Supervision and oversight authority of the federal state for schools	Interview with schools inspector for Nordstadt
Coordination unit for school social work of Dortmund city council	Interview with representative
Local prevention centres focusing on families with children younger than 10 years of age	Interview with regional coordinator and representative of the local prevention centre for Nordstadt

their children and where the school's social workers stand every day to offer advice and support to parents. According to the staff, school gate encounters are a key element of the school's work with parents. On the other hand, this observation took place occasionally in the parents' café and at the school gate. Both observations involved interactions with both staff members (social workers and social education workers) and newcomers and covered informal conversations of SLBs among themselves and with newcomers. The observations and informal conversations were documented by written fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) and vignettes mainly gathered right after the observations. Table 1 shows all fieldwork activities—formal interviews, informal conversations, and observation encounters—employed for this article.

4. SLB Work in Schools Going the Extra Mile

SLBs in schools are engaged in facilitating newcomers' access to resources, in line with their respective positions within the organisation and their varying degrees of agency and discretion. We identified two different dimensions of how SLBs respond (in)formally to new and increasing demands by going the extra mile.

4.1. *Satisfying Basic Needs and Trust-Building With Families*

Increasing numbers of new arrivals in Nordstadt have placed new demands on social infrastructures such as schools. Interviews in all schools show that SLBs have broadened their portfolio of tasks, for instance making the provision of (healthy) food one of their standard tasks. Indeed, supporting families' basic needs (with food or clothing) is becoming the rule rather than the exception.

One social worker who has been working at Rabbit School for about twenty years described the changing needs of children and their families. In the beginning, her work was dominated by the “classic tasks of a school social worker,” but now it was more about meeting the basic needs of families. In addition to migration, the Covid-19 pandemic also focused school routines and practices on families and their basic needs. Schools responded to emerging gaps, for example when welfare benefits were not provided quickly enough:

We meet the basic needs of the families here. If they don't have food, they can't go to school. Sometimes you look at a whole family with different needs and you see, what do they all need, the seven people, so that three of them can go to school? (School social worker, Rabbit School)

The quote reflects the growing adaptation of schools to the needs of pupils and their families. Brodtkin (2021, p. 22) identifies three ways in which SLBs respond to crises when routine practices prove to be unfit for purpose. In addition to “adaptation” and “resistance,” “innovation” becomes relevant by “changing both what they do and how they do it.” Based on the observation that children could not adequately participate in class without materials such as pens or in physical education without gym shoes, one of the schools installed a permanent kiosk where such items were sold for one cent each, funded by donations. Identifying the unmet needs of newcomer families is becoming an important prerequisite for teaching (Häggström et al., 2020, p. 2). Moreover, flexibility and adaptability are required with regard to overall time management. One of our interviewees for example pointed out that fixed consultation hours for parents did not work and that flexibility in when the school day started gave children the necessary time to arrive and adjust.

As schools are seen by many newcomers as government authorities and therefore often mistrusted, there is a need for them to strengthen communication with newcomer parents. In this vein, one mediation programme aims to open up schools to families from the Roma community in particular, where distrust of the education system is reported to be very high due to their long history of discrimination (Reuter, 2021). School social workers, Roma mediators, and sometimes teachers are increasingly becoming the “face” of a school:

People simply have a relationship with us as a person. Our face, that’s what makes the difference. Not a letter from the school. (School social worker, Rabbit School)

Relationship work is very personal and includes “revealing a bit more of oneself than in other fields of social work” as one social worker at Rabbit School put it. School social workers communicate beyond their official positions, for example talking about their own family situations. Establishing an informal relationship also forms the basis of convincing parents of the importance of sending their children to school regularly. Indeed, school absenteeism is a crucial problem in Nordstadt dealt with by telephone and house calls to absent children’s homes.

In many cases, our respondents’ jobs extended beyond their respective schools, involving other organisations in Nordstadt. The head of a pre-school group at Rabbit School for example took over responsibility for communicating with daycare facilities: “I often just give them my mobile number [instead of client numbers] so that the daycare facilities can call me. Though it’s not really my job, I’m really happy to do it.” Similarly regarding health issues, interview partners from all schools described a shift in schools’ tasks, including health education and communicating with people and organisations outside school, such as speech therapists.

4.2. Support in Paperwork and Strengthening Newcomer Agency

Schools are important contact points in all relevant everyday issues. Translating policy into reality, paper forms play an important role (particularly in Germany) in managing migration (Baviskar & Winter, 2017). With paper forms prevalent in such key arrival domains as housing, work, and naturalisation, any mistakes in filling them out can have serious consequences for newcomers’ livelihoods, agency, (future) trajectories, and mobility (Borrelli & Andreetta, 2019, p. 2; Hollifield, 2004). For most newcomers, dealing with paperwork is a great challenge as they have to navigate between different authorities in an unaccustomed language. Furthermore, a high share of newcomers, in particular Romanians and Bulgarians, are illiterate, thereby increasing the need for support and advice in filling out forms, as our school gate observations showed. Accordingly, repeatedly explaining how to navigate German bureaucracy has become a major stress factor for SLBs.

Owl School SLBs understand their role as contact points for preventing newcomers from being exploited in their work and housing situations (Bernt et al., 2022, p. 2225). Such exploitation is rife in arrival neighbourhoods, and even extends to “help” in filling out official forms. SLB support ranges from directing newcomers to other organisations where they can get specialised help to filling out forms, explaining and sorting documents received from the various government agencies, and accompanying people to authorities:

Simply sorting things, sorting documents. And it’s incredible what’s being done. Parents arrive here with bags [of paperwork] and spend days sorting through them. It really is unbelievable in this

country, the amount of paperwork. How are you supposed to get through all that? (Headteacher, Owl School)

Support also takes on informal forms such as asking a friend for warehouse jobs and explaining to newcomers how they should apply. Importantly, newcomers are not only seen as recipients of support. Schools also focus on qualifying, educating, and empowering parents. The trust-building practices described above are also a basis for strengthening parents' capabilities and efficiency:

It's really impressive how these women grow with these tasks. When you trust them to do something and start where they feel confident. In their language. In their parenting skills. In their way of getting in touch with people. And if they are well supported, they can also become successful. (Headteacher, Owl School)

Identifying and leveraging the agency of newcomer families is established by outreach work and easily accessible offerings. All schools in our study offered additional programmes for parents, e.g., language classes, sewing classes, and literacy skills, whereby constant information and outreach work were needed to increase willingness to take part regularly.

Support is often also provided informally by primary school staff, for instance in learning every day with a father about Germany for the naturalisation test or preparing training material for him. As such practices are time-consuming, they can only be done in their free time and only for a few newcomers. Indeed, limited resources lead to new constructions of "deservingness" regarding "economic usefulness," for instance reflecting family and political reasons for naturalisation. For example, one manager of the pre-school groups mentioned supporting a father with one-to-one tuition to prepare him for the citizenship test:

I meet up with him for one hour every day just for a bit of politics lessons [laughs]. Because that's exactly the kind of people Germany needs. The father is super committed, he's employed at [employer] in the warehouse on a permanent basis. And he also has a 450-euro-job and works hard. They're just great, the family. And he needs the German passport now to bring his mum to Germany. Last year, when the Taliban overthrew the government...his mother went to Iran illegally. (Manager pre-school group, Rabbit School)

As the quote shows, when constructing "deservingness," frontline bureaucrats partly adopt overarching national narratives such as "economic usefulness" and a person's motivation and willingness to contribute to society, but also questions of individual neediness (Kallio & Kuovo, 2014; Ratzmann, 2021; van Oorschot, 2000). Our school-gate observations show that "deservingness" also depends on newcomers' willingness to follow certain rules (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 143), such as the regular school attendance of their children. For example, the child of a Roma family was expelled from school for being absent for several weeks after the summer holidays. Our interviewees emphasised that this was not about punishing a family, but about strengthening children's welfare and their right to education in the context of complex transnational family relationships and regular changes of residence:

There are families where we try everything, but who don't recognise the added value of school at all. And then it's also difficult to get hold of them and at some point you're powerless. (Teacher, Fox School)

While SLBs' understanding of deservingness is not static (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 146), the examples highlight the key facilitating or hindering role played by individuals (in social infrastructures) during the arrival process (Hans, 2023).

5. Why Do SLBS Go the Extra Mile?

The examples presented above, in line with Ahmed (2012, p. 27) and Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000, p. 329), show that new SLB practices and routines are associated with more time and energy to reflect on previously familiar and well-established processes. They are also associated with additional workload, as well as frustration and perhaps even failure. Our ethnographic approach revealed that, alongside the above-mentioned factors such as individual neediness or client attributes, SLBs' embeddedness also proved to be an important motivating factor for going the extra mile. The following section sheds light on what makes new practices and routines possible, but also on the compromises or limits involved. While the first section is particularly relevant for high-level bureaucrats, the other two dimensions of embeddedness prove to be important for both high-level and SLBs.

5.1. *Embeddedness of Local Schools in Higher-Level Policies*

The rising number of migrant pupils in recent years caught governments off guard. Federal and local policy-makers are experiencing difficulties in quickly adapting established policies to changing demands, creating a policy vacuum. This in turn is causing schools to take action and expand their remits. In Dortmund, the handling of migration from Romania and Bulgaria (aka EU2 migration) highlighted the ability of policy-makers, administration, and civil society organisations to work strategically together. Based on the structures built for EU2 migration and driven by the need to act quickly in the face of the influx of refugees in 2015 and 2022, target groups and structures were adapted, and institutional learning processes initiated, to relieve council staff and departments in critical situations, while also enabling schools to take action.

Formal networks or working groups involving relevant stakeholders in Nordstadt, e.g., the Nordstadt Children and Youth Working Group, provide a forum for discussing current developments on the ground. One of the outcomes of such a working group was a "position paper" addressed to the city council, calling for the expansion of daycare and school capacities (AG Juno, 2022). It is important here to distinguish between lower-level SLBs such as social workers and teachers on the one hand and high-level bureaucrats on the other hand who feel able to make a difference and fuel the citywide discourse with the needs of their schools. Due to their embeddedness in the network of primary schools, headteachers feel that they are at least being listened to by council representatives such as the mayor, though are experiencing resignation because not much has changed in the actual conditions of the schools:

When seven primary schools say something, it carries weight....And sometimes it also puts pressure on the city. But somehow there is no real solution for us....They always listen to what we say. But nothing really changes. (Headteacher, Rabbit School)

Networks also serve to upscale projects and initiatives tested in a local context, influencing the city- and federal state-wide discourse and policy. Gained in such networks, knowledge of the ecosystem of arrival infrastructures and the services they offer is also a prerequisite for efficient and tailor-made signposting,

underlining the highly complex nature of frontline work in an arrival context. In addition, the self-esteem of frontline workers is enhanced through their embeddedness in citywide networks or in a regular working group where all school social workers in Dortmund meet and exchange information. Coordinated by a unit within the city council, this group represents the interests of school social workers and provides training and supervision. This resonates with Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2012, p. S22) who point to the importance of allowing space for such contacts, creating “an organizational environment that invites workers to bring forward their stories and enables them to speak both as citizens and state-agents. It ensures that their normative reasoning and pragmatic improvisations are guided and tempered by others struggling with similar issues.” In our case study, some school social workers mentioned the group as an important source of recognition and support:

Yes, we’re doing it right....We can’t do it any other way and we’re absolutely on the right track and we’ve already come a long way with our ideas and everything we’re doing, um, and that’s given us a good feeling. (School social worker, Rabbit School).

This knowledge about “doing it right” under given circumstances motivates school staff to go the extra mile. However, participating in neighbourhood and city-wide networks is time-consuming for school staff and, although they feel they have a voice in these networks, the results leave a lot to be desired. The above-mentioned problem of school absenteeism is one field where school staff needs more political support, as they feel abandoned by other municipal players (youth services, the police, public order office) with stronger powers over truants (e.g., fines).

Furthermore, the function of schools not only as places of education but also as arrival infrastructures is not sufficiently reflected in the resources at their disposal. Although the federal state has introduced an index to measure the social vulnerability of schools, the level of resources available for handling conditions in arrival neighbourhoods such as Nordstadt is inadequate. While some of the tasks performed by the SLBs are covered by project funding from the federal state, the municipality, or sometimes national programmes, obtaining follow-up funding constitutes part of their work. The effort involved in drafting annual and ad-hoc proposals and decisions for additional services (e.g., language classes, excursions, parents’ cafés) funded by the city council is criticised by headteachers and school staff as tying up resources, causing frustration at both levels and jeopardising the continuity of staff so crucial to social work. In some cases, regulations imposed by official policies exacerbate day-to-day problems in schools due to their incompatibility with everyday routines. For example, communicating with parents via WhatsApp is officially not allowed on data protection grounds, though many interlocutors practised it at the school gate because it is the easiest way to communicate with parents. For instance, it allows voice messages for the benefit of the illiterate, translation through apps, etc. This is where SLBs operate in a grey area, bending the rules.

Personal relations with individual council employees facilitate direct and open contact. For example, the head of one pre-school group had an informal collaboration with a municipal official responsible for vaccinating uninsured children. As a measles vaccination is a prerequisite for admission to daycare facilities and schools, the municipal official offered an informal vaccination session for children not registered with a paediatrician. In such ways, informal cooperation with public officials helps fill gaps in official services or circumvent official regulations, thus going the extra mile.

5.2. SLB Organisational Embeddedness Within a School: Sharing a Professional Ethos

As high-level bureaucrats, headteachers have multiple roles. Despite their professional status, they interact with parents, for example on children's school enrolment, thereby experiencing firsthand the tension between the needs of newcomers and bureaucratic regulations:

Families often find themselves having to go from one government office to the next. And then they end up here in despair. Tears flow. Those big eyes look at us. And then we are so touched and just take them in. We then have to call the school authorities and apologise. Because we have gone against the rulebook. (Headteacher, Rabbit School)

This frontline experience is an important backdrop for shaping the organisational atmosphere in which teachers and social workers extend their work remit, navigating in grey areas or circumventing regulations. This atmosphere shapes cooperation between the different professions in the school team—social workers, teachers, other pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff—all the while in the knowledge that headteachers share the same understanding of the situation. Indeed, this constitutes an important motivation for going that extra mile:

School is clearly a hierarchical place and how well school social work can develop always depends on the headteachers and, of course, the team. (School social worker, Faraway School)

The quote emphasises the role of headteachers, but also of SLBs, in shaping the organisational atmosphere and framework within which frontline work takes place. Our observations in two schools showed that regular and direct communication between different professions can make bureaucratic processes a lot easier for applicants. At the school gate, we observed that school staff often personally bring newcomers to colleagues instead of just directing them there. There is a mutual understanding and appreciation of the importance of tasks that go beyond the usual work remit of schools. For example, the head of the pre-school group assumed responsibility for making telephone calls for parents to secure a place in a daycare facility while pre-school teachers backed her up in the group because, as she said, "we are all looking in the same direction." Thus, SLBs within the same organisation provide mutual support for informal practices while these practices are hidden from official agencies such as the youth welfare office as these would not allow the set number of children in a pre-school group to be exceeded:

Because I know that otherwise the children will stay at home for the rest of the year. It's always very crowded in the rooms with 18 children. We're not even equipped for that. We don't have that many chairs and so on. But we do it. And the youth welfare office doesn't necessarily have to know. We work together on it. And it's just something that happens under the table. (Head of the pre-school group, Rabbit School)

Tensions between children's needs, regulatory requirements, staff capacity, and equipment levels place additional burdens on the pre-school team. However, because of the sense of togetherness in the team and the sharing of tasks, the SLBs are willing to cope with the higher workload and to think of ways of how to get around official regulations. Although this motivates and to some extent compensates for the negative aspects, the risks of burnout and staff absenteeism remain:

I have amazing teaching staff. Incredibly committed. But they are working at the limit. And that worries me. The teachers can't go on like that any longer. (Headteacher, Rabbit School).

It is clear that the heavy workload of SLBs and their handling of the diversifying and increasing needs of pupils (and their families) need to be seen and, wherever possible, rewarded by headteachers.

5.3. SLB Embeddedness in a Local Ecosystem of Social Infrastructures

SLB embeddedness in neighbourhood-based arrival networks is an important driver for headteachers to develop innovative responses to changing demands. In contrast to Ambrosini (2021) and his use of the term “battleground” to describe a field of contesting actors shaping asylum and immigration policy, in our case study we found shared values based on long-established networks in Nordstadt—as a long-standing arrival neighbourhood—and mutual support in facilitating newcomers’ access to resources. Despite the presence of right-wing extremist movements at different political levels, local actors may steer clear of state policies, instead adopting an approach prioritising newcomers’ needs. As one example, two headteachers developed a new curriculum, learning materials, and teaching rationale because standard textbooks and the general curriculum did not work in the Nordstadt context. The headteachers did “not wait for permission or money” from the school department but just got on with the job. While teachers often feel left alone in their commitment to respond to divergent migration-related needs (Häggström et al., 2020, p. 5), equality and diversity work are valued (Ahmed, 2012) in Nordstadt due to a common understanding of local conditions and a shared professional ethos. The starting point for going the extra mile is the shared understanding of Nordstadt as a neighbourhood where standard repertoires do not work—a backbone argument of our study. The following quote illustrates how the prevalence of illiteracy in Nordstadt changes the working practices of schools and their understanding of authority:

A paper form means nothing, a letter means nothing, because if you can't read and you don't understand the language, then it's useless. And when they see us and realise that it's unprejudiced, relationships develop. That's why we move around a lot. (School social worker, Rabbit School)

This understanding has been formed through decades of “infrastructuring” arrival:

We have known for years and decades what the schools and families here need. Local people have always done what they thought was right. We have circumvented law. We have stretched the rules. We didn't ask, we just did it. And we didn't wait for the money to come, we just got started. (Headteacher, Owl School)

Furthermore, the shared professional ethos of the ecosystem of social infrastructures in Nordstadt encourages the development of new ideas, finding individual solutions, implementing new practices and routines, and building a viable network and relationships for collaboration:

Everyone really enjoys working in these schools. Especially the Nordstadt schools, because there is a high work ethos, a high level of commitment. A high level of exchange and a high level of attitude. (Headteacher, Owl School)

SLBs also emphasise the importance of a shared local understanding and professional ethos in the ecosystem of social infrastructures for their motivation to go that extra mile:

I think everyone likes to work here because the place demands more of you than usual. And if you're not ready for that, you won't be here for long. Then you're in the wrong place. Everyone sticks together. There's actually a very good atmosphere among the staff. That's motivating. (School social worker, Rabbit School)

This common understanding, shared professional ethos and network enable the school SLBs to adapt quickly to new demands identified in their daily interaction with newcomers. Aware of the specific local conditions and work requirements in Nordstadt, school staff consciously decided to work there "as an expression of their ideals and values" to "make a difference" (Brodkin, 2016, p. 449). However, despite their high level of commitment within the Nordstadt landscape of arrival infrastructures, the SLBs cannot "do justice to everyone" (teacher, Fox School). Individual solutions and informal practices thus always favour some and exclude others.

At the same time, headteachers as high-level bureaucrats work to upscale local ideas and review existing policy frameworks, sometimes in small collaboration projects (when two headteachers work together) or in established networks, as in the above-mentioned position paper (AG Juno, 2022). In particular, the development of the "Overall Migrant Newcomer Strategy" in response to the influx of refugees in 2015 and 2022 created moments not only of institutional learning (see Section 5.1) but also of relationship- and network-building where people from the neighbourhood, both professionals and residents, worked together, for example, to arrange initial accommodation for newcomers. This institutionalised approach of close cooperation between the city administration and NGOs is similar to the pattern of horizontal cooperation described by Campomori and Ambrosini (2020). Based on mutual reliability, the close network facilitates an efficient and rapid flow of information and mutual support.

6. Conclusion

This article analyses the everyday work and practices of SLBs as policy intermediaries in primary schools. Using the case study of Nordstadt, an arrival neighbourhood of Dortmund, in Germany, the research links the strands of literature on street-level bureaucracy with the emerging research field of arrival infrastructures.

In line with Belabas and Gerrits (2017) and Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000), we argue that under certain conditions SLBs develop strategies that, instead of helping them cope with limited time resources, actually increase their own workload. We identified two different dimensions in which SLBs go the extra mile and exceed a school's (formal academic) education mandate. These are (a) addressing basic needs and building trust with parents and (b) helping parents with official paperwork and facilitating newcomers' agency. The shifts in tasks described above show that what used to be the exception is becoming the norm, and vice versa. In both dimensions we observed not only formal ways of handling scarce resources, but also many informal approaches. Moreover, the study illustrates the close interplay between formal and informal practices and how some informal approaches in response to a crisis such as the pandemic were later formalised. Furthermore, informal practices also occur within formal structures. Our findings thus support the call to think beyond the binary understanding of informal and formal (state) practices (Fawaz, 2017, p. 112).

Our empirical example shows how horizontal and vertical forms of (welfare) brokering, as yet mainly described for street-level organisations (Ratzmann, 2023, p. 84), can also be found in the everyday actions of SLBs in state and hierarchically organised structures such as schools. In particular, our findings on high-level bureaucrats illustrate vertical brokering, e.g., communicating local needs to the state government at the next higher political level. By contrast, horizontal brokering takes the form of SLBs responding to the needs of newcomers, often informally (Breidahl & Brodtkin, 2023, p. 43). We see a need for further research analysing (informal) brokering practices embedded in state institutions and thus bringing together the often separate strands of literature on brokering and the work of SLBs.

Our research contributes to a better understanding of how the (local) ecosystem of social infrastructures and newcomers' access to resources are mediated through players working in different positions in schools: In addition to schoolteachers and social workers, headteachers can also act as SLBs (Perna, 2021). Their translation of educational policy goals is what newcomers receive and perceive as public policy (Baviskar & Winter, 2017). In so doing, SLBs become the "face" of bureaucracy. Interestingly and in contrast to the study by Häggström et al. (2020), SLBs in our case study do not feel that they are "caring alone." One reason for their commitment is their (feeling of) embeddedness and collaboration in the ecosystem of formal and non-formal organisations where their arrival structuring work is highly valued. Alongside SLBs' individual professional ethos, their multiple embeddedness not only within their organisation but also in non-school social infrastructures (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024) plays a key role. The shared professional ethos (Andreetta, 2022; Perna, 2021), built through SLBs working in the local ecosystem of social infrastructures in Nordstadt, contributes to their "going the extra mile." Three different levels of embeddedness can be distinguished: (a) SLBs' embeddedness in the wider national regime and educational policies; (b) their embeddedness in their organisation which also contributes to organisational change (McQuarrie & Marwell, 2009); and (c) the shared professional ethos at a neighbourhood level with its dense cluster of arrival infrastructures and players connecting individuals, places and institutional structures.

All these (changing) organisational structures, practices, and networks should not obscure the dramatic structural deficiencies in cities dealing with immigration-based diversity. These cannot be adequately addressed by the discretionary powers of local SLBs. In the future, more systematic and structural support (beyond perceived crises) from the federal and state governments for schools in arrival neighbourhoods is needed.

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable and helpful comments and all interlocutors for their cooperation and support throughout the whole research process.

Funding

This research has received funding from the ESRC under grant agreement no. ES/T015810/1, and funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101004704.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Participants in this research did not give written consent for their data to be published, so due to the sensitive nature of the research, supporting data is not available.

References

- AG Juno. (2022). *Positionspapier AG Juno aus der Sitzung vom 10.06.2022. Appell zum Ausbau weiterer außersfamiliärer Betreuungsplätze sowie Grundschulplätze in der Dortmunder Nordstadt*. Unpublished document.
- Ahmed, S. (2007). 'You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing': Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(4), 590–609.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included. Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Ambrosini, M. (2021). The battleground of asylum and immigration policies: A conceptual inquiry. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(3), 374–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1836380>
- Andreetta, S. (2022). Granting "human dignity." How emotions and professional ethos make public services. *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 40(2), 36–53.
- Baviskar, S., & Winter, S. C. (2017). Street-level bureaucrats as individual policymakers: The relationship between attitudes and coping behavior toward vulnerable children and youth. *International Public Management Journal*, 20(2), 316–353.
- Belabas, W., & Gerrits, L. (2017). Going the extra mile? How street-level bureaucrats deal with the integration of immigrants. *Social Policy & Administration*, 51(1), 133–150.
- Bernt, M., Hamann, U., El-Kayed, N., & Keskinikiliç, L. (2022). Internal migration industries: Shaping the housing options for refugees at the local level. *Urban Studies*, 59(11), 2217–2233.
- Bierschenk, T. (2014). Sedimentations, fragmentations and normative double-binds in (West) African public services. In T. Bierschenk & J.-P. Olivier de Sardan (Eds.), *States at work. Dynamics of African bureaucracies* (pp. 21–245). Brill.
- Bierschenk, T., & Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (2019). How to study bureaucracies ethnographically? *Critique of Anthropology*, 39(2), 243–257.
- Borrelli, L. M., & Andreetta, S. (2019). Introduction. Governing migration through paperwork. *Journal of Legal Anthropology*, 3(2), 1–9.
- Børsh, A. S., Skovdal, M., & Jervelund, S. S. (2021). How a school setting can generate social capital for young refugees: Qualitative insights from a folk high school in Denmark. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(1), 718–740.
- Bosworth, M. (2016, June 12). Paperwork and administrative power in detention. *Faculty of Law Blogs / University of Oxford*. <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/06/paperwork-and>
- Boterman, W., & Ramos Lobato, I. (2022). Local segregation patterns and multilevel education policies. In Y. Kazepov, E. Barberis, R. Cucca, & E. Mocca (Eds.), *Handbook on urban social policies* (pp. 219–233). Edward Elgar.
- Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, 5(3), 23–32.
- Breidahl, K. N., & Brodtkin, E. Z. (2023). Managing asylum: Street-level organizations and refugee crises. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 26(1), 42–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2023.2227117>
- Brodtkin, E. Z. (1990). Implementation as policy politics. In D. J. Palumbo & D. J. Calista (Eds.), *Implementation and the policy process. Opening up the black box* (pp. 107–118). Praeger.

- Brodkin, E. Z. (2016). Street-level organizations, inequality, and the future of human services. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 40(5), 444–450.
- Brodkin, E. Z. (2021). Street-level organizations at the front lines of crises. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 23(1), 16–29.
- Campbell, J. L., Quincey, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth semistructured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294–320.
- Campomori, F., & Ambrosini, M. (2020). Multilevel governance in trouble: The implementation of asylum seekers' reception in Italy as a battleground. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(22). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00178-1>
- Collins, D., & Coleman, T. (2008). Social geographies of education: Looking within, and beyond, school boundaries. *Geography Compass*, 2(1), 281–299.
- Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(2), 178–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516629004>
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. I. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, 16(1), 99–115.
- Hägström, F., Børsh, A. F., & Skovdal, M. (2020). Caring alone: The boundaries of teachers' ethics of care for newly arrived immigrant and refugee learners in Denmark. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 117, Article 105248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105248>
- Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, 5(3), 1–10.
- Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, 78, 381–391.
- Hollifield, J. F. (2004). The emerging migration state. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 885–912.
- Jennings, J. L. (2010). School choice or schools' choice? Managing in an era of accountability. *Sociology of Education*, 83(3), 227–247.
- Kallio, J., & Kuovo, A. (2014). Street-level bureaucrats' and the general public's deservingness perceptions of social assistance recipients in Finland. *Social Policy & Administration*, 49(3), 316–334.
- Kurtenbach, S., & Rosenberger, K. (2021). *Nachbarschaft in diversitätsgeprägten Stadtteilen. Handlungsbezüge für die kommunale Integrationspolitik*. FH Münster. <https://www.hb.fh-muenster.de/opus4/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/13263/file/KurtenbachRosenberger2021NEU.pdf>
- Lewicki, A. (2022). The material effects of Whiteness: Institutional racism in the German welfare state. *The Sociological Review*, 70(5), 916–934. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221108596>
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy*. Russel Sage Foundation. (Original work published 1980)
- Lotta, G. S., & Marques, E. C. (2019). How social networks affect policy implementation: An analysis of street-level bureaucrats' performance regarding a health policy. *Social Policy & Administration*, 54(3), 345–360.
- Loyens, K., & Maesschalck, J. (2010). Toward a theoretical framework for ethical decision making of street-level bureaucracy: Existing models reconsidered. *Administration & Society*, 42(1), 66–100.
- Madden, R. (2010). *Being ethnographic. A guide to the theory and practice of ethnography*. Sage.
- Mahoney, J., & Thelen, K. (2009). A theory of gradual institutional change. In J. Mahoney & K. Thelen (Eds.), *Explaining institutional change. Ambiguity, agency, and power* (pp. 1–37). Cambridge University Press.

- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2000). State agent or citizen agent: Two narratives of discretion. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(2), 329–358.
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. (2012). Social equities and inequities in practice: Street-level workers as agents and pragmatists. *Public Administration Review*, 72(S1), S16–S23.
- McFarlane, C. (2012). Rethinking informality: Politics, crisis, and the city. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13(1), 89–108.
- McQuarrie, M., & Marwell, N. P. (2009). The missing organizational dimension in urban sociology. *City & Community*, 8(3), 247–268.
- Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & Van Heur, B. (Eds.). (2019). *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neal, S., Vincent, C., & Iqbal, H. (2016). Extended encounters in primary school worlds: Shared social resource, connective spaces and sustained conviviality in socially and ethnically complex urban geographies. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 37(5), 464–480.
- Perelmiter, L. (2021). “Fairness” in an unequal society: Welfare workers, labor inspectors and the embedded moralities of street-level bureaucracy in Argentina. *Public Administration and Development*, 42(1), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1954>
- Perna, R. (2021). Street-level workers, managers and institutional tensions: A comparative ethnography of healthcare practices of in/exclusion in three Italian public organisations. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 16(9), 1–18.
- Radtke, F. O. (2003, February 18–20). *Responding to institutional discrimination: The local management of inclusion into the education system* [Paper presentation]. The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the European Union and Australia, Sydney, Australia. https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41565/3/radtke_paper.pdf
- Ramos Lobato, I., Goldbach, A., & Hanhörster, H. (2023). “The kids get haggled over”: How institutional practices contribute to segregation in elementary schools. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8, Article 1250158. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1250158>
- Ratzmann, N. (2021). Deserving of social support? Street-level bureaucrats’ decisions on EU migrants’ benefit claims in Germany. *Social Policy & Society*, 20(3), 509–520.
- Ratzmann, N. (2023). Insights from the frontline of German welfare policy: The under-recognised role of brokerage in street-level practice. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 26(1), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2023.2248021>
- Reuter, F. (2021). Antiziganismus und Bildungsgeschichte. In D. Strauß (Ed.), *RomnoKher-Studie 2021: Ungleiche Teilhabe. Zur Lage der Sinti und Roma in Deutschland* (pp. 45–56). RomnoKher. https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/2021_RomnoKher_Ungleiche_Teilhabe.pdf
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Skovdal, M., & Campbell, C. (2015). Beyond education: What role can schools play in the support and protection of children in extreme settings? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 41, 175–183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.02.005>
- Stadt Dortmund. (2019). *Statistikatlas. Dortmunder Stadtteile* (Dortmunder Statistik No. 215).
- Stadt Dortmund. (2023a). *Tabellenband Bevölkerung*.
- Stadt Dortmund. (2023b). *Entwicklung Handlungsrahmen Neuzuwanderung 2021–2022*. Unpublished document.
- van Oorschot, W. (2000). Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public. *Policy & Politics*, 28(1), 33–48.

- Vinzant, J. C., & Crothers, L. (1998). *Street-level leadership. Discretion and legitimacy in front-line public service*. Georgetown University Press.
- Volmerich, O. (2022, August 18). 800 Jugendliche warten auf Platz an einer Schule—Stadt will Tempo machen. *Ruhr-Nachrichten*. <https://www.ruhrnachrichten.de/dortmund/800-jugendliche-warten-auf-platz-an-einer-schule-dezernent-verspricht-loesung-w1782596-2000604134>
- Voyer, A. (2019). 'If the students don't come, or if they don't finish, we don't get the money.' Principals, immigration, and the organisational logic of school choice in Sweden. *Ethnography and Education*, 14(4), 448–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2018.1445540>
- Wessendorf, S., & Gembus, M. (2024). The social front door: The role of social infrastructures for migrant arrival. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(12), 2822–2838. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2305276>
- Zacka, B. (2017). *When the state meets the street: Public service and moral agency*. Harvard University Press.

About the Authors



Heike Hanhörster is a junior professor and head of the Social Cohesion, Diversity and Migration in Urban Planning chair at the Institute of Urban and Regional Planning (ISR), TU Berlin. Her research interests include place-based processes of social inclusion and exclusion and people's encounters with difference. Her recent research focuses on newcomers' access to societal resources such as housing and education, social networks in low-income neighbourhoods, and institutional discrimination in the housing market.



Cornelia Toppel is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS), Dortmund. She holds a PhD in spatial planning from TU Dortmund University. Her current research focuses on migrant arrival and arrival policies, housing and residential location decisions, as well as urban regeneration of large housing estates. She has been involved in a variety of domestic and international research projects on migration, mobility, and housing.