cogitatio

URBAN PLANNING

Urban In/Formalities: How Arrival Infrastructures Shape Newcomers' Access To Resources

Edited by Heike Hanhörster, Martina Bovo, Miriam Neßler, and Susanne Wessendorf

Volume 9

2024

Open Access Journal

ISSN: 2183-7635

Urban Planning, 2024, Volume 9
Urban In/Formalities: How Arrival Infrastructures Shape Newcomers' Access To Resources

Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070–129 Lisbon
Portugal

Design by Typografia®
http://www.typografia.pt/en/

Cover image: © Valerii Apetroaiei from iStock

Academic Editors
Heike Hanhörster (Technical University Berlin)
Martina Bovo (IUAV University of Venice / Politecnico di Milano)
Miriam Neßler (Technical University Berlin)
Susanne Wessendorf (Coventry University)

Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning

This issue is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY). Articles may be reproduced provided that credit is given to the original and *Urban Planning* is acknowledged as the original venue of publication.

Table of Contents

Urban In/Formalities: How Arrival Infrastructures Shape Newcomers' Access To Resources
Martina Bovo, Miriam Neßler, Heike Hanhörster, and Susanne Wessendorf

Mapping Brussels' Displaced Housing Ecosystem: Palais des Droits' Post-Eviction Geographies and "Weird Alliances"
Tasneem Nagi, Luce Beeckmans, and Viviana d'Auria

Arrival Infrastructuring at a Southern European Gate: Public Action and Spaces in Palermo, Italy
Martina Bovo and Eléonore Bully

Looking for Daisies: The Hidden Attraction and Arrival Infrastructures of Welcoming Spaces in Rural Spain
Laura Oso and Leticia Santaballa

Multiscalar and In/Formal: Infrastructuring Refugee Arrival in Disempowered Cities
Norma Schemschat

"Activism Is a Good Means to Connect Things": Brokering as World-Making Against Competitive Tendering in Newcomer Support
Lieke van der Veer

Arrival Brokers and Commercial Infrastructuring for and With Migrant Newcomers in Dortmund, Germany
Miriam Neßler

Homes for Ukraine: Arrival Infrastructures and the UK's "New Bespokism"
Silke Zschomler and Mette Louise Berg

"We Stretched the Rules": How Street-Level Bureaucrats in Schools Shape Newcomers' Access to Resources
Heike Hanhörster and Cornelia Tippel

Keeping Faith: Faith-Based Organizations as Urban Migration Infrastructures for Illegalized Migrants in Rotterdam
Carola Vasileiadi and Thomas Swerts

Temporalities of Arrival: Burundian Barbershops as an Arrival Infrastructure in a South African Township
Nomkhosi A. Mbatha and Leah Koskimaki

Table of Contents

From Tolerating Informality to Formalizing Prohibition: Religious Practices of West African Migrants in France (1960s–2020s)
Laura Guérin

Digital Arrival Infrastructures: Housing Platforms and Residency Governance in Berlin's Rental Sector
Leah Aaron

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 9755
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.9755

EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal

Urban In/Formalities: How Arrival Infrastructures Shape Newcomers' Access To Resources

Martina Bovo [1,2], Miriam Neßler [3], Heike Hanhörster [3], and Susanne Wessendorf [4]

[1] Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, Italy
[2] Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto, IUAV University of Venice, Italy
[3] Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany
[4] Institute for Peace and Security, Coventry University, UK

Correspondence: Martina Bovo (martina.bovo@polimi.it)

Submitted: 9 December 2024 **Published:** 19 December 2024

Issue: This editorial 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

In recent years, scholars in migration, urban studies, and urban planning have increasingly focused on the diversity of arrival processes experienced by international newcomers and the variety of spatial settings they involve. Current research on arrival infrastructures focuses on both place-based opportunity structures and newcomers' agency in shaping arrival processes, illustrating the interconnectedness of formal and informal infrastructures. Arrival infrastructuring can be understood as a mediating process that connects individuals and their social, economic, and cultural capital to places and societal resources. The concept of "in/formality," which addresses the formal–informal nexus as a continuum rather than in binary terms, offers a valuable yet underexplored perspective to analyse arrival processes and actors involved, including the state, market, and old and new residents. Through the lens of in/formality, this thematic issue aims to explore the practices, negotiations, and interconnections among different (migrant and non-migrant) actors involved in arrival infrastructuring. The contributions highlight four recurring ways in which the interplay between informal and formal practices manifests: unusual alliances, brokering, boundary spanning, and structured workarounds.

Keywords

arrival infrastructures; in/formality; migration; urban spaces

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

In recent years, scholars in migration, urban studies and urban planning have increasingly focused on the diversity of arrival processes experienced by international newcomers and the variety of spatial settings they involve. Recognising arrival as a process rather than a fixed moment in migration trajectories, researchers have unpacked its temporal, territorial, and subjective complexities. Arrival is often discussed alongside "arrival infrastructures," defined as "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled upon arrival" (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 1). These infrastructures range from social support networks and coalitions to urban spaces and services that shape newcomers' everyday lives (Boost & Oosterlynck, 2019; Bovo, 2020). The infrastructural perspective highlights how resources such as co-ethnic networks, local restaurants, public libraries, cafes, public spaces, help desks, and housing services play critical roles for newcomers. Arrival infrastructuring can be understood as a mediating process that connects individuals and their social, economic, and cultural capital to places and societal resources. This lens emphasises the variety of policies, actors, and locations that facilitate, channel, or obstruct newcomers' arrival processes (Bovo, 2024; Fawaz, 2017; Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Hans, 2023; Meeus et al., 2019; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024).

Current research on arrival infrastructures focuses on both place-based opportunity structures (Phillimore, 2020) and newcomers' agency in shaping arrival processes, illustrating the interconnectedness of formal and informal infrastructures. Analysing these processes through the lens of in/formality offers a valuable yet underexplored perspective on the fluid processes of arrival that involve various actors, including the state, market, and new and old residents. Moving beyond the simplistic formal–informal binary, this thematic issue aims to explore the practices, negotiations, and interconnections among different (migrant and non-migrant) actors involved in arrival infrastructuring. It seeks to illuminate the in/formal nature of arrival infrastructures across the "Global North" and "South" and reflect on the role of in/formality in infrastructuring work. In the subsequent sections, we will introduce the term in/formality and its use in the thematic issue, and we will outline four in/formality dimensions of the infrastructuring work described by the contributions.

2. The Lens of In/Formality for Arrival Processes

The debate on informality has its roots in the 1970s, when the notion of the informal economy began to be explored, initially framed in relation to marginality and underdevelopment in the so-called "Global South" (Biehl, 2022). Over the past decades, this debate has evolved, delving into the intricate connections between informality, urbanisation, migration, and urban planning. Classical theories have examined the origins and approaches to informality, ranging from structuralist perspectives to neoliberal, reformist, and critical governance frameworks (Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). Notably, recent scholarship has begun to challenge the geographic and dichotomous definitions traditionally associated with informality. First, researchers have recognised that informality is not confined to a particular region, such as the Global South, but exists globally, including in the Global North. This challenges the myth of Northern formality (Alfaro d'Alençon et al., 2018; Jaffe & Koster, 2019; McFarlane & Waibel, 2012; Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014) and calls for a contextualised understanding of informality (Chiodelli & Gentili, 2021; Chiodelli & Tzfadia, 2016). Second, various contributions have sought to move beyond binary definitions of formal versus informal. Instead, scholars have proposed more nuanced frameworks, such as the "formal–informal continuum" (Chen, 2005; Guha-Khasnobis et al., 2006) and, later, the "formal–informal spectrum" (Gomez et al., 2020). Roy and AlSayyad (2004) conceptualise urban informality not as a discrete sector apart from

formal systems, but as “a series of transactions that connect different economies and spaces to one another” (Roy, 2005, p. 148). In migration studies, Schapendonk and Ekenhorst (2020) introduce the idea of “in/formal circuits,” further developed by Biehl (2022), who explores the dynamic interplay of “in/formalities and il/legalities” in the lived experiences and daily negotiations of migrant newcomers in Istanbul. Building on these reflections, this thematic issue adopts the term “in/formal” rather than “informal” to analyse arrival infrastructures and the processes of infrastructuring, encompassing those governed by state regulations as well as those that transcend such frameworks.

As discussed in the subsequent section, the contributors to this thematic issue provide a nuanced exploration of in/formality within arrival infrastructures across diverse geographical contexts and across different domains such as housing, social advice, local economies or education. From Central Europe to the Mediterranean and South Africa, informality emerges as a dominant paradigm, often surpassing formalised frameworks. In all these cases, informalities function as a logic and system of norms (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004) that underpin arrival infrastructuring practices. The contributions illustrate that arrival infrastructures exist along a continuum of formal and informal processes, challenging and moving beyond a binary conceptualisation. This continuum spans from informal infrastructures, such as squats and Burundian migrants’ barbershops, to formal, state-regulated entities such as public health clinics and schools.

Crucially, all examples reveal the intricate interplay between in/formal processes and systems. Informal infrastructures frequently interact with formal actors, while informal practices often occur within formalised settings. This dynamic is particularly evident in housing infrastructures and state-provided services, such as schools, faith-based organisations, and help desks, where social workers and volunteers navigate and blend formal and informal approaches, continuously crossing and reshaping the boundaries between the two.

3. Four Emerging Dimensions of In/Formality in Arrival Infrastructuring Work

The contributions in the thematic issue display the various entanglements of in/formal infrastructuring work and arrival infrastructures, and the way they shape access to resources. A cross-cutting reading of all contributions highlights four recurring ways in which the interplay between informal and formal practices manifests: *unusual alliances*, *brokering*, *boundary spanning*, and *structured workarounds*. Whilst these themes appear in almost all of the contributions, we use this section to highlight the diversity of facets of in/formality within and across the themes and to introduce the articles of the thematic issue.

Nagi et al. (2024) explore local responses to the shortcomings of the formal reception system in Brussels and highlight emerging *unusual or “weird” alliances*. Here, the intersection of immigration regimes and neoliberal housing systems creates gaps in housing supply that neither the reception nor housing systems adequately address. In this vacuum, non-conventional constellations of migrant and non-migrant actors form alliances using diverse tools—from occupations to ad-hoc collaborations with state and non-state actors—to meet housing needs, effectively creating a governance from below. In Southern Italy, Bovo and Bully (2024) describe the “local and adaptive” (Briata, 2014, p. 8) efforts of state and non-state actors in infrastructuring arrivals. They discuss various infrastructures, including a private dormitory, a public health clinic, and a help desk operated by a local association. In this context, the provision of arrival infrastructures relies on the agency and collaboration of both formal and informal actors, rooted in historical coalitions against the Mafia and more recent opposition to restrictive national border policies. Unconventional alliances are also

prevalent in shrinking contexts, as illustrated by Oso and Santaballa (2024) in Spain, and Schemschat (2024) in the US, France, and Germany. In Spanish rural towns, a variety of practices by formal and informal actors facilitate newcomers' access to resources, and infrastructuring efforts are undertaken by an array of actors with diverse backgrounds who do not normally work together, including individuals working in public administration and civil society, alongside migrants. In the US, France, and Germany, arrival processes are often in/formally negotiated with supra-local actors who are not usually involved in the provision of support, yet play a crucial role in local access to resources. Alliances develop among actors typically operating at different scales or within distinct policy domains. These alliances contribute to bridging provision gaps and addressing the diverse needs of newcomers. These contributions show that infrastructuring work is often developed by in/formal and unusual alliances between formal (e.g., public servants) and informal actors (e.g., occupations).

A second recurring theme is that of *"arrival brokers"* (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020), who often operate in/formally. Brokers occupy an in-between position, bridging "structural holes" (Burt, 1992), connecting people and thereby playing a key role in infrastructuring processes. In Rotterdam, van der Veer (2024) explores the role of activists as brokers between small-scale grassroots initiatives and the city administration. Positioned at the intersection of informal and formal infrastructures, these activists resist neoliberal reforms in welfare and integration governance while politicising refugee-led initiatives. Their in/formal positioning enables them to challenge the neoliberal and depoliticised provision of arrival infrastructures through competitive tendering. In Dortmund, Germany, Neßler (2024) shows how commercial brokering has developed into a practice that operates alongside and beyond the support offered by formal institutions, often filling gaps left by these structures. She shows how commercial brokering arises despite the strong presence of formal municipal or state-funded civil society support structures. Commercial brokers' intermediary position between the market and the state allows them to operate in both formal and informal ways, which enhances their appeal. In the UK, Zschomler and Berg (2024) discuss the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, a government-funded private hosting initiative, and describe private hosts as arrival brokers. By acting as "home-level bureaucrats" (Burrell, 2024), hosts often mediate between bureaucracies and their Ukrainian guests. Across these articles, brokers emerge as vital players for both newcomers and state structures, able to challenge and complement the formal system through their intermediary roles.

A third dimension of in/formality involves *"boundary spanning"* (Schiller, 2022) by infrastructuring actors. "Boundary-spanners" are officials who operate at the boundaries of their own organisation and create bridges and linkages between citizens and municipal entities (Schiller, 2022; see also Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010; Williams, 2002). Hanhörster and Tippel (2024) highlight the work of primary school teachers in an arrival neighbourhood in Dortmund, illustrating how their informal and formal practices shape newcomers' trajectories. They often extend their roles beyond formal job descriptions and expand their range of activities. By "circumventing the law" and going the "extra mile," they address unmet everyday needs and build trust with newcomer families. In Rotterdam, Vasileiadi and Swerts (2024) examine how formal faith-based organisations support newcomers and describe the work of volunteers and employees who engage in in/formal practices, often reacting to restrictive national policies regarding access to support. In this context, employees sometimes use their discretionary power and stretch the eligibility criteria for accessing their services, thus engaging in informal infrastructuring work. These contributions reveal that, even amid limited resources, infrastructuring actors frequently expand their roles beyond formal tasks, effectively spanning institutional and organisational boundaries.

Organised workarounds, developed to navigate the challenges of arrival processes and hostile policy environments, emerge as a fourth dimension of in/formality. In Durban, South Africa, a city characterised by dense urbanisation and spatial inequality, Mbatha and Koskimaki (2024) describe how Burundian migrants' barbershops function as informal social spaces. Indeed, these spaces provide access to "connectors" who help with access to labour, social and material resources, local knowledge, and networks. Burundian barbershops often operate informally as arrival infrastructures, and this allows them to adapt to the complex, ever-changing lives of newcomers and the recurring threats of violence against immigrants. Guérin (2024), focusing on Paris, describes how religious spaces within *foyers*—housing facilities built in the 1950s for migrant workers from former French colonies—have shifted from being informally tolerated to formally prohibited. She describes how residents of foyers creatively redefine interior spaces for worship, transforming them to informal prayer rooms. This exemplifies how individuals work around formal restrictions in increasingly hostile political climates. Finally, Aaron (2024) addresses housing platforms in Berlin where more privileged migrants navigate the legal process of becoming formal residents. She shows how, within Berlin's secondary housing market, digital platforms serve as arrival infrastructures that allow newcomers to navigate and negotiate regimes of residency.

The lens of in/formality helps to unpack the complexity of arrival processes and arrival infrastructuring work. While these processes vary depending on the context of arrival, the contributions to this thematic issue also show similarities in the way in/formal arrival infrastructuring work develops within and across the four dimensions of unusual alliances, brokering, boundary spanning, and structured workarounds. All contributions demonstrate that what is considered in/formal is inherently shaped by political discourses and power structures, constantly subject to negotiation. Furthermore, informal processes invariably unfold within the broader framework of state interventions and regulatory mechanisms (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004). This dynamic is evident in the historical development of specific arrival infrastructures, such as religious spaces in Parisian foyers and their legal regulation, as well as in the work of commercial brokers in Dortmund who can be perceived as informal (and often illegal), even when they possess formal licenses. The perspective of in/formality also allows us to understand how newcomers co-construct arrival infrastructures: they are not only participating in in/formal activities, but also shaping the landscape of arrival infrastructures through their practices. Newcomers may prefer informal infrastructures over municipal options because of their flexibility and accessibility, as in the case of dormitories in Palermo. Furthermore, new and oldcomers do not only use but also co-produce in/formal infrastructures, as exemplified with the unusual alliances in Brussels and the Burundian barbershops in Durban. All these examples highlight the inherent ambivalence of in/formal arrival infrastructuring and the need to recognise in/formal infrastructures' productivity for newcomers, while also considering the power dynamics among actors and the gaps and restrictions imposed by more formal infrastructures. We aspire for this thematic issue to chart new directions for research in the study of in/formal arrival infrastructuring, while also shaping and inspiring the work of local and national policymakers by broadening our understanding of the crucial question of how migrants can be both supported and empowered in their arrival.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all authors who contributed to this thematic issue. We also thank Tamlyn Monson for her helpful and constructive comments.

Funding

Part of this work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/T015810/1] and by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme [Project ReROOT, grant agreement number 101004704].

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Aaron, L. (2024). Digital arrival infrastructures: Housing platforms and residency governance in berlin's rental sector. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8480. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8480

Alfaro d'Alençon, P., Smith, H., Álvarez de Andrés, E., Cabrera, C., Fokdal, J., Lombard, M., Mazzolini, A., Michelutti, E., Moretto, L., & Spire, A. (2018). Interrogating informality: Conceptualisations, practices and policies in the light of the New Urban Agenda. *Habitat International*, *75*, 59–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.04.007

Biehl, K. S. (2022). Spectrums of in/formality and il/legality: Negotiating business and migration-related statuses in arrival spaces. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 112–129. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnac005

Boost, D., & Oosterlynck, S. (2019). "Soft" urban arrival infrastructures in the periphery of metropolitan areas: The role of social networks for sub-Saharan newcomers in Aalst, Belgium. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 153–177). Springer.

Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2894

Bovo, M. (2024). *Migration landing spaces. Processes and infrastructures in Italy*. Routledge.

Bovo, M., & Bully, E. (2024). Arrival infrastructuring at a southern european gate: Public action and spaces in Palermo, Italy. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8474. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8474

Briata, P. (2014). *Spazio urbano e immigrazione. Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva* europea. Francoangeli.

Burrell, K. (2024). Domesticating responsibility: Refugee hosting and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. *Antipode*, *56*(4), 1191–1211. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.13023

Burt, R. S. (1992). *Structural holes: The social structure of competition*. Harvard University Press.

Chen, M. A. (2005). *Rethinking the informal economy: Linkages with the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment*. United Nations University.

Chiodelli, F., & Gentili, M. (2021). The many shades of grey in urban governance: How illegality shapes urban planning, policy and development. *Political Geography*, *84*, Article 102309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102309

Chiodelli, F., & Tzfadia, E. (2016). The multifaceted relation between formal institutions and the production of informal urban spaces: An editorial introduction. *Geography Research Forum*, *36*, 1–14.

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Gomez, G. M., Chawla, S., & Fransen, J. (2020). Exploring the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the informal economy with a multifactor framework. In M. Iftikhar, J. Justice, & D. Audretsch (Eds.), *Urban studies and entrepreneurship* (pp. 181–202). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15164-5_10

Guérin, L. (2024). From tolerating informality to formalizing prohibition: Religious practices of West African migrants in France (1960s–2020s). *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8524. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8524

Guha-Khasnobis, B., Kanbur, R., & Ostrom, E. (2006). Beyond formality and informality. In B. Guha-Khasnobis, R. Kanbur, & E. Ostrom (Eds.), *Linking the formal and informal economy: Concepts and policies* (pp. 1–18). Oxford University Press.

Hanhörster, H., & Tippel, C. (2024). "We stretched the rules": How street-level bureaucrats in schools shape newcomers' access to resources. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8570. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8570

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-381-2023

Jaffe, R., & Koster, M. (2019). The myth of formality in the Global North: Informality-as-innovation in Dutch governance. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *43*(3), 563–568. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12706

Mbatha, N. A., & Koskimaki, L. (2024). Temporalities of arrival: Burundian barbershops as an arrival infrastructure in a South African township. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8674. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8674

McFarlane, C., & Waibel, M. (2012). *Urban informalities: Reflections on the formal and informal*. Routledge.

Meerkerk, I., & Edelenbos, J. (2014). The effects of boundary spanners on trust and performance of urban governance networks: Findings from survey research on urban development projects in The Netherlands. *Policy Sciences*, *47*(1), 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-013-9181-2

Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & van Heur, B. (2019). *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities*. Springer.

Mukhija, V., & Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (Eds.). (2014). *The informal American city. Beyond taco trucks and day labor*. The MIT Press.

Nagi, T., Beeckmans, L., & d'Auria, V. (2024). Mapping Brussels' displaced housing ecosystem: Palais des Droits' post-eviction geographies and "weird alliances." *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8614. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8614

Neßler, M. (2024). Arrival brokers and commercial infrastructuring for and with migrant newcomers in Dortmund, Germany. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8683. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8683

Oso, L., & Santaballa, L. (2024). Looking for daisies: The hidden attraction and arrival infrastructures of welcoming spaces in rural Spain. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8560. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8560

Phillimore, J. (2020). Refugee-integration-opportunity structures: Shifting the focus from refugees to context. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(2), 1946–1966. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa012

Roy, A. (2005). Urban informality: Toward an epistemology of planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *71*(2), 147–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360508976689

Roy, A., & AlSayyad, N. (Eds.). (2004). *Urban informality. Transnational perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*. Lexington Books.

Schapendonk, J., & Ekenhorst, M. (2020). From sectors to circuits: Re-describing Senegambian in/formal practices in Europe, and beyond. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, *111*(5), 705–717. https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12401

Schemschat, N. (2024). Multiscalar and in/formal: Infrastructuring refugee arrival in disempowered cities. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8702. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8702

Schiller, M. (2022). Urban planners as boundary spanners: Steering perceptions of asylum seeker accommodations in Germany. *EPC: Politics and Space*, *40*(3), 763–778. https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544211035401

van der Veer, L. (2024). "Activism is a good means to connect things": Brokering as world-making against competitive tendering in newcomer support. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8488. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8488

Vasileiadi, C., & Swerts, T. (2024). Keeping faith: Faith-based organizations as urban migration infrastructures for illegalized migrants in Rotterdam. *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8765. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8765

Weerts, D. J., & Sandmann, L. R. (2010). Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *81*(6), 632–657. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2010.11779075

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

Williams, P. (2002). The competent boundary spanner. *Public Administration*, *80*(1), 103–124. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00296

Zschomler, S., & Berg, M. L. (2024). Homes for Ukraine: Arrival infrastructures and the UK's "new bespokism." *Urban Planning*, *9*, Article 8574. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8574

About the Authors

Martina Bovo is a postdoc research fellow at IUAV University of Venice, Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto, and collaborates in teaching and research activities at Politecnico di Milano. She obtained a PhD in urban planning, design and policy and worked as a postdoc research fellow at KU Leuven. Her research focuses on the territorial dimension of migration and arrival processes. She recently published *Migration Landing Spaces. Processes and Infrastructures in Italy* (Routledge 2024).

Miriam Neßler researches and teaches in urban and migration studies, interested in issues of spatial, social, and environmental justice. As part of her PhD and in various research projects, she works on infrastructures of arrival and commodification. She is currently a research assistant at the Institute for Urban and Regional Planning at TU Berlin, where she works at the Chair for Social Cohesion, Diversity and Migration in Urban Planning.

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.

Susanne Wessendorf is professor of Social Anthropology at Coventry University's Institute for Peace and Security. Her work focuses on understanding new forms of social inclusion and exclusion in contexts of immigration-related diversity. Her recent research has investigated place-based opportunity structures for newcomers in European urban arrival contexts.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8614
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8614

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Mapping Brussels' Displaced Housing Ecosystem: Palais des Droits' Post-Eviction Geographies and "Weird Alliances"

Tasneem Nagi, Luce Beeckmans, and Viviana d'Auria

Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium

Correspondence: Tasneem Nagi (tasneem.nagi@kuleuven.be)

Submitted: 3 May 2024 **Accepted:** 25 September 2024 **Published:** 19 December 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

As displaced people arrive at European cities, the experiences of displacement caused by forces of bordering and securitization do not end at the point of arrival. Due to a pre-existing housing crisis characterized by critical shortages in affordable housing, a series of urban displacements ensue. The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately addresses. In this vacuum, moments of encounter between displaced migrants and non-migrants, who share a need for housing, can be witnessed in the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity. Through stories from housing struggles in Brussels, this article maps what we term a "displaced housing ecosystem" through the geographies and alliances that emerge along the trajectory after the eviction of Palais des Droits. Here, migrants and non-migrants come together and employ various tools, ranging from (political) occupations of vacant buildings to inventive ad hoc partnerships with state and non-state actors towards the provision of housing and other hospitality infrastructures. Building on Lancione's notion of "weird exoskeletons," the article aims to map such constellations. By focusing on infrastructural objects that reflect the emerging non-conventional alliances to respond to displacement, narrating the solidarities as well as antagonisms within them, the article sheds light on displaced housing governances from below. The purpose is to highlight the diverse and hybrid forms of actions, actors, and coalitions constituting an ecosystem for housing displaced migrants, shortly "displaced housing," in relation to and beyond formal reception and housing systems.

Keywords

bordering; Brussels; displaced housing; eviction; housing ecosystem

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction: A Displaced Housing Ecosystem Beyond the Formal/Informal Binary

As the 1,000 displaced people occupying no. 48 Rue des Palais started calling their squat "Palais des Droits" (Palace of Rights), the imaginations of the media and the public in Brussels were already occupied by images of unruliness, with a ministerial spokesperson deeming the situation "out of control" (Taylor, 2023). And indeed, the squat had emerged from outside the control and terrains of governance that destined its inhabitants to liminality, compelling them to inhabit the uninhabitable. A small group of homeless asylum seekers sought refuge in the empty building to escape the streets during winter; their homelessness a result of the Belgian government's failure to accommodate thousands of asylum seekers. Palais des Droits eventually housed about 800 registered applicants for international protection (""Palais des droits": Près de 800 demandeurs," 2023), together with a diverse group of displaced people who have no entitlements to housing in the eyes of the state: undocumented people, transient migrants falling under the Dublin Regulation, homeless people including those struggling with addiction, and more. The lived realities in Palais des Droits very quickly discourage any urges towards its romanticization. It was chaotic and rough, with frequent outbreaks of disease and violence. Nonetheless, within its "thrown-togetherness," and the fragile alliances that coalesced this group of people to make a home, lies a language of housing, and an assertion illegible to those who deem it "out of control."

In this article, we attempt to make legible the socio-spatial infrastructures that underpin making home in the precarities of displacement. The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately addresses. Through stories from housing struggles in Brussels, such as the trajectories that emerged after the eviction of Palais des Droits, we map how migrants and non-migrants who are experiencing displacement navigate the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity. In doing so, they employ various tools and create displaced geographies and alliances that extend beyond normative notions of housing, what we term a "displaced housing ecosystem." Building on Lancione's (2019) notion of "weird exoskeletons," the article aims to map such constellations. The purpose is to highlight the diverse and hybrid forms of actions, actors, and coalitions constituting an ecosystem for housing displaced migrants, shortly "displaced housing," in relation to and beyond formal reception and housing systems. In the remainder of this introductory section, we will first establish the theoretical groundings of our argument, linking border and urban displacements and disrupting the binaries of in/formality to trace a displaced housing ecosystem consisting of "geographies" and "weird alliances." In the following section, we will delve into the case study of Palais des Droits, contextualizing it within the Brussels scene, and following the trajectories that emerged after its eviction as a method to map a displaced housing ecosystem. Finally, we will zoom into three specific displaced housing geographies and their alliances, before offering some conclusions.

1.1. Connecting Border Displacements and Urban Displacements

In European cities, the experiences of displacement caused by bordering and securitization do not end at the point of arrival. Due to a pre-existing housing crisis characterized by critical shortages in affordable housing, a series of urban displacements ensue. Many scholars draw attention to how bordering is entrenched into the urban, where asylum accommodation acts as "internal border spaces" (Thorshaug, 2018; see also Fontanari, 2015) that transform the experience of forced displacement into "forced arrival" (Kreichauf, 2018).

The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately responds to. Hence, cross-border displacement folds into urban displacement, with a diverse population that shares spaces of housing marginality. By examining the diverse experiences of urban displacement, insights emerge on the limitations of categorizing border displacements through the legal asylum procedure (asylum seeker, refugee, undocumented migrant, etc.), which does not accurately reflect the living and housing conditions for people within each category and neither accounts for the commonalities between them and non-migrant citizens experiencing displacement and housing precarity. To this point, Ramsay (2020) argues:

> There is a persistent tendency to approach displacement in terms of politico-legal categories of exclusion, or through a mobility paradigm, or as a kind of liminality. Taken together, these theorizations render displacement into an exceptional experience that is precluded on differentiation from a supposedly stable non-migrant other. (p. 405)

Indeed, moments of encounter can be witnessed between displaced migrants and non-migrants, who share a need for housing in the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity.

The focus on migrant mobility misleadingly stresses the movement of people as the main aspect of displacement. Such focus underestimates the impoverishment and deprivation displaced people experience during the crisis and/or disregards the fact that said movement is a phenomenon shared among many groups, who do not necessarily share these vulnerabilities. Assal (2002) points out the need to differentiate between displacement as a spatial/geographical movement and as a socio-economic process, stating that "displacement and forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of political, economic and cultural processes and practices" (p. 71). Thinking of displacement as the outcome of an ensemble of many devices, it can then be largely viewed as a process that entails "the alienation or dispossession of the displaced persons from their former means of subsistence and the uprooting of their cherished values" (p. 74). It is this process of dispossession and its rhythms that define displacement as a condition shared between migrants and non-migrants within the urban. Ramsay (2020) argues that "recognizing the shared temporal rhythms of displacement, and how these manifest broadly as the effects of global capitalism and neoliberal restructurings, is one way [to] strengthen our analyses and critiques of bordering structures" (p. 385).

The idea of de-exceptionalizing displacement across a border, refusing to place it in contrast to an emplaced non-migrant is complemented by what Huq and Miraftab (2020) term a state of "citizenship in wait" and "in-situ displacement," where they foreground the precarious relationship to citizenship for both those displaced across a border and those displaced within the urban. Following this, embracing an "open urban citizenship" (Oosterlynck et al., 2018) and a "politics of presence" (Darling, 2017), it becomes significant to further scrutinize the dynamics that come into play in confronting bordering and housing apparatuses. Through these shared practices, displaced people enact negotiations that are grounded in survival and pose critical questions on subjectivities and ideas of citizenship, opening possibilities to imagine "new political constellations which work both within and beyond citizenship" (Turner, 2016). In this line, Casas-Cortes (2019) offers the notion of *care-tizenship* based on the work of Spanish feminist activists in precarity movements, which suggests "a community of practice forged by ties of caring relationships, mutually attending to basic needs in a context of increasing vulnerability among local, migrant and emigrant

populations” (p. 19). Housing, in this context, is attempting to counter a process of dispossession that impacts, albeit differentially, those who are displaced across the border into the urban as well as those displaced within it, and thus we qualify it as “displaced housing.”

1.2. Beyond the Formal/Informal Binary

Often, housing displaced people is reviewed in binaries of, on the one hand, the formal reception system charged with accommodating displaced people during the asylum process, and, on the other hand, the alternative housing produced by displaced people themselves and/or non-state actors. Scholarship, particularly from the Global South, has been increasingly drawing attention to the urban nature of displacement, placing the camp and informal settlement in conversation. Huq and Miraftab (2020) argue that “informal settlements and camps are spatial and institutional constructs that produce differentiated forms of political subjects vis-a-vis citizenship, state, planning, and humanitarian agencies” (p. 365). They also stress that, as part of deepening the Southern turn in urban theory, “an ontological blurring between informal settlement and camps…is crucial for a new grassroots politics that organizes the globally dispossessed across citizen and refugee divides” (p. 364).

To consider the actual offer of displaced housing in cities, it is important to move away from the exceptionalization of “informal” or “alternative” displaced housing. A relegation of the “informal” is a shortcoming, in that, as Agha and Lambert (2020) assert, “the ‘informal’ designation is a definition based on the fallacious institutional belief that certain self-built bodies do not have a form.” Looking across the field at both “formal” asylum infrastructures and “informal” housing infrastructures for displaced people, we find that both feature high levels of instability, manifested in a continuous cycle of moving around, threats of eviction or closure, or short envisioned timelines for their existence. They seem to be widely characterized by chronic and long-term temporariness (Awan, 2020; Vandevoordt, 2021; Welander, 2021). The shared temporalities are an indication that it is possible to read “formal” responses to reception using the same urban dynamics that condition “informal” displaced housing. Fawaz (2016) points to how “the perception of temporariness and ‘crisis management’ has placed ‘refugee policies’ at odds with the long-term future-oriented approach of planning” (p. 101), whereas she argues “it is possible to activate some of the frameworks developed for the study of informality in order to inform our understanding of processes of refugee settlement as well as ongoing responses to the refugee crisis” (p. 102).

The line in the sand between the formal and the informal in housing displaced people becomes especially blurry when we trace their housing trajectories, where people move in-between various forms of displaced housing. Darling (2017) emphasizes that “a focus on informality and urban presence has suggested, the city may become a space for a politics of critique relative to the state, a politics that refuses specific forms of governmentality—most notably the abjection of those displaced” (p. 192). We argue that it is important to center those lived realities by mapping the different geographies of displaced housing as part of an urban ecosystem. We therefore view the multiple geographies in the displaced housing ecosystem as interdependent since people appropriate and circulate between them. They are all, formal or informal or a combination of both, largely governed by the political economy of the city and the bordering practices of rising xenophobia and racism in Europe. Indeed, the political projects they contribute to, as well as the processes of space acquisition and appropriation, drastically vary. However, by reviewing an overall “displaced housing ecosystem,” and embedding it in urban governance dynamics, it is possible to uncover

how the work of local, regional, federal, and transnational actors battle the restrictions within urban space towards the ex/inclusion of displaced people.

1.3. A Displaced Housing Ecosystem

In this article, we foreground an urban perspective in reading displacement, choosing to "see like a city" (Amin & Thrift, 2017) to de-center the nation-state and its borders when addressing displaced housing. In this line, Darling (2021) theorizes "seeing asylum like a city," where he argues:

> Discussions have overlooked how the conditions of urban life shape refugee experiences, and how cities and their politics are reworked not just by the presence of refugees, but by the presence of claims to authority, sovereignty, and governance that come with attempts to order mobility at different spatial scales. (p. 901)

By proposing to read an urban displaced housing ecosystem beyond the limitations of border categories (migrant/non-migrant), and beyond the binaries of in/formality, in effect, we consider what it would mean to "take desperation seriously" as Lancione (2020) invites, and focus on the housing strategies of displaced people as propositional politics. Our aim here is, as Lancione and Simone (2021) suggest, to see "how that inhabitation brings to the fore rhythms of endurance that are pointing beyond the status quo of inhabitation, of how it's currently and acceptedly done, theorized and spoken of" (p. 970).

In framing a displaced housing ecosystem, our interest here is twofold. First, it is to investigate how, like cross-border displacements blend into urban displacement, the asylum system and the housing system impact one another as their governance structures at various scales meet in urban space. Second, it is to examine how the practices of migrant and non-migrant displaced people constitute a form of governance that operates in relation to the asylum and housing systems, but also transcends them. To address these research questions, we explore the different ontologies of displaced housing that we encountered along the displaced housing trajectories after the Palais des Droits eviction, which have their distinct geographies and are supported by different alliances and together constitute the displaced housing ecosystem. Hence, in the following section we elaborate on the two interrelated dimensions of the displaced housing ecosystem: its geographies and its alliances.

1.3.1. Displaced Housing Geographies

In intimately navigating the patterns of bordering and extractive urban transformations in European cities, certain displaced dwelling ontologies are developed, where housing practices engage with and transcend state imaginaries of "home" and certain bodies' entitlement to it. In tracing housing trajectories of displaced people, there are recurrent ontologies that emerge where displaced people's experience of dwelling in liminality also becomes, as Lancione and Simone (2021) put it, the "method of a way of being urban, of performing the in-between of spaces that are taken away and of bodies and existences that are marked as foreclosed" (p. 970). Hence, we conceptualize these ontologies and their correlating geographies as the different types of housing (co)produced within a condition of displacement, that a displaced person may encounter along their journey of displacement. These geographies are not fixed but rather represent an ambivalent negotiation between displaced people and the processes and spaces of asylum and the city.

Our mapping of displaced housing ontologies and corresponding geographies is not a catalog of inhabitation categories but is rather an attempt to situate certain nodes that kept emerging throughout our investigation, occupying a certain position vis-à-vis the governance of asylum and urban displacement. In this, we follow Darling's (2021) argument that "seeing asylum like a city" as a method "entails a concern for staying with multiplicity and focusing attention on the temporary stabilization of orders" (p. 909). Indeed, even within existing forms of government, displaced people have different capacities to shift and temporarily (de)stabilize order; these temporary stabilizations become significant places to study the governance of displaced housing from below. As such, we regard these displaced housing geographies as both spatial sites as well as institutional positions within asylum and urban governance informed by displaced subjectivities. Indeed, as Darling (2021) asserts, any critical reflection on what he terms "refugee urbanism" requires both "an examination of how those arrangements are embedded within, and enacted through spatial relations, and a consideration of the varying intensities of governing and being governed that are brought to attention through urban conjunctures of governance, agency, and subjectivity" (p. 900). Though we locate displaced housing geographies as sites, within that is an interplay between spaces, bodies, regulations, materials, and relations that is concurrent with the urban, which we explore as displaced housing alliances below.

1.3.2. Displaced Housing "Weird Alliances"

Behind the production of displaced housing geographies there are always "weird alliances" that posit an urban dwelling otherwise. Lancione and Simone (2021) affirm that "despite whatever hegemonic ordering ensues, there remain strange alliances among all of these elements—materials, buildings, designs, bodies, voices, choreographies" (p. 971). Hence, we frame displaced housing alliances as the solidarities that underpin the production of different displaced housing geographies, and the constellations of actors, together with material and immaterial elements, that facilitate forms of inhabitation within a condition of displacement. This does not suggest, however, stability or fixity within these alliances as they are "based not on negotiated settlements but on the mutual unsettling of provisional anchorage" (Lancione & Simone, 2021, p. 973). Displaced housing alliances are not weird in their unlikeliness; they are "weird" in that their membership and their propositional homing practices are deemed "weird" through their liminality. Lancione (2019) describes the practices of a community of homeless drug users in Bucharest, asserting that they "[constitute] a propositional politics of a *weird* kind because it is made from 'weird' stuff. It is assembled by self-describing *ciudați* [strange people]" (p. 547, emphasis in original).

Lancione (2019) underscores that "the 'weirdness' of these assemblages needs to be maintained to avoid a sanitized and romanticized reading of the underground as home" (p. 548). Here, we attempt to trace displaced housing alliances that present interesting contradictions and imperfect negotiations, transcending their romanticization, following Darling's (2021) suggestion that "a concern with how the capacity to navigate tensions of uncertainty and stability is unevenly distributed is one means of developing an account of refugee urbanism that eschews urban romanticism or exceptionalism" (p. 909). Indeed, different subjectivities of displaced people impact their "reach" and capacity to navigate between uncertainty and stability. This differentiated capacity within the weird alliances of displaced housing allows us to bring urban space, governance, and displaced subjectivities into conversation.

Henceforth, the article will apply the framework outlined above to the case of Palais des Droits in Brussels. In doing so, we explore the displaced housing ecosystem in Brussels, detailing some of its geographies and

weird alliances. We argue that such framing of displaced housing practices underlines an infrastructural perspective to seemingly fragmented housing interventions and highlights the openings towards expanded solidarities in the project of homing displaced people, migrant and non-migrant, in the urban context.

2. Evicting the Palais des Droits: Investigating Displaced Housing Trajectories After the Eviction

Palais des Droits sits on Rue des Palais on what is referred to as the "tracé royal," which connects the royal residence at Chateau de Laeken and the Palais de Bruxelles in the city center, and includes Rue Royale, Rue des Palais, and Avenue de la Reine. The *tracé royal* echoes colonial history, as the route has been taken by the Belgian king to run the affairs of colonies in his offices downtown, and in the mid to late 1800s it saw a construction boom of "mainly bourgeoise houses and mansions of neoclassical style" (Inventaire du patrimoine architectural, n.d.). Today, the *tracé royal* remains significant as "this urban axis not only hosts major vacant public buildings, but also displays past and ongoing struggles for the right to housing" (d'Auria et al., 2023), with multiple notable Brussels housing occupations situated along it such as the occupations of 123, the Gesu Church at Botanique, and Rue Royale 312. Cutting across Brussels, the *tracé royal* reaches the Northern Quarter which has, over the years, hosted subsequent waves of migration and displacement with many migrant communities settling there; first in the 1930s with displaced Jewish Europeans, then migrant workers from Mediterranean Europe, mostly Italy and Greece, then a later wave of migrant labor from Morocco and Turkey, and today it remains an arrival space for many new migrants (Daher, 2019). Most notably, the Northern Quarter witnessed massive transformation in the 1960s and 1970s with the introduction of the Manhattan Plan, a master plan of modernist office buildings envisioned as Brussels' World Trade Center. The process to partially realize the Manhattan Plan resulted in the expulsion of some 15,000 people (Daher, 2019). New waves of urban renewal have targeted the area's fragmented urban fabric, including the canal redevelopment, where the part approximate to the Northern Quarter is envisioned to become "a place for recreation for many people in Brussels" (Canal Brussels, n.d.).

In Belgium, displacement and housing struggles are further exacerbated by a "reception crisis," where for the past few years no accommodation has been provided for thousands of recognized asylum seekers ("UNHCR: Reception crisis in Belgium," 2023). The Northern Quarter is marked within its geography by the recurrent reception crisis in sites such as asylum infrastructures such as the former reception center located in one of the World Trade Center blocks and the Humanitarian Hub, as well as various migrant occupations. Notably, in the aftermath of the 2015 "summer of migration," the Maximillian Park was occupied by displaced migrants as their processes to apply for asylum were delayed and they found themselves facing homelessness, with their camp garnering massive citizen solidarity (Daher & d'Auria, 2018). For those who do go through the asylum procedure and are offered shelter, the critical moment of acceptance as a refugee is another confrontation with potential homelessness, as they are expected to arrange their own housing within two months, at which point they get evicted (Beeckmans & Geldof, 2022; Wyckaert et al., 2020). Beyond the asylum procedure, transient and undocumented migrants also must navigate an unaffordable housing market finding themselves among the broader group of urban dwellers experiencing housing insecurity and displacement.

The occupation of Palais des Droits falls within this local history where cross-border displacement and urban displacement meet in the physical space of the *tracé royal* and the Northern Quarter. The vacant building of the Palais des Droits is a representative of the vacancy problem in the city contrasting increasing housing

insecurities, with over 1.2 million square meters of undeveloped public land and vacant buildings in Brussels (“Over 1.2 million m^2 of undeveloped public land,” 2023). In 2001, the public building, formerly the tax office, was sold by the federal state to the German investor DEKA in a sale-and-lease-back operation until 2026. In 2018, the tax office left the premises while continuing to pay 2.7 million euros in rent until March 2021. In September 2022, the real estate company Banimmo and the Antwerp project developer LIFE started the purchase process, planning to redevelop the office building into a mixed-use environment with co-living housing units for young professionals. Both developers made a deal with the Brussels Region entailing that, in exchange for property tax exemption, the Region would be allowed to use the complex free of charge for two years for the temporary housing of 500 Ukrainian refugees. By October 2023, the building remained empty, and the occupation reportedly started when a Burundian family and some unaccompanied minors made their way into the building after being rejected by the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil; “Près de 300 demandeurs d’asile occupent un bâtiment à Schaerbeek,” 2022), slowly snowballing into hundreds of occupants, and eventually becoming Palais des Droits.

On the 14th of February 2024, Palais des Droits was eventually evicted in a bewildering fiasco of a process. The contents of the narration hereafter are built on our entry into the fieldwork at the critical moment of Palais des Droits’ eviction, where we carried out an ethnography as part of the “stop the reception crisis” movement that accelerated in the weeks after the eviction. We participated in many post-eviction mobilizations, including being involved in the opening of squats, mutual aid initiatives, and different forms of protest. This enabled a direct engagement and a co-creation of the narratives displayed here as they were experienced in community with a diverse group of interlocutors. The ethnography is supported by a media review, including news articles about the Palais des Droits, and social media pages of activist collectives and other relevant actors involved. Finally, some insights come directly from those evicted, through their own documentation of their circumstances shared in an online group. In addition to ethnography, visualization is a method utilized to both process and represent the collected data. The layering of maps, images, and diagrams was integral to processing the mapping. Having initiated the fieldwork at the moment of eviction, our interest is to trace the housing geographies displaced people sought and produced in their post-eviction trajectory, and the network of alliances that supported the formulation of these displaced housing geographies. This choice is a critical methodological approach as it allowed us to follow along, in real-time, the processes of negotiation towards the formulation of alliances and selection of geographies, using these trajectories as the evidence for what the displaced housing ecosystem in Brussels constitutes of, and what geographies and alliances are most relevant. By mapping the eviction and the challenging trajectories of residents thereafter, we hope to reveal the resistance that, notwithstanding repeated displacements, emerges as a seed for rethinking the homing of displaced people, and reflects the multiplicity of organizational set-ups, forms of activism, and communal support that facilitate a form of housing, however precarious.

During the Palais des Droits’ eviction, recognized asylum seekers were given blue wristbands that would identify them during the relocation to another site. In reality, many people were left behind and were not offered alternative solutions despite legal entitlements. Figure 1 maps the post-eviction housing trajectories of displaced people after Palais des Droits, what we call the “displaced housing” trajectories. For some, this eviction was a process of dispersal by Fedasil into temporary accommodation across Brussels and Flanders, including gyms and hotels. In Brussels, there are about 9,000 temporary accommodation places, with slightly above half of them being in fixed locations. With such high levels of instability, this means that each year about 15 new accommodation sites must be found (Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale,

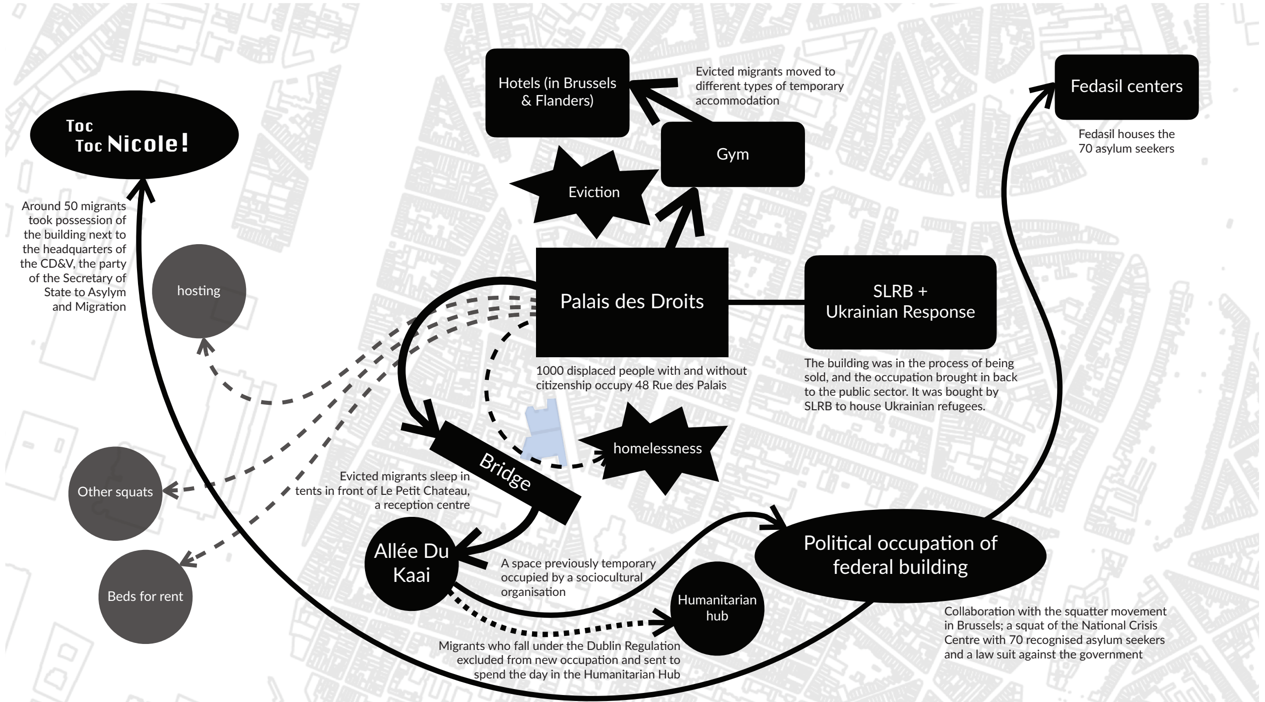


Figure 1. The displaced housing trajectories of Palais des Droits after its eviction. Notes: SLRB = Brussels Regional Housing Association.

2022). Apart from those housed by Fedasil in temporary occupations, for those deemed without entitlements or falling through the cracks, Palais' eviction was an expulsion back onto the streets. Many of the remaining people moved to various locations within the Northern Quarter, with each site constituting a link in a chain of further displacements. The journey started with a tent camp established by a bridge along the canal, in front of the reception center Le Petit Chateau. This encampment was a way to make a claim to housing addressed to the authorities responsible and accompanied by various protests and political actions. After three weeks, the camp was eventually evicted and dismantled. Some of its inhabitants moved to Allee du Kaai, a building temporarily occupied by a sociocultural organization, only to be evicted again after three nights, under the pretext that the building was due to undergo demolitions. Another temporarily occupied sociocultural space Citizen Corner stepped in and allowed the evicted residents to spend the night. At this point, a more strategic form of organizing housing for the now thrice evicted displaced people was imminent, and it was manifested in the political occupation of the National Crisis Center building. The occupation of the brand-new federal building was a way to enter into negotiations with the federal government, and it ultimately succeeded as Fedasil eventually housed the recognized asylum seekers after about two weeks of occupation. After the dissolution of the National Crisis Center occupation, for many unrecognized displaced migrants another political occupation was started next to the CD&V (Christian Democratic and Flemish) headquarters (the party of the current Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration). Outside of the trajectories above, there are traces of displaced people who have turned to hosting infrastructures where they are housed in private homes, have moved to other squats, or have found access to the ("informal") private rental market.

The eviction of Palais des Droits is a peculiar case, though not an isolated one, where displaced people were removed and further displaced to make way for a form of "formal" displaced housing, showcasing how

in/formalities overlap, sometimes within the same building. The building's occupation drew attention to its sale. As a result, the Brussels Regional Housing Association decided to execute its right of pre-emption and bought the building for 8 million euros. As this association is part of a task force to address the situation of Ukrainian refugees, it envisions that the building, after renovation, will be used to house them. The involvement of a major social housing actor in Brussels in migrant housing through the task force, although limited to the Ukrainian response, unlocks possibilities for integrating refugee housing into the broader housing question. Meanwhile, the differentiated response and policy mechanisms have resulted in 1,000 displaced people being scattered across a myriad of temporary accommodations or ending up homeless. As such, the eviction of Palais des Droits was a moment in time when hundreds of people had to figure out how to organize housing, navigating the very asylum infrastructures from which they were excluded as well as other infrastructures of urban hospitality. Navigating an ecosystem of displaced housing geographies to match people to where they may "battle" spaces in their homemaking constituted a puzzle, with the subjectivities of displaced people greatly impacting their "reach." Apart from the differentiation along places of origin, which was the case with Ukrainian refugees, other factors such as gender played a role. Minors, women, and families—in that order—were more likely to move through networks to accommodation, even if precarious, while the reach of, especially racialized, single men was far more limited. This culminated in the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Nicole de Moor suspending asylum housing for single men in August 2023, until the decision was ruled unlawful by Belgium's Council of State (Walker, 2023). Likewise, documentation status blocks the reach of undocumented displaced people, not just to asylum infrastructures and state accommodations, but even to some occupations and parts of the rental market.

In tracing these displaced housing trajectories, certain sites within which displaced housing is (re)produced kept emerging repeatedly. They are spatial locales, but also sites in the institutional make-up of asylum and housing governance and the politics of displaced housing. It becomes difficult to not consider these geographies and the alliances that support them as an incomplete lexicon. As such, this article is an attempt to trace, along the housing trajectories of displaced people, the ecosystem they navigate and (re)produce.

3. Mapping Brussels' Displaced Housing Ecosystem: Three Displaced Housing Geographies and Alliances

In this section, we have chosen to map displaced housing geographies and alliances, as part of a broader displaced housing ecosystem, to illuminate the entanglement of the asylum and housing systems (and by extension of migrant and non-migrant displacement), the porous boundaries of in/formalities, and how displaced housing showcases "an increasingly ephemeral typology from a robust building to tent and cardboard box" (Daher, 2019, p. 348). Though we trace multiple geographies within the case of the Palais des Droits eviction such as the temporary accommodation and hosting networks (see Figure 1), in this article we address in more detail the first three geographies the displaced groups accessed after the eviction. We focus our attention, as showcased in Figure 2, on the tent camp in front of the reception center Le Petit Chateau, the inhabitation of the temporary occupied sociocultural space Allee du Kaai, and the political occupation of the National Crisis Center, using them as examples to represent the geographies of homelessness, infrastructures of (in)hospitality, and squats respectively. Each of these geographies represents a certain position from which displaced people practice dwelling in liminality and have required a network of alliances to enable its production.

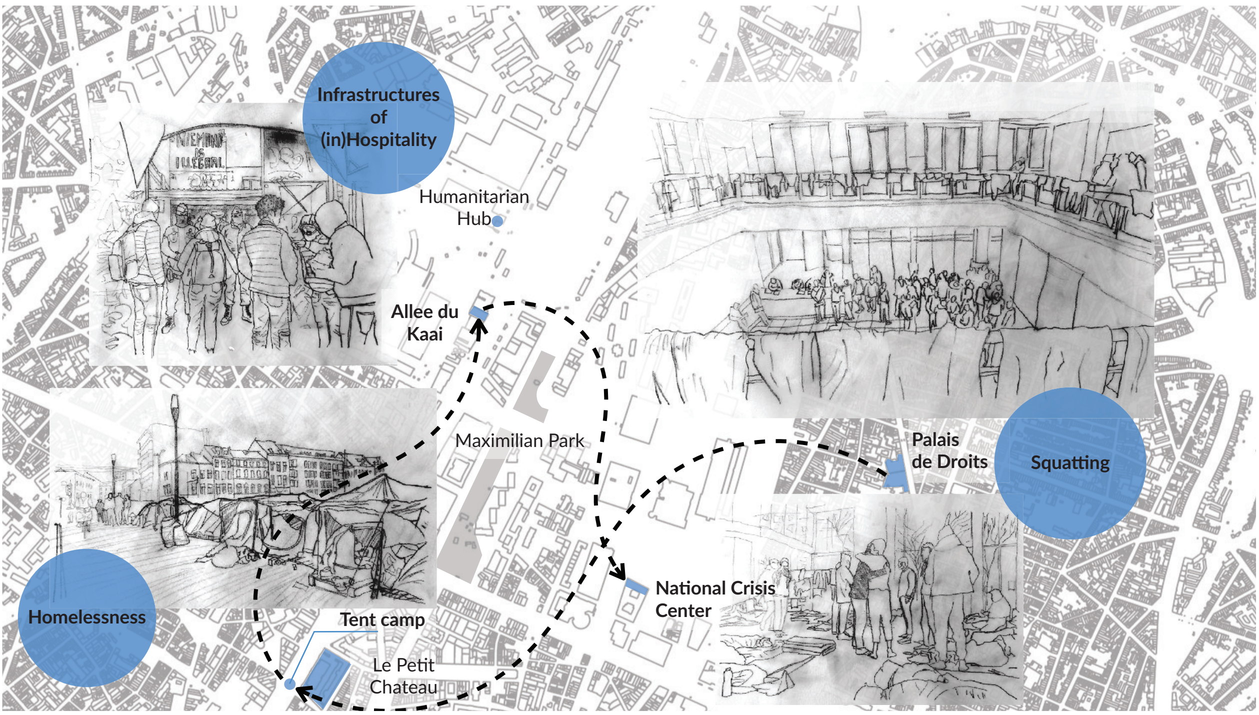


Figure 2. Displaced housing geographies along the Palais des Droits eviction trajectories.

Following Beeckmans et al. (2024), we use infrastructure as a feminist method to "condense the complex interplay between hosts, guests, space, and history by grasping concrete temporal and spatial instances through infrastructural objects" (p. 114). By highlighting certain infrastructural objects, and their double meanings within the geographies and alliances of displaced housing, it becomes easier to capture broad and complex urban dynamics. We have tried to embed this position within asylum and urban governance dynamics that cross multiple scales, in order to begin to make more legible the articulations of displaced housing practices in these geographies and the "weird" alliances that bring them to life; assemblages of people, objects, relations, not without tensions and contentions, but a moment of collectively (de)stabilizing order, enabling and carving space for displaced housing.

3.1. Homelessness: The Mattress

After the eviction of Palais des Droits, around 200–250 former occupants of the Palais des Droits spent the night next to the Fedasil reception center Le Petit Chateau. Tents started being set up on the sidewalk along both sides of the canal and the connecting bridge. The mattress became an element that represents the geography of homelessness and its tensions. As the camp began to emerge, it became evident that many displaced people left their mattresses at Palais des Droits as they expected to be rehoused, and in the process of eviction, they lost the mattress as a valuable asset. Collected through mutual aid efforts and neighborhood solidarity, the new mattresses and sleeping bags became the physical manifestation of inhabitation. A displaced housing geography was in the making, creating "rooms" with mattresses, tents, sleeping bags; offering food, through many people cooking and sharing; maintaining hygiene, through a cleaning system and gathering supplies. The distribution of tents, blankets, and mattresses was organized through citizen groups and neighbors in the Molenbeek neighborhood who rallied through a social media appeal. The displaced group of mostly men from Afghani, Burundian, Eritrean, and Palestinian origin would

articulate their needs together with members of a collective that offered support in Palais des Droits to launch the appeal. Soon, there were stories of other caring infrastructures that made the canal camp more inhabitable such as a woman who came from Antwerp to bring warm Middle Eastern food in big patches, or messages organizing the camp's daily cleaning.

With echoes from the Maximilian Park occupation, displaced people, citizen activists, and neighborhood residents rallied for modes of inhabitation in homelessness while also making an explicit demand to end it. The rules of engagement here, though humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross were present, were not of a humanitarian nature. The utilization of these networks represents an alliance, where citizens' differentiated "reach" to social networks and governance levels was employed to facilitate the camp's inhabitation and to highlight the reception crisis. With all the media attention they drew, the state had differentiated responses. The municipality of Molenbeek requested that all displaced people by the canal be rehoused by the federal government, while the federal government maintained that only those registered for asylum would be rehoused. Eventually, a consortium of the Brussels-based organizations The Citizen's Platform, Samusocial, and the Red Cross stepped in, with regional support, to open a temporary accommodation center to house around 140 displaced people. Shortly after, government bulldozers arrived to clear the camp, making sure to confiscate the mattresses as well. The iconic imagery of state workers pulling mattresses across the floor and into a dumpster represents the state's intolerance for such a mode of inhabitation and its view of any form of even the most precarious dwelling as claim-making. The mattress remains at the crux of the homelessness geography of displaced housing as even the more formalized homelessness infrastructures such as shelters are closely tied to asylum centers in their logics and conceptions of "home," where the number of beds is the optimal measure.

Homelessness appears to be an inevitable outcome of apparatuses of the border regime and neoliberal housing systems alike. As such, the infrastructures that address homelessness are relevant in the context of both migrant and non-migrant displacement. Important images in the memory of Brussels stem from the Maximilian Park camp, which marked and generated a different collective understanding of how asylum is governed and how it creates homelessness. More significantly, it indicated how civil action may be mobilized across a wide array of actors to respond to it. A similarly mobilized infrastructure emerged at the tent camp of Le Petit Chateau. These infrastructures vary from shower infrastructures to services offered to unsheltered homeless people such as communal kitchens, and collectives that offer clothing, blankets, tents, transport tickets, etc. They have developed certain rhythms and modes of operation that emerge and dissolve in moments of crisis, and are often mobilized in moments of solidarity across displaced struggles.

3.2. Infrastructures of (In)Hospitality: The Skeleton

After being evicted from the tent camp at Le Petit Chateau, 60 displaced people, including asylum seekers, sought refuge in Allee du Kaai, a sociocultural temporary occupation. In 2014, pending the regeneration of the canal zone in Brussels, the Department of Environment sanctioned the temporary use of the site made up of two storage structures and a plot of wasteland. The public tender was eventually won by Muriel Claeys, Brussels Cooperation, Oiseaux Sans Tête, and Toestand and was transformed into Allee du Kaai (Flanders Architecture Institute, n.d.). It was one of the first temporary use projects of such a scale envisioned as a form of citizen activation. This redevelopment, and many others in Brussels, call for sociocultural organizations to activate buildings under temporary use terms. Many of these citizen activations naturally engage with

important causes in the city and endorse a right-to-the-city approach. They are also becoming more aware of the role temporary use plays in urban transformations. As an example, the Permanent collective critiques the appropriation of the arts into generating cultural value in spaces that end up being gentrified and exclusionary, drawing a line between the precarity of artists and those displaced.

The eviction of the tent camp at Le Petit Chateau prompted a wide search for such spaces of hospitality where displaced people could urgently be housed. Allee du Kaai, Citizen Corner, and other sociocultural temporary use spaces became important sites to do so. The forms of governmentality here might be materialized in the building's skeleton. It highlights the vacancies of Brussels and the lack of permanence. Among the shifting functions and uses, displaced housing is scarcely considered. Noteworthy is that the same temporality is experienced by formal asylum infrastructures, where 15 new infrastructures must be found every year because many are closed frequently. This produces competition as fervent "real estate prospecting" by Fedasil, Samusocial, and other asylum housing operators—as well as sociocultural organizations that include displaced housing in their programs—is constantly taking place in Brussels.

The occupation of Allee du Kaai came at the tail end of the temporary use period as the building was scheduled to undergo demolition to be transformed into a public park. With claims of the building's uninhabitability due to asbestos, an eviction took place after three nights of occupation. This eviction displayed police officers and officials in hazmat suits removing displaced migrants from the building, as well as workers on the ceiling of the building drilling holes to prevent the building from being used. Noteworthy is that two weeks prior to this eviction, a 2,000-people memorial party took place in the same structure. It is worth exploring how such spaces of hospitality become spaces of inhospitality as the users appropriating them change.

By highlighting this geography, we draw attention to how institutions that were not initially intended to offer housing for displaced people, such as cultural institutions, become relevant. Some explore the possibility of adding a housing component to their profile, offer housing search help, or become part of referral networks for hosting displaced people in private homes. Utilizing an infrastructural lens allows regarding such practices as the facilitation of homing the city. Through everyday practices of pooling resources and maneuvering into the small openings that exist in funding, policy, and planning spheres, such organizations and their displaced communities attempt to secure permanence in the city (Nagi et al., 2023). They engage with different actors in these pursuits, and in doing so they confront their own precarity as well as that of their communities.

3.3. Squats: The Window

After the eviction of Allee du Kaai, a more intentionally political occupation was organized by 70 recognized asylum seekers with support from squatter movement activists. Together, they selected the brand-new National Crisis Center building, which was yet to be officially opened. The building, falling under the jurisdiction of the federal government, allowed the occupants to be in direct negotiation with the federal level. However, the building was also carefully selected as it falls within a commune with a friendly local government, which offers some protection in dealing with the police. The Palais des Droits post-eviction momentum had reached a critical point where the movement to "stop the reception crisis" had a stronger voice in drawing attention to the 3,000 homeless asylum seekers who have the legal right to housing. Nonetheless, the first nights of the occupation were tense, with a large-scale police presence. While the occupation started with people with more secure residence and citizenship status creating body blockades

in front of the building doors to prevent an eviction, by the morning the police had blocked the access of any food, medicine, or anyone including lawyers into the building. The direct confrontation was amplified by the floor-to-ceiling glass windows that created complete transparency to the outside, where the inhabitants lived in a fish-tank effect.

In this geography, windows represent the important tension around visibility. In the National Crisis Center occupation, this heightened visibility was part of the program to make specific demands to the federal government. In contrast, many squats sustain a much lower profile as their purpose is not to garner the public's attention, but to facilitate life for displaced people in the here and now. In both cases, it is the squats' ability to confront speculative logics in urban space and the exclusions of bordering that is central. The re-appropriation of vacant buildings to reclaim their use-value towards housing displaced people, even in its most fragile ways, is political. Nonetheless, these logics at times produce contradictions. In the National Crisis Center occupation, because of the heightened visibility and the articulation of "legal" rights to housing, unrecognized asylum seekers were excluded from this squat and were referred to spend the day at the Humanitarian Hub or to be housed in other displaced housing geographies. The regional government offered to house the displaced people within this squat in temporary accommodation, but the inhabitants refused. In their statement, they critique the frequent circulation in and out of temporary occupation, where residents have a 28-day shelter limit, and urge a more long-term solution asking federal authorities to "act swiftly to prevent people from sleeping rough by requisitioning buildings and staff to house the thousands of asylum seekers without shelter" (Chini, 2023). After three weeks of occupation, the 70 recognized asylum seekers within the National Crisis Center were rehoused by Fedasil and the squat was dissolved.

The majority of squats encountered during fieldwork seem to champion a "politics of presence" (Darling, 2017), where they included people experiencing different forms of displacement, and were implicated in both migrant and non-migrant housing struggles. They vary in scale and level of organization, some more explicitly politicized by residents towards specific aims and demands, and some in more subtle ways, whereby the implicit aim is the facilitation of life for disenfranchised groups. Nonetheless, both types of squats rely on familiar alliances for support, where often messages circulate within similar networks to arrange furniture, food, etc. The knowledge acquired during a long history of squatting tradition allows for the utilization of tactics and strategies in navigating urban governance. This includes learning to navigate various levels of governance to gain protection from eviction or to leverage certain demands beyond the squat itself. In the context of Brussels, this is a strategy utilized even by groups with precarious citizenship, where collectives of people without papers have employed squatting both as a means to housing and as a way to galvanize a political movement towards regularization, choosing to open or close the figurative windows to the public as they see fit.

4. Conclusion

The case of Palais des Droits offers a glimpse into the displaced housing ecosystem in the city and the circulation of displaced people within it. Mapping the trajectories of displaced people after their eviction from Palais des Droits, and following the geographies and alliances along these trajectories, was a way for us to de-center the binaries of migrant/non-migrant and of in/formality, focusing instead on the lived experiences of displaced people as they navigate the urban space. In transcending the migrant/non-migrant binary, we recognize how the infrastructures that address displacement cater to a broad network of people experiencing

urban precarity and housing insecurity. In transcending the in/formal binary, we recognize how asylum accommodations go through similar temporalities to their "alternatives," where practices of real-estate prospecting and the collapsing and building up of stock are dynamics that may mirror squatting practices as an example. In doing so, we uncover a displaced housing ecosystem that engages multi-scalar levels of asylum and housing governance and spans across and between categories of citizenship and housing.

Within the span of six weeks, the displaced people evicted from Palais des Droits have moved through multiple displaced housing geographies, supported by various displaced housing alliances that sustain inhabitation within said geographies. In this article, we chose to expand upon the geographies of homelessness, spaces of hospitality, and squats, but the post-eviction trajectories of Palais des Droits also reveal the geographies of "asylum accommodation," "hosting," and "beds for rent" in the private rental market. All of these displaced housing geographies are interconnected, not just in the circulation of displaced people between them, but also in that they represent different positions in the asylum and housing systems within which different forms of displaced housing are produced. Furthermore, investigating the displaced housing alliances complicates the roles of actors and the built environment, where navigating the various levels of urban and asylum governance opens negotiations and interpersonal exchanges that are situated and more nuanced.

As Lancione and Simone (2021) contend:

> What makes a certain inhabitation of the liminal "political" is not the adherence to a defined form of redemption, but the capacity to interlace concerns and to use them as a gateway to set loose a position, to elaborate an affirmation. (p. 972)

The reading of displaced housing geographies and alliances as an ecosystem allows for an understanding of urban displacement and refugee governance not just as the work of the state and marginal alternatives, but as infrastructural interventions into the urban that produce forms of inhabitation and care networks serving displaced migrants and non-migrants. This displaced housing ecosystem is not limited to Brussels but is a global ecosystem, where migrants are transnationally connected. Many displaced people anecdotally share instances of similar geographies that they have witnessed along their migratory routes, attaining displaced housing ontologies they import and employ into a new urban context. This global scale can be an asset, as knowledge of displaced housing from below may circulate and multiply. It further allows for an expansion of potential solidarities and articulates a shared project against displacement, encompassing a broad alliance of those impacted by the border regime and housing precarity. As such, displaced housing mobilizes the contradictions and complexities intrinsic to urban morphologies and urban politics, orchestrating choreographies that are at once pragmatic and transformative, flawed and creative; essentially, weird.

Funding

The research is funded by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Agha, M., & Lambert, L. (2020, December 16). Outrage: Informality is a fallacy. *The Architectural Review*. https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/outrage/outrage-informality-is-a-fallacy

Amin, A., & Thrift, N. J. (2017). *Seeing like a city*. Polity.

Assal, M. (2002). A discipline asserting its identity and place: Displacement, aid and anthropology in Sudan. *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, *18*(1), 63–96.

Awan, N. (2020). Horizonless worlds: Navigating the persistent present of the border regime. *Media Theory*, *4*(2), 139–158.

Beeckmans, L., & Geldof, D. (2022). Reconsidering the interrupted housing pathways of refugees in Flanders (Belgium) from a home-making perspective: A policy critique. *Housing Studies*, *39*(5), 1129–1151.

Beeckmans, L., Gola, A., Anaraki, S., Nagi, T., & Verheyden, H. (2024). Infrastructure as feminist methodology: Understanding the right to the city through infrastructural objects. *FKW//Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur*, *74*, 113–130.

Canal Brussels. (n.d.). *Central zone*. https://canal.brussels/en/node/8665/central-zone

Casas-Cortes, M. (2019). *Care-tizenship*: Precarity, social movements, and the deleting/re-writing of citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, *23*(1), 19–42.

Chini, M. (2023, March 16). Asylum seekers occupying Crisis Centre demand national crisis plan. *The Brussels Times*. https://www.brusselstimes.com/410102/asylum-seekers-occupying-crisis-centre-demand-national-crisis-plan

Daher, R. (2019). (Un)making home: Displaced in the North Quarter of Brussels. In A. Gola & A. Singh (Eds.), *Displacement and domesticity since 1945: Refugees, migrants and expats making homes* (pp. 343–353). KU Leuven Department of Architecture.

Daher, R., & d'Auria, V. (2018). Enacting citizenship in an urban borderland: The case of Maximilian Park in Brussels. *European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes*, *1*(1), 53–72. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/8517

Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography*, *41*(2), 178–198.

Darling, J. (2021). Refugee urbanism: Seeing asylum "like a city." *Urban Geography*, *42*(7), 894–914. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1763611

d'Auria, V., Beeckmans, L., Nagi, T., Verheyden, H., Drieskens, C., Anastasiou, A., Stevens, J., & Benoit, I. (2023, February 15). Het paleis zou een proefproject kunnen zijn voor een brussel dat Zich Wil Tonen Als leefbare en Verdraagzame Stad. *De Morgen*. https://www.demorgen.be/meningen/het-paleis-zou-een-proefproject-kunnen-zijn-voor-een-brussel-dat-zich-wil-tonen-als-leefbare-en-verdraagzame-stad~b488614c

Fawaz, M. (2016). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Flanders Architecture Institute. (n.d.). *Allee du Kaai*. https://www.vai.be/en/buildings/publieke-ruimte/allee-du-kaai

Fontanari, E. (2015). Confined to the threshold. *City*, *19*(5), 714–726. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1071112

Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. (2022). *Coordination de la stratégie d'intégration des Ukrainiens dans le tissu bruxellois*. https://www.helpukraine.brussels/sites/default/files/inline-files/ngrbc%20Strat%C3%A9gie%20d'int%C3%A9gration%20des%20BPTU%20FR.pdf

Huq, E., & Miraftab, F. (2020). "We are all refugees": Camps and informal settlements as converging spaces of global displacements. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *21*(3), 351–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2020.1776376

Inventaire du patrimoine architectural. (n.d.). *Rue des Palais*. https://monument.heritage.brussels/fr/Region_de_Bruxelles-Capitale/Rue_des_Palais/10302204

Kreichauf, R. (2018). From forced migration to forced arrival: The campization of refugee accommodation in European cities. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 249–279). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_11

Lancione, M. (2019). Weird exoskeletons: Propositional politics and the making of home in underground Bucharest. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *43*(3), 535–550. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12787

Lancione, M. (2020). Radical housing: On the politics of dwelling as difference. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *20*(2), 273–289. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2019.1611121

Lancione, M., & Simone, A. (2021). Dwelling in liminalities, thinking beyond inhabitation. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *39*(6), 969–975. https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758211062283

Nagi, T., Verheyden, H., Vandermeulen, A., d'Auria, V., & Beeckmans, L. (2023). The homing of newcomers in Brussels at the intersection of bordering and urban speculation: From survival strategies to infrastructures for civic imagination and urban inclusion. *Radical Housing Journal*, *5*(1), 75–99. https://doi.org/10.54825/hcbj5080

Oosterlynck, S., Beeckmans, L., Bassens, D., Derudder, B., Braeckmans, L., & Segaert, B. (Eds.). (2018). *The city as a global political actor*. Routledge.

Over 1.2 million m^2 of undeveloped public land and vacant buildings in Brussels. (2023, November 3). *The Brussels Times*. https://www.brusselstimes.com/778919/over-1-2-million-m%C2%B2-of-undeveloped-public-land-and-vacant-buildings-in-brussels

"Palais des droits": Près de 800 demandeurs de protection internationale enregistrés par la permanence de screening social. (2023, January 26). *Samusocial Brussels*. https://samusocial.be/palais-des-droits-pres-de-800-demandeurs-de-protection-internationale-enregistres-par-la-permanence-de-screening-social

Près de 300 demandeurs d'asile occupent un bâtiment à Schaerbeek: Fedasil et le centre de crise se renvoient la balle. (2022, November 3). *BX1*. https://bx1.be/dossiers/accueil-refugies/asile-plus-de-300-personnes-dont-des-mineurs-se-logent-dans-le-palais-des-droits-a-schaerbeek

Ramsay, G. (2020). Time and the other in crisis: How anthropology makes its displaced object. *Anthropological Theory*, *20*(4), 385–413. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499619840464

Taylor, L. (2023, January 5). 'Out of control': Conditions deteriorate in Schaerbeek squat. *The Brussels Times*. https://www.brusselstimes.com/346784/out-of-control-conditions-deteriorate-in-schaerbeek-squat

Thorshaug, R. Ø. (2018). Arrival in-between: Analyzing the lived experiences of different forms of accommodation for asylum seekers in Norway. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities (pp. 207–227). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_9

Turner, J. (2016). (En)gendering the political: Citizenship from marginal spaces. *Citizenship Studies*, *20*(2), 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1132569

UNHCR: Reception crisis in Belgium is concerning, but solutions are at hand. (2023, November 30). *UNHCR*. https://www.unhcr.org/be/98821-unhcr-reception-crisis-in-belgium-is-concerning-but-solutions-are-at-hand-2.html

Vandevoordt, R. (2021). Resisting bare life: Civil solidarity and the hunt for illegalized migrants. *International Migration*, *59*(3), 47–62. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12715

Walker, L. (2023, September 13). Decision to stop providing shelter for single men reversed by Council of State. *The Brussels Times*. https://www.brusselstimes.com/690781/decision-to-stop-providing-shelter-for-single-men-reversed-by-council-of-state

Welander, M. (2021). The politics of exhaustion and the externalization of British border control. An

articulation of a strategy designed to deter, control and exclude. *International Migration*, *59*(3), 29–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12778

Wyckaert, E., Leinfelder, H., & De Decker, P. (2020). Stuck in the middle: The transition from shelter to housing for refugees in Belgium. *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*, *4*(1), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.24306/traesop.2020.01.007

About the Authors

Tasneem Nagi (she/her) is an urbanist whose work dwells on forced displacement and housing. As a doctoral researcher at KU Leuven, she explores the interplay between the multiscalar politics of bordering and everyday homing practices of displaced people and their collectives.

Luce Beeckmans is a research professor at the Department of Architecture at KU Leuven and is also vice director of the KU Leuven Urban Studies Institute. Luce's research is situated at the intersection of migration, city, and architecture. More specifically, she focuses on the housing and home-making of refugees and migrants, while linking it to broader debates on urban diversity, inclusion, and citizenship.

Viviana d'Auria is professor of international urbanism at the International Centre of Urbanism in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering Science, KU Leuven. Exploring "practiced" and "lived-in" space is an integral part of her research within a more general interest in the pluriversal construction of cities.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8474
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8474

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Arrival Infrastructuring at a Southern European Gate: Public Action and Spaces in Palermo, Italy

Martina Bovo [1,2] and Eléonore Bully [3]

[1] Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, Italy
[2] Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto, IUAV University of Venice, Italy
[3] Lab'URBA, Université Paris-Est, France

Correspondence: Martina Bovo (martina.bovo@polimi.it)

Submitted: 22 April 2024 **Accepted:** 5 November 2024 **Published:** 19 December 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

This article investigates how the interplay of different actors has shaped the arrival of newcomers in the city of Palermo in Southern Italy. The recent debate on arrival infrastructures is currently developing in Central Europe, where arrival has been experienced as part of a reception crisis starting in 2015. Within this framework, Southern European contexts represent interesting fields of observation, both for the way arrivals are deployed and for the type of public action that has been mobilized. Here, arrivals are often linked to further departures; infrastructuring processes involve a wide range of in/formal actors, which can be inscribed into a Southern (European) definition of public action. Stemming from two research projects in urban studies, the article unpacks how different actors channeled newcomers' arrivals between 2015 and 2020. Methodologically, the work builds on qualitative methods and fieldwork, as well as on documents and discourse analysis. It highlights the interplay of a robust pro-hospitality political discourse, a broad—and partly informal—public action around it, everyday infrastructuring practices, and how they spatialized into diverse arrival spaces. In Palermo, public action takes roots in a specific urban historical trajectory of the city, through actions and spaces that lie between formality and informality and that often also reveal resourceful aspects.

Keywords

arrival infrastructures; informality; public action; Southern Europe

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

This article investigates the arrival infrastructuring work developed in the city of Palermo between 2015 and 2020, particularly focusing on the in/formal assemblage of actors, practices, and spaces involved. Starting from the so-called asylum crisis in 2015, Europe has witnessed a growing interest in the public and academic debate on arrival and arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al., 2019). Arrival has been increasingly described as a process and its emplacement in the city has been investigated out of the conventional understanding of "arrival neighborhood" (Hans et al., 2019). More recently, research shed light on the range of actors and spaces involved in the infrastructuring work, claiming the need to discuss a nuanced understanding of in/formality, beyond polarizations and within both the private and public sphere. With the aim to contribute to this debate, which has developed from Central and Northern European contexts, this article explores a Southern European city: Palermo, in Italy. Southern European countries found themselves at the threshold between European destination areas and Mediterranean departure territories, experiencing extremely fragmented temporalities and circular mobilities (Bovo, 2024b; Fontanari, 2019). This threshold condition concerns also the resources and dynamics that have been mobilized to address arrival. While being part of the European reception system, these countries are characterized by Mediterranean welfare structures and public action (Arbaci, 2019), that framed the way arrivals were addressed. Palermo is a European city with southern traits, and it has been a gate and a base point for recent Mediterranean migration trajectories (Bassi, 2015a). After a significant drop in arrivals by sea in 2012 and 2013, 2014 saw a new increase: 120,238 migrants were intercepted at Sicily's maritime borders (Italian Ministry of Interiors, 2014). These arrivals concerned people who were mostly fleeing their country of origin; some saw Palermo as a stopover, a city on the border of Europe, while others already saw it as a city of destination. Thus, arrival processes in Palermo describe very clearly the stretched space and time between travel and settlement, whose duration cannot be defined a priori and depends on external factors (e.g., changing regulations) and individual migratory projects (De Gourcy, 2013). These processes produced new demands for services, housing, and space and triggered the emergence of many forms of infrastructuring work, developed by a variety of actors and often exceeding the national reception system. In the article, "reception" (*accoglienza*) is used as a category of public action (Ambrosini & Campomori, 2020), while "hospitality" (*ospitalità*) is used as a political register and discourse shared by actors involved in welcoming migrants (Pulcini, 2019).

By investigating infrastructuring actors and spaces between 2015 and 2020, we show that in/formality has very blurred lines and shall be found in the *practices* of arrival infrastructuring, rather than attributed to specific settings or actors (being them private or public): Rarely actors or spaces are *forever* or *only* informal or formal. The way in/formal practices infrastructure arrivals reveals their resourcefulness and criticalities: on the one hand the capacity to "adapt" to changing and uncategorized needs, on the other some risks—first of all that of substitution of the public hand. In this sense, we argue that Palermo, as a Southern European context, not only enriches the knowledge on arrival infrastructures but also broadens the definition of in/formality, as a continuum of practices within given urban settings, and triggers a reflection on the need to stay with this in/formality and its ambiguity. After this introduction, the article describes our positioning within three fields of literature, and it presents the context of Palermo, focusing on the historical determinants and the hospitality turn that characterized its public action and that are crucial to understand infrastructuring work today. Then, we introduce the research questions and methodology, followed by a description of three examples of arrival infrastructures. The in/formality of these practices and their role for newcomers are addressed in the discussion, followed by some concluding remarks.

2. Arrival Infrastructuring Work in a Southern Perspective: Theoretical Framework

This article grounds on and aims at contributing to the current debate on arrival processes and infrastructures; however, it draws terminology and concepts from two further fields of literature: the debate on informality and that on Southern European contexts. In the framework of the recent reception crisis in Europe and in line with the increasing non-linearity of migration pathways across the Mediterranean (Babels, 2018), a growing body of literature has critically analyzed arrival processes. Recent conceptualizations of arrivals as processes (Meeus et al., 2019), and as "landings" (Bovo, 2024b) aim at enhancing the importance of the space and time between the travel and settlement, both for newcomers—especially when forcibly displaced—and local actors (municipalities, local associations, or settled inhabitants, being them native or immigrant). No longer necessarily linked to further settlement, arrivals encompass a temporal, territorial, and subjective complexity (Fontanari, 2019; Meeus et al., 2019; Tarrius, 1993). In this framework, scholars conceptualize the notion of arrival infrastructures, intended as all those parts of the city with which newcomers get entangled upon arrival (Felder et al., 2019; Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Meeus et al., 2019). In this regard, relevant contributions were made to the *Urban Planning* thematic issue Urban Arrival Spaces: Social Co-Existence in Times of Changing Mobilities and Local Diversity edited by Yvonne Franz and Heike Hanhörster (Franz & Hanhörster, 2020). The infrastructural perspective underlines the value and resourcefulness (Graham & McFarlane, 2015; Saunders, 2011; Schillebeeckx et al., 2019) of these parts of the city both to newcomers and the urban environment more generally. Arrival infrastructures are described as the "result of socio-material practices of a variety of actors, architects and planners, state employees, citizens, civil society organizations, newcomers and more established migrants" (Meeus et al., 2020, p. 14). In this sense, they range from robust material spaces to immaterial support networks and coalitions (Bovo, 2020): public libraries, cafes, public spaces, helpdesks, and housing services (El-Kayed & Keskinkılıc, 2023; Gardesse & Lelévrier, 2020; Wessendorf, 2022). Grounding on this definition, scholars have recently started using the term "arrival infrastructuring work" (Meeus et al., 2020), which shifts the focus from static networks or spaces to fluid practices of infrastructuring. The acknowledgment of the resourcefulness and embeddedness of arrival infrastructures in local contexts will be core points for this work. The arrival infrastructuring perspective will prove an effective lens to focus on practices, rather than statically on actors and spaces, while outlining the features of in/formality.

Many works, in fact, have started highlighting the in/formal character of infrastructuring work, which is often described as happening within more and less formalized networks of actors, practices, and settings. The debate on informality (Kudva, 2009; Roy & AlSayyad, 2004) represents a meaningful reference for this article. Nowadays in the literature, the notion of informality is not only related to the so-called "Global South," but it is also discussed in the "Northern" contexts (McFarlane & Waibel, 2012; Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014) of the Mediterranean and Europe (Alfaro d'Alençon et al., 2018; Chiodelli & Gentili, 2021; Chiodelli & Tzfadia, 2016), where the myth of Northern formality has been increasingly challenged (Jaffe & Koster, 2019). Informality has been used as a framework to discuss forced migration (Darling, 2016), arrival processes, and infrastructures, as well as to reflect upon the need for planning to engage with these issues. In fact, informality runs through as much as it impacts migratory projects and trajectories (Darling, 2016; Mudu & Chattopadhyay, 2016). Within the debate on post-2015 migration movements and arrivals in Europe, Agier et al. (2018) studied experiences of reception put in place at the border between France and the UK, from the so-called "jungle" of Calais to more formalized wooden temporary settlements set up by the municipality of Grande Synthe. While infrastructuring work was happening on the ground carried out by

migrants and local municipalities, Agier et al. (2018) highlighted the difficulty for the public debate and national political discourse to face the emergence of camps in Europe, commonly related to an idea of informality. Cremaschi et al. (2020) used the informality framework to describe DIY arrival infrastructures emerging in Central Italy. In the context of Beirut, Fawaz (2017) described the role of informal support action upon the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2015. We assume this debate as a background, particularly by embracing the description of in/formality as a continuum, its understanding beyond the formal vs informal binary as suggested in the editorial of this thematic issue. We share the need for a better "understanding of governance frameworks that include the range of actors that would normally be associated with so-called informality" (Alfaro d'Alençon et al., 2018).

Finally, our article bases itself on the broader study field of Mediterranean and Southern European contexts (Dines, 2016; Maloutas, 2018; Tulumello, 2022; Vittoria, 2023). We find particularly fruitful the contribution of Cassano (2007) about "Southern thought" (*pensiero meridiano*). Grounding on the literature that outlines Mediterranean historical and cultural traits (Braudel, 2008; Morin, 1999), Cassano argues that Southern thought encompasses the need/capacity to "stay with" contrasting thoughts and uncertainty and to exercise a complex and multiple gaze. Historically, the Mediterranean has been an "in-between" subject, and a challenge towards a plural way of thinking. Along these lines and within the planning field, it is also useful to recall more recent contributions that underline the peculiarities of Southern (and Mediterranean) European countries (Arbaci, 2019; Cremaschi & Lieto, 2020; Tulumello, 2022; Vittoria, 2023). These contributions are essential references for the analysis of the context of Palermo, the development of its public action in the last decades, and more recent infrastructuring practices. Additionally, they introduce the suggestion that such Southern contexts also represent an opportunity to question existing governing categories and outline new ones (Cremaschi & Lieto, 2020).

The three mentioned fields of literature are starting points to deal with the context of Palermo and the local infrastructuring practices, while envisioning new ways of framing in/formality in arrival infrastructures. The above-mentioned contributions help define three core points of this work: first, an approach that looks at arrival infrastructuring as an interplay between actors, spaces, and practices and sees some degrees of resourcefulness in them. Second, an understanding of in/formality beyond a dichotomous definition of formal vs informal. Third, an effort of contextualization of in/formal arrival infrastructuring practices in the Southern European framework. Here, indeed, informality is often not an "anomaly" and can structurally affect the governance of urban space (on illegal practices see Chiodelli & Gentili, 2021).

3. Public Action in Palermo: Historical Determinants and the Hospitality Turn

Palermo is the fifth Italian city in number of inhabitants and the largest in Sicily; it has been historically a crossroad of mobility trajectories, of goods, people, and information, and it has lately become an arrival and departure place for people across the so-called "central Mediterranean route." To better understand the particular and critical aspect of in/formality in Palermo, it is necessary to give some historical and geopolitical context. Several studies question the way local policies are trying to fit into a big-metropolis-oriented model and be competitive in the global market, whatever their size and peculiarities are (Castells, 2000; Conti & Spriano, 1990; Harvey, 2006; Sassen, 1991). In this perspective, Palermo could be seen as a "globalizing city" (Soderstrom, 2009), and as a city "in the South of the North" (Bully, 2021): Its public action is characterized by a historical fragility/instability of economic, demographic, and political

structures. Palermo has “metropolized” later than other Italian and European cities and has a particular relation to migration compared to other Italian cities (Cremaschi et al., 2020; De Filippo et al., 2013; Fioretti, 2011, 2013). Historically, Palermo has been a place of exchange and emigration more than of immigration (Colucci, 2018; Schmoll et al., 2015; Tornesi, 2001): After some first arrivals in the 1980s, since the 1990s it has registered a stable presence of foreign population, increasing in the 2000s. In 2019, foreign residents represented 3.9 percent of the entire population, among the lowest in Italian capital cities, and came from 130 different countries of origin. As in other Italian contexts, spatial segregation between natives and foreign groups has been low and moderate, despite the high level of urban inequalities and residential marginalization (Arbaci, 2019; Briata, 2014).

From 1945 to the 1990s, Palermo was characterized by the preponderance of the Mafia system, the tense relations with the state, and a weak institutional link with foreign countries (Lentini, 2011). These phenomena have greatly weakened the city demographically and have slowed down its economic development and relations with other cities, at a national and international level. This led to the emergence of opposition civil society movements, and to the creation of a multitude of associations, initially linked to religious structures, and later to political parties or social movements. It started with the so-called “Palermitan Spring” in the 1980s, which laid the foundations for the renewal of the city (Lentini, 2011). In 1985, Leoluca Orlando, the leader of a list of five parties, was elected mayor. His program was inspired by the movement Città per l’Uomo and launched the challenge of reappropriating the city against the Mafia. He then affirmed the will to develop the cultural and heritage capital of the city and to revive the historical center in a new light. This mandate made it possible to renew the links between local politics, local associations, and also left-wing militancy. The link between local public action and associations, religious and non-religious, will remain one of the hallmarks of Palermo, not only with regard to the anti-Mafia, but gradually also with regard to hospitality (Bully, 2021). Indeed, after three terms, two between 1993 and 2000, Leoluca Orlando returned in 2012 for two consecutive terms, during the so-called “European migration crisis.” In the last decade, Palermo has become one of the main points of arrival in Europe for migrants from the African continent. Starting from 2015, as in the rest of the region, the city has witnessed an increasing number of sea arrivals. Between 2015 and 2017, Palermo and the western coast of Sicily witnessed around 1,000 disembarkations every 10 days (Bovo, 2024b).

Until 2015 the city council’s position regarding hospitality was embodied in the so-called Consulta Delle Culture (City Council Deliberation No. 49 of 15 May 2013) and then focused on the people from the so-called first- or second-generation immigrants. From 2015 onwards, and particularly during the term following the 2017 re-election, the migration question became one of the central elements of Leoluca Orlando’s policy, as there was an urgency to host newcomers mostly arriving by makeshift boats. The multicultural narrative and the change in the city’s image, which had been the focus of the previous political terms—particularly with regard to urban and heritage aspects—now justified a pro-reception stance. This statement was built in opposition to restrictive European and national directives regarding migration. The link between the historical multicultural narrative and the hospitality model became very specific to Palermo’s local policies. In line with this hospitality turn, on March 20, 2015, the City Council, under the mandate of Leoluca Orlando, approved the “Palermo Charter,” a document that promoted international human mobility and a modification of the law on citizenship to promote an urban citizenship (Di Cesare, 2017). It would be acquired through residence, i.e., registration with the civil registry office (*anagrafe*), without depending on a residence permit issued by the decentralized state—the prefectures. This statement

called into question the nation-state, its borders, and its systems of belonging, all the more so as Sicily and Palermo were major arrival points (in Italy and Europe) of makeshift boats between 2015 and 2017. The municipality's approach of opposing the national government and the European authorities in charge of migration continued to grow during Leoluca Orlando's term in office, and then peaked in 2018 with the strong opposition to the measures of the immigration decree-law promoted by Giuseppe Conte and the interior minister, Matteo Salvini, in October 2019. By doing so, Palermo took a path shared by a growing number of cities worldwide, mainly located in the Global North, that engaged in the formulation of migration and citizenship policies in support of migrant populations (Ataç et al., 2021; Kaufmann, 2019). The clearest example of this is the "sanctuary cities" movement, undertaken by large cities such as Barcelona and Los Angeles, which declared themselves cities of refuge (Oomen, 2019) for displaced people, claiming their role within the national framework.

In Palermo, however, the political project of "local citizenship" and municipalist demands kept being fragilized by a lack of local services and infrastructures; in a context where public institutions fail to provide services, the third sector tries to cover the ground. The third sector includes associations, mutual societies, and cooperatives, and is itself made up of different players, with different interests in the hospitality field and relationships with the municipality. Part of Palermo's third sector, that of the historical center and the Albergheria/Ballarò district, works and collaborates as a network. Despite their different interests and positions, when it came to opposing national or European policies regarding migration, these players found themselves on the same side of the "battlefield" of governance, and all advocated a pro-reception vision. These different actors then reinforced the double-head public action dynamics born during the times of anti-Mafia movements. This particularity regarding local action in Palermo leads to a reconsideration of delegation (Campomori, 2019; Crosta, 2010) as a means of self-organization by local actors on common political themes—anti-Mafia, hospitality—in a constrained context and with a common perspective of opposition to the state. Also in the hospitality field, as it happened in the anti-Mafia movements, we witness a double-headed public action: being developed both by public institutions and third sector actors—who are only partially funded and contractualized by the first (Camus, 2014). Such a two-fold nature of public action sheds new light on delegation mechanisms (Campomori, 2019) as discussed in a part of multi-level-governance theories (Caponio & Borket, 2010; Scholten, 2014; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017). In Palermo, in fact, there is a prevailing horizontal governance where a large part of public services is delegated to third sector actors and where tensions between the two coexist with alliances—especially around specific topics. Finally, since 2015, the third sector in Palermo experienced yet another shift in its composition. What emerged from our fieldwork is that many newcomers who had activist experience in their countries of origin redeployed them within local associations in Palermo, focusing their political demands around human rights and particularly reception issues. In some cases, the commitment within Palermo's arrival infrastructures network has been a driver of professional careers in the third sector of reception or solidarity. And often, arrival infrastructuring work was performed more by recent newcomer groups than by "oldcomers" (Bovo, 2024a).

In a general perspective, Palermo's historically tense context in terms of demographics, economics, and politics has slowed down its development at different levels. Nevertheless, this context and its shortcomings led to the emergence of movements and initiatives that subsequently served Palermo's particular model of hospitality. Palermo's public action, within a pro-hospitality public discourse, can be described as an assemblage where formalized action by public bodies and larger associations formally managing reception

facilities coexist with less formalized constellations of associations engaged in infrastructuring work. The third sector, initially opposed to the municipality during the Palermo Spring period, became with the hospitality turn part of the "public hand." This assemblage is what in Palermo shall be addressed as "public" action and is structurally shaping local infrastructuring work.

4. Research Questions and Methodology in Palermo

This work revolves around two main research questions:

1. What actors, spaces, and practices are involved in infrastructuring arrival in Palermo? What are the features and traits of in/formality (if any)?

2. How does in/formality affect the way arrival is supported and channeled? What are the critical and resourceful aspects of it?

Methodologically, the article stems from two research projects in the field of urban studies, urban planning, and policies, with a clear spatial perspective; arrival infrastructuring work is always emplaced at the interplay between people, places, and practices (Briata & Postiglione, 2023; Stender et al., 2023). Our methodology was based on semi-structured interview grids, fed by a detailed knowledge of the context maintained by participant observation within a wide range of local structures, such as local helpdesks, health clinics, and public offices. The in/formal traits of the research context and the ethics of participant observation led us to anonymize the interviews, even though prior agreement to transcription had been sought from the various stakeholders. Where names are given, they are pseudonymized. Interviews (39 held between 2018 and 2020 + 52 held between 2020 and 2021) addressed politicians and local policymakers, public servants, third-sector operators, private service providers, and people with a migrant background. The latter happened to be mainly adult men considered "non-vulnerable" by public policies and excluded by reception facilities, when not holding a temporary permit. Their presence is not recorded in the statistics about the resident population but has been critical in Palermo's political trajectory. Our interviewees' countries of origin were mainly situated in West Africa (Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast) and to a lesser extent in North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia) and in the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq). By interacting with this group of people, we were able to access a wide range of migratory, administrative, residential, and occupational situations that show the importance of mobilizing resources in a structurally unequal system (Bourdieu, 1982).

In Palermo, our fieldwork started from the historical center, in the area of Ballarò, and extended to other urban neighborhoods. Ballarò has the traits of an arrival neighborhood (Bovo, 2024a) and is where different migration trajectories intersect—ranging from long-term settlements to recent arrivals. Ballarò also concentrates militant associations often involved in arrival infrastructuring work, who have decided to invest in the historical center from the 2000s (Soderstrom, 2009). Through regular fieldwork activities in the historical center, we had the occasion to analyze a certain type of third sector actors and practices, sharing a militant approach to migrant hospitality. These actors are different in terms of discourses and practices from the model of the cooperatives managing reception centers. While the cooperatives respond to calls for tender for public contracts delegating part of the state's public action (Bassi, 2015b), the militant third sector is mostly financed by subsidies from European, NGO research-action or integration-based projects. Moreover, the managing cooperatives cater to the categories defined by government bodies as priorities, while the militant third sector overcome such

categories. The volunteers and mediators we met, mentioned in Section 5, are mostly Italian men and women, working on a voluntary basis or sometimes paid as part of their associations' funded projects. To understand the infrastructuring work of these and other actors in Palermo, the next section outlines three stories showing a diverse landscape of arrival infrastructuring.

5. Three Stories of Arrival Infrastructuring Work: People, Places, and Practices Adjusting to Landing Needs

To unpack the kind of work that has emerged in Palermo since 2015, its variety, and its role for newcomers, we will focus on three arrival infrastructures. Among others, these three infrastructures cover different life domains and are characterized by different degrees of in/formality: a dorm informally managed by a priest, a public health clinic, and a third-sector helpdesk. In the stories, we will unpack what is in/formal in each case and how this impacts the infrastructuring work.

5.1. Missione Speranza e Carità: Where a "Low Wall" Enables Non-Linear Mobilities

In 1991, a lay missioner founded the Missione, a religious community that progressively acquired and managed a series of dormitories for homeless people in Palermo. Biagio Conte, the missioner, became a well-known figure in the public debate both for his claims for the need of spaces for the homeless and for the dimension that the Missione gained in its 30 years of life. In 2020, its dorms provided more than 1,000 beds, in the face of the 200 beds offered by public dormitories (Bovo, 2024b). Public institutional actors acknowledged this role although without a formalized mandate; as a social worker argued, "They manage to do things that the municipality does not…without these structures, people would simply live in the street" (social worker, 20.07.2020), and Biagio Conte used to have a strong influence even in the public action: "If he fasts everything keeps still, you can't move a step" (social worker, 20.07.2020). The Missione is however also a very controversial reality: They offer an extensive supply, which however lacks the quality standards that are sought in public structures. The facilities of the Missione are often described as mere "containers" or "no more than parking lots," as reported by hosts and volunteers in other associations (mediator, 14.07.2020; social worker, 20.07.2020).

Despite such a controversial nature, the Missione represented a key infrastructure for arriving migrants, who often ended up spending their nights there. Interestingly, many preferred to do so, rather than applying to enter public dormitories due to the easier access and exit procedures. Public dorms, in fact, require holding interviews and a maximum period of stay, in the perspective of supporting people's path towards autonomy. However, as seen, migrants' mobility is often not linear: Some people might need to spend only a few nights in Palermo before traveling north and cannot follow the public dorms' procedure, while others may not know for how long they are going to stay in the same place. An illustrative example is that of agricultural workers, holding or not temporary permits, who spend the crop seasons in different places, returning to Palermo only during winter and until they are called back for a new job. In these cases, not only is it important to easily access dorms but also to be able to exit freely—and return. This is possible only when access and exit procedures are very loose; at the Missione, it was a common practice to simply go to the entrance and ask to enter the dorm. A mediator stated, "You know how it works there? The border wall is low, and people simply jump in and out of the dormitories" (mediator, 14.07.2020).

In this case, in/formality largely shapes the whole arrival infrastructure, its space, practices, and managing actors; this example embodies a characteristic element of the arrival infrastructuring work in Palermo, which is the coexistence of formal and informal hosting services. As seen, despite not explicitly counting on the Missione bed offer, municipal staff are aware of the crucial role it plays in hosting migrant and homeless populations, in some way accounting for it within the local public action for newcomers. In this case, the informal management of the Missione dorms led to a controversial situation. On the one hand, it allowed for a greater accessibility than formally managed structures; on the other hand, it provided poor and often problematic living standards. In/formality in this case leads to a problematic trade-off between accessibility and quality of the arrival infrastructure.

5.2. Arci Porco Rosso: An "Open Harbor" on a Ground Floor of Ballarò

The Arci Porco Rosso is a third sector association, affiliated with the Arci network, a national cultural and social association. Among other activities, the Arci Porco Rosso holds a weekly Sans Papiers helpdesk: a service addressing undocumented migrants and often also local residents. Occasionally, drawing from European and national funds, they have managed to hire paid coworkers; the volunteers, who have changed over the years, in 2020 included a municipal councilor, social workers, interpreters and mediators, and researchers, in a mix of migrant and local activists. They collaborate with local associations in regards to legal assistance, job search, and language assistance, sharing competences and help. The Arci Porco Rosso started with four friends, who happened to be back in Palermo and to be temporarily unemployed. One day in 2015, one of them, already part of the Arci network and responsible for migration issues, got a call: A group of 10–15 Gambian young men received a rejection order and were in Palermo with no place to go. Grounding on the network of associations and actors in Ballarò, they managed to sort out the situation (volunteer, 20.07.2020). Starting from this unexpected experience of support, the Arci Porco Rosso was founded on the ground floor of Piazza Casa Professa, in Ballarò, as a space of open encounter and support.

The infrastructuring work of the Arci mainly regards bridging people to existing services and networks: from translation of papers received by public offices, preparation of interviews, navigation through administrative procedures, until accompaniment to public offices. The Arci Porco Rosso also provides access to networks and social capital that would be hardly accessible to newcomers. Often people passing there are put in contact with other associations in Italy and Europe: This is the case of Ibrahim, who thanks to the Arci Porco Rosso managed to get in contact with the association El Mamba 13 once he arrived in Marseille, France (Ibrahim, 12.05.2020). The effectiveness of this helpdesk and its peculiarity lies in its openness and embeddedness in the context. Its rootedness in the historical neighborhood of Ballarò is a key aspect: On the one hand, it allows to grasp changing needs and profiles, and on the other hand, it allows to bridge them to existing resources. A representative situation happened during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Arci was able within a short time span to grasp the changing needs of its users and to adjust accordingly. In the first lockdown, the helpdesk closed and volunteers tried to keep in contact with users. There emerged the need for basic material support and the space of the Arci became a warehouse for food distribution. When the municipality opened an online platform to request public support, the Arci started helping people making the requests and highlighted how the requirements—among them the municipal registration—were excluding those groups that were most in need. Interestingly, this information was received and addressed by municipal staff (volunteer, 01.10.2020), that tried to change requirements to increase accessibility for a larger target.

The case of the Arci Porco Rosso cannot be framed as only informal; its staff has a formalized and explicit relationship with the municipality, and the Arci itself is a formal national institution. In this framework, however, informality lies in smaller elements: The way relationships are built ranges from formal to informal, as in the story of its foundation; plus, the organization of the space and the management of the helpdesk leave space for informal encounters and support actions that are not always framed by written rules. This nuanced in/formality allows the Arci to adhere profoundly to the needs of newcomers and landing migrants; their infrastructuring work changes with changing subjectivities (Meeus et al., 2019). In/formality allows the management of situations with flexibility and the continuous (re)definition of the boundaries of action. This is clear in the management of the Arci ground floor space, which feels like a continuation of the public square in front of it, where people come and go from two doors, and where square tables are continuously rearranged to host individual and group meetings, so that it is hard to distinguish who is a "user" and who are the volunteers. When asked about the reason for the "success" of the Arci, one of its founders answered, "I think because it's an open-access space in a square, it's a little harbor ashore; the level of informality works very much" (Bovo, 2024b). This kind of infrastructuring work also hides a risk, which many volunteers underline: the risk of substituting public institutions in infrastructuring arrival—a critical issue largely debated in the social innovation literature studying initiatives able to respond to those needs that remain unanswered by the state.

5.3. Public Health Clinic: Opening Hours and Immediate Answers

Healthcare services for migrants, sometimes undocumented who cannot be assigned an ID number or a general practitioner, are often offered by the private and third sector (among which many charities) in Italy (Vittoria, 2023). Interestingly, thanks to a strong advocacy effort (doctor, 10.07.2020), Sicily is one of those regions where such services passed, between the 1980s and today, from the private and charity sphere, with ambulatories in churches or volunteering associations, to the public sphere in Provincial Health Agencies and territorial Operative Units that are generalistic and specialized in immigrant populations—both long-term and temporary city users, documented and undocumented. The access is direct and open to everybody, no reservation or booking is needed. One of the most relevant infrastructures in Palermo is one of the two public clinics working under the Operative Unit for the Promotion of Immigrant Health. The idea of this service is to offer regular care services and be, at the same time, specialized in patients with a migration background—as the street sign of the clinic, translated into six languages, shows. As a cultural mediator (15.07.2020) explains: "For a newcomer it is crucial, because it makes you feel safe."

To this aim, the clinic has adopted progressive measures and initiatives to effectively respond to the needs of the different profiles of migrants living in Palermo; these measures also explain why the infrastructuring work happening in the clinic is so relevant. First, the clinic (and the Operative Unit more in general) gathers in the same space various competencies: namely two doctors, a pediatrician, a nurse, and a social worker, with the collaboration of a gynecologist, psychologists, social-worker trainees, and cultural mediators. This allows a more comprehensive reading of people's needs, as well as communication support. Second, the doctor and the social worker decided to change the opening hours to better fit the working time of migrants. Third, the clinic provides a very crucial service: it issues the code for Temporarily Present Foreigners (*Stranieri Temporaneamente Presenti*; STP). The STP code is a national code, formally part of the healthcare national system, that gives access to essential and urgent care to people without a valid residence permit, who cannot sign in to the national health system, nor be assigned to a general practitioner. Despite this code

being formally available in the national system, not all public clinics provide this service; its relevance is well explained by a doctor of a hospital facility providing the same service:

> The point is that many cannot plan their departure, and this stresses the system….What characterizes the clinic Aiuto Materno and mine is the release mode of the STP code: We issue them on sight. To migrants who are not in a reception center, you can't say "Come back in eight days," so we do it right away and then start the procedure. Everything has to be done right away. (doctor, 29.07.2020)

Interestingly, the same clinics also provide patients with a personal medical history notebook, with all data gathered from medical screenings. The aim is to provide them with information that could be useful elsewhere along migration trajectories, acknowledging their right to movement (Bovo, 2024b).

The infrastructuring work of this clinic is framed in an entirely formalized and public setting, managed at a regional level in Italy. The doctor and social worker are public servants, and the tools (including the STP code) are also formal tools of the health system. In this case, informality concerns rather the way individuals navigate a formal setting: the way opening times are stretched beyond "traditional" working hours, the way the service and the space are organized, and the choice to use the STP code. What is at stake here is the "discretionary power" (Lieto, 2022) of individual actors who informally move within a given regulatory framework, without really acting against the rules but rather stretching them. Once again, this allows service providers to better adapt to migratory trajectories. In this case, the risk is that of linking such capacity of adaptation to the individual agency of single actors and not to the system as a whole.

6. Resourcefulness and Criticalities of In/Formal Practices

In the context of a large public action, as described in Section 3, the three examples help us address the question of what "in/formal" in arrival infrastructuring work is and why this in/formality is important for infrastructuring arrivals. In Palermo, informality is sometimes prevalent over formality (Chiodelli, 2019): We saw a private dorm whose space, actors, and practices are largely informal, a third sector helpdesk where informality rather pertains to organizational settings and habits, and a public health clinic where informality is linked to the discretionary power of public servants. The definition of in/formality emerging from these examples needs to be context-based and flexible: Actors and settings are rarely "always" or "only" informal (or formal). In this sense, we argue that practices should be the primary focus when considering in/formality, and we propose applying the in/formality framework to practices—or to infrastructuring work—rather than to the infrastructures themselves. This allows us to grasp a whole range of in/formal dimensions, comprising informal infrastructuring work happening in informal settings, informal habits and organizational arrangements, *and* informal individual and punctual actions taken in formal settings. Importantly, this definition broadens the concept of in/formality as it relates to the public or private nature of infrastructures, used by some contributions on arrival infrastructures (Hans, 2023; Schrooten & Meeus, 2019) and it overturns the idea that informal arrangements are exceptions to the formal ones.

The three examples contribute to understanding why in/formality is relevant in arrival infrastructuring work, but also clarify that its resourcefulness goes hand in hand with some criticalities. The resourcefulness of informal practices for arrival infrastructuring generally lies in the capacity of these practices to "adhere" and "adapt" to the specific needs of landing migrants. The cross-ability (and not only accessibility) of the

Missione dorms, the continuous presence, openness, and horizontal management of the Arci Porco Rosso, and the opening hours or STP code service in the clinics are all examples of this adaptability. What is particularly resourceful is the ability of such in/formal infrastructuring practices to move beyond—and stretch—binary categories of temporality, subjectivity, and mobility through which migration processes and urban context are governed in Europe. Agricultural workers can access a dorm, *despite* the fact they won't stay for a long time; newcomers can use the Arci Porco Rosso helpdesk, *despite* their status (at that moment); through the STP code, migrants can access immediate basic healthcare, *despite* the fact they might be leaving Palermo in the short term. Criticalities, on the other hand, are of diverse types: The case of the Missione dorm enhances a trade-off between access and quality of resources, the infrastructuring work of the Arci Porco Rosso faces the risk of substituting state-infrastructuring action, and the discretionary work of the health clinic links to direct adaptability to individuals rather than to the whole system. Interestingly, all these criticalities relate to the lack of, or problematic relationship between, infrastructuring work and public provision of infrastructures, and can be understood only if framed within the peculiar context of Palermo.

7. Concluding Remarks

This contribution outlines how infrastructuring work was deployed in the city of Palermo, between 2015 and 2020, during a moment of intense arrivals in the city; it suggests that to grasp the nature and role played by different actors, we shall assume a broad definition of "public" action, rooted in the specific context of Palermo. A long gaze at the history of the city helps to unpack this definition: On one hand, the retreat or absence of the public sector has created space for the third sector, which now plays a key role in service provision. However, this shift often carries the risk of substitution, a dynamic that remains critical and generates tensions. On the other hand, public and third-sector actors often work hand in hand, especially around certain policy fields—among which that of hospitality. This twofold nature of the public action represents a key feature of this city, where we examined three arrival infrastructures, operating within different life domains and showcasing various aspects of in/formality. From the three examples, we argued that in/formality shall be attributed to practices, rather than to spaces or actors: In/formal practices can happen for limited time periods, within formal and informal settings. We also argued that in/formality is resourceful because it makes arrival infrastructuring more "adaptive" to arrival needs, often challenging prevailing binary approaches towards it. Such resourcefulness should always be observed together with the related criticalities, that often attain the relationship with what is formal and (mainly) public.

The definition of in/formality we outlined and its ambiguous role in infrastructuring arrival are linked to the specific context of Palermo and can be more clearly grasped if framed within its position, as a city at the threshold between North and South, as a city "in the South of the North." This peculiar position has supported two kinds of trajectories: first, the trajectory of the city of Palermo on a national and international horizon. As seen, the alliance of the public political discourse, public institutions, and local associations around hospitality allowed Palermo to take a distance from the prevailing Mafia-related narrative and to describe itself internationally as a welcoming city. Second, the presence of many and diverse in/formal practices, common to many Mediterranean cities, support the trajectories of individuals who land in the city. The peculiarity of a local urban context in Southern Europe is therefore to infrastructure arrivals and migration trajectories beyond binary categories, in their plural temporality, subjectivity, and mobility. In this sense, therefore, Palermo, as a Southern European and Mediterranean context, embodies a precious opportunity for research and understanding of the three debates on arrival infrastructuring work,

in/formality, and “Southern thought.” In Palermo, the in/formal character of arrival infrastructuring work challenges conventional frameworks and approaches, inviting us to ”stay with” the ambiguity inherent in these processes, a characteristic of Mediterranean and Southern perspectives.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express gratitude to the editors and reviewers, who provided invaluable guidance and insightful feedback throughout the development of this article. Their expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping the ideas presented here. Special thanks to the volunteers and interviewees we met in Palermo, especially in Arci Porco Rosso, the Public Health Clinic, and Missione Speranza e Carità. We thank them for their collaboration and constructive discussions, which greatly enriched our work.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Agier, M., Barré, C., Boccara, D., Esnée, F., Fert, B., Foucher-Dufoix, V., Gualleze, A., Hanappe, C., Leclercq, O., Lussault, M., & Neuman, M. (2018). *La ville accueillante. Accueillir à Grande-Synthe, questions théoriques et pratiques sur les exilés, l'architecture et la ville*. Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture.

Alfaro d'Alençon, P., Smith, H., Álvarez de Andrés, E., Cabrera, C., Fokdal, J., Lombard, M., Mazzolini, A., Michelutti, E., Moretto, L., & Spire, A. (2018). Interrogating informality: Conceptualisations, practices and policies in the light of the New Urban Agenda. *Habitat International*, *75*, 59–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.04.007

Ambrosini, M., & Campomori, F. (2020). La controversia dell'asilo: Politiche di accoglienza e solidarietà contro i confini. *Politiche Sociali, Social Policies*, *2*, 181–200. https://doi.org/10.7389/97985

Arbaci, S. (2019). *Paradoxes of segregation: Housing systems, welfare regimes and ethnic residential change in Southern European cities*. Wiley.

Ataç, I., Rygiel, K., & Stierl, M. (2021). Building transversal solidarities in European cities: Open harbours, safe communities, home. *Critical Sociology*, *47*(6), 923–939. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520980522

Babels. (2018). *Méditerranée des frontières à la dérive*. Le passager clandestin.

Bassi, M. (2015a). *Mobilisations collectives et recomposition de l'action publique autour de l'enjeu migratoire en Sicile (1986–2012)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Institut d'études politiques de Paris. https://www.sudoc.fr/19171190X

Bassi, M. (2015b). Politiques de contrôle et réalités locales dans la gestion des migrations “indésirables” en Sicile. In C. Schmoll, H. Thiollet, & C. Wihtol de Wenden (Eds.), *Migrations en Méditerranée* (pp. 157–166). CNRS Éditions.

Bourdieu, P. (1982). *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Éditions de Minuit.

Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2894

Bovo, M. (2024a). Changing geographies of landing in Italy. Migration movements and spaces in contemporary Milan and Palermo. In D. Templin (Ed.), *Arrival neighborhoods: Migrations, urban spaces and infrastructures in European cities since the late 19th century* (pp. 223–243). Routledge.

Bovo, M. (2024b). *Migration landing spaces: Processes and infrastructures in Italy*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003441342

Braudel, F. (2008). *Il Mediterraneo. Lo spazio, la storia, gli uomini, le tradizioni*. Bompiani. (Original work published 1985)

Briata, P. (2014). *Spazio urbano e immigrazione in Italia: Esperienze di pianificazione in una prospettiva europea*. Franco Angeli.

Briata, P., & Postiglione, G. (2023). *People, places, practices*. Thymos Books.

Bully, E. (2021). *Palerme, "ville accueillante"? Instrumentalisation politique de l'accoglienza, formes d'hospitalité locale et effets sur les trajectoires des exilés* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Université Paris-Est; Università degli studi di Palermo.

Campomori, F. (2019). La governance multilivello delle politiche di accoglienza dei richiedenti asilo e rifugiati in Italia. *Le istituzioni del federalismo*, *2019*(1), 5–20.

Camus, A. (2014). Relations between third sector and public sector organizations: Identification of the main conceptual approaches. *Revue Interventions économiques*, *50*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.4000/interventionseconomiques.2162

Caponio, T., & Borkert, M. (Eds.). (2010). *The local dimension of migration policymaking*. Amsterdam University Press.

Cassano, F. (2007). *Il pensiero meridiano*. Laterza. (Original work published 1997)

Castells, M. (2000). Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society. *British Journal of Sociology*, *51*(1), 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2000.00005.x

Chiodelli, F. (2019). The dark side of urban informality in the Global North: Housing illegality and organized crime in Northern Italy. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *43*(3), 497–516. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12745

Chiodelli, F., & Gentili, M. (2021). The many shades of grey in urban governance: How illegality shapes urban planning, policy and development. *Political Geography*, *84*, Article 102309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102309

Chiodelli, F., & Tzfadia, E. (2016). The multifaceted relation between formal institutions and the production of informal urban spaces: An editorial introduction. *Geography Research Forum*, *36*, 1–14.

Colucci, M. (2018). *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia: Dal 1945 ai nostri giorni*. Carocci.

Conti, S., & Spriano, G. (1990). *Effetto città. Sistemi urbani e innovazione: Prospettive per l'Europa degli anni Novanta*. Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli.

Cremaschi, M., Albanese, F., & Artero, M. (2020). Migrants and refugees: Bottom-up and DIY spaces in Italy. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 189–199. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2921

Cremaschi, M., & Lieto, L. (2020). Writing Southern theory from the Global North. Notes on informality and regulation. *Equilibri*, *24*, 261–280. https://doi.org/10.1406/98117

Crosta, P. (2010). *Pratiche: Il territorio "è l'uso che se ne fa."* Franco Angeli.

Darling, J. (2016). 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

De Filippo, E., Morlicchio, E., & Strozza, S. (2013). Una migrazione nella migrazione. L'impatto della crisi sulla mobilità degli immigrati in Campania. *Sociologia del lavoro*, *131*, 222–238. https://doi.org/10.3280/sl2013-131014

De Gourcy, C. (2013). Partir, rester, habiter: le projet migratoire dans la littérature exilaire. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, *29*(4), 43–57. https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.6631

Di Cesare, D. (2017). *Stranieri residenti. Una filosofia della migrazione*. Bollati Boringhieri.

Dines, N. (2016). From 'southern 'to 'ordinary.' Conceptualizing and contextualizing segregation in public space in southern European cities. *Journal of Mediterranean Geography*, *127*, 101–108. https://doi.org/10.4000/mediterranee.8480

El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkılıc, L. (2023). Infrastructures in the context of arrival—Multidimensional patterns of

resource access in an established and a new immigrant neighborhood in Germany. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-355-2023

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2019). Between hospitality and inhospitality: The Janus-faced 'arrival infrastructure.' *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2941

Fioretti, C. (2011). Do-it-yourself housing for immigrants in Rome: Simple reaction or possible way out. In F. Eckardt & J. Eade (Eds.), *The ethnically diverse city* (pp. 535–559). Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag.

Fioretti, C. (2013). Abaco degli spazi urbani dell'immigrazione. *CRIOS*, *6*, 47–70.

Fontanari, E. (2019). *Lives in transit: An ethnographic study of refugees' subjectivity across European borders*. Routledge.

Franz, Y., & Hanhörster, H. (Eds.). (2020). Urban arrival spaces: Social co-existence in times of changing mobilities and local diversity [Thematic issue]. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3).

Gardesse, C., & Lelévrier, C. (2020). Refugees and asylum seekers dispersed in non-metropolitan French cities: Do housing opportunities mean housing access? *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2926

Graham, S., & McFarlane, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Infrastructural lives: Urban infrastructure in context*. Routledge.

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-381-2023

Hans, N., Hanhörster, H., Polívka, J., & Beißwenger, S. (2019). Die Rolle von Ankunftsräumen für die Integration Zugewanderter. Eine kritische Diskussion des Forschungsstandes. *Raumforschung und Raumordnung*, *77*(5), 511–524. https://doi.org/10.2478/rara-2019-0019

Harvey, D. (2006, November 2). *Neoliberalism and the city* [Public lecture]. 22nd Annual University of Pennsylvania Urban Studies Public Lecture, Philadelphia, PA, United States.

Italian Ministry of Interiors. (2014). *Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero* [Data set]. http://www.libertacivili immigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero

Jaffe, R., & Koster, M. (2019). The myth of formality in the Global North: Informality-as-innovation in Dutch governance. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *43*(3), 563–568. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12706

Kaufmann, D. (2019). Comparing urban citizenship, sanctuary cities, local bureaucratic membership, and regularizations. *Public Administration Review*, *79*(3), 443–446. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13029

Kudva, N. (2009). The everyday and the episodic: The spatial and political impacts of urban informality. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *41*(7), 1614–1628. https://doi.org/10.1068/a41101

Lentini, F. (2011). *La primavera breve: Quando Palermo sognava una città per l'uomo*. Edizioni Paoline.

Lieto, L. (2022). Planners as brokers and translators. On regulation and discretionary power. In Y. Rydin, R. Beauregard, M. Cremaschi, & L. Lieto (Eds.), *Regulation and planning. Practices, institutions, agency* (pp. 83–96). Routledge.

Maloutas, T. (2018). Travelling concepts and universal particularisms: A reappraisal of gentrification's global reach. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *25*(3), 250–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776417709547

McFarlane, C., & Waibel, M. (2012). *Urban informalities: Reflections on the formal and informal*. Routledge.

Meeus, B., Beeckmans, L., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2020). Broadening the urban planning repertoire with an 'arrival infrastructures' perspective. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.3116

Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & van Heur, B. (2019). *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities*. Springer.

Morin, E. (1999). Penser la Méditerranée et méditerranéiser la pensée. *CONFLUENCES Méditerranée*, *28*, 33–47.

Mudu, P., & Chattopadhyay, S. (2016). *Migration, squatting and radical autonomy: Resistance and destabilization of racist regulatory policies and b/ordering mechanisms*. Routledge.

Mukhija, V., & Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (Eds.). (2014). *The informal American city. Beyond taco trucks and day labor*. The MIT Press.

Oomen, B. (2019). Cities of refuge. Rights, culture and the creation of cosmopolitan citizenship. In R. Buikema, Buyse, A., & A. C. G. M. Robben (Eds.), *Cultures, citizenship and human rights* (pp. 121–136). Routledge.

Pulcini, E. (2019). Ospitalità e riconoscimento. *Iride, Filosofia e discussione pubblica*, *1*, 63–78. https://doi.org/10.1414/93341

Roy, A., & AlSayyad, N. (Eds.). (2004). *Urban informality. Transnational perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*. Lexington Books.

Sassen, S. (1991). *The global city*. Princeton University Press.

Saunders, D. (2011). *Arrival city: How the largest migration in history is reshaping our world*. Windmill Books.

Schillebeeckx, E., Oosterlynck, S., & de Decker, P. (2019). Migration and the resourceful neighborhood: Exploring localized resources in urban zones of transition. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. Van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 131–152). Springer.

Schmoll, C., Thiollet, H., & Wihtol de Wenden, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Migrations en Méditerranée*. CNRS Editions.

Scholten, P. (2014). The multilevel governance of migrant integration. In B. Garcés-Mascareñas & R. Penninx (Eds.), *Integration processes and policies in Euope* (pp. 91–108). Springer.

Schrooten, M., & Meeus, B. (2019). The possible role and position of social work as part of the arrival infrastructure. *European Journal of Social Work*, *23*(3), 414–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2019.1688257

Soderstrom, O. (2009). *Urban cosmographies: Indagine sul cambiamento urbano a Palermo*. Meltemi.

Stender, M., Bech-Denielson, C., & Hagen, L. (Eds.). (2023). *Architectural anthropology: Exploring lived space*. Routledge.

Tarrius, A. (1993). Territoires circulatoires et espaces urbains : Différentiation des groupes migrants. *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine (PERSEE Program)*, *59*(1), 51–60.

Tornesi, S. (2001). *Immigrazione in Sicilia, in Caritas, Immigrazione. Dossier Statistico 2001. XI Rapporto sull'immigrazione*. Nuova Anterem.

Tulumello, S. (2022). The "Souths" of the "Wests." Southern critique and comparative housing studies in Southern Europe and USA. *Housing Studies*, *37*(6), 975–996. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.1966391

Vittoria, A. (2023). Immigrazione e infrastrutture di arrivo. Come la politica sociale informale provvede all'accesso degli immigrati alle cure. Il contributo dell'esperienza dei commons urbani nella città di Napoli. *Studi emigrazione*, *203*, 277–292.

Wessendorf, S. (2022). 'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab051

Zapata-Barrero, R., Caponio, T., & Scholten, P. (2017). Theorizing the 'local turn' in a multi-level governance framework of analysis: a case study in immigrant policies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83(2), 241–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852316688426

About the Authors

Martina Bovo is a postdoc research fellow at IUAV University of Venice, Dipartimento di Culture del Progetto, and collaborates in teaching and research activities at Politecnico di Milano. She obtained a PhD in urban planning, design and policy and worked as a postdoc research fellow at KU Leuven, within the H2020 REROOT project. Her research focuses on the territorial dimension of migration and arrival processes. She recently published *Migration Landing Spaces. Processes and Infrastructures in Italy* (Routledge 2024).

Eléonore Bully completed her PhD in 2021 at Université Paris-Est (France), in co-supervision with the University of Palermo (Italy). Her research explores reception policies and practices in Southern European cities and their connection to the trajectories of exiles. Prior to this, Eléonore studied at the École d'Urbanisme de Paris (Université Paris-Est), where she conducted research in 2016 and 2017 on the residential trajectories of refugees in Calais and Paris. She currently works in consulting and is guiding public policies in Marseille, at the City Council.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8560
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8560

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Looking for Daisies: The Hidden Attraction and Arrival Infrastructures of Welcoming Spaces in Rural Spain

Laura Oso and Leticia Santaballa

Centro de Investigación Interuniversitario de los Paisajes Atlánticos Culturales (CISPAC), University of A Coruña, Spain

Correspondence: Laura Oso (laura.oso@udc.es)

Submitted: 30 April 2024 Accepted: 17 September 2024 Published: 25 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

In recent decades, shrinking areas in rural Spain have sought the arrival of newcomers. This migration is driven mainly by economic reasons and is not related to regionalizing or redistribution migration policies. The main contribution of this article is to highlight how the articulation between social agents' (public administrations, third sector, enterprises, migrant communities, and civil society) strategies and infrastructuring practices, within the framework of political, social, and economic structural contexts, has crystalized into specific "welcoming spaces," impacting newcomers' access to resources. The main innovation lies in the identification of an analysis model applied to three different types of "welcoming spaces" of attraction, arrival, and settlement, considering their impact on other mobilities. We have named them in order to represent the connection of rural territories with nature: the waves, the oak, and the river. The analysis reveals the factors that favor but also block access to resources for newcomers. This has allowed us to design an ideal type of welcoming space, which we have called "Daisy," and which beyond its theoretical value, could facilitate the revitalization of shrinking areas. "Looking for Daisies" represents the desire of local social actors, lost in the disjointed way in which infrastructuring practices are managed, to reach this goal. Framed under the Horizon 2020-funded program Welcoming Spaces—Investing in "Welcoming Spaces" in Europe: Revitalizing Shrinking Areas by Hosting non-EU Migrants (H2020-SC6-Migration-2019-870952), the research is based on qualitative fieldwork (comprising 75 semi-structured interviews and participant observation), carried out in three localities in two regions of Spain (Galicia and Castilla León).

Keywords

arrival infrastructures; migrant infrastructures; migration; rural; welcoming spaces

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

The European humanitarian crisis, which detonated in 2015, has sparked a growing interest in the study of the insertion of the migrant population in rural areas (McAreavey & Argent, 2018). This trend seems to converge with the proliferation of regionalizing migration policies, which seek the redistribution of migrants and refugees, among both EU countries, through the so-called dispersal policies, and within each national territory (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020) to outside the metropolises. Furthermore, in recent years, migrants have shown a growing interest in moving to rural areas (Barberis & Pavolini, 2015). In Spain, more than half of the inhabitants of small municipalities have migrated from cities or other countries (Camarero Rioja & Rivera Escribano, 2024). In contrast to other European contexts, there is a lower presence of asylum seekers and refugees in the Spanish rural environment. As pointed out in previous research (Alonso-Pardo et al., 2023), in this country, newcomers to shrinking areas are mainly economic migrants, returnees, or "roots migrants" (Wessendorf, 2007) who move to the land of their ancestors. It is therefore a migration phenomenon worth exploring in greater depth, as unlike other European countries, it does not respond to policies of asylum or relocation. European academic literature addressing these migration flows has focused mainly on studying the settlement of migrants in rural environments (Galera et al., 2018). In turn, media and political interest has been based on utilitarian narratives that perceive immigration in shrinking areas as a strategy for maintaining infrastructures of various kinds (services, labor, the fight against depopulation, etc.). However, less has been done to analyze migration in rural (Wulff et al., 2008) or peripheralized environments from an arrival infrastructures approach (El-Kayed et al., 2020).

The article's main contribution to the literature on arrival infrastructures, which to date has dealt mainly with urban environments, is its focus on shrinking areas. In addition, our work also identifies the factors favoring or blocking settlement and their impact on new mobilities. We aim to shed light on how arrival infrastructures are conditioned by the forms of governance and external factors in which they are embedded (Kreichauf et al., 2020), articulating into the analysis the role played by social actors' strategies and structural determinants in arrival dynamics. Another originality of the contribution lies in addressing not only the process of arrival, but also the infrastructures of attraction (initiatives to boost the population in devitalized contexts). Moving beyond a theoretical and empirical contribution, the article also aims to offer strategic options for policymakers and local actors. Framed under the Horizon 2020-funded program Welcoming Spaces—Investing in "Welcoming Spaces" in Europe: Revitalizing Shrinking Areas by Hosting non-EU Migrants (H2020-SC6-Migration-2019-870952), the research is based on a qualitative methodology. Due to space limitations, the data presented here refer to just three case studies (sited in the regions of Galicia and Castilla León) drawn from fieldwork comprising 75 semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

The article begins by introducing the state of the art, framing our research within the literature debates on arrival infrastructures, and is followed by a discussion of the methodology used in the study, before presenting the analysis of the empirical data, based on three case studies or examples of "welcoming spaces." To define them, names were chosen that represent a connection between rural territories and nature: the waves, the oak tree, and the river. The analysis reveals the factors that favor but also block the processes of attraction, arrival, and settlement for newcomers and their impact on new mobilities. This has allowed us to design an ideal type of "welcoming space," "Daisy," that beyond its theoretical value, could be capable of facilitating the transformation of rural areas into sustainable hosting spaces. "Looking for Daisies" represents the desire of local social agents, lost in the disjointed way in which attraction and arrival infrastructures are

managed, to achieve this goal. The conclusion highlights the article's principal contributions to the literature on arrival infrastructures.

2. State of the Art: Beyond the "Urban Focus," Attraction and Arrival Infrastructures in Shrinking Areas

In the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the so-called "migrant infrastructures," defined as the interplay of various "systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (e.g., state regulations, commercial intermediaries, socio-technological platforms, humanitarian organizations, migrant social networks; Cheng et al., 2024, p. 1). The "arrival infrastructures" perspective developed from this approach has been widely studied in urban settings (Meeus et al., 2019), mainly addressing research on housing (El-Kayed et al., 2020) and social integration (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020).

Arrival infrastructures have been defined as "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated" (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 11). The different types of arrival infrastructures are not only related to technological and spatial characteristics. Considering "people as infrastructure" (Simone, 2004), they also include "institutions, organizations, social spaces and actors which specifically facilitate migrant arrival" (Wessendorf, 2021, p. 4; see also Kreichauf et al., 2020). To deal with the complexity of social infrastructures (Kreichauf et al., 2020), literature has defined the concept of "social infrastructure ecosystems" as networks and services supported by different kinds of buildings, facilities, and organizations (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024, p. 2827). Nils Hans, quoting Mieke Schrooten and Bruno Meeus, refers to formal infrastructures as those that "include formal support structures provided by the state, e.g., language schools or public advisory organisations as well as infrastructures established by non-governmental stakeholders, such as (migrant) advisory organisations, which often emerge in response to state policies" (Hans, 2023, p. 382). For these authors, informal infrastructures are those developed through local service providers that facilitate arrival, supplying information and resources and acting as meeting places (e.g., cafés, restaurants, ethnic shops, and hairdressers; Hans, 2023, p. 382). Indeed, informal infrastructures are relevant in facilitating newcomers' access to resources and should therefore also be taken into consideration in planning debates (Fawaz, 2017). Arrival infrastructures can enable integration and social mobility processes for newcomers, although they can also present shortcomings and turn inhospitable (Felder et al., 2020; Wessendorf, 2021). Various studies have identified and typified "arrival spaces," defined as "'platforms of arrival,' where many immigrants find their first home in their new city," in an attempt to portray their characteristics and carry out a classification exercise on the basis of various indicators (morphology, etc.; Gerten et al., 2023, p. 2). However, most of this work, which is fundamentally of a quantitative nature, has been conducted in urban areas and, in particular, in specific neighborhoods of large cities.

This literature provides a strong theoretical starting point. However, analyses on the specificity of arrival infrastructures in rural settings are also needed. Through the recent "turn to arrival" (Wilson, 2022) at the theoretical level, several works have pointed to the need to clarify, through empirical studies, the complexity of "arrival regions and populations" in an explanatory framework specific to peripheralized rural areas, as it is understood that processes can be significantly different from urban contexts (Glorius et al., 2021).

The specificities of arrival infrastructures in shrinking areas are many. Firstly, literature on arrival infrastructures in urban contexts has highlighted the relevance of previously settled migrant communities and social and cultural networks as social infrastructures (Kreichauf et al., 2020), considering their key role in facilitating newcomers' arrival and social mobility (Wessendorf, 2021). Indeed, literature on migration has traditionally highlighted the fact that long-established migrants are key actors in the configuration of "bonding social capital" (Putnam, 2007). Some authors speak about the figure of "arrival brokers" (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Hans, 2023; Wessendorf, 2021): migrant-origin individuals that support newcomers and facilitate their access to resources in arrival spaces. Nevertheless, in some rural contexts, there is a lower presence of previously settled migrant communities, making "bridging social capital" relevant for newcomers' arrival processes. Indeed, the resident population can be a key stakeholder in providing access to resources to newcomers in shrinking areas (Glorius et al., 2021).

Secondly, urban literature recognizes a clear function of arrival infrastructures as an "entry mechanism" for the immigrant population (Wilson, 2022). Since the 2014 refugee movement in Europe, rural areas are also emerging as immigrant gateways (El-Kayed et al., 2020; McAreavey & Argent, 2018), although in most cases, the rural environment is a non-primary type of "arrival." Indeed, migrants also move to depopulated areas after first landing in urban environments, as in the case of many of the shrinking areas studied in the Spanish context (Alonso-Pardo et al., 2023).

Another fundamental aspect that distinguishes shrinking areas is that arrival does not necessarily occur spontaneously. Literature generally assumes that migrant population "arrives" directly in cities and analyzes the processes involved. However, rural areas often require incentives and attraction initiatives to encourage arrival. This is mainly the case of shrinking areas that consider migration a strategy to deal with depopulation or territorial imbalance. Attracting and retaining new arrivals require strategies in smaller cities and rural communities (Wulff et al., 2008). This leads us to consider different phases when studying migrant infrastructures in rural environments: attraction, arrival, and setting.

This article aims to contribute to the debates on the scientific production of arrival infrastructures in four aspects. Firstly, beyond the numerous literature that analyses this issue in urban environments, this research approaches arrival infrastructures in shrinking areas. Secondly, the Spanish case allows us to go beyond the studies that analyze regionalizing or dispersal migration policies (redistribution of migrants and refugees) since immigration in Spanish rural areas is mainly carried out by economic migrants, returnees, or "roots migrants" (Alonso-Pardo et al., 2023). Moreover, the research is original in that, moving beyond a quantitative study, it attempts to typify "welcoming spaces" in shrinking environments using qualitative data. Finally, another innovation is the consideration of four different phases in the migration process, beyond the "arrival approach" in the analysis of infrastructures: attraction, arrival, and settlement, and their impact on other mobilities. As noted above, some rural areas need to introduce initiatives to attract newcomers. By infrastructures of attraction, we are referring not only to the structural elements that encourage the population to immigrate to a territory (demand of the labor market, social benefits, etc.), but also to "attraction initiatives," defined as actions undertaken by different social actors with the aim of attracting newcomers in a shrinking area and with the ultimate objective of contributing to the revitalization of the territory. They can be public, led by organized civil society or NGOs, or developed by companies looking for workers to meet the demand of some labor sectors that are not attractive to long-standing residents (primary sector, care for dependent persons, etc.). Mix-model initiatives consist of the collaboration between diverse social agents in the territory in favor of revitalization.

Arrival infrastructures differ from those for the settlement of newcomers, as this phase is intrinsically distinct from settlement (Hans, 2023). Arrival can be defined as "a phase of the migration process in which newly arrived migrants encounter a new context for the first time," which includes "initial orientation and situational processes such as navigating bureaucratic systems, finding housing or finding a first job" (El-Kayed & Keskinkılıc, 2023, p. 357). Infrastructures of attraction and arrival impact differently on newcomers' access to resources and settlement, as shown by the theoretical representation of the model in Figure 1.

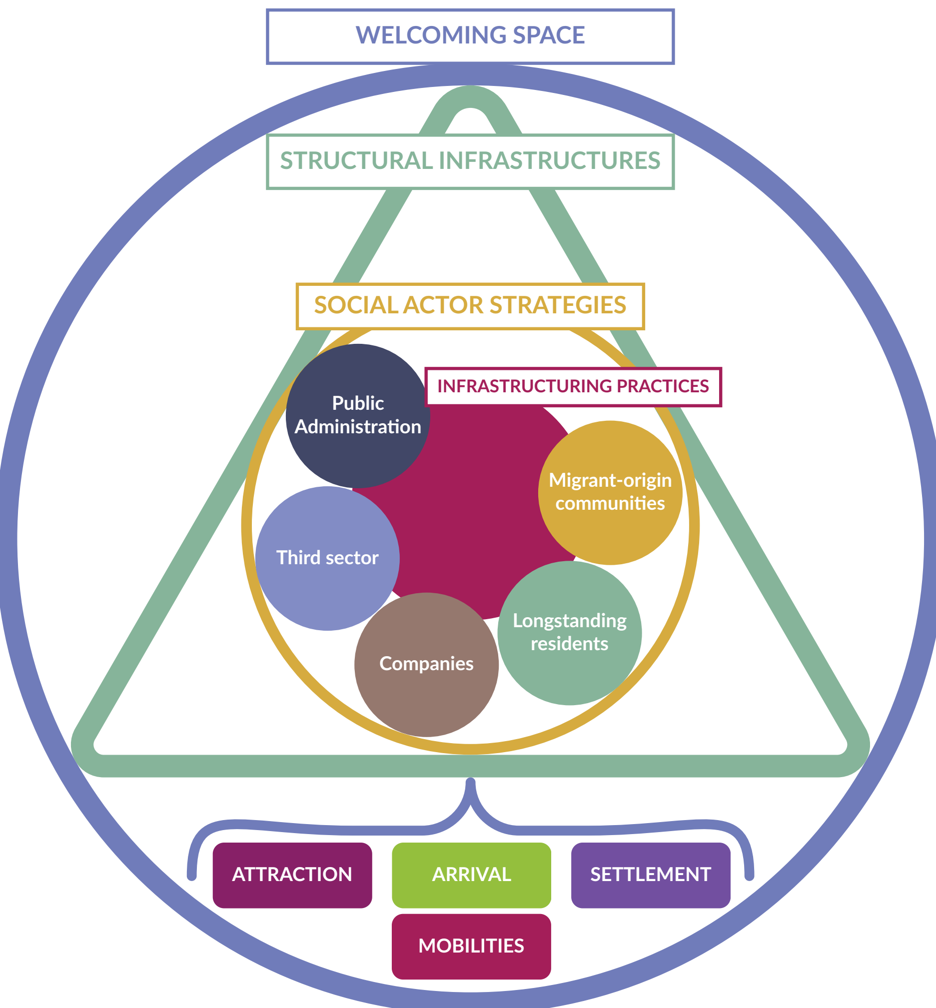


Figure 1. Theoretical model to study the impact of migrant infrastructures in welcoming spaces.

In short, the aim of this article is to consider how the strategies deployed by the various social actors (public administrations, third sector, companies, migrant origin communities, long-standing residents) are articulated with structural determinants (labor markets, etc.) in the configuration of "welcoming spaces." Based on the analysis of three "welcoming spaces," the objective is to identify those infrastructures that facilitate or block the development of the processes of attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers and their impact on new mobilities. Before presenting the empirical data, the following section summarizes a number of methodological considerations.

3. Methodology

The qualitative methodology was applied in two stages: First, the case studies were identified through an extensive documentary and bibliographic review, followed by three field trips, resulting in 19 days of inductive and ethnographic fieldwork implemented between 2020 and 2022. Despite having carried out numerous observation and participant observation sessions, most of the information was collected through semi-structured interviews using the "snowball" method to reach a total of 75 interviews involving 91 people, 80% of which were conducted in person and 20% telematically. Five versions of the questionnaire were adapted, depending on the type of agent interviewed: public administrations, migrants, non-migrants, civil society organizations, or businesses. In all, 27.5% of the people had had experiences of international migration (foreign-born population or population that had spent most of their lives abroad); 29.7% belonged to civil society organizations; 24.2% to the local administration (mayor's office, town council, technical profile, social work, social education, employment guidance, educational centers, health personnel, etc.); 3.3% to companies; 6.6% to other non-migrant population; 2.1% to stakeholders of the provincial administration; and 6.6% to education centers.

As Figure 2 shows, the three municipalities selected for in-depth discussion in this article are located in two regions (Castilla León and Galicia). We have selected them due to their representativeness and heterogeneity in terms of their welcoming spaces dynamics, which are examined in the following section.

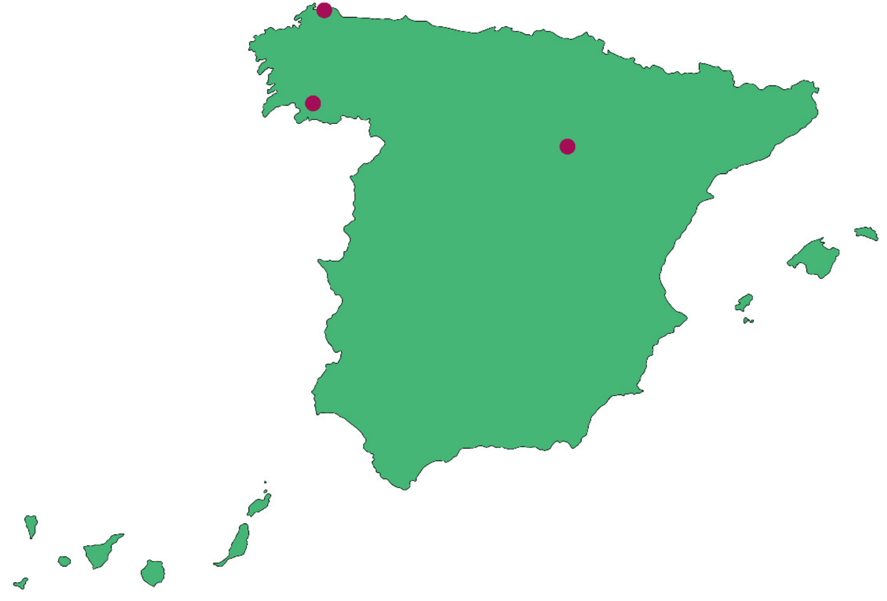


Figure 2. Map showing the three selected municipalities for this article.

4. The Underlying Welcoming Spaces of Attraction, Arrival, and Settlement of Newcomers in Shrinking Areas

The following presentation of the three case studies provides an insight into the infrastructures that either contribute to or block the processes of the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers and their impact on other mobilities, revealing how the strategies of the different social actors and the structural determinants are articulated in the configuration of welcoming spaces. Burela is the first of the three cases presented.

4.1. Burela: A Welcoming Space That Comes and Goes With the "Waves"

Burela is one of the most important fishing ports on Spain's northwest coast (located in the province of Lugo, in the Autonomous Community of Galicia), where the crisis in the sector at the end of the 20th century led to a rise in the recruitment of migrant workers. In this locality, home to 9,430 inhabitants (Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022) and with the youngest average age in the province of Lugo, attributable to the high percentage of foreign-born settled population (15.2%; Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022), labor market demand is the main structural infrastructure for attracting newcomers. Recruiting immigrants to work at sea initially took place through the intermediation of shipowners who acted as "brokers" (Lindquist et al., 2012) with companies in the countries of origin and later through the dynamization of the workers' own community networks (community brokers). Family reunification processes also emerged, which can be considered an informal social infrastructure of attraction (Simone, 2004). This resulted in the formation of a Cape Verdean community settled in Burela, although fishermen also arrived from Peru, Senegal, Indonesia, Morocco, and Ghana.

Despite the temporary nature of work at sea, newcomers have been settling in the locality due to the existence of other dynamic labor sectors. In addition to canning factories, its status as a *comarca* (county or administrative entity made up of a number of municipalities within a province) center means that Burela also has an extensive "service infrastructure." This concept can be defined as the "infrastructure of a country, society, or organization consisting of the basic facilities such as transport, communications, power supplies, and buildings, which enable it to function" (Infrastructure, n.d.). Service infrastructures in Burela include a hospital and transport networks (buses, rail service). As for the labor market, the dynamic service (hotel and catering, retail) and care sectors enable women of immigrant origin to find employment. This has favored the settlement of the migrant population, giving greater stability to family incomes.

In addition to the attraction exerted by structural labor market and service infrastructures, other arrival infrastructures have been created in Burela that have encouraged migrants to settle in the town. Over a decade ago, the local authority introduced an Immigration Plan that is still in place today. It provides services for the migrant population (legal advice, help with administrative procedures, etc.). In addition, other social actors working in public administrations, such as the health center's social worker, who shows a special sensitivity towards the immigrant population, have also created informal arrival infrastructures in order to facilitate the migrant population's access to services. Strong media infrastructures have also been put in place (see Figure 3), with merchandising and activities promoting Burela as an alleged model of social integration in the region.

In Burela there is also an intricate network of associations (cultural, feminist, sea workers,' sports, etc.), including several of migrant origin, such as the Batuko Tabanka association of Cape Verdean origin, and ASPEBU, an association of Peruvian migrants. There are also places of worship (Virgen de Cabo Verde, a mosque and Adventist church), providing social infrastructures that facilitate cultural and religious diversity. They are key spaces of informal infrastructures that provide the migrant community with a sense of safety and trust during the arrival process and a means of accessing resources support (bonding social capital; Wessendorf, 2021). The strong association movement also contributes to the participation of newcomers in civic society. Indeed, previous local governments had a councilor for social integration of Cape Verdean origin.

ELPROGRESO

LUGO A MARIÑA A CHAIRA RIBEIRA SACRA SARRIA DEPORTE GALICIA GENTE FIRMAS PODCAST & TV

La integración de inmigrantes en A Mariña, un modelo

Un caboverdiano, en un barco de Burela (Foto: José Mª Álvez)

EUROPA PRESS 07/ENE./15 - 13:10

PUBLICIDAD

Figure 3. An example of the media coverage of immigration in Burela. Source: "La integración de inmigrantes en A Mariña" (2015).

Cape Verdean compatriots often help newcomers with translations, accompanying them through bureaucratic procedures, lending them money to obtain the diploma, which costs 5,000 euros, that allows them to work as seamen, etc. When the men arrived alone and knew no-one, they would initially sleep on mattresses in their homes. In addition to the the emotional support provided, this type of assistance could be considered a relevant form of informal infrastructure, as the following quote shows:

> If you arrive in a country that is not yours, you don't have a mother or a father, you have a child, and a man who doesn't control his head, if everyone leaves you aside, doesn't give you a bit of affection, you go straight to the bottom. There are people who think that only having money is important, but support is more important for an immigrant. (woman of Cape Verdean origin, Burela)

Cape Verdean migrants generally develop migration strategies centered on sending remittances to the country of origin, as well as parcels containing clothes, medicines, and other items, and also investing in housing. The community offers informal social infrastructures for these types of transnational practices (collective shipments of containers, people who travel and carry packages, etc.; Oso & Pérez-Caramés, in press). This kind of transnational migration strategy is also reinforced by local government initiatives, including the organization of cultural activities (a Cape Verdean and Galician music festival, fundraising for Porto Mosquito, one of the principal localities of origin of the migrant population) and cooperation projects with some localities in Cape Verde.

However, Burela has experienced different periods where municipal and associative initiatives have been more or less favorable for the migrant-origin population's access to resources (Felder et al., 2020), depending on the political will of the party in power. The fieldwork revealed a community perception that, in recent years, spaces and opportunities have been lost for the population of migrant origin, some infrastructures blocking their long-term social mobility. Their labor market access is restricted to activities with fewer skills and worse working conditions, limiting their occupational mobility to other sectors. Indeed, the community of long-standing residents developed an arrival strategy, centered on a utilitarian perspective, due to the need for labor in the fishing sector, as highlighted by the following quote from a key informant:

> It [Burela] became a place where everyone was welcome, we would say, as long as they came to work. (key informant, Burela)

However, this arrival infrastructure, based on a positive attitude towards the migrant population, has a glass ceiling, with a series of structural mechanisms blocking the social mobility of the immigrant population. Indeed, it has been observed that some educational infrastructures are becoming spaces of blockage and exclusion from social mobility for descendants of migrants, especially those of Cape Verdean origin, who have high school drop-out rates. Young Cape Verdeans are unable to find alternatives to work at sea or in the more precarious activities of the service sector (catering, care, etc.) and are therefore emigrating to other parts of Spain or even abroad in search of social mobility, a situation that is questioning the intergenerational sustainability of the "welcoming space" in Burela. In this sense, the community, as shown in the following quote, is critical of the settlement processes that have generated spaces of social segregation and exclusion for the population of migrant origin (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020):

> If we want to go into the catering sector, no problem; if we want to take care of children, no problem. But then, if we want to work in offices or in other jobs, they won't hire us. And they always say: "Cape Verdeans fail at school." There are people who have an education....You go to a supermarket and you don't see a non-Spanish person working. However, you go into 10 [catering] kitchens and the most normal thing is that 8 out of 10 are Cape Verdean. So, there is that racism, that discrimination. (young woman of Cape Verdean origin, Burela)

In short, arrivals in Burela are fundamentally drawn by the labor market infrastructures, rather than by attraction initiatives led by public administrations, the third sector, or civic society. It is a welcoming space that rises and ebbs like the waves, depending on the tides and the attractiveness of the "fish" offered by the sea and other economic sectors (see Figure 4). The parallel development of arrival initiatives to facilitate access to resources (mainly by the local authority, associations, and the migrant community) have been relevant in favoring the arrival and settlement of newcomers, although these initiatives have fluctuated in accordance with the force of the political waves that have marked the town's development and have turned out to be unsustainable in intergenerational social mobility terms, as described in the following quote:

> Today, it's the ships that sustain Burela. This has always been the case. Burela is a fishing village. People come here because of the sea....What made Burela, as such, was...the workers that brought the sea and the boats. If we lose the sea...it's over, Burela dies. (key informant, Burela)

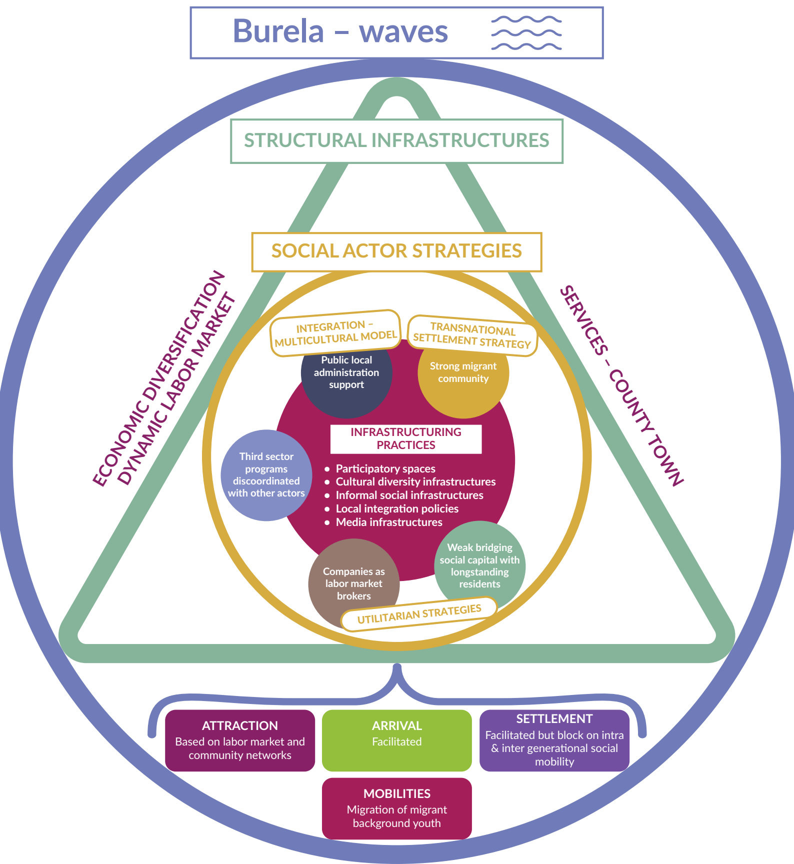


Figure 4. The "waves" welcoming space of attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers.

4.2. Celanova County: A Devitalized Oak, Which Connects With the Family

Less dynamic labor markets find it harder to incorporate newcomers and do not, on their own, guarantee the arrival of migratory flows. In some places, in the absence of economic dynamism, the arrival of the migrant population is related to emotional ties, as in Celanova (Galicia). This locality, home to 5,709 inhabitants (Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022) and head of the county of Celanova, lies in the inland province of Ourense, in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, bordering Portugal. The local economy is fragile, and is based on the primary sector, namely sheep and cattle farming and winegrowing, as well as the service sector, based on the care of dependent elderly people, tourism, trade, and catering. The area is also characterized by a rapidly aging population. In the past, the area's economic activity was based on subsistence, smallholder agriculture and livestock farming, as well as smuggling activities with the neighboring country of Portugal. The region experienced major historical emigration flows (to Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela, Switzerland, Germany, France, Equatorial Guinea, and the United States), which led to a demographic devitalization, generating an economic relationship of dependence on remittances and leading to the presence of "ghost properties," the result of investments by non-returned emigrants. The social and affective links, built up through the family and social relationships established by historical Galician emigration to America (Oso et al., 2008), channel the arrival of newcomers ("people as infrastructures" or social infrastructures; Simone, 2004; Wessendorf, 2021). The foreign-born population is mainly Venezuelan. The majority have national roots (father/mother or grandparents born in Galicia), hold Spanish citizenship, and come to Spain with a settlement strategy due to the difficult political situation in their country of origin, as described below by a

key informant. Other nationalities of both non-EU and EU origin are also present in the territory, although in much smaller proportions, such as Portuguese, Germans, Moroccans, etc.:

> Eighty percent of the people who come…are people who come to build some financial capital, who come from a very bad situation….Many of them are people who…their parents or grandparents, or maybe their grandparents, were from here and have already died and they come here because there is a grandfather's house half falling down in the village and they come and live there and it's their first means of escape. (key informant, Celanova)

The lack of employment options (a high unemployment rate of 18.30%; Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022) makes it difficult for Celanova to retain the new inhabitants. Thus, this locality is often seen as a "springboard" or a kind of transition zone (Saunders, 2011), which is used for "landing" and then "taking off" again in search of greater opportunities, once the refueling process is complete, as the following key informant illustrates:

> Many people who arrive, emigrate to other localities in Galicia or Spain. The municipality is like a first step….They come here to the village and see that it is a village, with a house that has been closed up for 30 years…and there are no resources, there is no work….In order to live in Spain, you have to have money and they end up leaving. This is a shuttle: I think that for 70% of people from Venezuela it is a shuttle, a shuttle to Vigo, to A Coruña, to Barcelona, to Madrid. (key informant, Celanova)

Nevertheless, despite its weak labor market dynamics, Celanova has a good "service infrastructure." This locality is well connected (the provincial capital Ourense is just 30 km away), it has a health center, a junior and senior school, and is also a member of an association of municipalities that share social services (known in Spanish as a *mancomunidad*).

Several initiatives (attraction infrastructures) have been introduced into the area in order to attract newcomers, and combat devitalization (repopulation strategy). One of them is the Regional Program for Returned Migrants, which allows Galician emigrants or descendants living abroad to receive financial support on arrival and in the first months of settlement in the region. Returned or "roots migrants" (Wessendorf, 2007) arrive with citizenship, which entitles them to full rights in Spain: They have family relations in the receiving country (bridging social capital, social infrastructures) and share a common language and culture. As already pointed out, some also have inherited homeownership from their emigrant ancestors. All these infrastructures facilitate arrival and settlement:

> For us, the issue of the family has been like a green corridor, right? At all levels of understanding why we are here, you know? It was like a piece of paper was automatically fitted in, you didn't have to question yourself like with other (migrant) people, right? Instead of saying "But why did they come here, but why here," ours was "Ah…it's natural," as everyone understood it. (a young woman returning to her partner's roots from Switzerland, Celanova)

Welcoming initiatives from local governments have also been introduced into the county of Celanova, although they are less institutionalized than in Burela. Examples include a coworking project (aimed at the creation of business projects), together with rural development initiatives funded by European programs (LEADER), which strengthen entrepreneurship activities. Entrepreneurship support infrastructures have favored the settlement of some newcomers with a high level of education (as is the case of many people from Venezuela with Galician

roots) and whose possibilities of finding qualified employment are extremely limited in the area. There is also support from the third sector and rural development associations. Some migrant associations, such as Cantaclaro, are very active in creating arrival infrastructures for newcomers, providing orientation on arrival, acting as “arrival brokers” (Hans, 2023), carrying out training activities that help newcomers to adapt to the Spanish labor market, organizing cultural activities that strengthen both bonding and bridging social capital, and defending the interests of newcomers before public administrations. Some of the initiatives set up by the immigrant community can be considered informal infrastructures—emotional support is one such example, as illustrated by a representative of the aforementioned association:

> We realized that many people were downhearted on arrival; there were many problems, not health problems like some new arrivals might have, but we began to see it was more of a social and economic problem. People felt lost and disheartened after they arrived: They didn’t know what they were going to do here. The feeling of culture shock…was very severe. (Cantaclaro association, Celanova)

In short, as Figure 5 shows below, Celanova has the appeal of an ancestral and majestic tree, possibly an oak, which connects us with the family, but which, devitalized by age, does not bear fruit. It is a territory that is often used as a springboard (for the first arrival and subsequent relocation to other more dynamic environments), although the weight of the emotional bond with the ancestors’ land and the support of attraction and arrival infrastructures mean that some newcomers choose to settle in the territory, investing in and generating entrepreneurial initiatives for its development. Migrants with emotional ties to the

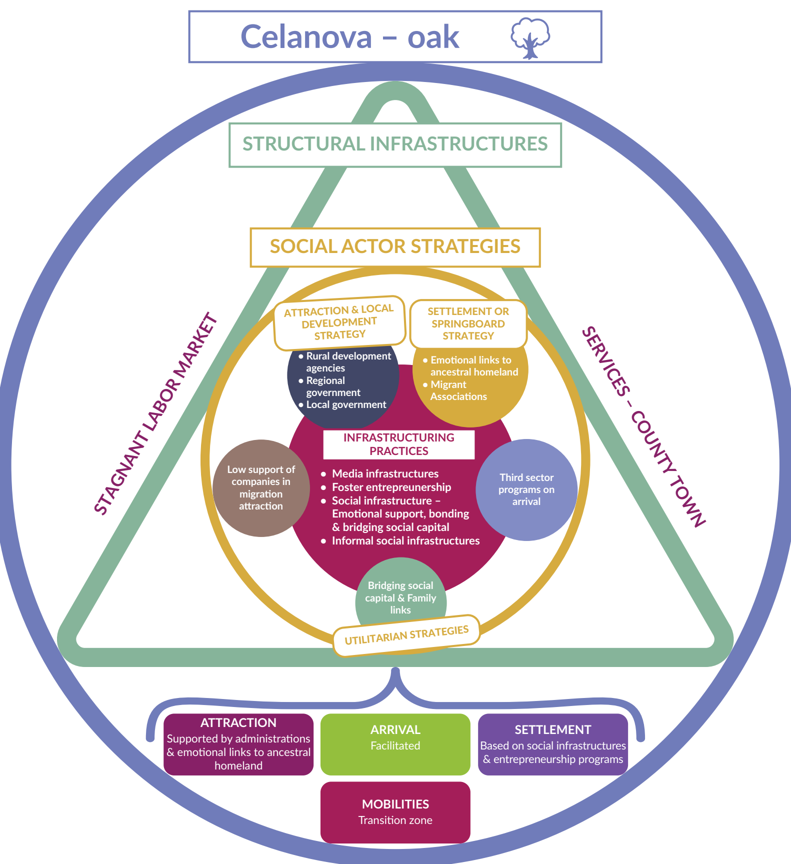


Figure 5. The “oak” welcoming space of attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers.

territory return full of energy and commitment, and with a debt that must be repaid to the land of their ancestors, implementing social innovation projects. Associations, regional and local administrations, development programs, and the third sector are key social actors that contribute to the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers in Celanova.

4.3. Arenillas: A River That Is Maintained Thanks to a Permanent Flow

Arenillas is a small village (province of Soria, Castilla León Autonomous Community) with only 53 inhabitants (Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022). Today's new residents are both of national origin, mostly descendants of former inhabitants, and of international origin (21%; Spanish Statistics Agency, 2022), namely non-EU citizens from Morocco and Colombia and of EU origin from Romania. However, throughout the long history of local reception, there have been more than 180 people of various nationalities. The devitalization of the territory dates back to the 1960s, largely due to the internal emigration of its inhabitants, principally to urban centers in the Basque Country, Madrid, Aragón, etc. The challenges facing the village are essentially a lack of service infrastructures and a non-dynamic labor market. The main economic sectors are agriculture and livestock (sheep), and a number of family building firms. Truffle farming, mycology, catering, and care for elderly dependents are also relevant for the local economy. It should be noted that decision-making is community-based and participatory, and there is an active residents' association, a key element in understanding the success of Arenilla's attraction and arrival infrastructures, as illustrated by a key informant from the association:

> The municipality and the association work together, we act in coordination. We make decisions together in open councils, anyone who lives in the village can participate. It is a community process, not a leadership process. Even the streets, the sidewalks, the curbs…everything has been done voluntarily by the people of the village, everything by the association and the local authority…there are other villages that fight over everything. (long-standing retired resident, Arenillas)

The village is proud to be one of the few localities in the area to resist depopulation. However, like Celanova, it is a place of transit; although, in this case, more than a "springboard," it is a "launching pad," insofar as migrants, mainly of Moroccan and Romanian origin, can spend between five and 10 years in the village. This need not be understood as a failure, as this type of time-limited stay can be linked to migration projects. Indeed, many migrants that arrive in this locality are not seeking to settle forever in the village: They may plan a temporary stay in order to fulfill a savings-and-return project or subsequent emigration to another territory. This type of dynamic has been highlighted in literature on urban settings, and is not considered a failed strategy (Wilson, 2022). The testimonies collected also point out in this direction:

> They are "passing through" for work reasons only, "it's like a bridge"….In the cases I know of, the people who have come from here (of Spanish origin), who have wanted to come to the village, nationals, have come with a project and to live, with a life project; the people who have come from abroad (international migrants) have usually come temporarily, using it as a step to earn money, or a job, and then change their life. (key informant, Arenillas)

Major efforts are being made to attract new residents to Arenillas, with the launch of several attraction initiatives, including the provision of temporary work on arrival and coordination with employers.

The Cepaim foundation’s Nuevos Senderos project is a representative example of past third-sector support for the attraction and arrival of people in the municipality. This project, which is also present in other Spanish provinces, provides accompaniment and advice for the social and labor insertion itineraries of migrant families in a situation of administrative regularity for settlement in rural areas. The work of this and other third-sector entities, in coordinated action with civil society and local governments, is essential for ensuring newcomers’ access to resources.

Arenillas’ socio-cultural association plays a fundamental role in carrying out community work initiatives (rehabilitation of buildings and pavement), recruiting newcomers, and promoting cultural and sporting events (including a music festival—Boina Fest), etc. It is fundamentally the promotion of these initiatives, given the lack of dynamism in the labor market, which is channeling newcomers’ arrival. In comparison with Celanova, Arenillas receives little support from regional and European projects, as small localities do not have the possibility of obtaining funding. Thus, Arenilla’s local authority and residents are mostly “left to their fate” regarding the challenges of depopulation. Any initiatives in this sense are driven mainly by the union of the neighbors, who work actively and jointly to attract population, developing informal attraction and arrival infrastructures, as described below:

> When families came, people would give them rabbits, firewood, eggs, etc. You have to spoil them. If people feel strange in a place, they leave. We have made big efforts, but they have been rewarded [in reference to the fact that the village is still alive]. (a long-term resident, Arenillas)

> They’ll lend you a hand with anything. If, for example, there’s something you need, or it’s run out, or whatever, you go to someone’s house: “Hey, give me this!” “Here you are!” Everyone helps everybody else. It’s like being part of a family here and there is no difference between foreigners or Spaniards. We are all the same. (middle-aged migrant man and woman of Moroccan origin, Arenillas)

Unlike the previous localities, in this case, attracting new residents is clearly intentional. The attraction infrastructure is materialized through mechanisms to promote the municipality on social media and in the press (see Figure 6), the selection of candidate families, and the availability of public social housing, with the restoration and provision of the former teacher’s, doctor’s, or priest’s house for selected families to live in. Arenillas’ website (https://www.arenillas.es) promotes the receptivity of the community and announces, as a milestone achievement, that population numbers are the same as in 1980. The media have described the municipality as “the miracle of Arenillas,” clearly due to the role that the community is playing in attracting newcomers, boosted by marketing strategies. The selection of candidates requires a planning and coordination capacity in the local community, showing the “ability and willingness to receive and integrate newcomers” (Glorius et al., 2021, p. 56).

Participatory action and social and media infrastructures are behind Arenillas’ resistance to depopulation. In this village, they withstand it as best as they can, but always accept that the migrants may come and go, along with their migratory projects, and therefore access to resources is not subject to permanence (Meeus et al., 2020). They are aware of the opportunities and limitations of the village and have naturalized human movement, seeing it as a win-win situation and conceptualizing a kind of arrival infrastructure that celebrates the interaction of agencies of migrant and non-migrant population (Zack & Landau, 2022). It is a welcoming space that we can define as “fluvial” (see Figure 7), in which the river is maintained and thanks to it there is

EL ESPAÑOL
NOTICIAS DE CASTILLA Y LEÓN SORIA

Una edición anterior del Boina Fest Boina Fest • Facebook

SORIA

Música contra la despoblación: un pequeño pueblo de Soria multiplica este sábado por 25 sus habitantes con el Boina Fest

Grandes artistas se subirán al escenario para hacer cantar y bailar al público con sus canciones en una cita que comenzará a las 17:00 horas

5 agosto, 2024 - 09:56

GUARDAR

Figure 6. An example of the news coverage in Arenillas. Source: Santisteban (2024).

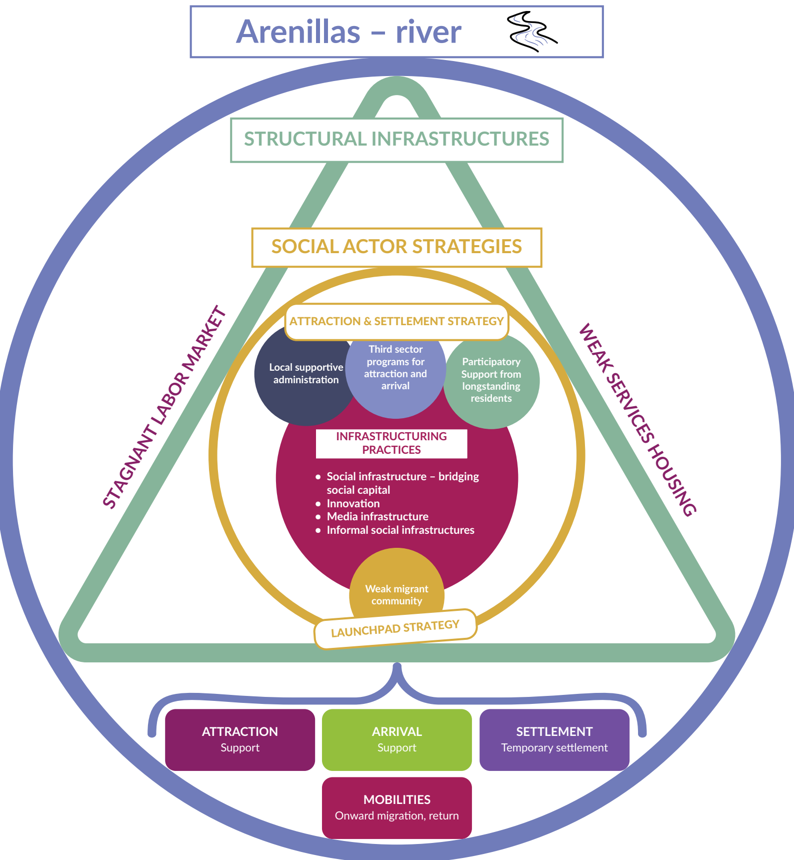


Figure 7. The "river" welcoming space of attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers.

life, although the waters are never the same. The people of Arenillas are proud of their river and, together, they take care of it, preventing it from drying up and ensuring the arrival of new "waters" or newcomers.

4.4. The Daisy as an Integral Development Welcoming Space

The analysis of the fieldwork data sheds light on the factors that favor or block the development of processes of attraction, arrival, and access to resources and settlement in shrinking areas. Firstly, the coordinated participation of the social agents present in the territory is required. It is necessary to develop active public policies at various levels of governance, with local authorities playing a key role. Political actions also require the support of the third sector, which is fundamental for channeling infrastructures, both for attracting and receiving newcomers and for their access to resources and settlement. Thirdly, community action, which may or may not be channeled through the associative movement, participation infrastructures, or civil society (people infrastructures), is another of the three fundamental pillars for guaranteeing a successful welcoming space. Unlike urban areas, where literature highlights the importance of the support of bonding social capital for the arrival of newcomers (Wessendorf, 2021), shrinking areas specifically require a combination of actions to facilitate both bonding and bridging social capital. Emotional support and social bonding infrastructures of an informal nature are clearly relevant for the success of the initiatives, both on the part of the newcomers and the entire community settled in the territory (Wulff et al., 2008). Furthermore, we must consider the essential role played by the migrant population's strategies (which can be of a transnational nature, aiming at settlement, savings, and return or re-emigration) and understand that non-permanent settlement in a town is not synonymous with the failure of an initiative. The hosting intentionality of the long-standing community is also relevant to understanding the success of attraction and arrival infrastructures (Glorius et al., 2021), as has been shown in Arenillas.

However, attraction and arrival infrastructures are limited by the weight of the structural determinants present in the territories. The fieldwork data show that the factors that favor the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers are related to economic diversification, a dynamic labor market, and opportunities for stable employment, together with the presence of housing, services, and good transport networks in the territory (services infrastructures). For this reason, attraction initiatives alone do not guarantee the success of welcoming initiatives. Comprehensive actions are required that seek to work actively not only on attraction, but also on arrival and access to resources infrastructures, and, ultimately, on the sustainable development of the territories. This involves fostering employment and housing, supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, providing access to services and improving transport networks in the towns, encouraging citizen participation, as well as facilitating bonding and bridging capital and developing marketing actions. In this sense, attraction initiatives in rural areas should not focus on instrumentalist objectives (i.e., welcoming immigrant populations as mere labor market supplies, to prevent the closure of services such as schools or to obtain aid and funding, etc.), but rather on comprehensive sustainable development programs, where all social actors are active participants in locality revitalization processes. Indeed, as demonstrated in Burela, if arrival infrastructures are not accompanied by other types of comprehensive actions, situations of exclusion and blocked social mobility may emerge, thereby failing to guarantee the intergenerational sustainability of welcoming spaces. Moreover, the analysis has shown that informal infrastructures are relevant in order to facilitate the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers in shrinking settings, emotional support being crucial. Finally, the analysis of empirical data has highlighted the fact that settlement is not the end of the road: New mobilities occur in the majority

of territories, and fluidity should therefore be considered a natural event, rather than a failing of the welcoming spaces.

Taking the “welcoming spaces” extracted from the analysis as a starting point, we offer a theoretical proposal, the Daisy ideal-type, which states a compendium of infrastructures of attraction, arrival, and access to resources and settlement that would eventually favor the transformation of shrinking areas into spaces of revitalization. We are aware that this type is difficult to implement but it can be an inspiring theoretical example for both academics and policymakers. The Daisy theoretical “welcoming space” is summarized in Figure 8.

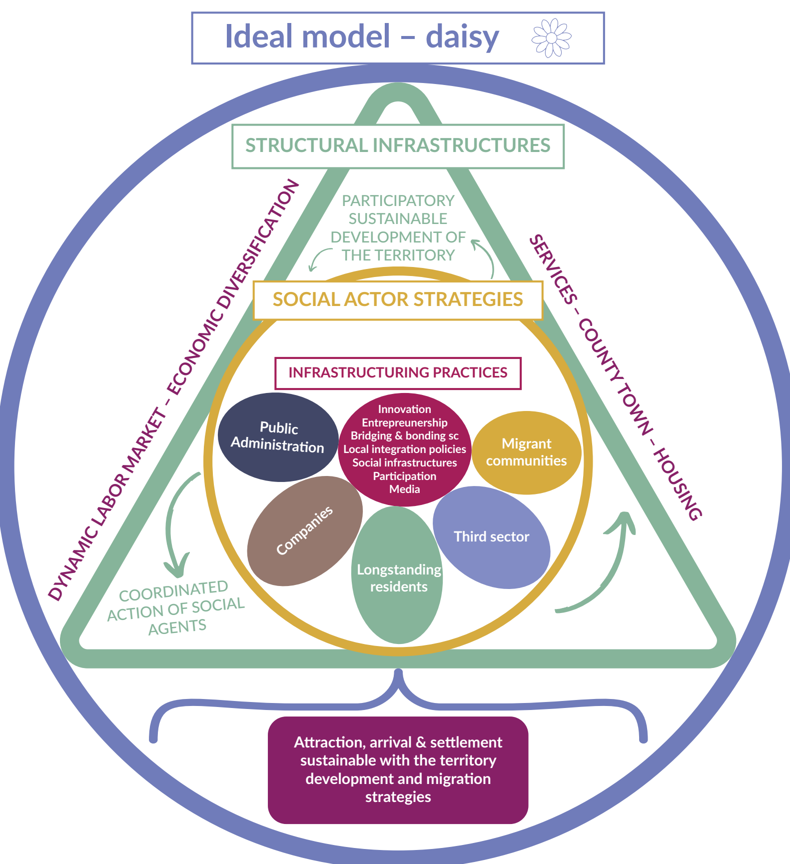
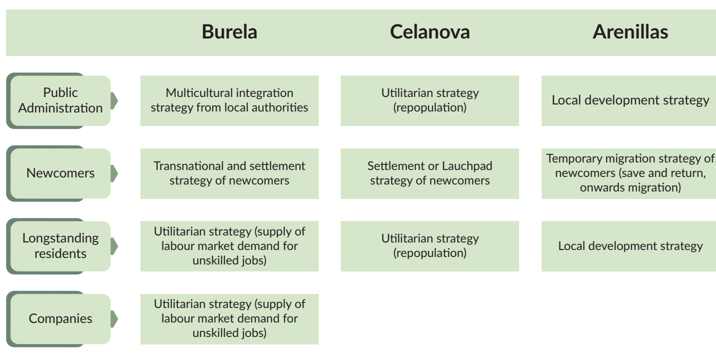


Figure 8. Daisy: The theoretical welcoming space of attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers. Note: sc = social capital.

Figure 9 summarizes the infrastructures that block or facilitate the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers in the three localities studied.



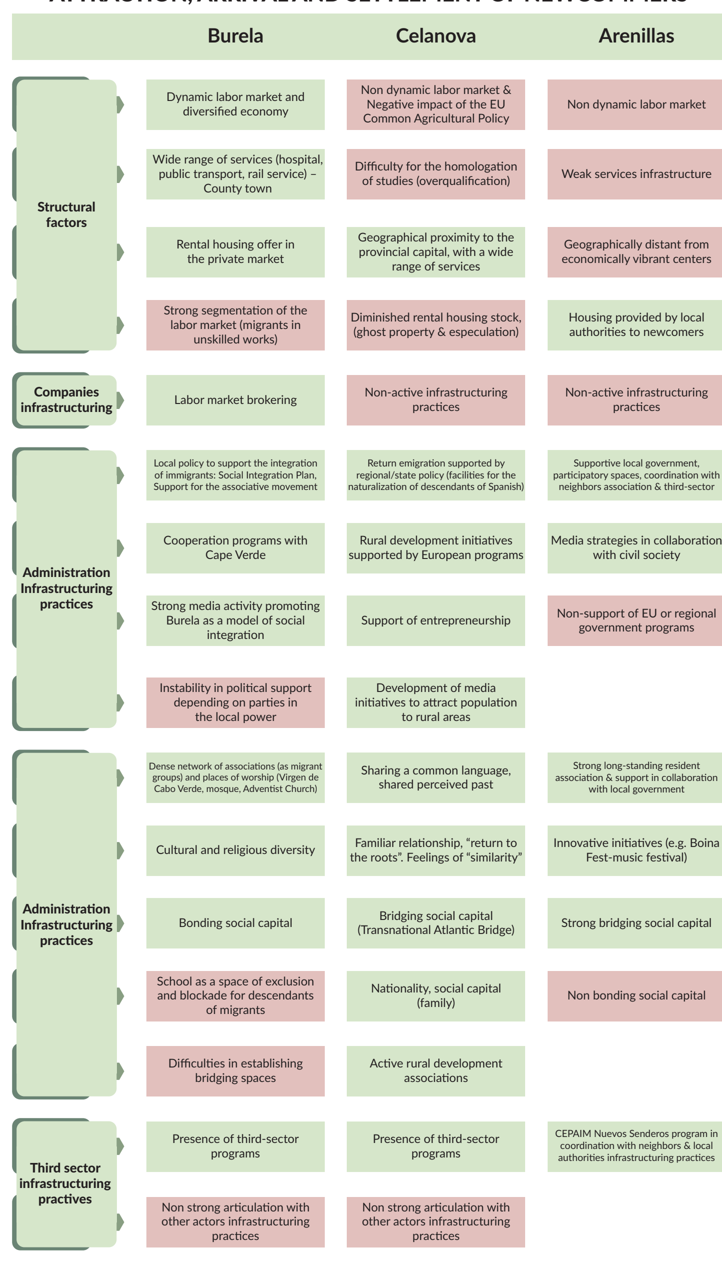


Figure 9. Infrastructures that facilitate or block the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers.

5. Conclusion

The main contribution of this article to the literature is to highlight the specificity of shrinking areas when analyzing migrant and arrival infrastructures. Firstly, it shows how, in rural localities, it is necessary to consider the pre-arrival process, insofar as the arrival of newcomers often depends on attraction initiatives. Secondly, the study proposes a model of analysis to study the role of migrant infrastructures in the three interconnected phases of the process of newcomer attraction, arrival, and settlement in rural areas and considering their relationship with other mobilities. This model is based on the impact of structural infrastructures and the role played by the various social actors in the configuration of practices of attraction and reception of newcomers, both at the strategic level and in terms of their infrastructuring practices. Based on this model of analysis and on the three cases of welcoming spaces presented (the waves, the oak, and the river), the results of the qualitative fieldwork highlight how the arrival, reception, and settlement of newcomers in rural areas require structural infrastructures such as dynamic labor markets, diversified economies, opportunities for stable employment, housing, services (health and education centers, etc.), and good transport networks communications. On the other hand, the research reveals the main infrastructuring practices that favor the processes of attraction, arrival, and settlement and their impact on new mobilities in rural areas, such as the coordinated participation of social agents, active public policies, third-sector support, and community action, together with the positive effects of innovation, emotional ties, as well as media, entrepreneurship, and social infrastructures. Regarding this latter aspect, the study emphasizes the fundamental role played by informal social infrastructures and in particular by bridging social capital (beyond bonding) in shrinking areas.

The results also point to the need to articulate migrant population strategies (of a transnational nature, aiming at settlement, savings, and return or re-emigration) with the hosting intentionality of the long-standing community. Moreover, the study highlights how, in rural areas, attraction infrastructures alone do not guarantee the success of welcoming initiatives—they must be articulated with arrival and access to resources infrastructures and with the aim to ensure the sustainable development of the territories. Finally, the article proposes an ideal type of welcoming space (Daisy) which, although difficult to implement, is of value, not only theoretically, but also for planning the attraction, arrival, and settlement of newcomers in rural areas.

Acknowledgments

We wish to extend our warmest gratitude to the project partners and participants in the fieldwork for their contribution to the results of this research. We would also like to thank the blind peer reviewers for their thought-provoking comments and Sarah Moss for proofreading. The content of this article is part of the PhD research of Leticia Santaballa.

Funding

This article has been elaborated under the Welcoming Spaces project (https://www.welcomingspaces.eu), which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement no. 8709528—"Welcoming Spaces" in Europe: Revitalizing Shrinking Areas by Hosting non-EU Migrants (H2020-SC6-Migration-2019-870952; https://doi.org/10.3030/870952). The theoretical approach has also been elaborated in the context of the INCASI2 project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under the Marie

Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 101130456 (https://incasi.uab.es; https://doi.org/10.3030/101130456). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Alonso-Pardo, P., Oso, L., & Santaballa, L. (2023). Newcomers and 'roots migrants': Chain migrations and the revitalization of rural shrinking areas in Spain. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *24*(Suppl. 5), 979–999. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01036-6

Barberis, E., & Pavolini, E. (2015). Settling outside gateways: The state of the art, and the issues at stake. *Sociologica*, *9*(2). https://doi.org/10.2383/81426

Camarero Rioja, L. A., & Rivera Escribano, M. J. (2024). Reto demográfico, migración y arraigo de los jóvenes rurales. *Revista Española de Sociología*, *33*(1), Article a205. https://doi.org/10.22325/fes/res.2023.205

Cheng, Y. E., Cabanda, E., Somaiah, B. C., & Yeoh, B. (2024). Migration infrastructures and (im) mobile lives: Interruptions, failures, and repairs. *Applied Mobilities*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/23800127.2024.2343540

El-Kayed, N., Bernt, M., Hamann, U., & Pilz, M. (2020). Peripheral estates as arrival spaces? Conceptualising research on arrival functions of new immigrant destinations. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2932

El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkılıc, L. (2023). Infrastructures in the context of arrival—Multidimensional patterns of resource access in an established and a new immigrant neighborhood in Germany. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-355-2023

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2020). Between hospitality and inhospitality: The Janus-faced 'arrival infrastructure.' *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2941

Galera, G., Giannetto, L., Membretti, A., & Noya, A. (2018). *Integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in remote areas with declining populations* (OECD Local Economic and Employment Development Papers, No. 2018/03). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/84043b2a-en

Infrastructure. (n.d.). In *Collins English Dictionary*. https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/infrastructure

Gerten, C., Hanhörster, H., Hans, N., & Liebig, S. (2023). How to identify and typify arrival spaces in European cities—A methodological approach. *Population, Space and Place*, *29*(2), Article e2604. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2604

Glorius, B., Bürer, M., & Schneider, H. (2021). Integration of refugees in rural areas and the role of the receiving society. *Erdkunde*, *75*(1), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2021.01.04

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-381-2023

Kreichauf, R., Rosenberger, O., & Strobel, P. (2020). The transformative power of urban arrival infrastructures: Berlin's Refugio and Dong Xuan Center. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 44–54. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2897

La integración de inmigrantes en A Mariña, un modelo. (2015, January 7). *El Progreso*. https://www.elprogreso.es/articulo/noticias/la-integracion-de-inmigrantes-en-marina-un-modelo/20150107131047161506.html

Lindquist, J., Xiang, B., & Yeoh, B. S. (2012). Opening the black box of migration: Brokers, the organization of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, *85*(1), 7–19. https://doi.org/10.5509/20128517

McAreavey, R., & Argent, N. (2018). New immigration destinations (NID) unravelling the challenges and opportunities for migrants and for host communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *64*, 148–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.09.006

Meeus, B., Beeckmans, L., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2020). Broadening the urban planning repertoire with an 'arrival infrastructures' perspective. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.3116

Meeus, B., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2019). Migration and the infrastructural politics of urban arrival. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures. Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 1–32). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_1

Oso, L., Golías, M., & Villares-Varela, M. (2008). Inmigrantes extranjeros y retornados en Galicia: La construcción del puente transnacional. *Política y Sociedad*, *45*(1), 103–117. http://esomi.es/attachments/article/134/PS%20Oso.pdf

Oso, L., & Pérez-Caramés, A. (in press). ¿Revisitando el nexo migración, género y desarrollo? Corredores de desarrollo y cadenas transnacionales de cuidados entre Cabo Verde y Galicia. In L. Oso & K. Espiñeira (Eds.), *Inmigración y desarrollo rural en España: Perspectivas y nuevos retos hacia territorios inclusivos*. Revista Española de Sociología.

Putnam, R. D. (2007). *E pluribus unum*: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century. The 2006 Johan Skytte prize lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *30*(2), 137–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x

Santisteban, O. (2024, August 5). Música contra la despoblación: Un pequeño pueblo de Soria multiplica este sábado por 25 sus habitantes con el Boina Fest. *El Español*. https://www.elespanol.com/castilla-y-leon/region/soria/20240805/musica-despoblacion-pequeno-pueblo-soria-multiplica-sabado-habitantes-boina-fest/875912437_0.html

Saunders, D. (2011). *Arrival city: How the largest migration in history is reshaping our world*. Windmill Books.

Simone, A. (2004). People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, *16*(3), 407–429.

Spanish Statistics Agency. (2022). *Población del padrón continuo por unidad poblacional*. https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736177010&menu=resultados&secc=1254736195526&idp=1254734710990

Wessendorf, S. (2007). 'Roots migrants': Transnationalism and 'return' among second-generation Italians in Switzerland. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *33*(7), 1083–1102. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830701541614

Wessendorf, S. (2021). *Accessing information and resources via arrival infrastructures: Migrant newcomers in London* (LSE International Inequalities Institute Working Paper 57). The London School of Economics and Political Science. https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108512/1/LSE_III_working_paper_57.pdf

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

Wilson, H. F. (2022). Arrival cities and the mobility of concepts. *Urban Studies*, *59*(16), 3459–3468. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980221135820

Wulff, M., Carter, T., Vineberg, R., & Ward, S. (2008). Attracting new arrivals to smaller cities and rural communities: Findings from Australia, Canada and New Zealand—Introduction by special guest editors. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *9*, 119–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-008-0048-x

Zack, T., & Landau, L. B. (2022). An enclave entrepôt: The informal migration industry and Johannesburg's socio-spatial transformation. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2333–2351. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211012632

About the Authors

Laura Oso is professor of sociology at the University of A Coruña, Spain. She is deputy director at CISPAC—Interuniversity Research Centre for Atlantic Cultural Landscapes (https://cispac.gal/en). PhD in sociology from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, she has published extensively on issues related to gender and migration, transnational families, as well as on the link between migration, social mobility, and development. Her latest published book, co-edited with Anastasia Bermudez, is *New Trends in Intra-European Union Mobilities Beyond Socio-Economic and Political Factors* (Routledge, 2021; https://www.routledge.com/New-Trends-in-Intra-European-Union-Mobilities-Beyond-Socio-Economic-and-Political-Factors/Bermudez-Oso/p/book/9781032038889).

Leticia Santaballa is a PhD researcher in the ESOMI research team (University of A Coruña). She holds a BA in psychology from the University of Santiago de Compostela and has focused her career on local development and migration studies, holding MA degrees in international cooperation and social policies with a focus on migration. She has valuable working experience in reception-inclusion of migrant population, local participation, and management of refugee camps.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8702
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8702

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Multiscalar and In/Formal: Infrastructuring Refugee Arrival in Disempowered Cities

Norma Schemschat

Department of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Correspondence: Norma Schemschat (n.schemschat@uva.nl)

Submitted: 15 May 2024 **Accepted:** 17 September 2024 **Published:** 19 December 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

This article explores how refugee arrival is infrastructured in declining cities in the US, France, and Germany, examining whether urban shrinkage affects local practices of facilitating the arrival and emplacement of newcomers. In doing so, it reveals how refugee arrival is infrastructured across scales and by a bricolage of actors operating on a spectrum of in/formality. While a great deal of arrival infrastructuring takes place locally, the municipalities themselves were found to be notably absent from many processes. As a result of long-term decline and limited municipal budgets, local non-governmental actors, including refugees themselves, have been found to play important roles alongside regional and national foundations in shaping arrival in the cities under investigation. While bottom-up action was found to have considerable impact through various interventions, its influence was constrained as its institutionalization was contingent upon funding from external entities such as foundations. The article introduces the concept of multiscalar arrival infrastructuring to showcase these complex interdependencies and to question the power imbalances and competing interests among actors shaping arrival infrastructures for newcomers in downscaled and disempowered places.

Keywords

arrival infrastructures; left behind places; refugee arrival; urban decline

1. Introduction

Refugees are increasingly arriving and settling in economically and demographically declining areas and places considered "left behind." They arrive through national dispersal programs, resettlement initiatives, or

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

by personal choice (Gardesse & Lelévrier, 2020; Martins & Davino, 2023). Recent scholarship on arrival in declining places has focused on the impact of international migration on local development (Hudson & Sandberg, 2021; Radulescu, 2021; Schemschat, 2024) and on how migration is governed in these settings (Martins & Davino, 2023; Meijer et al., 2023; Urso, 2022). This article contributes to this emerging literature by taking the downscaled positioning of cities as a starting point to examine how the scalar positioning of shrinking cities impacts how arrival infrastructuring operates. Arrival infrastructures are "places, services, institutions, technologies and practices with which migrants are confronted in their process of arrival in a new city" (Felder et al., 2020, p. 55). They are conceptualized here as a complex ensemble of actors and practices that shape arrival and inclusion at multiple scales. Our data provide insights into how the effects of institutional withdrawal and urban decline lead to the increasing significance of both bottom-up action and regional and/or national foundations in arrival infrastructuring: the result is a bricolage of infrastructuring that operates across scales and on a spectrum of in/formality.

The arrival infrastructure lens in urban migration studies has sparked insightful analyses of how arrival is facilitated locally and how it manifests socio-spatially, resulting in context-sensitive studies of refugee arrival. Studying arrival infrastructuring implies investigating the interrelations among actors, their capital, and their arrival contexts. Some of that research has focused on arrival in disadvantaged settings (see Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Phillimore, 2021; Seethaler-Wari, 2018), underlining the impact of urban contexts on arrival. For example, arrival settings marked by long-term decline often struggle with shrinking municipal budgets and social challenges, and they are often home to smaller populations of established migrants thus impacting opportunities for social and economic inclusion. Yet, so far, only a few authors have explicitly discussed the processes of arrival infrastructuring and downscaling of cities together. Notable exceptions are Haase et al.'s (2020) study of Leipzig's Inner East and El-Kayed et al.'s (2020) work on peripheral estates as arrival places. Recently, a growing number of research consortia pay attention to international migration in peripheral places, including areas experiencing decline (see, for example, Welcoming Spaces, 2024).

Urban decline is a structural phenomenon since long-term population loss transforms places both in terms of their socio-economic profiles and their built environment (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). Understanding how downscaling affects arrival infrastructuring merits further analysis because "the relative positioning of a city within hierarchical fields of power may well lay the ground for the life chances and incorporation opportunities of migrants locally and transnationally" (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009, p. 189). Declining places are ambivalent places of arrival for newcomers as they can facilitate or hinder emplacement. This study follows Meeus et al. (2019) in recognizing the potentially ambivalent nature of arrival infrastructures, too, acknowledging that they can facilitate arrival and inclusion while simultaneously hindering it through policies or other restrictive regulations. This double-ambivalence calls for a better understanding of the ways in which arrival infrastructing functions across actor landscapes and scales to which this article aims to contribute. It starts from the assumption that the urban arrival context shapes local processes of infrastructuring arrival and thus seeks to understand the impact of urban decline and a city's scalar positioning on these processes and the actors involved.

Declining cities are not cut off from translocal networks of international migrants, and scholars have emphasized how migrants contribute significantly to urban processes. In her work on cities and diasporic networks, Sassen (2002, p. 217) has highlighted that the global city "operates as a partly denationalized platform for global capital and, at the same time, is emerging as a key site for the most astounding mix of

people from all over the world" and therefore becomes a site where the "incipient unbundling of the exclusive authority over territory and people… long associated with the national state" occurs. Consequently, migrant and refugee collectives have become significant actors who shape urban environments. While Sassen's work focused on global cities, smaller localities, too, have grown in importance within arrival geographies due to, for example, dispersal and resettlement programs (see Bose, 2021; Flamant et al., 2020), leading to a growing diversity in arrival settings.

Both urban decline and international migration can be conceptualized as glocal: global phenomena with local effects (Swyngedouw, 2004). A scalar approach is sensitive to this phenomenon and to how localities impact newcomers' socioeconomic capabilities, thereby providing a framework for analyzing the influence of urban processes on arrival infrastructuring. Urban decline, both material and symbolic, not only affects the social and physical infrastructure in places but also influences historically developed local identities, residents' place attachment, and attitudes toward immigration. Such economically disadvantaged areas, often with small(er) populations of established migrants, may face challenges with diminishing municipal budgets, which negatively impacts efforts to facilitate inclusion and social cohesion. Furthermore, the frequently adverse socio-economic conditions in many declining areas prioritize economic development in municipal action, resulting in the convergence of multiple policy objectives. This can also affect the domain of refugee integration; in some declining localities, cultural diversity is increasingly integrated into urban re-growth strategies (see Pottie-Sherman, 2018). The three cases examined in this study, (a) Akron, Ohio in the US-Rust Belt, (b) Nevers in France's so-called "diagonale des faibles densités" (Depraz, 2017, para. 11), a low-density region covering a territory stretching from the country's Northeast to its Southwest, and (c) Pirmasens in Germany's structurally weak Southwest Palatinate, exemplify the interconnections between diverse policy objectives, including refugee reception and integration on the one hand, and urban revitalization and place marketing on the other. These intersections result in complex actor constellations and occasionally conflicting interests. In addition to the bottom-up practices of non-governmental actors and migrant groups, the analysis demonstrates that urban decline also leads to an increased role of upper scales in arrival infrastructuring, with new actors such as foundations and other organizations entering the field. The findings of this research thus align with previous research on local migration governance in shrinkage-affected areas and the interdependency among scales (Martins & Davino, 2023, p. 868).

The article proceeds with an overview of the theoretical concepts mobilized and a contextualization of the case studies, followed by a presentation of the methods and data the analysis is based on. Subsequently, it presents the findings from the analysis and a discussion thereof. This article proposes the concept of multiscalar infrastructuring, particularly in the context of institutional withdrawal, and offers a conceptual framework to explore it. It contributes to the literature on arrival infrastructures in two ways: firstly, by demonstrating how spaces affected by decline can lead to a bricolage of action; and secondly, by critically elucidating the complexities associated with arrival infrastructuring beyond urban centers of growth.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is committed to critical urban and migration scholarship that employs a power-sensitive lens to examine urban processes and how they are shaped by international migration. It is situated within the growing literature that investigates arrival infrastructuring in downscaled places (e.g., El-Kayed et al., 2020; Haase et al., 2020) and utilizes the theoretical concepts of scalar positionality (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2009),

arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al., 2020), and people as infrastructures (Simone, 2004). These concepts not only facilitate the understanding of international migration and urban rescaling as mutually constitutive but also underline the significant role of newcomers in urban transformations. Thinking with Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) enables us to critically reflect on the ways in which global processes manifest locally; following Meeus et al. (2020) and Simone (2004) in their conceptualization of (arrival) infrastructuring as socio-spatial practice ensures sensitivity to the actors involved and the motivations driving their actions. Simone's (2004) concept of people as infrastructures further directs attention toward questions of in/formality. Bringing their work into conversation builds a firm basis for the study of arrival infrastructuring in downscaled cities.

Çağlar and Glick Schiller (2015, p. 2) propose approaching cities not in terms of their size but in terms of power. Within this power-sensitive understanding of urban positionality, global restructuring processes and territorial stigmatization drive rescaling efforts in decline-affected places. Often seen as "left behind," these places are disempowered in global inter-urban competition for human and financial capital. Çağlar and Glick Schiller thus challenge the notion of isolated urban processes and urge us to analyze places in relation to and in interaction with global power hierarchies. To them, migrants play an active role in the scalar positioning of cities.

In their work on arrival infrastructures, Meeus et al. (2020, p. 11) propose going beyond the focus on neighborhoods "as port of first entry" by focusing on the social and material infrastructures newcomers encounter upon arrival. To them, such a perspective "highlights how such situations are located within, but equally transcend, the territories of neighborhoods and other localities" (Meeus et al., 2020, p. 11). While their work thus explicitly calls for investigations into how infrastructuring can span multiple scales, these processes and how different scales of action interrelate have received less attention and merits further exploration.

Many authors (see Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2015; Fawaz et al., 2018; Simone, 2004) thus shift the analytical focus to the in/formal action of local actors, including refugees. Such a focus sheds light on how "researchers, policymakers, and urban activists can practice ways of seeing and engaging urban spaces that are characterized simultaneously by regularity and provisionality" (Simone, 2004, p. 408). Simone (2004) coined the term "people as infrastructure" and refers to how, in disadvantaged urban settings, diverse groups negotiate public spaces from which cooperation and practices of living in diversity emerge. He writes:

> This process of conjunction, which is capable of generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual) and which attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements, is what I call people as infrastructure....people as infrastructure describes a tentative and often precarious process of remaking the inner city, especially now that the policies and economies that once moored it to the surrounding city have mostly worn away. (Simone, 2004, pp. 410–411)

Although in many ways different from the urban context of Johannesburg based on which Simone formulated his reflections on urban in/formality, his reflections are also fruitful for the study of in/formality in decline-affected cities. In the places studied here, local actors tried to make the most of the limited resources available, engaged in negotiations of public space and belonging, and partook in efforts to build

livelihoods under conditions of institutional withdrawal, thereby reshaping the city. Finally, Simone's writings support an analysis of in/formalities and arrival infrastructuring that is sensitive to local urban histories.

Before presenting the findings, the following sections provide an overview of the methods employed and a contextualization of the three cases studied.

3. Methods and Case Study Selection

The reflections in this article build on a qualitative exploration of refugee arrival in three cities experiencing urban decline: Akron, Ohio in the US, Nevers in France, and Pirmasens in Germany. The case studies are emblematic cases of urban shrinkage in their respective national contexts and have emerged as arrival places for refugees, making them interesting cases for the study of arrival infrastructuring under urban decline. Their differences in welfare regimes and migration governance add complexity to the "comparative gesture" (Robinson, 2011) undertaken in this article, and result in a design that follows a most similar/most different logic (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). All three cities have seen a long-term demographic decline since the 1960s and the 1970s. Selective out-migration, aging, high poverty and unemployment rates, and low tax bases are shrinkage-reinforcing factors. All countries have seen increasingly hostile immigration legislation at the national level. While challenging, this case study constellation provided rich insights into arrival infrastructuring in "left behind" places.

Collected between 2019 and 2022, mainly qualitative data were subject to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data. Additionally, data were collected via urban (virtual) walks, observations, documents, media analysis, and archival work. Interview participants were identified through purposive sampling via investigations into local administrations and actors involved in refugee arrival, upon which snowball sampling was applied to extend the pool of participants. In total, 68 semi-structured interviews were conducted across the three locales, which were enriched by informal conversations held via WhatsApp and email as well as during two walking interviews and two group discussions. The interviewee pool covers relevant actors, including refugees, long-term residents, members of local governments, policymakers in urban planning, and volunteers and representatives of organizations active in refugee arrival and integration. The interview structures varied from actor group to actor group but largely centered on the cities' trajectories of growth and decline, how refugee arrival was experienced and managed, and how newcomers perceived their declining places of arrival. The research project was conducted in large parts during the Covid-19 pandemic, rendering on-site fieldwork challenging and sometimes impossible. To address lockdown-induced obstacles, digital ethnographic approaches were employed, including virtual walks via extensive Google Street View databases and remote interviewing. The chosen methodological approach made it possible to overcome the challenges of conducting fieldwork during the pandemic and allowed for rich data that supported an in-depth mapping of actors involved in arrival infrastructuring across scales. The remainder of this article presents the results.

4. Results

The subsequent sections focus on arrival infrastructuring across scales via a broad mapping of local actor constellations based on fields of action and the scales at which actors operate. The discussion then seeks

to find answers to the question of how the identified multiscalar arrival infrastructuring practices and urban decline are related.

4.1. Local Contexts: Urban Growth and Decline, Refugee Arrival, and Emerging Fields of Action

The analysis focused on three fields of action relevant to arrival: social inclusion, economic inclusion, and arrival. The field of social inclusion comprises a variety of practices and localities. Practices include the facilitation of intercultural exchange, access to social networks, language acquisition, and legal support, and places ranged from shops to cultural centers. Economic inclusion spans action in the realms of economic integration and autonomy of refugees and economic revitalization. Finally, the field of arrival encompasses the actors involved in facilitating arrival, notably concerning housing. The power-sensitive analysis revealed sometimes conflicting interests of the actors across these fields of action.

For all three cases, the analysis revealed complex actor constellations in infrastructuring arrival. Volunteering and non-governmental action were important in all localities and often emerged in part as a response to the places' downscaled positioning. The socio-economic effects of decline, including limited municipal budgets, paved ways for non-municipal actors—be they non-governmental organizations, residents, refugee community organizations (RCOs), or regional and national foundations—to shape arrival infrastructures either by integrating newly arrived populations into pre-existing programs or by responding to the decline-induced challenges, such as daily transport or economic integration. The conceptual mapping of these actors in Figures 1, 2, and 3 highlights the complexities of the arrival infrastructuring across scales. The municipal governments of the places studied here were not found to play driving roles in infrastructuring arrival. Akron remains an exception as the only city that has developed a welcoming plan, which, while partly symbolic, institutionalizes the city as welcoming. The plan provides newcomers and those involved in arrival infrastructuring with a public discourse to which they can tie their action, and creates the possibility of holding municipal leaders accountable.

Former "rubber capital of the world," Akron's rapid deindustrialization led to a population loss of over 35% (US Census Bureau, n.d.). However, since the early 2000s, the city has become an important location for refugee resettlement in Ohio, making the local resettlement agency a driving actor in this field of action. The agency works with voluntary agencies at regional scales, which, in turn, cooperate with the UNHCR. Arrival in Akron is thus organized in a truly multiscalar way with actors at national and supranational scales determining the number of refugee arrivals and a resettlement agency supporting newcomers both financially and in terms of housing at neighborhood scale. The arrival of resettled refugees and newcomers from other parts of the US, driven by a growing community of newcomers, local organizations, and jobs in the service and manufacturing sectors, has mitigated the city's demographic decline (New American Economy, 2017). In Akron's North Hill neighborhood, a district significantly influenced by refugee resettlement, numerous shops, associations, and cultural centers have revitalized previously vacant buildings, and the city formalized its welcoming stance with an aforementioned Welcoming Plan in 2017. The plan centers on the economic contribution of newcomers and was developed with other local organizations, putting forward how newcomers contribute to the rescaling of Akron. Akron's arrival infrastructures are concentrated in North Hill. As a historic immigrant neighborhood, North Hill has branded itself as an international district supported by various RCOs promoting cross-cultural encounters, integration, and local cohesion. The substantial number of refugee-led organizations is partly due to

resettlement agencies' support ceasing after approximately 90 days, necessitating refugees to become self-sufficient. As a result, refugee-run businesses and RCOs actively shape social and economic inclusion at the neighborhood level. Additionally, numerous foundations support local initiatives for housing and socio-economic inclusion which are offered by, amongst others, community development corporations (CDCs). In light of the city's post-industrialization and experiences with population loss, and in line with the Welcoming Plan, many local actors promote the role of refugees in local revitalization. Figure 1 provides an overview of arrival infrastructures across scales in Akron.

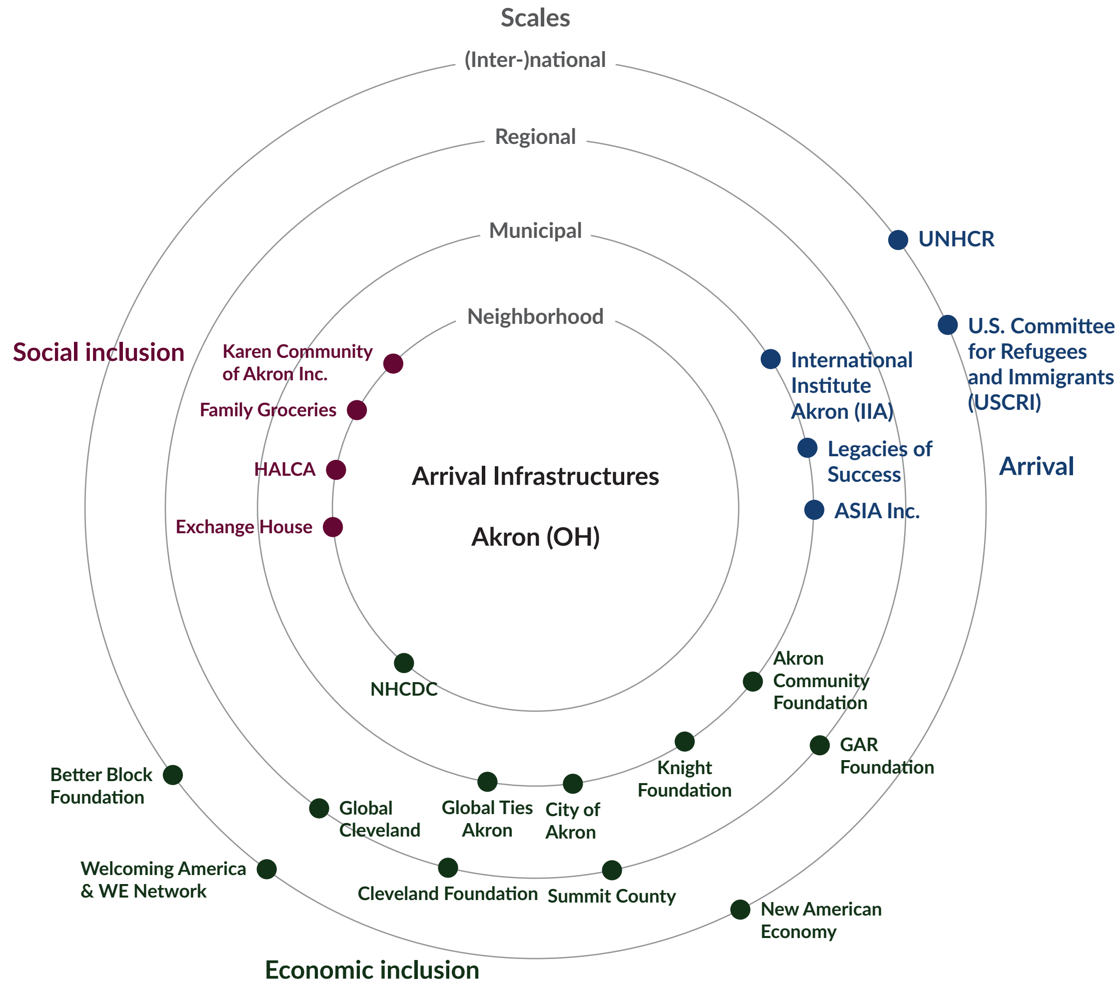


Figure 1. Arrival infrastructures across scales (Akron, Ohio).

In Pirmasens, arrival infrastructures are shaped by nationally organized arrival alongside the local provision of services by associations. Having undergone large-scale deindustrialization with a loss of 30% of its population by 2021, Pirmasens saw a slight demographic increase in 2022 (Statista, 2023). A mid-sized city in Germany's Southwest Palatinate, shrinkage effects such as high residential vacancy rates and low costs of living have allowed the city to provide arriving refugees with decentralized housing, i.e., in vacant apartments scattered throughout the city. However, according to interviews, the city was quickly unable to adequately manage refugee arrivals post-2016. While the case of Akron exemplifies a local discourse focused on the benefits of refugee resettlement for declining cities, narratives in Pirmasens emphasize the strained social services in a municipality significantly affected by prolonged economic and demographic

decline. Nevertheless, Pirmasens' residents and local organizations contribute substantially to infrastructuring processes through volunteer work and charitable organizations, particularly in the domain of social inclusion. Support for newcomers relies heavily on these practices in a city where long-term decline results in many long-term residents needing support, too. Wide-spread residential vacancies and low costs of living led to the increased arrival of recognized refugees during Europe's "long summer of migration" (Hess et al., 2016). At the time of data collection, the municipal leadership was rather pessimistic regarding the positive impact of newcomers on the city: "The influx of refugees is good for Pirmasens if the newcomers contribute something and do not burden the authorities" (Pirmasens, interview, June 2021). Tied to this, there is great effort towards the economic inclusion of refugees which is largely facilitated by municipal actors, including employment agencies and a coordinator for the education of newcomers (*Bildungskoordinator für Neuzugewanderte*), who work in close cooperation with other local actors. Figure 2 below visualizes the infrastructuring of arrival in Pirmasens.

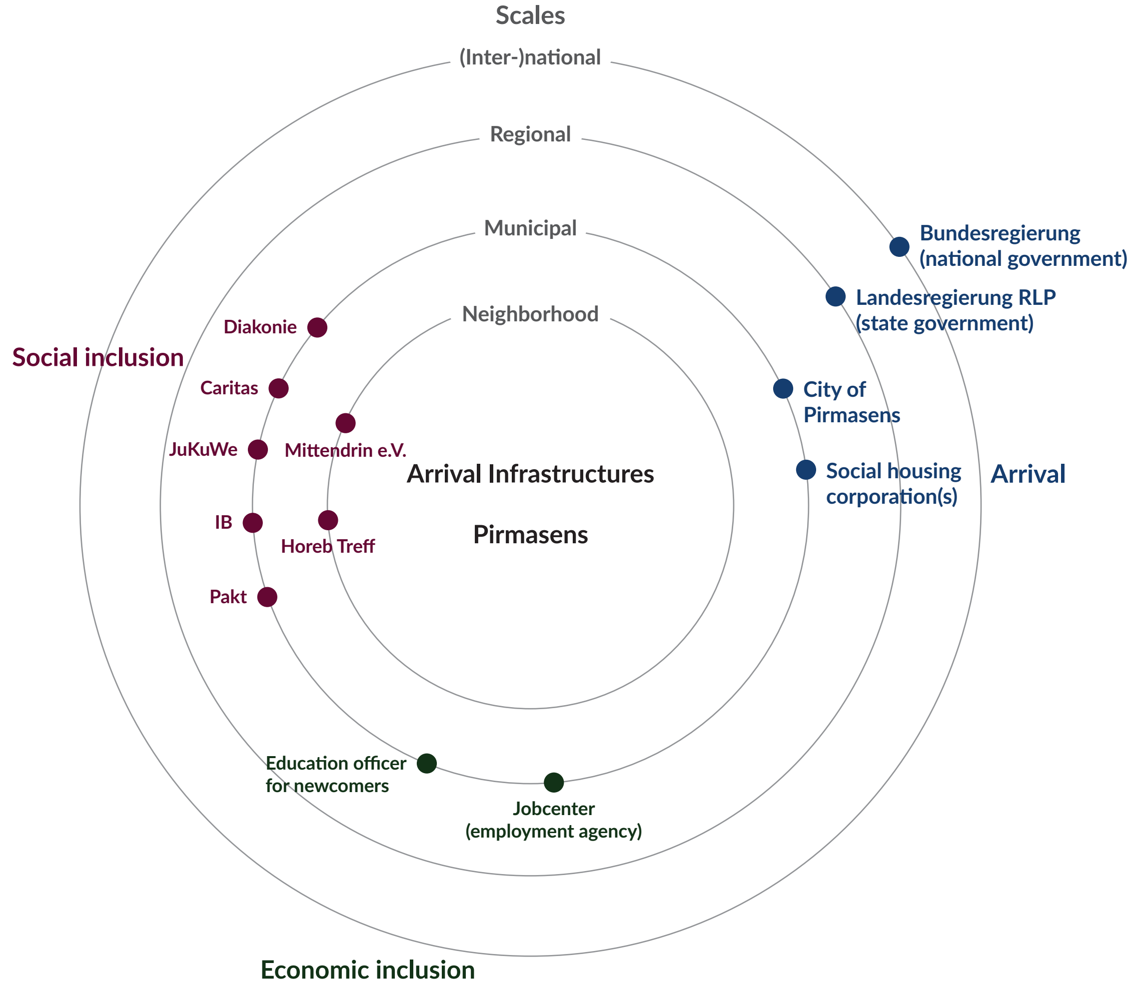


Figure 2. Arrival infrastructures across scales (Pirmasens).

Finally, Nevers is a mid-sized city in central France and the administrative seat of the Nièvre department. It has also lost almost 30% of its population since 1975; of the 45,480 inhabitants at that time, 32,284 were left in 2020 (INSEE, 2023). Refugees in Nevers arrive predominantly through the French national dispersal scheme that redirects refugee arrivals from the so-called "hot spots" to less densely populated areas in

France. The promise of dispersal, away from metropolitan areas or border towns, provides individuals with housing but often implies the deprivation of social networks concentrated in larger cities. As such, arrival remains strongly shaped by national organizations and their local partners. With regards to the latter, a local foundation is mandated by the French state to provide housing, language courses, and support for economic integration of individuals under international protection. However, the country was found to be chronically unable (or unwilling) to house asylum seekers so that residents are often involved in infrastructuring arrival informally by providing accommodation, legal support, transport across the region or clothing. While volunteers underlined in interviews both humanitarian and political motives, some also expressed that it was important for newcomers to stay in a city that has seen many of its young residents leave. Besides a government-driven part of arrival infrastructuring, there is thus a detached arm of local arrival infrastructuring that is predominantly driven by a well-organized and regionally connected network of volunteers, as can be seen in Figure 3.

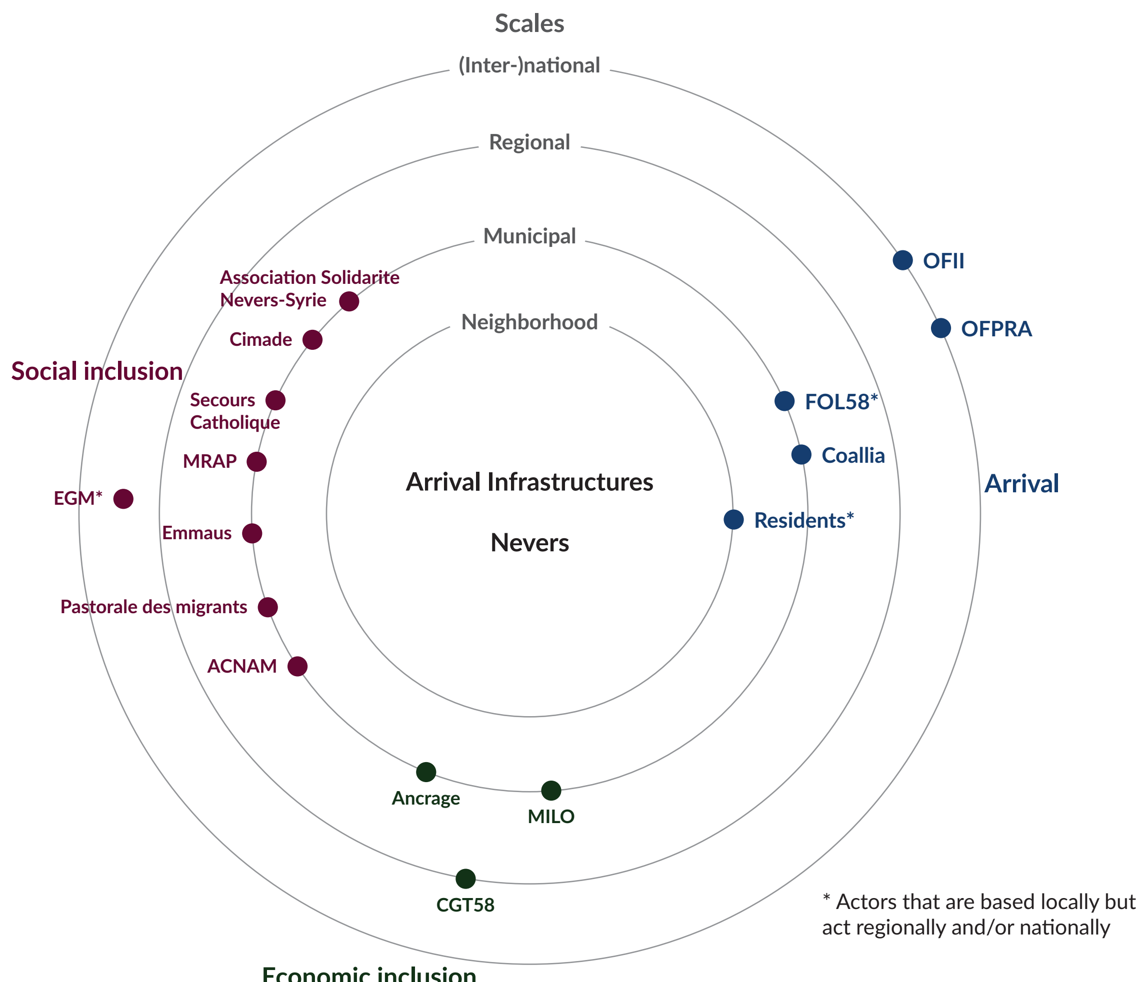


Figure 3. Arrival infrastructures across scales (Nevers).

The mapping of actors in the three localities and the reading of their actions through a scalar lens exposed both cooperation and disconnection. In all three cases, national scales continue to play important roles in arrival, as immigration continues to be governed nationally. However, social and economic inclusion was found to be infrastructured largely through non-governmental actors across scales, with a frequent concentration of

action at the local scale. Interestingly, urban decline in cities appears to have driven a process in which both regional and local scales grew in importance. The following sections will discuss this in more detail, starting with the role of in/formal practices at local and neighborhood levels.

4.2. Infrastructuring Arrival In/Formally and From the Bottom-Up

As tax revenues shrink with the cities' populations, municipalities' ability to invest in social infrastructure can be limited, rendering the engagement of residents and non-governmental organizations more important. Ročak (2020) refers to civic action as part of the software of shrinking places and emphasizes its potential role in dealing with decline. The analysis shows that they are also important for facilitating refugee arrival; in all three cases, arrival is to varying degrees infrastructured at neighborhood levels, largely by local organizations and NGOs, but also by individuals, often refugees themselves or established migrants who act as arrival brokers (Hans, 2023; Phillimore et al., 2018; Wessendorf, 2018). Such brokers provide newcomers with orientation and are crucial in places with fewer opportunity structures. Through shared experiences and language, brokers and other refugees "provide an important source of practical support and emotional backing" (Adam et al., 2019, p. 43), which are crucial in arrival infrastructuring from the bottom-up. When shrinking cities lack such established migrant populations, arriving refugees are more likely to engage in onward mobility when opportunities arise and rely more strongly on local support from other social and faith-based organizations. This could be seen in Pirmasens and Nevers, where several respondents signalized that the two cities were good places to be for the time being, lending importance to the notion of temporality in arrival.

Temporality also appears to have played a role in determining whether newcomers engaged in arrival infrastructuring: where refugee resettlement had been in progress for an extended period, there was a higher likelihood that brokers would play active roles in arrival infrastructuring. Akron, a place that looks back at 20 years of refugee resettlement, clearly demonstrates that. In North Hill, arrival brokers served as first points of contact but also functioned as vocal representatives for their communities in city-scale discussions. A notable example is Pema, a Bhutanese refugee who has resided in Akron for many years. He maintains transnational connections and is frequently cited as a point of contact for individuals who have not yet been resettled. During one of our discussions, our respondent Pema indicated that as a community leader, he regularly participated in municipal programs aimed at enhancing the wider public's understanding of local refugee communities. He is convinced of such municipal strategies and their capacity to reach larger audiences:

> They're getting it out to the public and to people who have complaints. And you know, it helps to balance out any prejudices...most of the vacant lots are gone. The city is getting a lot more money because there are many people working in the city, they're taxpayers, and homebuyers contributing property taxes. And grocery stores, I mean, a small grocery store like mine: I'm contributing thousands of dollars every year. And there are several businesses like mine in this place. (Pema, interview, February 2021)

Pema's account is exemplary for a distinct narrative that ties refugee presence in North Hill to the neighborhood's revitalization. In relation to the city's history of urban decline, Pema spoke on multiple occasions during our interviews about the challenges that newly arrived refugees encounter, particularly regarding employment opportunities. As an intermediary between residents, local organizations, and the

municipality, Pema not only serves as a frequently consulted community leader by local organizations but also operates as a local business proprietor; Unable to obtain familiar Bhutanese goods, he established his own store when the commute from Akron to Cleveland became excessively burdensome: “Since the refugee population [was] growing and the needs [were] growing, the demands [were] growing, and so we thought: ‘How about we collect all the food and get it all in one place? How about we open a store?’ ” (Pema, interview, February 2021). Beyond providing access to goods, his grocery store emerged as a significant space for the local Southeast Asian refugee community, as it transitioned into a space of encounter and an information hub during the pandemic. This transition also underscores the social role of migrant entrepreneurship in such settings. To that end, several migrant-led organizations providing services ranging from social care and translations to intercultural exchange accompany Pema’s shop as part of the local arrival infrastructure. Particularly in contexts with disadvantageous opportunity structures for immigrants, migrant organizations, RCOs, and other NGOs are essential due to their proximity to the community and quasi-institutional character (de Wit & Koopmans, 2005). Interview participants in Akron emphasized the significance of these organizations, as national support via local resettlement agencies ceases after 90 days. Consequently, several RCOs and other local organizations frequently operate with considerable autonomy from the city administration, with numerous organizations established by members of the South Asian refugee community, as our respondent Pema illustrates. Examples include ASIA Inc., the Ka’ren Community of Akron, and HALCA. In certain instances, culturally sensitive services are provided to all refugees, irrespective of their national background. ASIA Inc. has been cited by multiple interview participants as playing a driving role in arrival infrastructuring and was a partner in the development of the municipal Welcoming Plan. This positions the organization strategically between the city and neighborhood scales.

In Nevers, infrastructuring arrival at the neighborhood and city scales is carried out largely by a local foundation tasked with the implementation of national policies: FOL58. It coordinates housing locally and regionally and provides language courses and other training to facilitate social and economic inclusion. It partners with various local and regional actors, including social housing corporations, NGOs, and organizations from the business sector. As their services reach only individuals who are seeking asylum or who are recognized as refugees, other local NGOs and residents provide support for individuals who fall outside these categories. One of them is the AFPLI, which offers alphabetization and language courses to newcomers, regardless of their recognition status. As an open space for learning and meeting others, the organization supports refugees in their attempts to overcome structural barriers. It is also a member of the regional chapter of the EGM, a countrywide network of volunteers and NGOs, which I will return to in the next section. Local action in Nevers is thus a good example of local arrival infrastructuring and how it exists on a spectrum of in/formality with state-mandated NGOs, smaller organizations, and residents participating in infrastructuring refugee arrival (sometimes cooperatively).

In Pirmasens, a migrant council forms an institutional link between the local population of migrants on the one hand, and the municipality on the other. Further, so-called *Quartiersbüros* (neighborhood centers) build important spaces for residents to profit from programming and services, including language courses or fostering encounters. One of the centers’ managers emphasized the co-productive nature of these centers saying:

> [We] attached great importance to the fact that the citizens are aware that [the office] is something that is built up together with them and not something that is imposed on them from above, as is often the

> case with social projects, where a person comes and says "I know what is good for you". (neighborhood center, interview, December 2020)

Both the council and *Quartiersbüros* function as formal intermediaries between newcomers and the city. More significantly, however, the local network Pakt plays a crucial role in infrastructuring arrival through the coordination of various volunteering initiatives. As articulated by a member of the network:

> Pirmasens would be lost without voluntary work. That's also why the Pakt exists.…Before, volunteering has always remained an area aside: in Pakt, it can all come together—for Pirmasens. And I think this is also highly appreciated by the city leadership. (Pakt, interview, May 2021)

The case of Pakt is noteworthy insofar as the pronounced effects of long-term decline have led to the proliferation of self-help practices and volunteering over time, which was subsequently coordinated and institutionalized within the network. Such coordination facilitates an integrated approach to volunteering, which benefits a large range of vulnerable residents. While not targeted exclusively at refugee populations, Pakt has become a crucial element in the local arrival infrastructures in Pirmasens, particularly post-2015 when refugee arrivals increased. As confirmed by our quoted respondent, support from local political leadership is crucial and underlines the necessity for municipal governments support to sustain such activities. Through its open structure, the accessibility of the coordinating office (which relocated from the city hall to one of the city's more severely decline-affected neighborhoods), and multiple programs, Pakt significantly shapes local arrival infrastructuring via the inclusion of refugee populations into its existing programs and services: be it the distribution of clothing or afternoon activities for children, most activities were made accessible to refugees as well. The network further employed newcomers as mediators with specific language skills. However, as the network is funded through donations and faces chronically tight budgets, translation and mediation support provided by newcomers remain underpaid or unpaid, contributing to precarity among refugees. As such, Pakt's practices also exemplify the ambivalences inherent in arrival infrastructuring (Felder et al., 2020).

The local actor constellations in all three cases exemplify Simone's (2004) concept of people as infrastructure: Urban decline has driven the increased prevalence of non-governmental local action ranging from informal practices to almost institutionalized action that is, in certain instances, significantly influenced by bottom-up practices. In some cases, local action has garnered attention from actors at higher scales.

The analysis through the lens of scale provides insights into how actors at regional and national scales get increasingly involved in local action, which will be further examined in the subsequent section.

4.3. Arrival Infrastructuring Across Scales: Non-Governmental Actors Infrastructuring Arrival From Afar

Regional actors, notably foundations and organizations promoting economic development, were found to be influential actors in infrastructuring refugee arrival under conditions of decline. While the role of NGOs in facilitating arrival has been discussed in the literature (Sidney, 2019; Steigemann, 2019), the role of regional and national foundations in arrival infrastructuring has been subject to less scrutiny. The findings of this article contribute to the collective efforts to fill this gap.

Starting with Nevers, local volunteers operate beyond the local scale, owing to their organization within the aforementioned EGM network. Its members provide first-hand legal assistance, informally coordinate housing opportunities, and provide mobility support across the region. Thus, they stem a large bulk of arrival infrastructuring, and they do so from the intimate scale of the home to the regional scale. Organizing under the EGM umbrella allows small organizations in Nevers to tie their action to nationwide operations, including protests or festivals. Regional employment associations were also found to be involved in arrival infrastructuring through cooperation with FOL58. This cooperation consisted, for example, of concerted efforts to match newcomers with vacancies in so-called "*métiers en tension*," job sectors with labor shortages: "We know the industries where there is a shortage of manpower, you see? And we know that the companies in Nièvre mainly need flat welding, for example" (local foundation, interview, May 2021).

In Pirmasens, Pakt collaborates closely with municipal entities, including education coordinators for newcomers (*Bildungsbeauftragte für Neuzugewanderte*), whose responsibility is to enhance municipal processes in the economic integration of refugees. According to the coordinator in Pirmasens, "part of this federal coordination was to bring the actors together and to see where there might still be deficits, where we can make a difference" (coordinator for education, interview, October 2020). Municipal entities thus continue to influence bottom-up action in Pirmasens. However, the network was also supported and technically assisted by a prominent German think tank whose comprehensive evaluation of the network resulted in a widely disseminated publication that provided the network with visibility at the regional and national levels thus elevating local action across scales. The evaluation additionally facilitated the transfer of experiences to other municipalities.

The role of non-governmental actors at regional and national scales emerged most prominently in Akron, as illustrated in Figure 4. Foundations have historically increased in significance in the US Rust Belt: as a former industrial region, there have been periods of substantial capital accumulation, from which influential regional foundations emerged. The increasing importance of such non-governmental actors can be further explained by the historically conflictual relationship between States and cities in the Rust Belt, which is harshly felt in Rust Belt cities that have downscaled and face increasingly tight budgets. As mayors of many Rust Belt Cities lost power, local CDCs emerged as political actors, funded through foundations and other private capital,

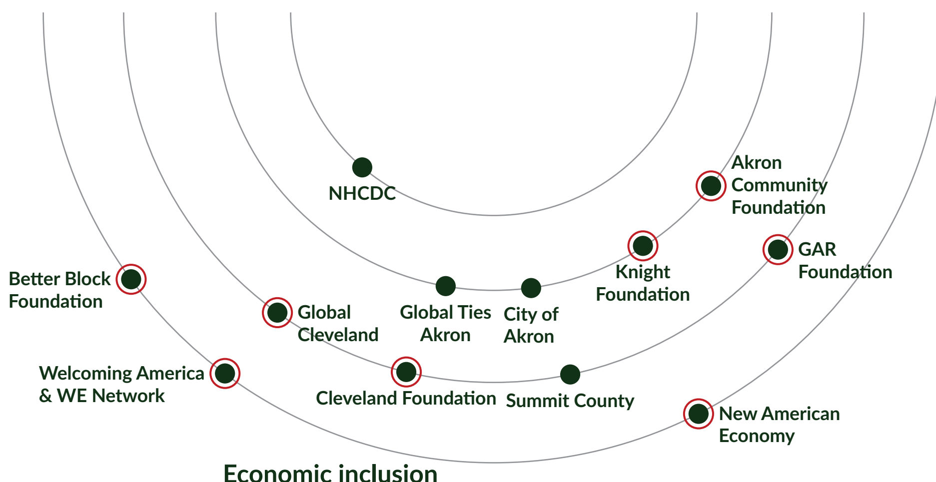


Figure 4. Regional and national foundations involved in infrastructuring emplacement (Akron, Ohio).

with a significant influence on local arrival infrastructuring. Foundations continue to impact local action in the present day. In Akron, a total of five foundations and three think tanks (circled in Figure 4) were found to influence arrival infrastructuring through various means and occasionally from distant locations, notably in the domains of economic inclusion. A significant portion of these foundations' activities involve raising awareness of the benefits of newcomers and cultural diversity for cities experiencing population decline and promoting research that underlines the economic contributions of newcomers.

Notable examples are the Knight Foundation, GAR Foundation, and Akron Community Foundation with their funding and technical support for various local actors, including the NHCDC and its Exchange House, the CDC Legacies of Success, and ASIA Inc. The story of how the Exchange House emerged is noteworthy when discussing the cross-scalar operations at play in arrival infrastructuring under decline: the building's revitalization goes back to a temporary use project in 2015 organized by a Dallas-based NGO that conducts place-making projects in cities across the US. In interviews, members of the NHCDC explained that the building was initially acquired by said foundation for their activities but then transferred to NHCDC. Today, the Exchange House is an integral part of infrastructuring arrival in North Hill. Similarly, Cleveland-based foundation funds the CDC Legacies of Success. Another Cleveland-based actor is Global Cleveland, which has shown itself interested in other Rust-Belt cities' stories of refugee arrival and refugee-led revitalization. The organization focuses on networking and community engagement while promoting stories that exemplify the advantages of immigration for declining US cities. In Akron, they support amongst others ASIA Inc. The involvement of Global Cleveland and the Cleveland Foundation underlines the political nature of arrival infrastructuring in a region where cities have an interest in retaining newcomers but often stand in political opposition to conservative State governments. These foundations' funding thus also allows local actors to continue their work, even if regional or national politics pursue opposing agendas or when municipal budgets are too tight.

In the following section, we will discuss these socio-political dimensions of infrastructuring arrival in declining cities in more detail.

4.4. Socio-Political Dimensions of Multiscalar Infrastructuring

As indicated in the previous sections, arrival infrastructuring in the studied locations manifested differently in space, contingent upon historical and social contexts as well as local politics. For instance, the complexity of the concerted infrastructuring of arrival in Akron can be attributed in part to historically entrenched racial inequalities. These can result in conflicting positions associated with the differentiated needs and experiences of newcomers in relation to long-term residents that belong to marginalized groups. This is in line with previous research by Franklin (2019) which found that Black residents are disproportionately affected by the effects of urban decline in US shrinking cities. In such settings, questions regarding resource allocation have emerged as crucial conflict lines as numerous residential groups feel in need of support or experience disadvantage. Consequently, migrant organizations, as institutionalized networks, play a crucial role and facilitate political integration in (super)diverse contexts (Eggert & Pilati, 2014, p. 872).

Conflicts also emerged as a theme from interviews in Pirmasens, where long-term residents were reported to express disapproval of support directed towards refugee populations. The historical trajectory of its growth and decline has shaped the local population. During the city's prosperous shoe and leather industry

period, manufacturers actively recruited in schools and factory work provided a stable income for many household members. Workers occasionally earned sufficient income to acquire second homes, which they would subsequently rent to families affiliated with the local US military base. Consequently, the local working class experienced financial stability despite their low educational attainment. The contemporary class structure in Pirmasens is significantly influenced by this history of industrial growth and deindustrialization-driven decline, with a substantial base of low-income households dependent on social welfare today. As a result, awareness of this local identity has emerged as a key factor in establishing trust and has become an integral element in arrival infrastructuring by actors such as the Pakt or *Quartiersbüros*. While local action is often driven by the logic of charity—which is often individualized and informal—the close cooperation between the Pakt and municipal actors led to collectivization and formalization of bottom-up action in Pirmasens that acknowledges the widespread need for support among the population.

This socio-demographic and socio-economic configuration differs significantly from that of Nevers, where the informal nature of arrival infrastructuring practices can be best understood as part of a broader political contestation against national legislation on immigration, which was frequently described by interview participants as *politique de non-accueil* (unwelcoming politics). In numerous instances during the interviews, Nevers' history as a socialist stronghold was emphasized, including representations of the region as *terre d'accueil* (welcoming territory). As put by Philippe, a volunteer and member of the local chapter of the EMG network:

> Here, I think there is a tradition, right? I think that we should put it in perspective with how the department [important intermediate governance level in France] is structured politically and with its political history, which has a socialist side, with an Avenue de Bérégovoy [referring to Pierre Bérégovoy, French socialist, mayor of Nevers from 1983–1993 and prime minister from 1992–1993]. Rather welcoming. Now over the last few years, I don't have enough hindsight, but we can observe in the apartment blocks racist reflections in the stairwells.... But, the last elections have shown that Bourgogne Franche-Comté remained socialist and that there has not been this tipping over [to the right] as we had feared. (Philippe, interview, November 2021)

Similar to other members of the local network of volunteers and activists, Philippe is politically engaged, close to retirement age, and middle-class. The network predominantly comprises former teachers, managers, and directors of local associations, constituting part of the local petite bourgeoisie (Guéraut, 2021). Informal conversations with volunteers indicated a conflict between them and the municipal government over establishing Nevers as a welcoming city. Volunteers, as seen in the previous quote, often tied their action to the regional socialist past and local identity. However, in their recent work, Guéraut and Warnant (2022) investigated Nevers' "socialist crisis" and interpret local conflicts as result of the city's restructuring. After benefiting from decentralization efforts and the relocation of public jobs and local authorities in the 1980s and 1990s, Nevers, like other cities in France, has been confronted since the 2000s with the necessity to reduce public expenditure. The local middle class was particularly affected by these reductions, resulting in "structural tensions" (Guéraut, 2021, para. 2) between them, the local government, and other social groups. This also suggests that the struggle over Nevers as welcoming space is part of wider efforts to contest austerity measures and their exclusionary effects.

Under complex socio-political conditions, contesting exclusionary politics and infrastructuring a welcoming place was often bottom-up and migrant-led, facilitating newcomers' agency in shaping their arrival

environments. In the case of Akron, a significant degree of organization among refugees was observed, which can be attributed to both temporal and institutional factors. Resettlement has been ongoing for a considerably longer period than in Pirmasens and Nevers, and the US resettlement system entails a rapid withdrawal of government support for newcomers, necessitating self-reliance. In addition to this, some local RCOs were founded by Bhutanese refugees who demonstrated their organizational capacities well before resettlement (Gonzalez Benson & Pimentel Walker, 2021). Bottom-up and informal infrastructuring led by RCOs occasionally built on the welcoming narrative of the city. However, respondents also expressed concerns regarding a perceived disparity between action taken at different scales, which were considered by some as insufficiently connected. This perception elicited frustration among certain refugees, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

> We are celebrating Welcoming Week this week. One of the biggest shocks to me was that if you go to our city website, there's nothing....That got me thinking, "They were the first people to advertise their Welcoming Week, but what are they doing to inform the community about it?" It's all about putting the stamp without doing the work. There's a big gap that needs to be filled...it is easy to be informed, it is easy to organize conferences where...they have a lot of research and many books and think they understand, but they haven't understood anything. (Gloria, interview, September 2022)

> You know, I sometimes feel like the city and North Hill are two different cities, you know? We don't communicate very clearly or very often. Sometimes, if we have an event in North Hill, the city government has no idea what's going on. (Sonam, interview, September 2022)

These interviews thus indicate that while the multiscalar nature of arrival infrastructuring can facilitate cooperation among actors across scales, it can also result in a disconnect between them. The observed disconnect, in conjunction with the reliance on external funding, confirms previous findings by Gonzalez Benson and Pimentel Walker (2021) that RCOs frequently experience financial instability and are excluded from urban governance processes. And yet, more than actors in the fields of social and cultural encounter, RCOs operate in a complex sphere of welfare provision at the local scale, spanning various activities from case management to healthcare provision, which places them alongside institutional actors such as resettlement agencies (Gonzalez Benson, 2020). Our study confirms this and places RCOs as actors firmly embedded in arrival infrastructuring. Such a disconnect between the local and other scales was also observed in Nevers, where the informal infrastructuring of arrival occurred in opposition to an exclusionary national stance on immigration. In stark contrast, arrival infrastructuring in Pirmasens was integrated into local support structures at the municipal level, which were already well established in response to severe shrinkage effects. Following the German urban planning approach Soziale Stadt (Social City), local social action is coordinated among several actors at neighborhood and city scales, leading to close cooperation. All local infrastructuring appeared to operate via the Pakt, institutionalizing and formalizing volunteering activities, and complicating urban in/formalities as a result. Contrasting these local conditions thus demonstrates that arrival infrastructuring occurs on a spectrum wherein formality and informality are neither fixed states nor always distinctly separable.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article investigated arrival infrastructuring in cities affected by a long-term urban decline through the lenses of scale and urban in/formalities. Emphasis was placed on local actor constellations, how action was related to urban decline, and the scales at which actors operated. In proposing the concept of multiscalar infrastructuring and offering a conceptual framework to explore it, the article contributes to the literature on arrival infrastructures by exposing how urban decline leads to a bricolage of action, and by critically engaging with the complex arrival infrastructuring beyond urban centers of growth. This approach allowed for an investigation into the complex scalar interrelations between actors and fields of action and elucidated the political dimensions of infrastructuring in decline-affected urban environments. The decline was found to significantly influence arrival infrastructuring, both in its formal and informal shape. It not only resulted in local conditions that rendered arrival and its infrastructuring more challenging but also limited the capacities (and/or willingness) of municipal governments to sufficiently support refugee populations. For all municipal governments studied, economic recovery remained a primary objective, sometimes resulting in the intersection of economic development and refugee integration. Consequently, many local actors involved in infrastructuring arrival were also found to be committed to economic development, with refugee arrival often presented by local actors as either an opportunity or risk for the city's efforts to halt economic and demographic decline.

In the three contexts examined, refugee arrival remains nationally regulated. However, the significant involvement of non-governmental actors at multiple scales suggests that arrival is infrastructured both formally and informally. While arrival infrastructuring relies heavily on non-governmental actors everywhere, urban decline leads to an increasing dependence on external funding, which was found to be provided by regional and national foundations. As tax revenues and local budgets shrink due to long-term decline, foundations emerged as crucial entities with significant power to shape local arrival infrastructures. With significant financial capacities they offer much-needed resources, and thus inhibit great power in shaping local action in places struggling with the effects of decline. This was particularly the case for Akron which also happened to be the only city in this study that adopted official welcoming strategies. This means that even if a city adopts a welcoming stance, it may not have the capacity to finance local action, thus relying on external funding from, for example, foundations. While facilitating much of the observed local action, their involvement also exposed the dependency of disempowered cities on external funding. Parallelly, bottom-up actors grow in importance, too. In both Nevers and Pirmasens, volunteers and local organizations filled the gaps left by shrinking municipal budgets, actively infrastructuring arrival from below. In obtaining funding from regional or national foundations, some of these actors received what Benson Gonzalez (2020) referred to as organizational legitimacy.

We were able to identify a paradoxical situation: a significant number of interventions occurred (as to be expected) at the local level; however, the municipalities were notably absent (Figures 1, 2, and 3). While residents demonstrate considerable impact through their interventions, their influence was constrained as the institutionalization of their actions was contingent upon funding from external entities such as foundations. As these processes are shaped by the effects of long-term decline, we observe that arrival infrastructuring operated on a spectrum of in/formality and across scales. We can thus confirm that the effects of institutional withdrawal and urban decline indeed shape arrival infrastructuring in shrinking places, underlining the shift from "government to governance" (Harvey, 1989) also in arrival infrastructuring—with all the complexities such a shift entails.

As social cohesion and refugee inclusion emerged as issues that were addressed, sometimes informally, from the bottom-up, local and intimate scales can be expected to be particularly significant in downscaled cities. Further research could explore these aspects in greater depth. The findings from this study also underscore the necessity for critical analysis of the (political) motives and objectives of various actors engaging in infrastructuring "from afar". This analysis should encompass investigations into their relationship to national or municipal politics, as well as their potential as catalysts for progressive action from the bottom-up. Such research should also examine more extensively the role of national contexts in these dynamics. Beyond the scope of this article is a more elaborate study of the experiences of refugees in settings of urban decline. Future research should interrogate how newcomers become entangled in the bricolage of arrival infrastructuring identified in this study. Finally, while addressed in part in previous research (see Schemschat, 2024), how arrival in disempowered places is lived and experienced merits ongoing exploration at the nexus of urban and migration scholarship.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, the editors of this thematic issue, and Dominique Jolivet for their time and helpful comments on earlier versions of the article. The author is furthermore grateful for the English editorial support provided by Rachel Barber.

Funding

The data used in this article were collected during doctoral research that received funding from the EU under Marie Skłodowska Curie Grant Agreement No. 813803. The article was written during a postdoctoral fellowship funded by the EU under Horizon Europe Grant Agreement No. 101079254.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Adam, F., Föbker, S., Imani, D., Pfaffenbach, C., Weiss, G., & Wiegandt, C.-C. (2019). Social contacts and networks of refugees in the arrival context—Manifestations in a large city and in selected small and medium-sized towns. *Erdkunde*, *73*(1), 31–45. https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2019.01.02

Bose, P. S. (2021). Refugees and the transforming landscapes of small cities in the US. *Urban Geography*, *42*(7), 958–978. http://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1785202

Çağlar, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2015). A multiscalar perspective on cities and migration. A comment on the symposium. *Sociologica*, *9*(2). http://doi.org/10.2383/81432

de Wit, T. D., & Koopmans, R. (2005). The integration of ethnic minorities into political culture: The Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain compared. *Acta Politica*, *40*(1), 50–73. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ap.5500096

Depraz, S. (2017). Penser les marges en France: L'exemple des territoires de «l'hyper-ruralité». *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes Français*, *94*(3), 385–399. http://journals.openedition.org/bagf/2086

Eggert, N., & Pilati, K. (2014). Networks and political engagement of migrant organisations in five European cities: Networks and political engagement of migrant organisations. *European Journal of Political Research*, *53*(4), 858–875. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12057

El-Kayed, N., Bernt, M., Hamann, U., & Pilz, M. (2020). Peripheral estates as arrival spaces? Conceptualising research on arrival functions of new immigrant destinations. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2932

Fairclough, N. (2000). Discourse, social theory, and social research: The discourse ofwelfare reform. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *4*(2), 163–195. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9481.00110

Fawaz, M., Gharbieh, A., Harb, M., & Salamé, D. (2018). *Refugees as city-makers*. American University of Beirut.

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2020). Between hospitality and inhospitality: The Janus-faced "arrival infrastructure." *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2941

Flamant, A., Fourot, A.-C., & Healy, A. (2020). Editorial: Out of the big cities! The reception of exiles in small immigration localities. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, *36*(2/3), 7–27.

Franklin, R. S. (2019). The demographic burden of population loss in US cities, 2000–2010. *Journal of Geographical Systems*, *23*, 209–230. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10109-019-00303-4

Gardesse, C., & Lelévrier, C. (2020). Refugees and asylum seekers dispersed in non-metropolitan French cities: Do housing opportunities mean housing access? *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2926

Glick Schiller, N., & Çağlar, A. (2009). Towards a comparative theory of locality in migration studies: Migrant incorporation and city scale. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *35*(2), 177–202.

Gonzalez Benson, O. (2020). Welfare support activities of grassroots refugee-run community organizations: A reframing. *Journal of Community and Practice*, *28*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2020.1716427

Gonzalez Benson, O., & Pimentel Walker, A. P. (2021). Grassroots refugee community organizations: In search of participatory urban governance. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *43*(6), 890–908.

Guéraut, E. (2021). Le mépris comme reassurance sociale: Une petite bourgeoisie culturelle confrontée à son déclin. *Sociétés contemporaines*, *119*(3), 33–60. https://doi.org/10.3917/soco.119.0033

Guéraut, E., & Warnant, A. (2022). *À Nevers, la fin d'un ancrage à gauche?* Metropolitiques. https://metropolitiques.eu/A-Nevers-la-fin-d-un-ancrage-a-gauche.html

Haase, A., Schmidt, A., Rink, D., & Kabisch, S. (2020). Leipzig's inner east as an arrival space? Exploring the trajectory of a diversifying neighbourhood. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 89–102. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2902

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as key component of the arrival infrastructure. How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetiva*, *78*, 381–391.

Harvey, D. (1989). From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, *71*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583

Hess, S., Rodatz, M., Kasparek, B., Kron, S., Schwertl, M., & Sontowski, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Der lange sommer der migration grenzregime III*. Assoziation A.

Hudson, C., & Sandberg, L. (2021). Contested hope for the future: Rural refugee reception as municipal survival? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 82, 121–129.

INSEE. (2023). *Population en historique depuis 1986*. https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=COM-58194#chiffre-cle-1

Martinez-Fernandez, C., Audirac, I., Fol, S., & Cunningham-Sabot, E. (2012). Shrinking cities: Urban challenges of globalization. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *36*, 213–225.

Martins, J. R., & Davino, C. (2023). Local migration governance in European shrinking areas: A German and an Italian case. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *24*, 863–888.

Meeus, B., Beeckmans, L., Van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2020). Broadening the urban planning repertoire with an “arrival infrastructures” perspective. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.3116

Meeus, B., Van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2019). *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Meijer, M., Popławska, J. Z., & Szytniewski, B. (2023). Spaces of decoupling in the Netherlands and Poland: Emerging local governance networks for hosting non-EU migrants in peripheral and shrinking areas. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *24*, 839–862.

New American Economy. (2017). *New Americans and a new direction: The role of immigrants in reviving the great lakes region*. https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/new-americans-and-a-new-direction-the-role-of-immigrants-in-reviving-the-great-lakes-region

Phillimore, J. (2021). Refugee-integration-opportunity structures: Shifting the focus from refugees to context. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *34*(2), 1946–1966.

Phillimore, J., Humphris R., & Kahn, K. (2018). Reciprocity for new migrant integration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*, 215–232.

Pottie-Sherman, Y. (2018). Austerity urbanism and the promise of immigrant- and refugee-centered urban revitalization in the US Rust Belt. *Urban Geography*, *39*(3), 438–457. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2017.1342398

Radulescu, S. M. (2021). Embracing refugees: A revival solution for shrinking American cities. *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*, *36*(2). https://www.law.georgetown.edu/immigration-law-journal/in-print/volume-36-number-2-winter-2021/volume-36-number-2-winter-2021-7

Robinson, J. (2011). Cities in a world of cities: The comparative gesture. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *35*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00982.x

Ročak, M. (2020). *The experience of shrinkage: Exploring social capital in the context of urban shrinkage* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Radboud University.

Sassen, S. (2002). Global cities and diasporic networks: Microsites in global civil society. In H. Anheier, M. Glasius, & M. Kaldor (Eds.), *Global civil society 2002* (pp. 217–238). Oxford University Press.

Schemschat, N. (2024). Welcoming, revitalising, re-growing? Refugee arrival and urban development in shrinking cities. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, *40*(1), 139–155.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political Research Quarterly*, *61*, 294–308.

Seethaler-Wari, S. (2018). Urban planning for the integration of refugees: The importance of local factors. *Urban Planning*, *3*(4), 141–155. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v3i4.1696

Sidney, M. (2019). NGOs as arrival infrastructures: Pathways to inclusion for immigrants in the US and Canada. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 53–80). Springer.

Simone, A. (2004). People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, *16*(3), 407–429.

Statista. (2023). *Entwicklung der Einwohnerzahl in Pirmasens (kreisfreie Stadt) von 1996 bis 2022*. https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/803267/umfrage/entwicklung-der-gesamtbevoelkerung-in-pirmasens

Steigemann, A. M. (2019). First arrivals: The socio-material development of arrival infrastructures in Thuringia. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 179–205). Springer.

Swyngedouw, E. (2004). Globalisation or “glocalization”? Networks, territories and rescaling. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *17*(1), 25–48.

Urso, K. (2022). Widespread hospitality and social inclusion of migrants: An opportunity to regenerate rural areas. In M. Bergamaschi (Ed.), *The multidimensional housing deprivation: Local dynamics of inequality, policies and challenges for the future* (pp. 121–134). FrancoAngeli.

US Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Quickfacts Akron City, Ohio*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/akroncityohio/PST045222

Welcoming Spaces. (2024). *About*. https://www.welcomingspaces.eu/project-partners-2

Wessendorf, S. (2018). Pathways of settlement among pioneer migrants in super-diverse London. *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies*, *44*(2), 270–286. http://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1341719

About the Author

Norma Schemschat is a social geographer and urban sociologist currently serving as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam, where she is affiliated with the program group Political Sociology and the EU-twinning project BROAD-ER. She holds a PhD from ENS-PSL (Paris) and is a member of the Amsterdam Research Centre on Migration as well as the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN). Her research focuses on refugee integration in peripheral places, concepts of belonging, and urban migration governance.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8488
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8488

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

"Activism Is a Good Means to Connect Things": Brokering as World-Making Against Competitive Tendering in Newcomer Support

Lieke van der Veer [1,2]

[1] Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
[2] Department of Urbanism, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

Correspondence: Lieke van der Veer (vanderveer@essb.eur.nl)

Submitted: 23 April 2024 **Accepted:** 28 October 2024 **Published:** 12 December 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

Neoliberal reform of welfare and integration regimes affects service provisioning for migrants and refugees across Europe. This article studies the effects of competitive tenders (*aanbestedingen*) as a modality of such reform on the political possibilities of small-scale grassroots initiatives that support recent newcomers in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. This article studies these dynamics from the perspective of activists who self-identify as brokers and who assist the organisers of these small-scale initiatives. So far, existing research has rarely looked at the interstices of literature on brokerage and literature of neoliberal reform nor applied literature on neoliberal reform of the nexus of integration/welfare governance in cities—despite evidence that brokers have appeared as critical figures in the context of neoliberalisation and (re)politicisation. Brokerage and neoliberal reform are part and parcel of urban theorising and so are collaborative dimensions to urban governance, urban approaches to asylum and integration, and urban inequalities. Combining studies on brokerage with studies of neoliberal reform, this article shows that brokers make use of their positioning in-between the city administration and small-scale grassroots organisations to engage in a form of world-making that re-connects resistance to depoliticised elements of arrival infrastructure—while trying to help small-scale support initiatives to formalise. The main argument is that the interplay between informal and formal infrastructure gives unique insight into the political-economic dimensions of infrastructuring and to constitutive contradictions that underpin neoliberalisation. It is based on long-term ethnographic research, including a year of full-time fieldwork in Delfshaven, a classic arrival quarter.

Keywords

brokerage; competitive tendering; grassroots initiatives; informality; infrastructure; neoliberalism; newcomer support; refugees; Rotterdam

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

"Everything is organised through tenders," Jozefien sighed when I met her in the language café she has co-founded in a grassroots library in Delfshaven, a borough in the West of Rotterdam. Jozefien is a prominent figure in advocacy for refugees who is committed to strengthening small-scale support. When I first met her, she was in her early 70s, and at that point she looked back on a career in local and national politics. Asked about her role in the city, she usually says she sees herself as a "connector," and when asked what motivates her to do so, she more than once mentioned the importance of resisting competitive tendering (*aanbestedingen*). Jozefien is concerned about the ways competitive tendering has "fragmented" (*versnipperd*) the landscape of service provisioning to newcomers. And she is not the only one. The initiators of the grassroots library are driven by a similar mission to resist tendering. In their view, competitive tendering contributes to the weakening of existing socio-physical infrastructure in neighbourhoods (van der Zwaard et al., 2018, p. 12).

Competitive tendering is a particular way of regulating and funding civil society initiatives. In competitive tendering, the municipality sets pre-determined targets and organises a competitive procedure amongst service provisioners. The service provisioner that "wins" the tender will be paid market fees by the municipality. This means that service provisioning has a for-profit character and that the criteria for success are measured by key performance indicators (KPIs) that include the number of migrants helped. In Rotterdam in the field of newcomer integration between 2015 and 2018, organisations bound to a tender for "refugee integration" included the local Dutch Refugee Council. Welfare organisations, too, are bound by tenders.

Literature exists on how neoliberal reform mediates support to migrants and refugees. Examples from urban contexts in the UK (Darling, 2016, 2024), France (Bonduelle, 2022a, 2022b), and Germany (Glick Schiller, 2023; Glick Schiller et al., 2023) bring forward what happens when asylum and integration are treated as business or industry. Other literature examines the role of brokerage in informal networks that play a role in refugees' and migrants' access to resources in arrival infrastructure (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Hans, 2023; Wessendorf, 2022). However, limited research has looked at the interstices of these bodies of literature. Studies on neoliberal reform do not explicitly consider the role of brokerage activities—although studies have shown that brokers are located at the intersections of political, economic, and social systems (Xiang et al., 2012, p. 85), that they have appeared as a critical figure in the context of neoliberal reform (Lindquist, 2015), and that brokers play a role in producing and politicising migration infrastructurally (Lin et al., 2017).

This article is an anthropological study based on ongoing ethnographic research in Rotterdam, including 12 consecutive months of full-time fieldwork. I seek to contribute answers to an ethnographic question that is of interest within anthropology and beyond: How does neoliberal reform transform the in/formal urban infrastructure of resource provisioning by/for refugees and the routines of those who inhabit this infrastructure? To answer this question, I connect studies of neoliberal reform in the governance of integration/welfare to studies on brokerage. The main reason for engaging with these two strands of literature is ethnographic: The people in refugee assistance and advocacy I worked with drew on the notion of "bridge-builder," "connector," and "advisor" in their (self-)identifications and brought up the "tender trap" (*aanbestedingsfuik*) as one of their main concerns.

By bringing my material in dialogue with these two strands of literature I argue that brokerage reveals constitutive contradictions between multiple forms of world-making within arrival infrastructure. Brokers

resist forms of neoliberal reform in welfare/integration governance and politicise informal refugee-led initiatives that they see as viable alternatives to market-driven infrastructure. Meanwhile, these refugee-led initiatives at times experience a pull towards formalising their position by participating in competitive tenders. This constitutive contradiction points to political-economic dimensions of arrival infrastructuring and to existing urban inequalities that surface in the interplay between in/formal actors within this infrastructure.

Although competitive market funding is a common funding structure in urban contexts across Western Europe, differences and similarities between urban and national contexts with regards to forms of economic regulation are unexplored. Few studies have been done about competitive tendering and its effects on service provisioning in the Netherlands specifically. A recent study has shown that in Rotterdam, actors in "urban networks of diversity and inclusion" are critical of the "tendering system" and the "fierce competition for funds" (Schiller et al., 2023, p. 6)—but more research is needed to identify the specificities of urban localities with regards to competitive tendering. We know that migrants in the Netherlands from the 1990s onwards have become "more exposed to market forces" (Bruquetas-Callejo et al., 2007, p. 29) but we don't know how this observation sits with other national political-economic contexts. This study is a first step to giving insight into the effects of these market dynamics on informal spaces and actors in specific urban neighbourhoods.

These dynamics are relevant for the field of urban studies for several reasons. First, urban governance is increasingly structured by the imperative for the local state to cooperate with civil society organisations (Aarsæther et al., 2011). Second, the governance of asylum and integration is delegated to the local level (Darling, 2020; Glorius & Doomernik, 2020; Guiraudon & Lahav, 2000). In the Netherlands these urban forms of asylum- and integration governance are well-researched (Doomernik & Ardon, 2018; Kos et al., 2016). Third, the two key concepts of this contribution are part and parcel of urban theorising—as several studies on brokerage (Jaffe & Koster, 2019; Koster, 2019; McFarlane, 2012) and neoliberal reform (Blanco et al., 2014; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Geddes, 2006) demonstrate. Fourth, this article advances debates about the political-economic dimensions of urban inequalities (Schinkel & van den Berg, 2011; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008).

Alongside its contributions to urban studies, this article engages with studies on brokerage and neoliberal reform in the context of arrival infrastructure. It adds to studies on brokerage by showing that people who operate as brokers do not merely close gaps within a given system but also participate in multiple and contradictory forms of world-making. It contributes to studies on neoliberal reform in urban integration/welfare governance by showing how people who occupy in-between positions are a fruitful ethnographic starting point to study how pressures of neoliberalisation transform in/formal urban spaces created by/for migrants and refugees. In doing so, this article brings specific political-economic context of arrival infrastructure into view.

The article develops as follows. The theoretical section examines literature on brokerage and literature on market-driven resource provisioning to refugees and migrants. The methodological section attends to the specificities of the ethnographic fieldwork and analysis that underpins this article. The ethnographic section demonstrates how situated acts of brokerage engage with neoliberal reform that affects arrival infrastructure. The concluding section suggests that neoliberal reform transforms in/formal urban spaces and the activities of people who inhabit these structures.

2. Conceptual Understandings: Brokerage and Neoliberal Reform

In this section I define and connect the two key concepts this article contributes to: brokerage and neoliberal reform. I situate how the tendencies that these concepts purport to describe play out in Rotterdam and for each concept highlight four associated notions that are of specific relevance to my findings and discussion. With regards to brokerage, relevant associated notions are in/formality, in-betweenness, small-scale support initiatives and refugee advocacy, and world-making. For neoliberal reform, relevant associated notions are competitive tendering, integration/welfare governance, infrastructure, and (de)politicisation.

2.1. Brokerage in the Context of Refugee Support: In/Formality, In-Betweenness, and World-Making

Brokers are observed to facilitate flows of goods and resources, to create connections between previously unconnected others, and to translate different rationalities, interests, and meanings (Lindquist, 2015; Mosse & Lewis, 2006; Stovel & Shaw, 2012). Literature on brokerage has demonstrated how brokers mobilise their capacities in various arenas. This includes channelling resources between NGOs, state institutions, and local communities (Koster & van Leynseele, 2018), "brokering care" between donors and people in need of assistance (Fechter, 2020), and participating in economies of advice (James & Koch, 2020). People who operate as "brokers" are seen to rely on their informal relations (Stovel & Shaw, 2012, p. 147). Studies on informality have shown how formal and informal are always connected (Koster & Nuijten, 2016; McFarlane, 2012; Smart & Koster, 2024). With regards to "arrival infrastructure" specifically (see Section 2.2), research has demonstrated the interconnectedness of formal, non-formal, and informal networks (Fawaz, 2017).

One defining characteristic of brokerage is the liminality and moral ambiguity that is ingrained in brokers' structural position (Bräuchler, 2019; Koster & van Leynseele, 2018; Walther, 2021). These studies show that brokers typically occupy positions between groups, persons, rationalities, interests, entities, and logics, and that the field they are situated in is oftentimes characterised by competition, friction, and divergent logics and demands. Research on reception and support for newcomers in the Netherlands for instance appreciates the connective role of people who occupy a liminal position (Ghorashi, 2023; Ghorashi et al., 2023; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016). These studies have drawn attention to the "insider-outsider position" and "in-between positioning" of people who work as volunteers in asylum seekers' centres (Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016, p. 234), and to "in-between persons" (*tussenpersonen*) whose role is considered in relation to the gap between citizens and the government (Ghorashi, 2023, p. 272). In Dutch neighbourhoods, these persons are called upon to bridge the boundaries between informal support networks that succeed in providing support to groups seen as "hard to reach" and formal organisations that are met with suspicion by such groups (Ghorashi et al., 2023, p. 99).

In Rotterdam specifically, brokerage facilitates exchanges between civil society organisations in the field of diversity and inclusion and the municipality (Schiller et al., 2023). Small-scale minority-led organisations rely on connectors and gatekeepers to get out of "peripheral positions" in an urban system in which "power is unevenly distributed" (Schiller et al., 2023, p. 10). In the wake of the asylum governance crises across Europe in 2015 and 2016, the role of small-scale support initiatives for migrants and refugees specifically gained visibility across Europe (Feischmidt et al., 2019). These initiatives include refugee-led organisations (Larruina et al., 2019; Rast, 2024; van der Veer, 2021). Small-scale support initiatives present opportunities but also challenges for refugees (Larruina, 2023; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018; van der Veer, 2019). A variety of roles,

strategies, positionalities, and stances can be identified among refugees and their advocates in the way they relate to policy (Ponzoni, Ghorashi, et al., 2020; Ponzoni, Mars, & Ghorashi, 2020).

Recent literature on brokerage has cast brokers against the ethical horizon of brokering for a better future and has shown how they hope to make a difference in the lives of others (Bräuchler, 2021; Fechter, 2020). I see this as a shift to attend to the "world-making" potential of brokerage and of the systems in which brokers operate writ large. I define world-making as the capacity to shape new practices and forms of subjecthood within a wider social order by enacting specific projects or visions of political and socio-economic organisation. Other literature has drawn attention to the world-making capacity of phenomena such as resistance (Walters, 2022, p. 133) and the world-making capacity of socio-material infrastructure (Carse, 2007, p. 31). The notion of world-making can be traced down to Dewey (1927) as the creative capacity of humans and nonhumans (Dijstelbloem & Walters, 2021, p. 510). As scholars in science and technology studies who draw inspiration from Dewey's pragmatist philosophy have outlined, "world-making" occurs in making and remaking links between partially connected goods (Law, 2004, p. 151).

2.2. Neoliberal Reform in Integration/Welfare Governance: Competitive Tendering and (De)Politicised Infrastructure

Urban studies research has contributed to understandings of how neoliberalism unfolds in local governance networks (Blanco et al., 2014; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Geddes, 2006). With regards to the neoliberalisation of resource provision to migrants and refugees in urban localities, case studies have drawn attention to the emergence of urban "asylum markets" (Darling, 2016) and "integration business" (Glick Schiller, 2023; Glick Schiller et al., 2023). Through the logics of market competition, economic efficiency, and public–private partnerships, neoliberal reform reshapes sites of service provision (Bonduelle, 2022a, 2022b).

The Rotterdam City Council has entered into partnerships with organizations in the field of civic integration (*inburgering*) and welfare (*welzijn*) that provide services to newcomers. These organizations assist the municipality in fulfilling quotas it receives from the national government. These quotas determine for each Dutch municipality the number of refugee status holders that should be provided with housing and integration programs. The City Council determines the specific KPIs that tendered organisations in integration/welfare governance are bound by—including the number of migrants helped. Thematic priorities in partnerships that the city of Rotterdam has set in recent years include job market orientation, courses in Dutch norms and values, and buddy programs. Just like in similar European localities, services that contracted organisations deliver to migrants and refugees in cities of settlement include navigating bureaucratic barriers, providing psycho-social support, and encouraging social participation (cf. Glick Schiller et al., 2023).

Such partnerships in which governments contract NGOs are part and parcel of neoliberal reform. In these calls for tender, local governments set out specific procurement orders in service provision. NGOs can respond to these calls for tender by putting in a bid. The bid with the most efficient approach to the procurement order "wins" the tender and contractually commits itself to KPIs that the local state identifies to measure the success of the project. Competitive tendering contracts ensure that local states can procure specific services from selected organisations and that contracted organisations can make a profit in ways that are supported by public funds.

Outsourcing to organisations contracted through competitive tendering disperses service provision. There are several reasons to characterise these dispersed provisioning practices as infrastructure. The notion of infrastructure lends itself well to studying the interlinkages of technologies, institutions, and actors (Lindquist & Xiang, 2018, p. 154; cf. Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), and brings into view interconnected practices that facilitate migrant arrival—including practices by informal actors in urban neighbourhoods (Schrooten & Meeus, 2020). Among actors in migrant support in the Netherlands it is common practice to use the word "infrastructure" (*infrastructuur*). An influential government agency for instance speaks of "*aankomstinfrastructuur*" (arrival infrastructure)—including formal organisations (such as the city administration and tendered organisations like the Dutch Refugee Council) and people (such as neighbours; SCP, 2020, p. 19). And as mentioned in the opening paragraph, the initiators of the grassroots library use this word when they claim that competitive tendering "weakens existing socio-physical *infrastructure* of neighbourhoods" (van der Zwaard et al., 2018, p. 12, emphasis added). In all these iterations, "infrastructure" is not just a material non-human configuration but includes human actors.

Infrastructure has particular political ordering capacities and potentials (Lin et al., 2017; van der Veer, 2019). Studies show that the outsourcing to (contracted) NGOs has depoliticising effects on service provision by the state generally (Clarke, 2012) and to asylum seekers and refugees specifically (Darling, 2016). Depoliticisation works alongside processes of neoliberalisation in turning asylum into an economic concern (Darling, 2016). Scholarship has long been concerned with the depoliticising effect of migrant support. Interventions aimed at refugees are observed to "work to establish the refugee phenomenon as a non-political occurrence" (Nyers, 2006, p. 29; cf. Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017, p. 21), while Miriam Ticktin speaks of an "antipolitics of care" (Ticktin, 2011, pp. 14–15).

Combining studies on brokerage with studies on neoliberal reform, in this article I show that brokers make use of their positioning in-between the city administration and small-scale grassroots organisations to engage in a form of world-making that re-connects resistance to depoliticised elements of arrival infrastructure—while trying to help small-scale support initiatives to formalise. I propose that brokers' arrival infrastructuring gives unique insight into the pressures of competitive tendering on small support initiatives for newcomers that are affected by neoliberal reform in integration/welfare regimes.

3. Research Methods

This article is based on ongoing long-term ethnographic field research in Rotterdam. It includes 12 months of full-time field research in 2018. During this time, I lived in Rotterdam, in the borough of Delfshaven. Delfshaven is a classic arrival quarter (Gidley et al., 2018, p. 155). In this borough, 70 percent of the residents have a migration background (Rotterdam City Council, 2016). The borough is recognised for its superdiversity as well as its residents' participation and engagement (IDEM Rotterdam, 2018, p. 12).

Data were collected in accordance with the ethical standards of the Radboud Institute for Social and Cultural Research, the Research Ethics and Review Committee of the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Research, and the Humanity Ethics Committee from Leiden University. During interactions with my interlocutors, I kept detailed notes of conversations and observations, sometimes in a little booklet, sometimes on my phone, sometimes directly on my laptop. Every evening, I worked on these notes and

added reflections. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data are stored in an encrypted folder secured with a password.

Fieldwork activities included shadowing refugee advocates who acted as brokers as well as grassroots organisers who I accompanied to meetings with other organisations and with public administrators. Refugee advocates were over 70 years of age and were born and raised in the Netherlands; organisers were of differing ages under 40 years of age and had a refugee background. Fieldwork also included engaging in volunteer activities—in the grassroots library, but also in small-scale support initiatives by and for refugees—and spending leisure time with these organisers and with advocates who acted as brokers. I conducted numerous ethnographic interviews with public administrators, funding experts, and people working for migrant reception facilities. I attended many events that were initiated by my interlocutors, including community engagement activities and brainstorming sessions.

The exploratory goal of my study made necessary an inductive research process. The analysis involved several phases of sorting and labelling ethnographic material in accordance with thematic and descriptive categories that emerged in the iterative process of identifying connections and patterns. I discussed these thematic and descriptive categories with my interlocutors during informal fieldwork conversations—which refined my understanding of the dynamics they shared with me.

Contact with most interlocutors was initially established at an event that took place in January 2018 at a "market of initiatives" where more than 30 initiatives that relate to refugees were showcased. The arrival infrastructure in Rotterdam is a rather coherent network that converges on one advisor in particular, Jozefien, who sustained its cohesiveness and functioned as a key informant and gatekeeper. Although I intended to approach scale as an emergent characteristic of this network—that is, to not predetermine a locality that is cut off from any links (Latour, 2016, p. 317; Salter & Walters, 2016, p. 6)—Delfshaven was a key site. More than half of my interlocutors lived and/or worked there.

I use pseudonyms for some participants and organisations to offer privacy and plausible deniability for my interlocutors. The main reason for doing so is that studying the relations between actors—including actors whose social position is under threat—came with expressions of jealousy and suspicion vis-à-vis other actors. These expressions are a valuable epistemological tool in a competitive landscape, yet they could be used against someone in securing alliances. Knowing that people make statements in private they would not make in public, delinking people's names from their words and opinions was an effort to assess future risk and prevent public criticism or abuse (cf. McGranahan, 2021).

Some interlocutors have established scholarly credibility themselves, and in these cases the use of a pseudonym would disregard their contributions. This holds particularly true for the initiators of the grassroots library: one of them has worked on a doctoral dissertation on residents' participation and the other has done anthropology-like research in Rotterdam (de Boer & van der Lans, 2013). Together they have published a book on grassroots organising (Specht & van der Zwaard, 2015) and with four others they wrote the aforementioned report that discussed the impact of competitive tendering (van der Zwaard et al., 2018). This report resonates well with my findings. This article builds on their report by giving the themes it discusses a more contextualised meaning for arrival infrastructure for migrants and refugees specifically.

4. Ethnography

This section unfolds the ethnographic narrative that is at the heart of this contribution. It introduces the interlocutors and their concerns around competitive tendering, situates local alternatives to competitive tendering, and provides a contextualised understanding of the pull of competitive tendering on small-scale organisations that lays bare constitutive contradictions of arrival infrastructuring.

4.1. Retired Professionals With Activist Aspirations Who Operate as Brokers

The professional histories of the three most prominent brokers in this study give insight into the professional networks they nurture. These histories provide context to the world-making these brokers engage in, explains the meaning they attribute to resistance, and helps to understand how they seek to politicise elements of urban arrival infrastructure. Truus, Henk, and Jozefien look back on a career in refugee advocacy, local politics, social work, and trust funds. Born at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s, their careers flourished halfway through the 1970s during a progressive left-wing cabinet, in the heydays of the "community development work" (*opbouwwerk*) and when the market forces that would gain traction in the 1980s were not a concern yet. They have retired but are still committed to strengthening the position of small-scale refugee-led initiatives in the city in the face of welfare retrenchments and competitive tendering. Mourning over welfare drawbacks—that take shape in the form of "disappearing infrastructure" and "dwindling expertise"—is a vital force that motivates them to provide backing for refugee-led support initiatives in Rotterdam.

"There's an activist under every paving stone," Jozefien once said to me about Delfshaven, the borough she has lived in for decades. She is vice-president of the resident-led neighbourhood council in Rotterdam's borough of Delfshaven and is affiliated with the Socialist Party. In Jozefien's words, the language café is a "meeting ground between refugees and volunteers" that helps people to "settle into the neighbourhood." What is "of chief importance" in her work, she once told me, is to "revitalise the knowledge, experience, and talents" of refugee-led organisations. Next to running the language café, Jozefien assists refugee-led initiatives to access resources from the local government. Resources include influential people and financial assets.

Truus, another prominent advisor, is driven by a similar set of affects. Having worked as a lecturer in "welfare work" (*welzijnswerk*) in education programs for social workers, she more than once exclaimed to me that "this is not how I trained them!" usually in the context of the public sector (*maatschappelijk middenveld*) "simply executing" procurement orders (*inkoopopdrachten*) instead of having "a vision of their own." Like Jozefien, Truus is also committed to boosting the talents of people with a forced migration background. And for Henk, a former director of the local Refugee Council who is worried about the "dissolving" of support organisations for refugees, things are no different. The advisors are thus concerned by the dismantling of previously existing "infrastructure" and are personally committed to helping people with a refugee background to flourish in the face of the liberalisation of welfare provision.

All three brokers believe in resistance and disobedience. Truus more than once called for "the public sector" to "resist" (*zich verzetten*) and Henk regularly called out the "obedience" (*braafheid*) of people who accept "problematic policies." Jozefien is confident that "activism [*actievoeren*] is a good means to connect things."

4.2. Assisting Refugee-Led Initiatives

By assisting people with a refugee background to set up refugee support initiatives and by “connecting status holders to different initiatives in the borough,” to use her terms, Jozefien works directly with and for the people affected by the developments she denounces. She introduces newcomers not only to the language café she co-founded but also to other small-scale support organisations in the city. This includes for instance Aida’s initiative and Luciano’s initiative. In order to shed light on the coordination between the brokers and the small-scale refugee-led initiatives they give advice to, it is relevant to know some details about these two initiatives and the organisers that started them.

Both organisers came to the Netherlands as refugees themselves and over time came to use their migration background as a form of capital to help newcomers with learning the Dutch language and navigating the Dutch bureaucracy. “It would be so good if people like Aida and Luciano would be given more credit,” Jozefien told me one morning in a conversation when she generously praised the competences of these two organisers. “Luciano really is a key actor,” Jozefien added, and remarked that “the municipality and the Refugee Council should make use of his position.”

The three brokers try to make visible to local administrators what is the added value of Aida’s and Luciano’s initiatives. Truus once explained to me that what she admired so much about Aida’s initiative is the “personal involvement” of the organiser—while contrasting this approach with organisations that are (in Truus’ words) “more formal.” In helping these organisers, Jozefien seeks to strengthen an informal infrastructure that is grounded in what she calls “solidarity”—not only via Rotterdam’s solidarity platform, but also by fostering personal connections between resident-led initiatives and promoting the work of such initiatives on social media platforms.

4.3. “Where Are All the Small Foundations? The Entire Social Domain is Tendered!”

To make tangible the effects of neoliberal reform in integration/welfare governance, it makes sense to add detail to the frustrations with competitive tendering that grassroots organisers and their advisors reported to me. The ascendancy of competitive tendering is something the brokers fiercely disapprove of. “They have to stop with these tenders immediately!” Truus told me over tea at her home. When I asked her why, she explained that “civil society should do the agenda setting.” What she means is that with competitive tendering, the municipality predefined targets that NGOs only respond to. “Resistance” is Truus’ solution to counter these dynamics. Henk has a similar view, and considers organisations with a competitive tender as an “executive organisation of the government” (*uitvoeringsorganisatie van de overheid*). And Jozefien, too, is concerned about the fact that (in her words) “organisations have become keen on the numbers,” referring to KPIs. “I don’t like that,” she added.

The grassroots organisers, too, are concerned with how the municipality spoils the spirit of small initiatives like theirs. Aida repeatedly grumbled to me that, as a result of competitive tendering, “all money goes to big foundations.” In a conversation Aida had with the founder of a funding organisation, Aida felt that her impressions were confirmed: She nodded heavily when this founder said, rhetorically and with agitation, “Where are all the small foundations? The entire social domain is tendered!” And more often I heard how grassroots organisers would denounce competitive tenders. “The question is: Do competitive tendering

contracts help the people?" Luciano once rhetorically asked me. He began, "These market dynamics..." before trailing off and shaking his head instead. And one afternoon, when I was drinking tea with her and a volunteer who works for her initiative, Aida said about tendered organisations that they "do control, control, control." "Everything that's concerned with the municipality, for us, is the government," Aida added.

4.4. Clashes Between Resident-Led Initiatives and Tendered Organisations: "These People Are 'Neighbours,' not 'Clients'"

The following vignette further illustrates the effects of competitive tendering and gives insight into how brokers occupy a position of in-betweenness vis-à-vis formal and informal infrastructure. At times when tensions between tendered organisations and grassroots initiatives were palpable, I have seen how the refugee advocates operated as mediators. One afternoon, a meeting was convened between small-scale welfare initiatives in the borough of Delfshaven and a welfare organisation with a competitive tender to see how they could collaborate. Together with eight others, Truus and Jozefien were there alongside Aida.

One woman who works for a small-scale welfare initiative, Hannah, got into an argument with the representative of the tendered welfare organisation. Hannah's initial point was that she finds it "disturbing" that tendered organisations refer beneficiaries to small initiatives that are largely run by volunteers and thereby "pass on difficult issues to a network of volunteers." Hannah added that "if I make a mistake, I am liable myself, whereas you [the representative from the contractually tendered welfare organisation] would be backed up by your organisation." At that point Aida joined the discussion too, emphasising that "organisations like mine bear a lot of responsibility, but we don't have the capacity." The representative of the tendered welfare organisation responded by saying that she "simply has one pair of hands," and that the organisation she works for is "just more policy-oriented." What this meant, the representative explains, is that she does not have a lot of room to manoeuvre and that she has to represent "her client's interests." Something in the representative's response seemed to infuriate both Aida and Hannah. Hannah said: "So you, the institutional side, get all defensive now? This conversation is getting out of hand!" Aida snapped: "And by the way, these people are *neighbours*, not 'clients.'" After taking a deep breath, Hannah cried out: "My heart is pounding right now! This is just not right!"

The advocates encouraged all present to "express their grievances," and complimented the participants by saying, "You all are doing fantastic work!" In addition, they tried to highlight the importance of the current conversation in itself by saying, "The restructuring of the welfare sector is happening today, right here right now!" The representative of the welfare organisation, however, became impatient: "I don't have time for this. What can I do *now*?" Jozefien suggested to organise "a fair discussion about what we all stand for, and work towards a collaboration of formal and informal parties." The topic was closed, but grievances resurfaced after the meeting. About the argument, Truus said, "We have been having this discussion for years already!" And about the contractually tendered welfare organisation, Truus said, "They are not listening! They are always defending themselves! They are not asking questions!" Truus turned her attention to me and added: "This is going terribly wrong."

4.5. Meanwhile in the Grassroots Language Café: "We Are Just Talking…and Listening. It's Good"

Alongside urban spaces in which resident-led initiatives clash with tendered organisations, there are also spaces that deliberately resist neoliberalisation. One such space is the aforementioned grassroots library. Jozefien operates as a gatekeeper of this space. The following vignette offers an example in which control and ownership became unsettled and where different target audiences coexist.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's get started again!" (*dames en heren, we gaan weer beginnen*!), Fadi playfully announced to the four fellow participants who were seated at the round table. As he tried to get everybody's attention, he chuckled to himself and beamed with pride. Fadi is one of the participants of the language classes that are organised in a grassroots library in the West of Rotterdam. It was his idea to take the lead in kicking off the class today, and by the looks of it he enjoyed it. For this short moment he in fact took over my role as teacher—by keeping order and managing the class—but also took the floor in Dutch, a language that he is not yet proficient in. Fadi was born in Syria and was in his early twenties when I met him.

During classes, Dutch-speaking residents would volunteer to help people who wanted to improve their Dutch. In fact, it was me who introduced Fadi to the language class. I did so because he once said to me that the "formal" language and integration courses that he took were—in his words—"a bit odd" (*een beetje raar*). Fadi said to me, about these formal classes: "They focus a lot on how you present yourself. About how you sit, how you walk, how you talk, that you shouldn't move your hands too much." Hoping to offer him a more informal space to practice his Dutch, I encouraged him to go to the language café.

One participant characterised the cafe to me as "we're just talking. No homework. No exercises. And listening. It is good." Indeed, the set-up of the classes was spontaneous, and so was the door policy: Everyone who wanted to learn the Dutch language was welcome. Participants I conversed with included an engineer whose mother tongue is Serbian, an architect from Portugal, and a historian from Syria. These three men would not be likely to meet each other: Being labelled as an "economic migrant," an "expat," and a "refugee status-holder," respectively, they would flow through different bureaucratic channels. The language café is one of the rare places where people whose asylum procedures reached different outcomes gather.

The language café is located in a building that operates as a grassroots library since 2013. From the start, the initiators insisted on not receiving municipal funding: Because such funding is coupled with "shifting policy targets," such funding would compromise their "autonomy" (van der Zwaard et al., 2018). Also, the library does not participate in "professional networks in the social domain" because instead it cherishes its "close connection to the direct surroundings and other self-organisations in the city" (van der Zwaard et al., 2018, p. 51).

4.6. The Pressure to Formalise: "Self-Sufficiency Is an Illusion That Should Be Readily Abandoned"

The constitutive contradictions that underpin the world-making that brokers in refugee advocacy engage in could be grasped by considering the pressure to formalise and the pull of competitive tendering on small-scale organisations—despite reasons to resist neoliberal reform at the same time.

Although the organisers are critical of the way competitive tenders regulate support for newcomers, they could also be a means used to secure the work that they envision doing. Every now and then the organisers

did express ambitions to draw on these instruments themselves. This most clearly happened in the case of Luciano's initiative. Instead of regular complaints about "market dynamics," he more often came to speak about "customisation" (*maatwerk*) and "alignment" (*stroomlijning*)—terms that have a rather formal sound to them. He also changed the focus of his initiative to better match the pre-determined targets of competitive tenders set by the municipality at that time, invited a policy advisor who decides on competitive tendering contracts to an event he organised, and mentioned to this policy advisor that he was open to "collaborate."

In the face of short-lived funding from subsidy regimes, Luciano reckoned that his initiative could become more durably embedded within the support infrastructure through tendering. As demonstrated elsewhere (van der Veer, 2021), most organisers struggle to secure a livelihood, work hard to turn their initiative into a life-sustaining practice, try to negotiate for themselves a legitimate social position, and attempt to bring their initiatives into congruence with what they think is considered remunerable and valued by the local state.

The advocates who support refugee-led initiatives, on the one hand, are committed to helping organisers with a forced migration background to establish such a legitimate social position. On the other hand, they diametrically oppose competitive tendering. This tension points to differences in positionality between the organisers and their advisers. While the advisors use their positioning in-between formal and informal infrastructure for brokering against competitive tendering, the organisers are positioned differently and have different concerns and aspirations.

The initiators of the grassroots library who wrote the report that discussed the impact of competitive tendering recognise this tension. Although they themselves insist on remaining what they call "autonomous" and "informal," they recognise this pressure on grassroots initiatives to "formalise" (van der Zwaard et al., 2018, p. 11). The municipality plays a role in supporting most informal initiatives in Rotterdam (p. 51), the authors write, and this is not something to denounce per definition: "The feasibility of self-sufficiency is an illusion that should be readily abandoned" (p. 59), they argue. Support by "the institutional world" is pressing for "reasons of continuity" (*de continueringsvraag*; p. 5): because applying for short-lived project funding consumes a lot of time and energy for small-scale informal organisations, the increased formalisation of initiatives renders them eligible to competitive tenders—which are seen to offer relative durability. Participating in competitive tenders can be a way to fix structural financial problems caused by short-lived subsidy regimes (p. 18).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

How does neoliberal reform transform in/formal urban infrastructure of resource provisioning by/for refugees and the routines of those who inhabit this infrastructure? This has been the central question of this article. What I showed is that tendering exerts pressure on informal infrastructure. Some of my interlocutors are concerned that neoliberal values and logics that have been adopted in formal infrastructure deteriorate informal support infrastructure in neighbourhoods. The rhetorical question "Where are all the small foundations?" is on the minds of people who have long been working in Rotterdam's "social domain." The question is rhetorical because the consensus among the interlocutors in this study is that small-scale neighbourhood-based initiatives have "dissolved" as an effect of competitive tendering. Pressured by a high "responsibility" (for "difficult issues"), a high "liability" (without "back-up"), and insufficient "capacity" (as they are volunteer-led), small-scale organisations "disappear." Instead of a logic of "solidarity," a logic of

“numbers” is said to gain traction, “neighbours” transform into “clients” that contribute to tendered organisations’ KPIs, and a logic of “control, control, control” springs up. In the ongoing arrival infrastructuring, civil society initiatives have lost their “agenda-setting” function and have become “simply executive”—the advisors claim.

This pressure on informal infrastructure shows that formal and informal infrastructure are entangled in the sense that values and logics from formal infrastructure get to circulate in informal networks. The refugee advocates in this study are uniquely positioned at the interface of informal and formal infrastructure: They nurture contacts with activist movements, resident-led task forces, and neighbourhood-based spaces, but also with political parties, the city administration, renowned civil society organisations, funding organisations, and higher education institutes. In the view of some of my interlocutors, formal infrastructure is experienced as “the institutional side” and civil society organisations that are part of this infrastructure are seen to be “executive organisation[s] of the government.” Informal infrastructure, on the other hand, is seen to be grounded in “solidarity” and includes urban spaces in which control and ownership between refugees and volunteers are unsettled and where different target audiences coexist.

This positioning in-between formal and informal infrastructure equips the refugee advocates well to mediate between representatives of formal organisations with a competitive tendering contract and more informal neighbourhood-based resident initiatives (including refugee-led organisations). This in-betweenness also equips these advocates well to connect informal initiatives to resources distributed by formal organisations. Given the informal contacts these advisors nurture with people in various local arenas of power, they can engage in advocacy work on behalf of refugee-led initiatives that struggle to receive “credit” from formal organisations. By helping the organisers to access influential people as well as funding possibilities, advisors further weave together the formal and informal infrastructure. Their in-betweenness is an asset that allows them to translate between different rationales.

Given the structural entanglement of formal and informal infrastructure it is not simply that the advocates close some kind of gap. This entanglement in and of itself is also not something the advocates denounce. As we have seen, the “self-sufficiency” of initiatives is an “illusion” and support from “the institutional world” is pressing for “reasons of continuity.” Rather than closing a gap, the advocates are on a value-driven mission to “revitalise” informal infrastructure. They do so by being a gatekeeper of spaces that resist the values and logics of formal (tendered) infrastructure, but also by translating the added value of small-scale initiatives (and particularly refugee-led initiatives) to local administrators and by helping informal initiatives access formal resources.

They do so by putting up what they call “resistance,” by engaging in “activism,” by encouraging others not to be “obedient” and to have a “vision.” Incited by this explicitly political goal, they counterwork the depoliticisation that—in the context of competitive tendering in migrant support infrastructure specifically—is observed to go alongside neoliberalisation. Combining the brokers’ capacity to shape the circulation of resources with their explicit vision about socio-economic organisation and their commitment to helping organisers with a forced migration background, the world-making capacity of the kind of infrastructuring they are a driving force of becomes manifest. Noting that previous studies define world-making as the making and remaking of links, world-making seems to be an intuitive yet largely under-explored dimension of brokerage.

In this study, the three advisors are driven by a similar vision to resist tendering. This resistance is one of multiple strategies but there are also others—depending on positionality and context. As we have seen, some organisers with a refugee background who are critical of neoliberal reform at the same time experience a pull from competitive tendering. They are tempted to yield the values and logics of competitive tendering as this carries the promise of securing a position of relative durability in Rotterdam's arrival infrastructure. Apart from differences in positionality and relative privilege between the three advocates on the one hand and the grassroots organisers they support on the other, this points to contradictory forms of world-making that are constitutive to arrival infrastructuring. It is worth recalling here that tendered infrastructure in itself is world-making—but in ways that the brokers in this study diametrically oppose. What this shows is that arrival infrastructuring is not univocal but is grounded in a diversity of practices and ongoing negotiations between differently positioned actors who play various roles. Situated encounters this article unfolded—between advocates, welfare organisations, neighbourhood-based organisations, and beneficiaries—revealed just that.

Acknowledgments

I am profoundly grateful to those in Rotterdam who showed and told me what were matters of concern to them. I am thankful to Martijn Koster, Toon van Meijl, Halleh Ghorashi, Maria Schiller, and Marlou Schrover for their constructive comments on my thinking about brokers. My thoughts on competitive tendering owe to Tessa Bonduelle and Nina Glick Schiller. I would also like to thank Heike Hanhörster, Martina Bovo, Miriam Neßler, and Susanne Wessendorf, the academic editors of this thematic issue.

Funding

This project was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement no. 679614) and by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under the Dutch National Science Agenda (grant agreement no. NWA.1389.20.002).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Aarsæther, N., Nyseth, T., & Bjørnå, H. (2011). Two networks, one city: Democracy and governance networks in urban transformation. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *18*(3), 306–320.

Blanco, I., Griggs, S., & Sullivan, H. (2014). Situating the local in the neoliberalisation and transformation of urban governance. *Urban Studies*, *51*(31), 29–46.

Bonduelle, T. (2022a). *Outsouring crisis: Resettling refugees and sheltering asylum seekers in France* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Toronto.

Bonduelle, T. (2022b, December 21). A Fordist fantasy? Managing fluidity in the French asylum system. *American Ethnologist*. https://americanethnologist.org/online-content/essays/a-fordist-fantasy

Bräuchler, B. (2019). Brokerage, creativity and space: Protest culture in Indonesia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *40*(4), 451–468.

Bräuchler, B. (2021). Facilitating resonance: Brokerage in indigenous activism. *Cultural Dynamics*, *33*(4), 382–400.

Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2002). Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism." *Antipode*, *34*(3), 349–379.

Bruquetas-Callejo, M., Garcés-Mascareñas, B., Pennix, R., & Scholten, P. (2007). *Policymaking related to immigration and integration. The Dutch case* (Working Paper No. 15). IMISCOE

Carse, A. (2007). Keyword: infrastructure—How a humble French engineering term shaped the modern world. In P. Harvey, C. Bruun Jansen, & A. Morita (Eds.), *Infrastructures and social complexity: A companion* (pp. 27–39). Routledge.

Clarke, J. (2012). The work of governing. In K. Coulter & W. R. Schuman (Eds.), *Governing cultures: Anthropological perspectives on political labor, power, and government* (pp. 209–232). Palgrave Macmillan.

Darling, J. (2016). Privatising asylum: Neoliberalisation, depoliticisation and the governance of forced migration. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *41*(3), 230–243.

Darling, J. (2020). Out-sourcing refuge: Distance, deferral, and immunity in the urban governance of refugees. In S. Pasquetti & R. Sanyal (Eds.), *Displacement: Global conversations on refuge* (pp. 175–192). Manchester University Press.

Darling, J. (2024). Governing through partnership: Strategic migration partnerships and the politics of enrolment and ambivalence. *Political Geography*, *108*, Article 103041.

de Boer, N., & van der Lans, J. (2013, October 23). Geef ons de sleutels. *De Groene Amsterdammer*. https://www.groene.nl/artikel/geef-ons-de-sleutels

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. Ohio University Press.

Dijstelbloem, H., & Walters, W. (2021). Atmospheric border politics: The morphology of migration and solidarity practices in Europe. *Geopolitics*, *26*(2), 497–520.

Doomernik, J., & Ardon, D. (2018). The city as an agent of refugee integration. *Urban Planning*, *3*(4), 91–100.

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115.

Fechter, A. M. (2020). Brokering transnational flows of care: The case of citizen aid. *Ethnos*, *85*(2), 293–308.

Feischmidt, M., Pries, L., & Cantat, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Refugee protection and civil society in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fleischmann, L., & Steinhilper, E. (2017). The myth of apolitical volunteering for refugees: German welcome culture and a new dispositif of helping. *Social Inclusion*, *5*(3), 17–27.

Geddes, M. (2006). The limits to local governance: Institutionalist analysis and neoliberalism. *International Journal of Urban Regional Research*, *30*(1), 76–97.

Ghorashi, H. (2023). Het belang van een insider-outsider perspectief. *Mens en Maatschappij*, *98*(3), 270–274.

Ghorashi, H., Boersma, K., & Azarhoosh, F. (2023). Tussen-denken en inclusief besturen rond armoede. In T. Overmans, M. Honingh, & M. Noordegraaf (Eds.), *Maatschappelijke bestuurskunde. Hoe verbindende bestuurskundigen (kunnen) inspelen op maatschappelijke vraagstukken* (pp. 97–113). Boom.

Gidley, B., Scholten, P., & van Breugel, I. (2018). Mainstreaming in practice: The efficiencies and deficiencies of mainstreaming for street-level bureaucrats. In P. Scholten & I. van Breugel (Eds.), *Mainstreaming integration governance: New trends in migrant integration policies in Europe* (pp. 153–169). Palgrave Macmillan.

Glick Schiller, N. (2023, October 11). *If migration is an industry, what commodity is produced?: Connecting people, place and power* [Keynote address]. 9th Annual Conference on Migration and Diversity, Berlin, Germany.

Glick Schiller, N., Wenger, J., Niebuhr, J. C., Haase, S., Kern, A. F., & Blechschmidt, S. (2023). *The business of welcoming migrants*. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. https://doi.org/10.48509/MoLab.7722

Glorius, B., & Doomernik, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Geographies of asylum in Europe and the role of European localities*. Springer.

Guiraudon, V., & Lahav, G. (2000). A reappraisal of the state sovereignty debate: The case of migration control. *Comparative Political Studies*, *33*(2), 163–195.

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.

IDEM Rotterdam. (2018). *Gebiedsbeeld Delfshaven*.

Jaffe, R., & Koster, M. (2019). The myth of formality in the Global North: Informality-as-innovation in Dutch governance. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *34*(3), 563–568.

James, D., & Koch, I. (2020). Economies of advice. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of anthropology*. Oxford University Press. https://oxfordre.com/anthropology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.001.0001/acrefore-9780190854584-e-20

Kos, S., Maussen, M., & Doomernik, J. (2016). Policies of exclusion and practices of inclusion: How municipal governments negotiate asylum policies in the Netherlands. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, *4*(3), 354–374.

Koster, M. (2019). Assembling formal and informal urban governance: Political brokerage in Recife, Brazil. *Antropologica*, *61*, 25–34.

Koster, M., & Nuijten, M. (2016). Coproducing urban space: Rethinking the formal/informal dichotomy. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *37*(3), 282–294.

Koster, M., & van Leynseele, Y. (2018). Brokers as assemblers: Studying development through the lens of brokerage. *Ethnos*, *83*(5), 803–813.

Larruina, R. (2023). *The winding road to meaningful integration: A ten-year multi-perspective approach to unravelling refugee reception and integration in the Netherlands* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Larruina, R., Boersma, K., & Ponzoni, E. (2019). Responding to the Dutch asylum crisis: Implications for collaborative work between civil society and governmental organisations. *Social Inclusion*, *7*(2), 53–63.

Larruina, R., & Ghorashi, H. (2016). The normality and materiality of the dominant discourse: Voluntary work inside a Dutch asylum seeker center. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, *14*(2), 220–237.

Latour, B. (2016). Onus orbis terrarum: About a possible shift in the definition of sovereignty. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *44*(3), 305–320.

Law, J. (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*. Routledge.

Lin, W., Lindquist, J., Xiang, B., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2017). Migration infrastructures and the production of migrant mobilities. *Mobilities*, *12*(2), 167–174.

Lindquist, J. (2015). Brokers and brokerage, anthropology of. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of social & behavioral sciences* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 870–874). Elsevier.

Lindquist, J., & Xiang, B. (2018). The infrastructural turn in Asian migration. In G. Liu-Farrer & B. Yeoh (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of Asian migrations* (pp. 152–161). Routledge.

McFarlane, C. (2012). Rethinking informality: Politics, crisis, and the city. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *13*(1), 89–108.

McGranahan, C. (2021, December 13). The truths of anonymity: Ethnographic credibility and the problem with pseudonyms. *American Ethnologist*. https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/rethinking-pseudonyms-in-ethnography/the-truths-of-anonymity-ethnographic-credibility-and-the-problem-with-pseudonyms

Mosse, D., & Lewis, D. (2006). Theoretical approaches to brokerage and translation in development. In D. Lewis & D. Mosse (Eds.), *Development brokers and translators: The ethnography of aid and agencies* (pp. 1–26). Kumarian Press.

Nyers, P. (2006). *Rethinking refugees: Beyond states of emergency*. Routledge.

Ponzoni, E., Ghorashi, H., Badran, M., & Aumaj, S. (2020). *Naar een structurele plek voor het perspectief en de visie van vluchtelingen in beleidsvorming*. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Ponzoni, E., Mars, K., & Ghorashi, H. (2020). *De kracht van een alternatief verhaal: De complementaire bijdrage van burgerinitiatieven aan inclusie van vluchtelingen in de Nederlandse samenleving*. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Rast, M. (2024). *Unsettle and be unsettled: How co-creation with refugees can help transform exclusionary societal and academic structures* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Rast, M., & Ghorashi, H. (2018). Dancing with "the other": Challenges and opportunities of deepening democracy through participatory spaces for refugees. *Social Inclusion*, *6*(1), 188–198.

Rotterdam City Council. (2016). *Herijkt gebiedsplan Delfshaven: 2016–2018*.

Salter, M. B., & Walters, W. (2016). Bruno Latour encounters international relations: An interview. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *44*(3), 524–546.

Schiller, M., Awad, I., Buijse, N., Chantre, M., Huang, Y.-C., Jonitz, E., van den Brink, L., & van Dordrecht, L. (2023). Brokerage in urban networks on diversity and inclusion: The case of Rotterdam. *Cities*, *135*, Article 104219.

Schinkel, W., & van den Berg, M. (2011). City of exception: The Dutch revanchist city and the urban homo sacer. *Antipode*, *43*(5), 1911–1938.

Schrooten, M., & Meeus, B. (2020). The possible role and position of social work as part of the arrival infrastructure. *European Journal of Social Work*, *3*, 414–424.

SCP. (2020). *Nederland papierenland: Syrische statushouders en hun ervaringen met participatiebeleid*.

Smart, A., & Koster, M. (2024). Beyond formal–informal dichotomies. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of anthropology*. Oxford University Press. https://oxfordre.com/anthropology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.001.0001/acrefore-9780190854584-e-350#acrefore-9780190854584-e-350-div1-1

Specht, M., & van der Zwaard, J. (2015). *De uitvinding van de Leeszaal: Collectieve tactieken en culturele uitwisselingen*. Trancity.

Stovel, K., & Shaw, L. (2012). Brokerage. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *38*, 139–158.

Ticktin, M. (2011). *Casualties of care: Immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France*. University of California Press.

Uitermark, J., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2008). Civilizing the city: Populism and revanchist urbanism in Rotterdam. *Urban Studies*, *45*(7), 1485–1503.

van der Veer, L. (2019). Treacherous elasticity, callous boundaries: Aspiring volunteer initiatives in the field of refugee support in Rotterdam. *Voluntas*, *33*, 83–92.

van der Veer, L. (2021). Guessing games with target groups: Securing a livelihood by supporting refugees in a hostile environment. *Intersections*, *7*(2), 32–48.

van der Zwaard, J., Specht, M., Fortuin, K., Vendeloo, H., Schipper, K., & van Wieringen, T. (2018). *Voorbij de pioniersfase van bewonersinitiatieven*. Joke van der Zwaard. https://www.jokevanderzwaard.nl/2019/07/09/verduurzaming-van-lokale-initiatieven

Walters, W. (2022). Resistance as practice: Counter-conduct after Foucault. In A. Drieschova, C. Bueger, & T. Hopf (Eds.), *Conceptualizing international practices: Directions for the practice turn in international relations* (pp. 122–137). Cambridge University Press.

Walther, E. M. (2021). Brokers in straitjackets: The moral quandaries of refugee support organisations in Slovakia. *Cultural Dynamics*, *33*(4), 316–330.

Wessendorf, S. (2022). "The library is like a mother": Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189.

Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, *48*(s1), S122–S148.

Xiang, B., Yeoh, B., & Lindquist, J. (2012). Opening the black box of migration, brokers, the organization of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, *85*(1), 7–19.

About the Author

Lieke van der Veer is a social anthropologist who works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology of the Erasmus University Rotterdam and at the Department of Urbanism at the Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands. Her work focuses on state–society relations at the interface of self-organisations and forms of government. Her recent work studies social equality policies. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork she has published on refugee-led assistance and advocacy.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8683
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8683

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Arrival Brokers and Commercial Infrastructuring for and With Migrant Newcomers in Dortmund, Germany

Miriam Neßler

Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, TU Berlin, Germany

Correspondence: Miriam Neßler (m.nessler@tu-berlin.de)

Submitted: 14 May 2024 **Accepted:** 1 October 2024 **Published:** 19 December 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

Current research underlines the important role of arrival infrastructures in urban spaces in enabling and shaping migrants' arrival. These include arrival brokers, individuals who help newcomers access resources. As yet, we have little knowledge on brokers' informal and commercial practices in the context of arrival, especially in European cities, whereby brokers unsettle common "distinctions between 'state' and 'market,' as well as 'formal' and 'informal'" (Lindquist, 2012, p. 75). This article aims to contribute to our understanding of arrival brokers by shedding light on commercial brokering in an arrival area in Dortmund, Germany, looking at the relations between brokers and newcomer clients. The study is based on ethnographic research, including one year of participant observation in a broker's shop, and interviews with both brokers and newcomers. Covering both perspectives, this article analyses how commercial arrival brokering shapes newcomers' access to resources. The findings offer new insights into arrival brokers' multiple facets of in/formal and commercial infrastructuring. The article shows how brokers' accessibility depends on spatial, social, financial, and temporal factors. It is relational both within the local context of service provision and through setting the conditions governing resource access. Arrival brokers can influence newcomers' arrival processes by enabling, channelling (and sometimes blocking) resource access while also offering opportunities for newcomers to circumvent and compensate for other—more formal—forms of support. Commercial brokering evolves as a practice between brokers and newcomers within, parallel to, and beyond the support provided by more formal institutions.

Keywords

arrival brokers; arrival infrastructure; commercial; in/formality; migration

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

To introduce the topic of commercial arrival infrastructuring, this article opens with a vignette from the ethnographic fieldwork on which it is based:

> 4 October 2021, early afternoon. It's my first day volunteering at Karim's shop for my research, a copy shop in Dortmund's Nordstadt. Karim's shop is no normal copy shop: In addition to copies, people can pay money for support with paperwork and other advice. After completing a child benefit application for a Spanish man and writing a letter to a Romanian woman's insurance company, I got talking to a man who turned out to be Ghanaian. He asked me if I could arrange an appointment for him at the foreigners' office. He had only recently moved to Dortmund from another German city and his residence permit had expired more than a month ago. Since he did not have internet access, I used my phone to arrange an appointment for him. I then wanted to print out the confirmation, but he was unable to pay for that. I asked him to come back later with the money to pick up the printout. I was under the impression that I should only help those able to pay. Later, I had a very bad conscience after learning that, although Karim usually charges a fee for his services and copies, he also serves clients for free if they don't have enough money. However, it was not only my inappropriate behaviour (that hopefully did not have any negative consequences) that made this encounter noteworthy: The man showed me a letter indicating that a council-run advice centre had previously tried to get him an appointment. Why would he come to the copy shop rather than go to the more formal and non-commercial counselling centre?

In recent years, scholars have increasingly analysed the importance of urban space(s) for integration, discussing the role of established and emerging arrival neighbourhoods for migrants' arrival and potential settlement (Bovo, 2020; El-Kayed et al., 2020; Fawaz, 2017; Hans et al., 2019). The concept of arrival infrastructures takes this research one step further, allowing a micro-perspective on "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled upon arrival and where their future spatial and social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated" (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 1). Arrival infrastructures are understood in terms of their function for newcomers, implying that ordinary spaces like shops and train stations can also act as arrival hubs (Bovo, 2020; Meeus et al., 2019; Wessendorf, 2022). This perspective of arrival infrastructures puts an emphasis on in/formal urban spaces which are often excluded in the more prominent studies on migrants' support by social networks or state(-funded) integration structures. Expanding this notion, this article provides a better understanding of "who the actors involved in these [arrival] spaces are and how they act and interact" (Bovo, 2020, p. 29). It focuses on arrival brokers such as Karim from the introducing vignette and their role in shaping migrant newcomers' arrival in a new socio-spatial setting, taking a specific look at commercial brokering practices.

Representing prominent components of migration infrastructures (Lindquist et al., 2012), brokers have only recently gained attention in the study of arrival infrastructures, more specifically in the European context (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Hans, 2023). Arrival brokers are understood as "individuals who take on an instrumental role in newcomers' settlement" (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020, p. 4). Although many anthropological studies engage with brokers and their role in blurring our understanding of "distinctions between 'state' and 'market,' as well as 'formal' and 'informal'" (Lindquist, 2012, p. 75), only a few studies focus on brokering in (European) arrival contexts. Commercial practices in particular have attracted little attention so far—an interesting fact given that the concept of arrival infrastructures is rooted in work on "migration infrastructures" where commercial infrastructures are understood as an important dimension of

how migration is facilitated and channelled (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Responding to this gap, the article connects the concept of arrival infrastructures with current studies on brokering in the context of migration and access to basic resources within European welfare systems. It provides empirical evidence on arrival brokers' commercial support practices and their role for migrant newcomers in an arrival area in Germany, asking how commercial arrival brokering takes place and how it shapes newcomers' access to resources.

The article starts by reviewing literature on arrival infrastructures, (arrival) brokers, and commercial brokering practices, followed by a presentation of the methods and case study. The empirical section shows how in/formal commercial brokering takes place, focusing on brokers' accessibility and their impact on newcomers' access to resources. The conclusion sums up my findings, linking them back to the debate on in/formal arrival infrastructures in the context of today's welfare and integration regimes.

2. In/Formal Arrival Infrastructures, Brokers, and Commercial Support for Migrant Newcomers

An increasing body of literature deals with informal practices, actors, institutions, and spaces at the intersection of migration and urban development and planning (Darling, 2017; Fawaz, 2017). Darling (2017) suggests that "a concern with urban informality enables a valorization of incremental and often highly tactical practices [of migrants]" (p. 189). At the same time, there is increasing recognition of the contribution of informal non-state or non-state-funded actors in facilitating access to welfare and social rights (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2024; Phillimore et al., 2021). This takes place in the paradoxical context of neoliberalism and welfare austerity on the one hand (Koch & James, 2022), and increasing bureaucratization and regulation in the context of integration and access to welfare benefits on the other (Swyngedouw, 2019; Voivozeanu & Lafleur, 2023). Which practices and actors are considered informal and by whom is a product and expression of the "ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and the illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized" (Roy, 2011, p. 233). The focus on arrival brokers as informal actors is thus considered as a starting point in this article, grounded in the empirical observation that brokers are (a) non-state-funded actors who are (b) considered informal by stakeholders within the more formal sphere of support provision and integration governance. I use the term in/formal (Biehl, 2022) to account for the informal–formal relationships that are expressed and constructed through regulations and discourses but also through brokers' and newcomers' practices. The following section introduces the concept of arrival infrastructures, before engaging with existing studies on (arrival) brokers.

2.1. Arrival Infrastructures

The concept of arrival infrastructures is part of a larger infrastructural turn in research on migration and arrival, emphasising the context shaping people's multi-directional spatial and social mobilities. It builds on Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) notion of "migration infrastructure [as] the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility" (p. 122). Understanding migrants' arrival not as an end but as a starting point, the notion of arrival infrastructure puts a focus on the various infrastructures, spaces, media, and people that come into play upon arrival. As such, they "select, give direction to, and retain or accelerate certain migratory subjects" (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 15). Using the infrastructural perspective allows us to better understand the non-/inclusivity of certain spaces and their inclusive or exclusive effects (El-Kayed & Keskinkılıc, 2023; Felder et al., 2020).

The study of arrival infrastructures expands our recognition and knowledge of urban in/formalities in the context of arrival. It "allows for a critical as well as transformative engagement with the position of the state in the management of migration" (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 2). As such, formal actors and spaces with their regulations and normativities are seen next to, in a continuum with, and in their relation to other, more informal actors and spaces. The interplay of different structures in a spatial context is also described as an "ecosystem" (Greater London Authority, 2021, as cited in Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024, p. 2827), although the emergence of arrival infrastructures is not as "natural" as the biological term might suggest. For instance, Schillebeeckx et al. (2019) discuss how arrival infrastructures are "not only the result of community dynamics, but of a combination of reciprocity within communities, state-based redistribution, and market exchange" (p. 149), and thus dependent on the local constellations of urban, welfare, and integration regimes. Newcomers are often conceived as users of infrastructures and their agency and active role in co-producing arrival infrastructures has gained little attention so far (Wajsberg & Schapendonk, 2022). Wajsberg and Schapendonk (2022) therefore propose focusing on infrastructuring practices. As we will see, in the context of commercial brokering, this implies taking broker and client practices into account as part of and co-constituting arrival infrastructures.

2.2. (Arrival) Brokers

Arrival brokers are conceptualised as "individuals who take on an instrumental role in newcomers' settlement" (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020, p. 4), a concept based on an understanding of a broker as a "specific type of middleman, mediator, or intermediary" (Lindquist, 2015, p. 870). Backed by a long history in anthropological research (for an overview see James, 2011; Lindquist, 2015), scholars are renewing their interest in brokering in the context of international migration and neoliberal transformation (Elcioglu & Shams, 2023; Lindquist, 2012; Lindquist et al., 2012). Migration brokers are prominent figures in the study of migration infrastructures connecting social, regulatory, and commercial domains. Although their brokering also includes support in destination countries (Jones & Sha, 2020; Wee et al., 2018; Zack & Landau, 2022), relatively little work on migration in/to the Global North includes this perspective.

Brokers are characterised by their translating, bridging, connecting, and transforming roles (Ho & Ting, 2021; Hönke & Müller, 2018; Lindquist, 2015), with their practices evolving in the context of gaps between different social spheres and between different actors and resources. In the context of (im)migration, they bridge spatial, social, and cultural gaps to make various aspects of migration and arrival easier. Hans (2023) has shown how arrival brokers serve as "informal information nodes" (p. 786) for newcomers, filling gaps in the more formal provision of support. Many are members of the same group that they are supporting, with some scholars describing them as "ethnic brokers" (e.g., Voivozeanu & Lafleur, 2023). They may be part of a broader organisational context (Hans, 2023; Tuckett, 2018; see also the literature on volunteering, e.g., Ambrosini & Artero, 2023), but their understanding as brokers highlights their informal practices beyond this—more formal—context. While benefiting from their structural position "from within" (Bräuchler et al., 2021), for example through arrival-specific knowledge (Hans, 2023), they may also be subject to the same barriers and restrictions they previously faced, leading them to use brokering as a way of gaining a foothold in society themselves through the acquisition of social and symbolic but also financial capital (Tuckett, 2018).

2.3. Commercial Brokering

Whereas commercial brokering has not yet been studied to any great extent in the context of arrival infrastructures, it is often implicit in the study of international migration. As such, migration brokers are mostly understood as recruiters in the context of labour migration (Deshingkar, 2019; Lindquist et al., 2012), sometimes also as smugglers (Alkan, 2021; Faist, 2014), or both (Jones & Sha, 2020). Brokering is also conceptualised as a migration industry (Cranston et al., 2018; Schapendonk, 2018). So far, conceptualisations of brokers in the context of arrival infrastructures focus on those offering their services for free, with few empirical insights existing on commercial brokering practices (Hans, 2023; Wessendorf, 2021). However, various studies show how brokers are also getting paid by migrants to find them jobs (Alkan, 2021) and housing (Bernt et al., 2021; Parsloe, 2022), and helping them gain access to a legal residence status and social security through communicating with the relevant immigration (Tuckett, 2018) and welfare authorities (Ratzmann & Heindlmaier, 2022; Voivozeanu & Lafleur, 2023). Looking at these brokering activities through the lens of arrival means acknowledging brokers' important role in providing access to fundamental societal resources against the backdrop of the transformation of European welfare and integration regimes. Voivozeanu and Lafleur (2023) even speak of a "brokerage industry" (p. 729) evolving not only in a context of austerity but also of ongoing bureaucratisation and state attempts to control migration and access to welfare benefits.

Literature on migration, welfare, and immigration brokers hints at important aspects associated with brokers' ambivalent role, especially when it comes to commercial support practices: Scholars ascribe a moral ambivalence to (commercial) brokers, either denigrating brokers as exploitative or acclaiming them for their creative mediation (cf. James, 2011; Tuckett, 2018). Scholars also perceive brokers ambivalently, referring to their work as il/legal or il/licit depending on the field of operation (spatial or social mobility) and the perspective (the state or migrants; Alkan, 2021). Less research has been done on brokers' impact on migrants' arrival and their agency in this process (cf. Deshingkar, 2019). Wee et al. (2018) show how migration brokers serving domestic workers in Singapore are able to create both "chutes and ladders," resulting in upward social mobility but also new vulnerabilities, and ultimately new and often unpredictable conditions for migrants' resource access. In their study of Romanian migrant workers in Germany, Voivozeanu and Lafleur (2023) found that precarious migrants were especially dependent on brokers to access welfare benefits. Yet there is a lack of empirical studies on commercial brokering in (European) urban arrival areas focusing on brokers' practices, their socio-spatial embeddedness, and their interrelation with and role for newcomers.

3. Researching Commercial Arrival Brokering in Dortmund-Nordstadt

The insights in this article are based on a larger study of arrival infrastructures in established arrival neighbourhoods, including 13 months of ethnographic research conducted in Dortmund-Nordstadt. Dortmund is a city with around 600,000 inhabitants located in the post-industrial Ruhr region in Western Germany. Due to its industrial heritage, the city has been shaped by migration. This is specifically the case in Nordstadt, an inner-city working-class district that traditionally represents the first place of residence for many immigrants coming to Dortmund. Scholars and public authorities alike acknowledge Nordstadt's important function as an arrival neighbourhood (Gerten et al., 2023; Kurtenbach, 2015; Staubach, 2014). Now home to 10% of Dortmund's population, more than half of its inhabitants have a foreign nationality.

In line with developments in many other European cities, immigration has further diversified the population in recent years, with non-EU nationals (e.g., from Syria, Ukraine, Somalia, Morocco) and EU citizens (e.g., from Bulgaria, Romania, Spain) moving into the area. These recent newcomers form a heterogeneous group with regard to their legal status, nationalities, socio-economic status, and educational and religious backgrounds.

The area offers relatively accessible and affordable housing and features a dense landscape of formal and informal arrival infrastructures. Both the city administration and a very active civil society comprised of migrant-run organisations and other non-governmental and welfare organisations play an active role in shaping arrival infrastructures (Kurtenbach & Rosenberger, 2021; Neßler et al., 2024). As part of this, an overall strategy for new arrivals, especially for EU migrants, is in place to initiate and coordinate projects for improving social inclusion in various fields such as access to welfare, education, and housing. Alongside these efforts of formal actors, scholars highlight the continuing importance—albeit little recognised by the public authorities—of informal and often migrant-led support for newcomers (Hans, 2023).

With a view to better understanding the different practices of brokers and clients as well as their thinking and motives, the research relied mainly on participant observation and interviews. Once or twice a week, I joined Karim, a broker, in his high-street shop to observe and participate in shop activities as a part-time volunteer. Karim agreed to host me after I stumbled across his shop while looking for phone credit and found out that he and his team also offered support services for dealing with red tape and other things. Everyone working in the shop knew about my research and we also shared common reflections about what was going on in the shop. I conducted semi-structured and ethnographic interviews with eight arrival brokers, three of whom mentioned charging clients for their support services. While Karim and one other broker spoke openly about their commercial practices, others were more reticent. I am thus aware that my "insider" perspective on brokers' practices is limited and does not include more exploitative practices.

To gain a more holistic view of brokers' practices and their relevance for newcomers to Dortmund, I further conducted 34 semi-structured and many more informal interviews with migrant newcomers living in or frequenting the neighbourhood. To broaden my knowledge of the context in which commercial arrival brokers operate and to get to know a variety of newcomer groups, I was involved in a more formal, socio-educational neighbourhood centre and "hung out" in other public and semi-public spaces in the area. Since much of the institutional and organisational landscape was set up in the context of EU and refugee migration since 2014/2015, the research focused on migrant newcomers with an international migration history who had arrived in Dortmund in the last decade. I met some of my interviewees in Karim's shop, others in more formal settings in other institutions in Nordstadt or via snowball sampling. Interviews took place face-to-face and were conducted in (often a mix of) German, Spanish, French, English, Arabic, Soninke, and Romani. Some interlocutors acted as "community interpreters" helping me with establishing interview contacts, facilitating multilingual interviews, and discussing interview results.

Nineteen interviewees used the services of commercial brokers. The majority were EU citizens or family members of EU citizens and socio-economically dependent on welfare benefits. Most directly mentioned commercial support, whereas others would only talk about this aspect after being specifically asked. This suggests that commercial brokering might be underestimated in studies on arrival and settlement because the commodification of support might not always be explicitly mentioned. Although having just moved to Dortmund myself and still struggling with some similar problems as my interviewees (e.g., finding childcare),

my situation differed from that of my interlocutors. As a *white* German working in the academic field, I did not encounter the same challenges and was not reliant on commercial brokering. Ethical approval for the study was gained from the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development in Dortmund. Based on written or verbal consent by all interviewees, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised. Pseudonyms were chosen by either the interviewee or myself. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded with the help of qualitative data analysis software and analysed in an iterative process informed by grounded theory.

4. Arrival Brokers and Their Commercial Infrastructuring for and With Migrant Newcomers

Brokers play an important role in helping newcomers in Dortmund-Nordstadt gain access to goods, services, and information. Commercial brokering is conducted by a variety of actors, ranging from ad-hoc brokers to officially registered businesses. Although they are seen as informal actors and their practice of charging money for support was condemned by more formal actors such as municipal representatives, their legal status was not necessarily informal: One broker ran a registered business offering assistance with citizenship and vehicle red tape. Other than him, I was unable to check brokers' businesses' formal status, though it became clear that commercial brokering practices often complemented other formal services such as translation. I therefore consider arrival brokers and their commercial practices as both formal and informal, as their businesses' legal status varies and might be only one aspect next to their operational logic and perception and outcomes of support.

When looking at a broker's motives, it is impossible to separate help from profit. "Our passion is to help people"—a slogan on a broker's business card (see Figure 1) points to this ambivalence. Shopkeeper Karim was driven by the social and religious motive to improve people's situations, while at the same time needing to ensure that his shop kept running and that he and his employees were able to earn a living (at least partially) with the fees charged for their services. This twin motivation is embedded in their own structurally weak position: Most brokers whom I spoke with (though not all) had personal arrival experience and reported helping other migrants as one of their motives for support services (see also Hans, 2023). Although Karim had previously worked in a refugee camp and acquired useful additional skills as well as new clients there, he had no social worker qualifications, barring him from a formal job in the social sector. As such, brokers can be seen as both "product[s] and producer[s]" (Tuckett, 2018) of past, present, and future arrival infrastructures.

Brokers' services encompass paid support for immigration matters (such as arranging visas), for the initial arrival (finding housing, registering with authorities, etc.), and for ongoing issues that both newcomers and established residents face (such as translations, accompanying people to authorities, and bureaucratic paperwork). Though differing in their legal, social, educational, and national backgrounds, the majority of my interviewees had arrived to Dortmund in the legal context of EU migration (mostly from Spain). Others had arrived to join their families, as students or as refugees, after having been granted asylum somewhere else in Germany. Most of them were dependent on welfare benefits, which not only often went hand in hand with precarious living situations but also with a lot of paperwork. Whereas some of the interviewed newcomer clients had arrived via a broker and directly utilised their services, others found and stayed with brokers because of their relational accessibility.

Figure 1. Business card of a commercial broker.

4.1. Brokers' Relational Accessibility

Brokers in Dortmund-Nordstadt are especially accessible to newcomers in spatial, social, financial, and temporal ways. Firstly, brokers' locations and embeddedness in the urban space play a crucial role. Many operate in arrival neighbourhoods, more specifically close to or in places frequented by newcomers for shopping, socialising, or other daily activities. Some newcomer interviewees found out by chance that a person or shop nearby offered support on a commercial basis, including individuals with no prior contacts in Dortmund. Brokers were also digitally accessible. Although Karim was more oriented towards local people from Nordstadt, people from other districts of Dortmund and even the surrounding cities and other parts of Germany and beyond would contact him. Through their social media presence and well-known phone numbers, brokers were able to establish contacts with migrants more easily, sometimes even before they left their country of origin, especially when visa procedures and the first steps were arranged from there. This demonstrates that the dividing line between migration and arrival brokers is blurry.

Secondly, accessibility is not only spatial but also social. My interviewees described how they were directed to a commercial broker by acquaintances or people they met in (semi-)public spaces. The high-street location of Karim's shop and its reputation among both recently arrived and established clients made it accessible for members of a whole range of social and ethnic groups. Most brokers were well embedded in social (migrant) and often co-ethnic networks. For example, a substantial share of Karim's clients had links with Karim's home country, Morocco, but also other (ascribed) linguistic, religious, or geographic similarities and shared identities (e.g., language, religion, etc.) played a role. Brokers' own "arrival-specific knowledge" (Hans, 2023, p. 381) and their positionality allow newcomers to get more culturally-sensitive treatment.

Thirdly, accessibility is also conditioned by financial aspects. Price scales for brokering services differ greatly. Depending on the service and the scarcity of the brokered resource, but also on a broker's perception of a client's deservingness, prices vary greatly. Some interviewees reported having had to pay several thousand euros for the initial "arrival package." They spoke of some brokers overcharging, while others offered fair prices. Money excluded some people both financially and morally, when people were not able or willing to pay a (certain) price for a service. However, prices were also adapted to clients' financial and social circumstances. As already mentioned in the vignette introducing this article, the prices charged by Karim were usually small (up to 5 euros). Karim also made exceptions and prices were negotiable. Abdallah, for

instance, was not charged anything for a whole range of support services due to his child being disabled. Another example of how commercial services are rendered accessible to newcomers was expressed by my interviewee Latifa: On telling her broker that she didn't have the requested 5,000 euros, he replied:

> No problem, just give me 1,000 euros for now. I'll fill out all the documents for the job centre for you. And when you get the money from the job centre, you can pay me back 500 euros a month.

This form of debt, similar to "fly now, pay later" in migration brokerage (Seiger, 2021), shows how prices take account of the formal welfare system.

Lastly, brokers' accessibility has a temporal component. Constituting an alternative to more formal non-commercial support, people turn to commercial services to receive prompt and flexible support. Karim for example opened his shop every day of the week and, additionally, was contacted by phone at all hours by people needing help. Many interviewees who also knew civil society organisations regularly used brokers' services because they did not need to arrange appointments with them. Such as Sara who, despite working in civil society organisations and schools every day, preferred going to Karim's shop with her paperwork. She would appreciate his flexibility and ability to quickly resolve her problems. Brokers would also be available for time-consuming support: For example, Karim regularly closes his shop to accompany clients to appointments, e.g., at the job centre or foreigners' office. This is possible due to his more informal operational logic allowing "off-the-record" support. On the other hand, this also entails lower reliability: Clients and I were often kept waiting for Karim outside the shop. Brokers set the conditions for their support. As we will see in the next section, newcomer clients are in many respects reliant on brokers and the quality of their services, while at the same time using brokers as a way to circumvent and compensate for other—more formal—forms of support.

4.2. Commercial Arrival Brokering and Its Multiple Effects on Newcomers' Access to Resources

To facilitate resource access, brokers react to their customers' needs by operating in and connecting different fields. Malika, one of my newcomer interviewees, stated that "if you have money, you can get everything you want." Brokers' services cover not only the support available at civil society organisations, e.g., with paperwork, but also services in fields that are not or only rarely covered by more formal service provision. For example, brokers might help clients facing legal restrictions to find a job or support them in finding a flat before or directly upon arrival, i.e., at a time when formal assistance is not (yet) accessible. Rachida told me why a broker (*Simsar* in Arabic) was necessary for successful arrival:

> As we didn't have a flat, we were not registered. Yet without being registered, it wasn't possible to get work, because you can't work here without registration.... So, we obviously needed a *Simsar*, right from the start.

By offering "all-inclusive packages," brokers enable newcomers to quickly gain relative stability: Brokers' clients get registered with the municipality, gain regular employment and rental contracts, and become members of the social welfare system. The combination of different services and the depths people take to afford them highlight how newcomers are relying on brokers, but also how brokers can enable upward social mobility a priori. This requires not only profound knowledge of relevant institutions and procedures but also

the construction of relationships of trust with those working in the respective organisations and institutions. Many brokers are in contact with interpreters, landlords and housing companies, employment agencies, and clerks at local institutions, such as the schools' department or foreigners' office. Karim, for example, knew the names and phone numbers of some of these individuals and would often start calls with a short chat. Such direct contacts with formal and informal actors allowed him to quickly service his clients' needs and argue in their favour.

But brokers' specific networks and competencies also channel people into specific situations. Most interviewees had found housing in Nordstadt and many worked as pickers in logistics (men) or as cleaners (women). Many reported bad housing and working conditions and a lack of proficient support in dealing with paperwork. This led to further problems, for instance with landlords and public authorities, as well as negative effects on people's health. Depending on brokers' networks and competencies, commodification may thus negatively impact the result of a service. This is especially true when profit takes precedence over help. Some interviewees reported services being recorded as completed, even though the results were not up to scratch. Rachida, for example, paid a broker to find a place in a kindergarten for her child, but after two trials, his support work stopped. She even suspected that he had gone specifically to the kindergartens in question in the knowledge that they were full to avoid further efforts. Others reported hidden costs. Some brokers also tended to monopolise their positions by not sharing information on other support structures with their clients. There were various examples of how brokers benefitted from their clients' weak positions and lack of knowledge, especially when newcomers had few pre-existing social networks, few (German) language skills, and no knowledge of more formal organisations.

However, newcomers are not only victims or passive users. In Karim's shop, clients negotiated about the speed and price of almost every service. Rachida, after she had found a kindergarten on her own, felt that her broker owed her a service and requested him to support her with other issues. Newcomers' position as paying clients seemed to differ from their position as users of a civil society organisation. Commercial brokering, in this regard, is not only an infrastructuring practice for newcomers, but it is co-created with newcomers. This is further amplified by the fact that some newcomers opt for brokers instead of civil society organisations or other uncommercial support although they offer similar support. While this highlights brokers' relational accessibility vis-à-vis other support structures, it also shows newcomers' agency, although limited, in choosing a certain infrastructure. Newcomers use brokers as small windows of opportunity and thus co-create brokers as a commercial infrastructure.

5. Conclusion

This article aimed to expand our knowledge of urban in/formalities in the context of migrant arrival. Shedding light on the work of arrival brokers in Dortmund-Nordstadt (Germany), it contributes to the debate on arrival infrastructures. The article establishes a connection between the notion of arrival brokers and infrastructures, building on literature on brokers and their commercial practices in a range of migration- and arrival-related contexts. It contributes to a better understanding of arrival infrastructures as an assemblage of different actors, spaces, media, and technologies, including newcomers themselves. Through using the perspective of both brokers and newcomers, the article shows how commercial brokering functions as an infrastructuring practice transcending formal–informal binaries.

Brokers' accessibility is contingent upon a range of social, spatial, financial, and temporal factors. Brokers' own positionality and their embeddedness in migrant networks allow them to cater for newcomers within different social networks. The location of brokers in long-established arrival areas makes them accessible to a wider range of clients, including newcomers without preexisting contacts. Their digital presence blurs the line between migration and arrival brokers, partly facilitating both pre- and post-arrival support. It also contributes to their temporal accessibility because brokers are not only available on-site but also online. They offer ad-hoc, yet possibly time-consuming services. As alternatives to more formal but temporally constrained support structures (e.g., including those where appointments need to be arranged), their flexibility may also lead to others having to wait. Fees for support services may exclude clients, but may also include others when their financial situations and reliance on welfare benefits are taken into account. In sum, brokers' accessibility is relational because the conditions set by brokers develop in relation to newcomers as clients. They create both in- and exclusions and can only be understood within the context of the local provision of arrival infrastructures.

Brokers' ambivalent effects on migrants' arrival—enabling, channelling, and possibly blocking resource access—can be described as "chutes and ladders" (Wee et al., 2018). Catering to their clients' needs and resources, brokers can provide newcomers with access to different fields relevant to their initial and ongoing arrival. Migrant newcomers are to a high degree dependent on brokers' competencies and networks as well as on the degree of their profit or altruistic orientation. However, newcomers are not only victims or passive users in this regard. My empirical material shows how newcomers sometimes prefer commercial instead of non-commercial support. Their (limited) choices highlight brokers' relational accessibility when municipal structures, civil society organisations, or social networks are not accessible or certain services are not available. Through opting for brokers, newcomers co-create a commercial infrastructure as a way of circumventing more formal pathways to support, representing an alternative that they could keep on going to without the need to arrange an appointment, wait, and register. As such, commercial arrival brokering is not only an infrastructuring practice for newcomers but also an act of "'minor' critiques" (Darling, 2017, p. 189) by newcomers, showing where formal structures are not flexible, efficient, and accessible enough.

Arrival brokers operate between the formal and the informal—in terms of their official status, the spaces they use, the people they connect with, and the outcomes they produce. As such, they form part of a support provision infrastructure within, parallel to, and beyond the one provided by state(-funded) institutions. They facilitate newcomers' access to basic resources, such as housing and welfare benefits. In the same vein, they facilitate the city administration's communication with newcomers and thus draw our attention to the role of the state (Meeus et al., 2019). Although arrival brokers' relations with more formal institutions need to be further analysed, the commodification and informalisation of support for newcomers point to the reliance on informal mediation within the realm of the welfare state. This article calls for a reflection on the role of state institutions and civil society organisations in dealing with informal brokers and their contribution to newcomers' social inclusion. While acknowledging brokers' important function, the study reveals ways in which more formal structures could better cater to the needs of different newcomers. To what extent the (local) state is able or willing to decommodify this emerging "brokerage industry" (Voivozeanu & Lafleur, 2023, p. 729) depends not only on the provision of the requisite infrastructures and their accessibility but also on its ability to reduce the barriers that create the need for brokers' extensive and intense support in today's welfare and integration regimes.

Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude goes to all interlocutors and interpreters for their participation in the research project by sharing their experiences and perspectives with me. A special thanks goes to Karim who included me in his daily activities in the shop. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development in Dortmund and the research project AIMEC for their contributions to the broader research project and the development of this research article, especially Heike Hanhörster, Cornelia Tippel, and Lara Hartig. I also thank the four anonymous reviewers, Susanne Wessendorf, and the FLINTA DOKs for their constructive and helpful comments.

Funding

This research has been conducted as part of the research project AIMEC (Arrival Infrastructures and Migrant Newcomers in European Cities) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/T015810/1).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Alkan, H. (2021). Temporal intersections of mobility and informality: Simsars as (im)moral agents in the trajectories of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Germany. *Migration Letters*, *18*(2), 201–213. https://doi.org/10.59670/ml.v18i2.1181

Ambrosini, M., & Artero, M. (2023). Immigrant volunteering: A form of citizenship from below. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *34*(2), 252–262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00454-x

Bernt, M., Hamann, U., El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkilic, L. (2021). Internal migration industries: Shaping the housing options for refugees at the local level. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2217–2233. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211041242

Biehl, K. S. (2022). Spectrums of in/formality and il/legality: Negotiating business and migration-related statuses in arrival spaces. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 112–129. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnac005

Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 23–32. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2894

Bräuchler, B., Knodel, K., & Röschenthaler, U. (2021). Brokerage from within: A conceptual framework. *Cultural Dynamics*, *33*(4), 281–297. https://doi.org/10.1177/09213740211011202

Cranston, S., Schapendonk, J., & Spaan, E. (2018). New directions in exploring the migration industries: Introduction to special issue. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(4), 543–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1315504

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

Deshingkar, P. (2019). The making and unmaking of precarious, ideal subjects—Migration brokerage in the Global South. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(14), 2638–2654. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1528094

Elcioglu, E. F., & Shams, T. (2023). Brokering immigrant transnationalism: Remittances, family reunification, and private refugee sponsorship in neoliberal Canada. *Current Sociology*, *72*(5), 890–908. https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921231155652

El-Kayed, N., Bernt, M., Hamann, U., & Pilz, M. (2020). Peripheral estates as arrival spaces? Conceptualising research on arrival functions of new immigrant destinations. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2932

El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkılıc, L. (2023). Infrastructures in the context of arrival—Multidimensional patterns of resource access in an established and a new immigrant neighborhood in Germany. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-355-2023

Faist, T. (2014). Brokerage in cross-border mobility: Social mechanisms and the (re)production of social inequalities. *Social Inclusion*, *2*(4), 38–52. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v2i4.29

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2020). Between hospitality and inhospitality: The Janus-faced 'arrival infrastructure.' *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2941

Gerten, C., Hanhörster, H., Hans, N., & Liebig, S. (2023). How to identify and typify arrival spaces in European cities—A methodological approach. *Population, Space and Place*, *29*(2), Article e2604. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2604

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-381-2023

Hans, N., Hanhörster, H., Polívka, J., & Beißwenger, S. (2019). Die Rolle von Ankunftsräumen für die Integration Zugewanderter. Eine kritische Diskussion des Forschungsstandes. *Raumforschung und Raumordnung|Spatial Research and Planning*, *77*(5), 511–524. https://doi.org/10.2478/rara-2019-0019

Ho, E. L.-E., & Ting, W.-C. (2021). Informality during migration, "conversion" within and across national spaces: Eliciting moral ambivalence among informal brokers. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *46*(4), 944–957. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12460

Hönke, J., & Müller, M.-M. (2018). Brokerage, intermediation, translation. In A. Draude, T. A. Börzel, & T. Risse (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of governance and limited statehood* (pp. 332–352). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198797203.013.16

James, D. (2011). The return of the broker: Consensus, hierarchy, and choice in South African land reform. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *17*(2), 318–338. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2011.01682.x

Jones, K., & Sha, H. (2020). *Mediated migration: A literature review of migration intermediaries*. Coventry University. https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/files/45724813/MIDEQ_WP1_Jones_Sha_2020_Mediated_migration.pdf

Koch, I., & James, D. (2022). The state of the welfare state: Advice, governance and care in settings of austerity. *Ethnos*, *87*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1688371

Kurtenbach, S. (2015). *Neuzuwanderer in städtischen Ankunftsgebieten. Rumänische und bulgarische Zuwanderer in der Dortmunder Nordstadt*. ZEFIR. https://omp.ub.rub.de/index.php/ZEFIR/catalog/view/42/42/450

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

Lindquist, J. (2012). The elementary school teacher, the thug and his grandmother: Informal brokers and transnational migration from Indonesia. *Pacific Affairs*, *85*(1), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.5509/201285169

Lindquist, J. (2015). Brokers and brokerage, anthropology of. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.; pp. 870–874). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12178-6

Lindquist, J., Xiang, B., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2012). Opening the black box of migration: Brokers, the organization of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, *85*(1), 7–19. https://doi.org/10.5509/20128517

Meeus, B., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2019). Migration and the infrastructural politics of urban arrival. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 1–32). Palgrave Macmillan.

Neßler, M., Cornelia, T., & Schneider, J. (2024). Politiken des Ankommens in Dortmund. In F. Gesemann, D. Filsinger, & S. Münch (Eds.), *Handbuch Lokale Integrationspolitik* (pp. 1–18). Springer.

Nordensvärd, J., & Ketola, M. (2024). A theory of informal and formal social citizenship and welfare. *Journal of Social Policy*, *53*(3), 772–791. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279422000630

Parsloe, T. (2022). *Arriving through Infrastructures: Berlin's institutional shelters for refugees 2015–2019* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Cambridge. https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/338944

Phillimore, J., Bradby, H., Brand, T., Padilla, B., & Pemberton, S. (2021). *Exploring welfare bricolage in Europe's superdiverse neighbourhoods*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111504

Ratzmann, N., & Heindlmaier, A. (2022). Welfare mediators as game changers? Deconstructing power asymmetries between EU migrants and welfare administrators. *Social Inclusion*, *10*(1), 205–216. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v10i1.4642

Roy, A. (2011). Slumdog cities: Rethinking subaltern urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *35*(2), 223–238. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2011.01051.x

Schapendonk, J. (2018). Navigating the migration industry: Migrants moving through an African-European web of facilitation/control. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(4), 663–679. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1315522

Schillebeeckx, E., Oosterlynck, S., & De Decker, P. (2019). Migration and the resourceful neighborhood: Exploring localized resources in urban zones of transition. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 131–152). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_6

Seiger, F.-K. (2021). Migration infrastructure, moral economy, and intergenerational injustice in mother-and-child migration from the Philippines to Japan. *Mobilities*, *16*(5), 707–723. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1967093

Staubach, R. (2014). Zuwanderung aus Südosteuropa. Diskurs, Medienresonanz und Reaktionen auf die Herausforderungen der (Neu-)Zuwanderung am Beispiel der Dortmunder Nordstadt. *Informationen zur Raumentwicklung*, *2014*(6), 539–556.

Swyngedouw, E. (2019). Governing newcomers' conduct in the arrival infrastructures of Brussels. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 81–101). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_4

Tuckett, A. (2018). Ethical brokerage and self-fashioning in Italian immigration bureaucracy. *Critique of Anthropology*, *38*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X18775199

Voivozeanu, A., & Lafleur, J.-M. (2023). Welfare brokers and European Union migrants' access to social protection. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *74*(4), 717–732. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13021

Wajsberg, M., & Schapendonk, J. (2022). Resonance beyond regimes: Migrant's alternative infrastructuring practices in Athens. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2352–2368. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211044312

Wee, K., Goh, C., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2018). Chutes-and-ladders: The migration industry, conditionality, and the production of precarity among migrant domestic workers in Singapore. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(14), 2672–2688. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1528099

Wessendorf, S. (2021). *Accessing information and resources via arrival infrastructures: Migrant newcomers in London* (International Inequalities Institute Working Paper 57). London School of Economics and Political Science. https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108512/1/LSE_III_working_paper_57.pdf

Wessendorf, S. (2022). 'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab051

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

Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration Infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, *48*(1_suppl), 122–148. https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12141

Zack, T., & Landau, L. B. (2022). An enclave entrepôt: The informal migration industry and Johannesburg's socio-spatial transformation. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2333–2351. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211012632

About the Author

Miriam Neßler researches and teaches in urban and migration studies, interested in issues of spatial, social, and environmental justice. As part of her PhD and the AIMEC project on which this article is based, she works on infrastructures of arrival and commodification. She is currently a research assistant at the Institute for Urban and Regional Planning at TU Berlin, where she works at the Chair for Social Cohesion, Diversity and Migration in Urban Planning.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8574
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8574

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Homes for Ukraine: Arrival Infrastructures and the UK's "New Bespokism"

Silke Zschomler and Mette Louise Berg

UCL Social Research Institute, University College London, UK

Correspondence: Silke Zschomler (s.zschomler@ucl.ac.uk)

Submitted: 30 April 2024 **Accepted:** 17 September 2024 **Published:** 29 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

This article examines arrival infrastructures and arrival brokering practices emerging from the UK government's response to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. We focus on Homes for Ukraine, a private hosting scheme. The scheme is an example of the "new bespokism" that characterises the government's approach to asylum. It has given rise to new geographies of settlement against a background of a "brutal migration milieu" (Hall, 2017) and provides an interesting entry point to examine arrival infrastructures. Drawing on insights from place-based research on the policies and practices of the hosting scheme, we discuss how it has shaped the landscape of arrival infrastructures for a distinct group of newcomers in a London borough and Oxford/shire. Our research included interviews and multi-modal participatory ethnographic fieldwork with Ukrainians, as well as interviews with hosts, practitioners, and support workers. The article reflects on the role of hosts as "arrival brokers" and how the Homes for Ukraine scheme created a distinct arrival context and infrastructure with significant implications for the ability of Ukrainians to exercise agency in stark contrast to those within the UK asylum system. We reflect on the politics of the Ukraine schemes as a form of arrival infrastructure that facilitates certain forms of mobility while hindering other forms.

Keywords

arrival infrastructure; brokering; hosting; new bespokism; politics of arrival; solidarity; UK; Ukraine

1. Introduction

The UK's asylum system is a "system of suffering" (Darling, 2022): privatised, fragmented, and under-resourced (cf. Berg et al., 2023, p. 215). Asylum policies are increasingly characterised by what Tomlinson (2022, p. 33)

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

calls the "new bespokism approach to asylum law and policy," referencing the proliferation of ad hoc schemes set up to respond to the protection needs of particular groups of people deemed especially deserving of support and welcome. By implication, the asylum system is becoming a residual system for those implicitly deemed less deserving. Meanwhile, new legal measures curtail asylum by making it dependent on the mode of arrival (Prabhat et al., 2022), thereby undermining the UK's international legal commitments according to the UN Refugee Convention. It is important to understand these parallel developments as part of an "integrated whole" (Tomlinson, 2022, p. 33) and it is within this context that this article is situated.

We focus on the bespoke schemes that were designed as part of the UK's response to people fleeing Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion. The largest of these, the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, known as Homes for Ukraine (HfU), is a visa-based private hosting scheme that invites UK residents who have a spare room or property to sponsor Ukrainians and host them for at least six months (Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities [DLUHC], 2023; UKVI & Home Office, 2022). HfU was launched with fanfare and was met with immediate enthusiasm; 120,000 people and organisations signed up in the first 24 hours (Wright & Strauss, 2022), including many public and political figures. As of 30 June 2024, 150,715 Ukrainians had arrived in the UK under the HfU scheme (DLUHC, 2024; Home Office & UKVI, 2024). While appearing to represent a U-turn from a government that was otherwise known for its hostility vis-à-vis refugees and migrants, we argue that the Ukraine schemes were a clear manifestation of the differentiation and fragmentation created by the "new bespokism" and have reproduced and further embedded racialised "hierarchies of belonging" (Back & Sinha, 2018).

The HfU scheme mobilised what we call "new actors," including newly created organisations and members of the public with no previous history of refugee campaigning or activism who stepped in to offer support for Ukrainians. This article reflects on the roles and activities of hosts as "arrival brokers" (cf. Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020) and how the HfU scheme created a new and distinct arrival infrastructure, which facilitated the agency of Ukrainians supported by the scheme. We highlight the exclusionary nature of the HfU infrastructure (as it was only accessible to those within the scheme), and advance current discussions about arrival infrastructuring and brokering by bringing the blurred and opaque state/non-state boundaries (cf. Giudici, 2021) that emerge in this context into focus.

The article draws on research we conducted in 2023 with Ukrainians hosted through HfU, hosts of the scheme, as well as practitioners, support workers, volunteers, and mental health professionals in Newham, a highly diverse London borough, and Oxford/shire, an affluent county that does not otherwise host people in the UK asylum system but had a strong uptake of the HfU scheme.

We start by situating the reception of Ukrainians in the wider context of the UK's new bespokism and increasing hostility vis-à-vis and criminalisation of people seeking asylum, before introducing the HfU scheme. We then situate the reception of Ukrainians drawing on arrival infrastructuring and brokering literature. In the methods section, we describe our fieldwork sites and the methods we used for the research. We examine the role of hosts as arrival brokers and how the political and policy landscape shaped arrival infrastructuring processes. In the conclusion, we return to the implications of the new bespokism for the wider landscape of refugee arrival and welcome and the distinct arrival infrastructure created by the HfU scheme. Following Macklin's (2021) work on sanctuary vs settlement programmes in the Canadian context, we ask how and if the arrival infrastructures and forms of support that were mobilised and developed as

individuals and communities signed up to host Ukrainians worked against and/or with the state: did hosting engender a politics of opposition and/or of collaboration?

2. The Ukraine Visa Schemes and New Forms of Hospitality

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 quickly led to mass displacement into neighbouring countries. In response, the UK designed three schemes to protect those fleeing the war. Two required Ukrainians to apply for visas *before* travelling to the UK. These were the Ukraine Family Scheme (terminated in February 2024; Quinn & Syal, 2024) and the HfU (DLUHC, 2023; UKVI & Home Office, 2022), which we focus on in this article. Ukrainians who were already in the UK were able to extend their stay via the Ukraine Extension Scheme (for an overview of the schemes, including their differences, see Casu et al., 2023, p. 20). The Ukraine schemes complement other ad hoc schemes, including the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (2014–2021); four different pathways for people fleeing the 2021 war in Afghanistan; and the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route, which are all separate from the asylum system and differ from each other in terms of rights, access to the labour market and welfare support, length of residence, and pathways to permanent residence or citizenship (for a more detailed overview see Benson et al., 2024; Casu et al., 2023). Those entering the UK under one of the Ukraine schemes, do *not* enter the asylum or dispersal system and are *not* conferred refugee status. While the asylum system and the Ukraine Family Scheme are overseen by the Home Office, responsibility for the HfU scheme from the point of arrival of Ukrainians into the UK lies with the DLUHC, with the Home Office overseeing the processing of visas and suitability checks of sponsors (National Audit Office, 2023, p. 5).

In the months after the launch of the Ukraine schemes, the welcome of Ukrainians was visible in cityscapes from multilingual signage at sites of arrival and public spaces, through to the display of Ukrainian flags and colours on private and public buildings, as seen in Figure 1, creating a distinct climate of hospitality. At train

Figure 1. Ukrainian flag at Stratford Town Hall, London Borough of Newham, May 2023.

stations across the UK, volunteers and local authority staff were deployed to identify and welcome arriving Ukrainians, as seen in Figure 2. Government endorsement and emotionally stirring saturation media coverage were important factors in motivating hosts to sign up (cf. Armbruster, 2018).

Figure 2. Multilingual welcome sign for Ukrainians at Edinburgh Waverley Station, April 2022.

All three Ukraine schemes provided the right to stay in the UK for an initial three-year period (later, a possibility for extension up to a further 18 months was announced; Quinn & Syal, 2024). However, only HfU offers financial support to Ukrainians via a one-off arrival payment, their hosts through monthly support payments, and funding for local authorities through a tariff for each new arrival in their area, thus creating inequalities among and between Ukrainians who were fleeing the conflict and arriving in the UK in the same period (see Turcatti, 2024, p. 2; Vicol & Sehic, 2022, p. 3). HfU operates on the premise of a pre-arrival match between Ukrainians, usually referred to as guests, and hosts in the UK as a prerequisite for starting the visa application process. To facilitate this process, various matching services were set up both by established third sector organisations as well as new providers and private actors, but crucially *not* by the government (the government only provides a list of recognised providers), which thereby displaced the associated risks entirely onto individual hosts and guests (see also Burrell, 2024, pp. 10–11). Local authorities were tasked with carrying out accommodation checks prior to the arrival of Ukrainian guests and welfare checks after their arrival (there were issues reported with these especially during the early phase of the scheme), as well as leading the process of rematching in case of a breakdown of hosting arrangements or when hosting arrangements cannot be extended beyond six months and Ukrainians cannot move into rented accommodation. Once they have arrived in the UK, Ukrainians are allowed immediate access to the labour market, education, healthcare, and the social benefits system (Casu et al., 2023). By contrast, people in the asylum system are generally not allowed to work and cannot access mainstream benefits; their financial support is set below social benefit rates (Berg & Dickson, 2022). However, the HfU scheme entails distinct vulnerabilities associated with its specific set-up, organisation, and support mechanisms, including risks of modern slavery and sexual exploitation (particularly given that the majority of Ukrainian newcomers are

female) as well as homelessness in situations of host-guest relationship breakdown (for a more detailed analysis see British Red Cross, 2023; Turcatti, 2024).

The Ukraine schemes bore the hallmark of policies designed in a hurry and the poor implementation and lack of safeguarding measures led to scathing criticism (Townsend, 2022; Vicol & Sehic, 2022). Reflective of how hospitality and welcoming are always conditional and closely linked to hostility and exclusion (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018, p. 2; Derrida, 2000), the schemes were by design exclusionary; other groups who were fleeing war and violence were not offered bespoke routes or schemes, and were instead targets of deterrence measures. Critical voices noted a double standard based on racialised perceptions of Ukrainians as white and European (Zamore, 2022), and that the schemes individualised and privatised the state's responsibility to offer asylum (Burrell, 2024; Lewicki, 2022; Tomlinson, 2022). In the UK prior to HfU, private and community hosting for refugees had only existed on a relatively small scale after being introduced in 2016 (Phillimore et al., 2022, p. 387). Yet there are precedents of organised private hosting schemes. These include the Kindertransport, a privately funded and organised scheme that saw approximately 10,000 Jewish and non-Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia arriving in Britain in 1938–1940 and hosted mainly in private homes (Göpfert & Hammel, 2004, pp. 21–22). As with HfU, the Kindertransport was organised in a context of geopolitical tensions, anti-refugee sentiments, and an understanding that the children would eventually return home (Göpfert & Hammel, 2004, p. 22). Like HfU, the Kindertransport included selected groups while excluding others who were/are just as in need of protection. In the case of the Kindertransport, the parents of the children were not offered protection; most of them perished in the Holocaust (Göpfert & Hammel, 2004, p. 25).

Notwithstanding the problematic aspects of the Ukraine visa schemes as outlined above, for Mette (second author), who was completing research on the asylum system at the time, the Ukraine schemes seemed strikingly generous and premised on hospitality, compared to the slow, punitive, and hostile asylum system with its no-choice dispersal and exclusion from the welfare system and labour market for those within it (Berg et al., 2023; cf. Burrell, 2024, p. 16).

We now turn to arrival infrastructuring and brokering literature to situate the reception of Ukrainians while noting the distinct character of the HfU scheme.

3. Arrival Infrastructuring and Brokering as Framework

There is a growing body of literature focusing on arrival contexts, i.e., local conditions that migrants encounter and that enable them to access information, resources, and networks, and which in turn shape their arrival (Meeus et al., 2019; Wessendorf, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024). This literature grows out of work on migration infrastructure, which directs our focus "towards those human *and* nonhuman actors that move migrants within specific infrastructural frames" (Lin et al., 2017, p. 169), in this case, the HfU scheme. We use arrival infrastructuring as a lens to examine the forms of support and new solidarities that have developed and been enabled by the HfU scheme.

A focus on arrival infrastructures highlights the importance of place-based opportunity structures in arrival and settlement processes. Meeus et al. (2019, p. 11) define arrival infrastructures as those "parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled upon arrival, and where their future local or

translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated" and where they "find the stability to move on." The focus is generally on the "initial orientation and situatedness" (El-Kayed & Keskinkilic, 2023, p. 357) of settlement processes, including finding housing, employment, and navigating bureaucratic systems. As such, these discussions are distinct from work that is concerned with longer-term migrant integration. Infrastructures of arrival vary between areas; they are embedded in and shaped by local socio-economic conditions, including the availability and access to jobs and housing as well as local organisational and social infrastructures, e.g., the prevalence of civil society organisations and co-ethnic or other migrant networks (Wessendorf, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024). As such, "chains of sorting" operate within arrival zones, distributing migrants across reception spaces (Hall, 2017, p. 1567).

Arrival infrastructures include a range of interlinked institutions, places, and different actors, such as community organisations, street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), and residents of both migrant and non-migrant backgrounds. Different practices, activities, and technologies play a role in shaping the arrival processes of newcomers and can be crucial for accessing resources (Wessendorf, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024). Key to migration infrastructures is the broker, "a human actor who gains something from the mediation of valued resources that he or she does not directly control" (Lindquist, 2015). In the context of migrant arrival, Hanhörster and Wessendorf (2020) refer to such individuals as "arrival brokers." By connecting newcomers to people, organisations, or institutions, arrival brokers are instrumental in facilitating access to resources for newcomers. They may aid newcomers in coping with everyday life or in accessing e.g., employment or housing through sharing their own knowledge. They also "fulfil an important mediation function by helping people get in touch with others ('social bridges') or connecting them with institutions ('social links')" (Hans, 2023, p. 387). To date, work on arrival brokers has often focused on longer-established migrant individuals (Hans, 2023; Wessendorf, 2022).

There is a large and rich body of literature on private and community hosting, especially in the Canadian context where the practice is well established (e.g., Hyndman et al., 2021; Macklin, 2021). Burrell (2024) has written about the hosting of Ukrainians in the UK specifically, including the affective dimension associated with hosting in the intimate sphere of private homes (see also Gunaratnam, 2021; Monforte et al., 2021; Phillimore et al., 2022). Literature on brokering meanwhile is focused on practices and activities in public or semi-public spaces and that is also the focus of this article. Our work sheds particular light on the "socially productive" nature (Lin et al., 2017, p. 168) of arrival infrastructure, and how the HfU scheme effectively turned those signing up as hosts into arrival brokers.

HfU provides an interesting entry point to examine arrival infrastructures for a distinct group of newcomers in the context of welfare state outsourcing and Britain's "brutal migration milieu" (Hall, 2017). We connect literature on arrival infrastructuring and brokering to debates on the increasing "bespokism" and privatisation of refugee reception and hosting. This allows us to critically examine the at times blurry roles and interplay of different actors (such as the state, street-level bureaucrats, and private citizens) as well as fuzzy boundaries between formal and informal infrastructuring and the emergence of "bespoke" brokering processes. Our work advances conceptualisations of arrival infrastructuring by adding the crucial dimension of "privatisation" of arrival infrastructures to current discussions and further asks what this means for migrant agency.

To date, work on arrival infrastructures has focused more on typical arrival areas and "transition zones" (Schillebeeck et al., 2019) and there are gaps in the literature on non-typical areas such as the ones we

examine in Oxford/shire. By investigating both a typical and a non-typical arrival area, this article contributes to current understandings of how "very different places shape arrival processes" (El-Kayed & Keskinkilic, 2023, p. 355). We thus add to current conceptualisations of brokering by investigating a new, particular group of actors, i.e., HfU hosts, including how their brokering practices were instrumental in shaping the experiences of a distinct group of newcomers. We argue for the need to understand the distinct arrival infrastructure that was created by HfU in the context of the "integrated whole" (Tomlinson, 2022, p. 33) of bespoke schemes, a privatised asylum system, and a hostile political and policy framework.

We now turn to the methodology we employed to capture the new geographies of arrival and settlement that were mediated by HfU in two different localities in the UK.

4. Capturing New Geographies of Arrival and Settlement in Two Localities

Our research began in 2022 with geo-spatial mapping to establish the unfolding patterns of Ukrainian arrivals in the UK. Established "dispersal areas" for people in the asylum system tend to be deprived small towns and rural areas in decline, with few services and poor public transport, and hence available cheap rental housing (Berg & Dickson, 2022). By contrast, the HfU scheme attracted hosts living in affluent areas with a limited supply of affordable rental housing. From the beginning then, it was clear that Ukrainian newcomers were often settling in places that would have no or scarce existing arrival infrastructures raising intriguing questions about how they would fare compared to those settling in more traditional arrival areas. We therefore decided on a place-based approach focusing on the contrasting areas of Oxford/shire and the London borough of Newham. Oxford is a City of Sanctuary, but Oxfordshire is not an asylum dispersal area and is among the least deprived of local authorities in England (Oxfordshire County Council, n.d.). By contrast, the London borough of Newham is a "classical arrival area" (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024, p. 6) and has high levels of deprivation (Newham London, n.d.). Based on data from the 2021 Census, Newham has been described as the "most-diverse district" in England and Wales (Catney et al., 2023, p. 7) and the local authority with the largest number of Ukraine-born usual residents (Barton, 2022).

After receiving research ethics approval, we conducted field research from March to September 2023. We interviewed 23 interlocutors split between three Ukrainians and four hosts in Oxford/shire and four Ukrainians and four hosts in Newham. We did *not* interview Ukrainians and hosts who lived together to ensure research participants felt able to speak candidly. We also interviewed an interlocutor from the local authority in Newham, and two frontline workers, one in Oxford and one in London. One of these was Ukrainian themselves. Additionally, we interviewed two mental health practitioners who work on refugee wellbeing, both of whom were also hosts and one of whom was Ukrainian; three "new actors," one of whom was a Ukrainian newcomer herself and one of whom was also a host and considered herself part of a new diaspora response. All interviews were in English and almost all were audio recorded with participants' consent.

In our interviews with Ukrainians, we took a narrative approach and invited our interlocutors to tell their stories of coming to the UK including making the decision, arriving, transitioning, as well as settling in in the context of the HfU scheme. Our interviews lasted about an hour each and were in places suggested by the participants, including a church, public libraries, cafes, or online. We invited the Ukrainian interlocutors to also participate in an auto-ethnographic app-based research component ($N = 6$), but in this article, we only draw directly on

the interview material. Interviews with hosts and others explored their respective roles, how they became involved, and their experiences of the scheme, including challenges and suggestions for improvements.

Religious groups have widely embraced refugee hosting and settlement (Phillimore et al., 2022, p. 386). We recruited Ukrainian participants in Oxford/shire via a Russian Orthodox Church with a mixed Russian-Ukrainian-British congregation, which had taken a public stance in favour of Ukraine's right to self-determination. We recruited hosts via the Anglican Diocese, which had an active outreach programme for Ukrainians and hosts. In London, we recruited participants via Newham Council's Welcome Newham Team who circulated information about our research among their pool of hosts and Ukrainian guests and provided us with contact details of interested individuals. These different channels may have skewed the profile of participants to a degree. It may also be that the material from Oxford/shire presents a more positive picture given the resources put in place to support the hosting by the respective faith organisations relative to the Newham material generated via the local authority.

Ukrainian participants were in their thirties to forties, and all were women; this was unsurprising and reflects the imposition of martial law in Ukraine (Benson et al., 2024). Several had arrived in the UK with children, two with husbands (there are some exceptions to the travel ban on men), and one with her sister and mother who were both living in separate HfU hosting arrangements. Reflecting the wider profile of Ukrainians in the UK (Vicol & Sehic, 2022, pp. 13–14), most of our research participants were middle-class and educated to a degree level. Two had continued working remotely in their jobs in Ukraine, several went back to visit during the period of research. Our host interlocutors were in their thirties to eighties, two were single, the others were married or lived with their partners; five of them were women. One host family had a teenage child, several others referred to themselves as empty nesters. Three of the hosts were white British, three were non-British, one was born in Ukraine and had been living in the UK for 18 years and described herself as British-Ukrainian; one British host described herself as a brown woman. All were middle-class and in comfortable living conditions. Some of our Oxfordshire-based hosts seemed especially affluent, which could partly be an effect of our recruitment channels, as it appears to be distinct compared to Newham. However, other research on refugee hosting has also noted a preponderance of middle-class hosts in comfortable conditions (Monforte et al., 2021). With regards to HfU specifically, Kathy Burrell notes similarly that the hosts she interviewed were financially comfortable and living in "salubrious neighbourhoods" (Burrell, 2024, pp. 7–8). Tellingly, none of the hosts we spoke to referred to rising costs of food and energy as part of the national cost of living crisis (see for example Harari et al., 2024) as impeding their ability to host or extend their hosting arrangements. Several of our host interlocutors passed on their monthly thank-you payments to their Ukrainian guests as they did not feel they needed them to cover additional costs. Reflecting a national pattern (Tryl & Surmon, 2023, p. 8), none of the hosts we spoke to had hosted before and they did not have a background in refugee rights activism.

We explained to all interviewees that participation was entirely voluntary and confidential and have used pseudonyms throughout, as well as changing other information to protect anonymity. We offered shopping vouchers to Ukrainian interview participants. We were mindful that we asked Ukrainian participants to share recent, potentially traumatic experiences with us and made it clear that interviewees were free to stop interviews at any point. The extent to which the impact and trauma of war and displacement were present in the interviews differed, but all participants were keen to tell their stories. As female researchers with a migration background ourselves and racialised as white, we felt it was easy to find common ground with our

interlocutors (see also Burrell, 2024, p. 9). Our Ukrainian interviewees especially expressed gratitude that we were interested in their experiences, and one said it had been cathartic to tell her story. Some of our host interlocutors pointed out that their participation in the interview helped them to reflect on and process their hosting experiences as well as their involvement in the HfU scheme more generally. The interviews provided us with a rich dataset and unique accounts of very different and often striking experiences of the scheme. We were in regular contact with each other during the fieldwork period, shared our reflections and observations through debriefs, and kept notes to capture the texture and tone of the narratives that were shared with us. Transcription and data analysis went hand in hand and coding was done manually focusing, for this article, on themes of motivations for hosting/coming to the UK, hospitality, providing and receiving support, challenges, and outlook for the future. In what follows, we discuss how the landscape of arrival infrastructures has been shaped by the HfU hosting scheme in the two fieldwork sites.

5. From HfU to Arrival Infrastructuring and Brokering Practices

Hosting arrangements come with their own affordances and logics (cf. Farahani, 2021, pp. 667–668), and we found a range of relationships between Ukrainians and their hosts from relatively distant to very involved, e.g., one host accompanying her Ukrainian guest on visits back to Ukraine. As Macklin (2021, p. 32) has argued, private hosting schemes inflect the relationship between hosts and the refugees they shelter "but does not fully determine it." How the requirements of the scheme were implemented at the practical level ranged from a spare room to semi-separate living arrangements within the same property to an entire house that was made available. Hosting arrangements also differed in their temporal availability, ranging from being as much as possible limited to the initial sign-up period of six months to being open-ended. Most hosting arrangements that were part of our study were characterised as positive and most of our Ukrainian interlocutors were still living in the accommodation provided to them through the scheme at the time of fieldwork. Most of the hosts we spoke to utilised a recognised matching service to facilitate their sponsorship and hosting arrangement; several pointed out that this was important to them, and they deliberately refrained from simply using social media channels. Two of the hosts we spoke to in Newham were matched with their Ukrainian guests through the local authority's rematching service. Some of the hosts had already navigated the moving-on period of their guests.

The hosting arrangements we heard about also differed greatly in the ways they were lived on a day-to-day basis, including how living arrangements intersected and were shared. In this section, we discuss how the arrival infrastructure of the HfU enabled and facilitated brokering practices, with what implications for the relations between Ukrainians and their hosts, and in what ways the scheme facilitated as well as restricted the agency of Ukrainian newcomers.

5.1. Hosts As Arrival Brokers

The way in which hosts acted as arrival brokers differed, but we noted extensive welcoming and brokering practices across all the accounts that were shared with us. To this end, the scheme created a distinct arrival landscape and interplay of formal and informal arrival infrastructures. The timing of our research is significant as the HfU had already been running for a year and resources and guidance were available (for an account of the early period of the scheme cf. Burrell, 2024).

All the hosts we spoke to expected to be actively involved in arrival brokering and infrastructuring beyond solely providing accommodation. This was also promoted in guidance about the scheme, for example, in a toolkit from one of the main matching services:

> Sponsors must provide accommodation to an individual or family for a minimum of six months. You will also need to provide a welcome to your area. Your local authority will be responsible for the wrap-around support for the people you sponsor, but you should expect to provide some support yourself. Later in the toolkit, we will cover the different types of assistance: registering with a GP, dentist, accessing local and public services and opening a bank account. (Reset, n.d., "Understanding the Homes for Ukraine Programme," para. 4)

This meant that hosts were often well-prepared and ready to act as first point of contact for their Ukrainian guests. Some of the hosts we spoke to explained how they proactively prepared for this prior to the arrival of their guests so they could help them with a range of administrative tasks, such as applying for their welcome payment or their biometric residence permit card as well as registering with a GP, and so forth. In some cases, hosts had already organised school places for children. Others had identified relevant information about resources that were made available specifically for Ukrainians, such as scholarships from selective private schools, free access to recreational facilities in their locality, and information about social activities. Hosts also frequently provided introductions to their local area, and some supported with childcare or English language tuition.

Many of the hosts were regularly contacted by their local authority and the matching services and other third-sector organisations they had utilised to organise their sponsorship to provide ongoing support for them as hosts. Our interlocutors made use of resources such as webinars, toolkits, and in-person events in different ways and to different degrees, which made them feel supported overall. All this could have a profound impact on the newcomers' experience of arrival and navigating a new environment. As one of our Ukrainian interlocutors in Newham, a mother in her 30s with a primary school-aged child explained:

> My hosts, they were very prepared for this, because, yeah, I suppose they attended some courses or meetings. So, with all the registration, I mean GP, school, Universal Credit, what else, so insurance, BRP residential permit, I mean, so with all these things they helped me a lot....When we came to the One Stop Shop in the library [set up by the council for Ukrainian newcomers], so they were just a few things, I mean, maybe job or, hmmm, I think by that time we already did most things with my host. But I know that not all hosts can do this....So I'm not a good example to find out the difficulties. (Anastasiya)

In their work, Wessendorf and Gembus (2024, p. 11) point out that, "often, it just takes one crucial piece of information to access a support network from which many other resources can be accessed." This "one first contact" subsequently helps with navigating the system and takes on the role of facilitating access to arrival information and next steps for newcomers. Their research shows that it can be challenging for newcomers to find arrival brokers, and they do so in different ways through navigating local social infrastructures often relying on serendipitous encounters (Wessendorf, 2022). By contrast, a "first point of contact" was built into the set-up of HfU through private hosting. Many of our host interlocutors were well aware of the importance of being the first contact, as one of our hosts in Oxford describes:

> By the time [name of guest] came to us, Oxford had some pretty established networks and because I was already in contact with [name of mother and son hosted by host's sister in a self-contained flat nearby] and through somebody I knew at church, she was also hosting and bizarrely my boss at work who lives outside Oxford was also hosting a family….I knew exactly kind of what to do, to sort of plug her into all of the networks, which was really helpful. So, all the practical side of kind of sorting out things for her we did in the first couple of days. That was really smooth, but then I took her up to there's a church…that has a weekly meetup of Ukrainian families in Oxford, and we went there, kind of the first week she was with us, and then she probably about two or three times a month used to go there. So, she found herself a sort of network of support quite quickly. She also got herself a job very quickly [Claire later explained that her guest got the job through a contact from the church network]. She was very kind of self-sufficient. So, I would say we were probably quite useful in the first kind of month or so. (Claire)

Given the challenges in identifying arrival brokers, Wessendorf and Gembus (2024, p. 12) see it as "crucial" for newcomers to be in an arrival area as this "facilitates encounters with brokers who have specific arrival expertise as well as empathy with the arrival situation and are thus able and often willing to help." However, our accounts from hosts and guests suggest that being in a typical arrival area was less important for Ukrainian newcomers as the high media and public profile of the scheme and the host-guest relationships that were built-in, meant that hosts became arrival brokers for their guests and acted as the crucial "one first contact." The brokering practices of the hosts in smaller towns and villages in Oxfordshire, were comparable to the integral "bridging role" of volunteers and civil society that Mehl et al. (2023) identified in their work on refugees in rural areas in Germany, which they see as compensating for structural and institutional challenges, particularly in the areas of housing, job market, navigating bureaucracy, and the enabling of mobility.

The brokering practices of our host interlocutors would frequently go far beyond signposting their guests to services and resources which has been highlighted in previous work on arrival infrastructures (Wessendorf, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024) and were more akin to the activities of arrival brokers identified by Hans (2023) who focused on longer-established migrants. In many instances, hosts would accompany their guests to appointments and help them navigate formal or informal support services and activities. Jane, one of our Oxfordshire-based hosts, a woman in her 80s who with her husband hosted a mother with two children in their self-contained guest cottage, remarked that "there was quite a lot in the early days of having to commute around." This is one of the examples she shared with us:

> And I had to get them their Covid jabs sorted. We had to go to Northampton one day with the two children. They wouldn't do the mother. That's an hour's drive. So off we went on Saturday and got the two children done. They were doing adults but no, they wouldn't do [name of mother]. So, the next day we had to go to Oxford, which was 45 min in the other direction to get her done, and then, when it came for the biometric thing, we had to go to Gloucester, or was it Worcester? But it was an hour, an hour and a half's drive.

As Jane's account shows, many of the hosts spent considerable time, effort, and their own resources to broker the arrival of their Ukrainian guests. In effect, they became "home level bureaucrats" (Burrell, 2024, p. 13) acting as intermediaries between bureaucracies, "street level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980), and their

Ukrainian guests, which could be challenging to fit around their own lives. For example, Helen, one of our Oxfordshire-based hosts who had a busy working life, explained: "It was hard, and it was time-consuming, and I may have done some things that I wouldn't have needed to do. But if I hadn't done them, who would?" Helen's reflections raise important questions about the absence/presence of the state in the HfU set-up and arrangement and the "passing on of responsibility" (Burrell, 2024, p. 9), and the issue of "privatisation" of arrival infrastructures inherent to the scheme (see also Giudici, 2021; Macklin, 2021).

5.2. Providing Material and Practical Support and Mobilising (New) Networks

Besides facilitating access to information or services, providing material and practical support has been highlighted as a crucial support mechanism for refugees and people in the asylum system who often rely on third-sector organisations, settlement services, and educational settings to access these supports, e.g., help with filling in forms to access welfare or other government-provided assistance, as well as direct financial assistance or donations (Griffiths et al., 2005; Ziersch et al., 2023). By contrast, we found that many Ukrainians had wide-ranging access to material and practical support through their hosts. Besides providing support in navigating administrative systems, some hosts would also pass on their monthly thank-you payments to their guests, buy food for them, or help them furnish their new accommodation once they transitioned from the hosting arrangement into rented accommodation (see also Burrell, 2024).

Furthermore, hosts often mobilised their own networks to facilitate and broker the arrival and settling in of their guests, which could be pivotal, e.g., for accessing job opportunities, in some instances preventing downward occupational mobility, or facilitating moving on to independent housing. The latter was experienced as challenging by most of our host interlocutors. One of our Oxford-based hosts, a retired couple who had been hosting a three-generational family (grandmother, mother, daughter) for seven months, recounted the experience of brokering the guests' moving on to independent housing. This particular case illustrates the hosts' extensive engagement with the local authority as well as mobilisation of local networks:

> And we helped them to rent the house. It's actually rented through our church…and we negotiated with the church to give us a slightly reduced rent and so they could afford it…they got two lots of housing benefit. Because [name] the mother, she's got universal credit and she's got a housing benefit and the granny she's got a pension. She's got a UK pension, so she also gets a housing benefit. Putting the two housing benefits together meant they could afford something. Because initially, we thought they'd only have the one lot of housing benefit…and you know with the budget that we'd worked out…they weren't very nice houses, very small or dirty or cramped. Then we talked to the local council who have a specialist Ukrainian desk to help the Ukrainian people in this area. We talked to them, and they worked it out, and they said: "Well, you should be able to get two lots of housing benefit"…and that made, you know, made a big difference. You could get a better sort of standard of housing. And then this church house became available which was sort of in that housing, that bracket. They just gave a bit of a discount. And they're very happy there. They're settled. It's within walking distance of the school and to the shops and the buses.…It was an unfurnished house, we got to basically furnish the whole house in a week, just from, you know, putting a notice on Facebook and people had a spare this and a spare that. And we drove around collecting stuff and putting it in the house. We basically had everything we needed. We got a fairly big church, anyway.…So we got crockery, and cutlery, and pots and pans, beds, and sofas. We have several Ukrainian families in our church, staying with people from our church,

> and they've all managed to get into accommodation, and we've been able to provide furniture for all of them. (James)

Besides using their existing networks, hosts, particularly in Oxford/shire, also became involved in or set up new networks, often through social media, such as WhatsApp or Facebook groups to support their brokering activities (see also Burrell, 2024; Tryl & Surmon, 2023). Others mobilised their local community, as one of our Oxfordshire hosts remarked: "We live bang in the middle of a very, very lovely, friendly village, and we've had lots of support from neighbours" (Jane). The pre-existence of social infrastructures typically found in more conventional arrival areas were thus compensated for by resourceful hosts, community support, and new HfU-specific networks that hosts were able to mobilise.

5.3. Between Facilitating and Constraining Agency

The accounts we heard from our interlocutors revealed how the extensive and distinct arrival infrastructuring and brokering set in motion by the HfU scheme enabled this group of newcomers to access services and different supports relatively smoothly. The HfU scheme thus facilitated a degree of agency for the Ukrainians who came to the UK and enabled them to begin to forge a sense of belonging. This aspect of the scheme again provided a striking contrast to the asylum system, which actively restricts agency and hinders those seeking asylum from establishing a sense of belonging (Berg et al., 2023; Gill, 2009). In addition, there was a noticeable effort from many local authorities, civil society and faith-based organisations, and other support and advice services to provide multilingual information and support in Ukrainian and Russian through translating information, websites, and guidance notes. Local authorities and other organisations were also making significant efforts to employ Ukrainian and/or Russian-speaking staff, at times recruited from among the Ukrainian newcomers, to run HfU-related projects, services, or special activities. Overall, this helped to limit barriers for Ukrainians in accessing resources and allowed them more agency in navigating their arrival and initial settlement processes as several of our interlocutors including Ukrainian guests, hosts, as well as practitioners pointed out during interviews. However, the temporal uncertainty of the scheme is a key constraining factor. At the time of our research, there was no communication from the government about what would happen once the schemes close down. This came up in some of the interviews with practitioners:

> There is a lot of uncertainty, and we are getting increasing kind of queries about, you know, what next for me? What do I do? And at the moment, all I can say is, wait until the government decides. At the moment you're okay, you have two to three years left [on] your visa. But what next, I can't say, and that is a cause of concern....Long-term planning is very difficult for people. (Frontline worker in London)

Other research has also found that Ukrainians are faced with a "prevailing sense of temporariness and uncertainty" which left them "feeling protected but lacking certain rights" (Benson et al., 2024, p. 2; Burrell, 2024).

Some of our interlocutors alluded to how hospitality and the scheme-facilitated opportunity to exercise agency was fragile and conditional. This was, for example, emphasised by one of the Newham hosts, Mariya, a single woman in her late 30s who was born in Ukraine and had been living in the UK for 18 years and holds UK citizenship, thus describing herself as British-Ukrainian. In addition to hosting her friend's family via HfU,

she had also brought her parents to the UK via the Family Scheme. In the early days of HfU, she had facilitated matching via her social media networks. At the time of the interview, she was very involved in different support networks and herself provided different kinds of informal support and advice both to Ukrainians as well as hosts. During the interview, she highlighted the risk of Ukrainian newcomers being "too choosing" and thereby breaking trust or goodwill, e.g., when using the sponsorship scheme in an agentive way:

> People come here, stay with the host in Brighton for the first six months, and then they look for the host in London....you need to be realistic, because other people in London pay high rent...work hard and do something very, very hard, and it's very important for the host as well. There has to be a really good balance with us....The minute you break the trust you will start losing the opportunities and that's what I see after the first seven, eight months, it started to be, and I speak to a lot of English or British or other culture hosts who are hosting. We have to be careful with this because...as we know one little rotten apple can spoil the entire bucket, you know, we really need to be careful. We can, we cannot ruin an impression by doing something that would disappoint the hosts. But at the same time, we are not here to please the hosts, so it's something, something [moves her arms back and forth] because we are not here for holidays. It's a balance.

Mariya's reflections are a poignant reminder that notions of deservingness are fragile and contingently constructed. She feared that the hospitality extended could be rescinded if Ukrainians were not seen as sufficiently appreciative or were perceived to be too demanding. As Farahani has argued, ideas of deservingness "influence even private hospitable practices and condition the direction, quality, and form of hosting" (Farahani, 2021, p. 667), and by implication the extent of agency Ukrainians were able to exercise.

Overall, we observed how the private hosting scheme provided a unique framework for different interplays of informal and formal arrival infrastructuring and brokering processes. It generated distinct practices embedded within host-guest relationships and the wider social infrastructures of the scheme. In general, the informal brokering practices provided by the hosts worked in tandem with the formal arrival infrastructuring put in place by the local authority, e.g., the wrap-around support mentioned in the toolkit earlier and for which councils received a tariff for each new arrival. In Newham, this formal arrival infrastructuring took the form of a "one-stop shop," set up by the Council in the local library and a specialised Ukrainian desk at the local authority in Oxford. However, our conversations with practitioners revealed that the level of formal infrastructuring varied greatly between different local authorities. The landscape of arrival infrastructures for Ukrainian newcomers was further enhanced by support from civil society, faith-based, as well as diaspora organisations (see also Tryl & Surmon, 2023) and Ukrainians' own networks and resources, facilitating agency but with a growing sense of uncertainty given the time-limited leave of the HfU scheme.

6. Conclusion: HfU and the UK's New Bespokism

In this article, we have shown how the arrival infrastructure of the HfU scheme was socially productive in generating a bespoke infrastructure for Ukrainians including in areas or places with no history of asylum dispersal or refugee settlement, principally through mobilising private individuals to host. The unprecedented response from civil society which HfU set in motion is seen as one of the scheme's key successes and HfU is being considered a "model for the future" (Kandiah, 2023). In this context, interrogating

the mobilisation seems especially pertinent, and as we have argued, ad hoc government-endorsed schemes like HfU need to be seen as part of the "integrated whole" of the "new bespokism" (Tomlinson, 2022).

Private hosting resonates with neoliberal retrenchment and restructuring of the welfare state. In that vein, Burrell (2024) has questioned the "domesticating" of responsibility the scheme entails (p. 3). The scale of the private hosting programme and offering of hospitality towards a distinct group of newcomers also entrenches racialised differentiation among protection seekers resulting from the "new bespokism" (Tomlinson, 2022). The HfU thus reproduced and further cemented gendered, racialised, class- and age-based "hierarchies of belonging" (Back & Sinha, 2018).

A government-endorsed private hosting scheme such as HfU rests on collaborative politics by citizen-hosts (Macklin, 2021) and is unlikely to foster radical or transformative forms of solidarity (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020) although hosting did appear to work as a political catalyst for some of our hosts. In the case of HfU, and the UK's societal response to Ukrainians arriving, we can see potential germs of new forms of solidarities where arrival infrastructures and brokering extend beyond conventional areas and groups. The scheme exposed a large group of middle-class UK residents with no prior history of refugee activism to the complexity of the benefit system for the first time as hosts started navigating "the austere state" and its welfare and social support systems and found them woefully inadequate (see Burrell, 2024, p. 13). In the early months of the Ukraine schemes, the press carried stories of the disbelief of hosts at the intransigence of the UK Home Office as the body responsible for issuing visas, with newly formed host activist groups considering legal action (see, for example, Bowden & O'Dowd, 2022). In our research, some hosts articulated unease about the exclusionary and racialised underpinnings of the scheme, but overall, a politics of collaboration and accommodation prevailed.

Lin et al. (2017, p. 169) have argued that migration infrastructures are "entangled with power geometries that result in differential access to resources, thereby invoking questions of equity and distributional justice." Indeed "infrastructures are often constructed in ways that exact the political interests and discriminatory wills of their designers" (Lin et al., 2017, p. 170), illustrated most starkly in this case by the exclusionary nature of the Ukraine schemes at a time of escalating conflicts in other parts of the globe, but with no equivalent schemes for differently racialised groups, many from former British colonies or countries in which the UK has had active military deployment.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the people who participated in the research and who took the time to share their experiences with us. We are very grateful for the support of and contribution to the research by our UCL colleague Jo Billings and the geospatial mapping that Melissa Barrientos carried out for the project. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

Funding

The research for this article was funded by the UCL Grand Challenges, Place and Displacement Special Initiative.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Armbruster, H. (2018). "It was the photograph of the little boy": Reflections on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(15), 2680–2699. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1554226

Back, L., & Sinha, S. (2018). *Migrant city*. Routledge.

Barton, C. (2022). *How many Ukrainians live in the UK?* House of Commons Library. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/how-many-ukrainians-live-in-the-uk

Benson, M., Nando, S., & Zambelli, E. (2024). *Humanitarian visas in a hostile environment: Historical legacies, geopolitical ties and everyday experiences* (MIGZEN Research Brief No. 5). University of Birmingham. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10571433

Berg, M. L., & Dickson, E. (2022). *Asylum housing in Yorkshire: A case study of two dispersal areas*. University College London.

Berg, M. L., Dickson, E., Nyamakanga, F., & Gómez, N. (2023). "My name is not 'asylum seeker'": Countering silencing, unhearing and labelling in the UK asylum system through co-research." In C. Cameron, A. Koslowski, A. Lamont, & P. Moss (Eds.), *Social research for our times: Thomas Coram Research Unit past, present and future* (pp. 209–226). UCL Press.

Berg, M. L., & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2018). Hospitality and hostility towards migrants: Global perspectives—An introduction. *Migration and Society*, *1*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2018.010102

Bowden, G., & O'Dowd, V. (2022, May 3). *Priti Patel faces legal threat over Ukraine visa delays*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61310346

British Red Cross. (2023). *Fearing, fleeing, facing the future: How people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine are finding safety in the UK*. https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/how-people-displaced-by-the-conflict-in-ukraine-are-finding-safety-in-the-uk

Burrell, K. (2024). Domesticating responsibility: Refugee hosting and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. *Antipode*, *56*(4), 1191–1211. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.13023

Casu, L., Berg, M. L., & Zschomler, S. (2023). *United Kingdom country report: Government responses to increased influx of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23 in the United Kingdom*. NIBR, Oslo Met.

Catney, G., Lloyd, C. D., Ellis, M., Wright, R., Finney, N., Jivraj, S., & Manley, D. (2023). Ethnic diversification and neighbourhood mixing: A rapid response analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales. *The Geographical Journal*, *189*(1), 63–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12507

Dadusc, D., & Mudu, P. (2020). Care without control: The humanitarian industrial complex and the criminalisation of solidarity. *Geopolitics*, *27*(4), 1205–1230. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1749839

Darling, J. (2022). *Systems of suffering: Dispersal and the denial of asylum*. Pluto Press.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities. (2023). *Becoming a sponsor: Homes for Ukraine*.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities. (2024). *Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme: Visa data by age and sex of applicant up to 30 June 2024*.

Derrida, J. (2000). Hostipitality. *Angelaki*, *5*(3), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706

El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkılıc, L. (2023). Infrastructures in the context of arrival—Multidimensional patterns of resource access in an established and a new immigrant neighborhood in Germany. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-355-2023

Farahani, F. (2021). Hospitality and hostility: The dilemmas of intimate life and refugee hosting. *Journal of Sociology*, *57*(3), 664–673. https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833211018511

Gill, N. (2009). Governmental mobility: The power effects of the movement of detained asylum seekers around

Britain's detention estate. *Political Geography*, *28*, 186–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.05.003

Giudici, D. (2021). Beyond compassionate aid: Precarious bureaucrats and dutiful asylum seekers in Italy. *Cultural Anthropology*, *36*, 25–51. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca36.1.02

Göpfert, R., & Hammel, A. (2004). Kindertransport—History and memory: In memoriam Erna Nelki. *Shofar*, *23*(1), 21–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42943756

Griffiths, D. J., Sigona, N., & Zetter, R. (2005). *Refugee community organisations and dispersal: Networks, resources and social capital*. Policy.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2021). "Not in my name": Empathy and intimacy in volunteer refugee hosting. *Journal of Sociology*, *57*(3), 707–724. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783320969866

Hall, S. M. (2017). Mooring "super-diversity" to a brutal migration milieu. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *40*(9), 1562–1573. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1300296

Hanhörster, H., & Wessendorf, S. (2020). The role of arrival areas for migrant integration and resource access. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v5i3.2891

Hans, N. (2023). Arrival brokers as a key component of the arrival infrastructure: How established migrants support newcomers. *Geographica Helvetica*, *78*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-78-381-2023

Harari, D., Francis-Devine, B., Bolton, P., & Keep, M. (2024). *Rising cost of living in the UK*. House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9428/CBP-9428.pdf

Home Office, & UKVI. (2024). *Transparency data: Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data*.

Hyndman, J., Reynolds, J., Yousuf, B., Purkey, A., Demoz, D., & Sherrell, K. (2021). Sustaining the private sponsorship of resettled refugees in Canada. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.625358

Kandiah, K. (2023). The UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme: A model for the future? *Forced Migration Review*, *72*, 13–17.

Lewicki, A. (2022, March 18). On generosity, sponsorship and the right to asylum. *Sussex Centre for Migration Research Blog*. https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/sussex-centre-for-migration-research/2022/03/18/on-generosity-sponsorship-and-the-right-to-asylum

Lin, W, Lindquist, J., Xiang, & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2017). Migration infrastructures and the production of migrant mobilities. *Mobilities*, *12*(2), 167–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2017.1292770

Lindquist, J. (2015). Brokers and brokerage, anthropology of. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (pp. 870–874, 2nd ed.). Elsevier.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Macklin, A. (2021). Working against and with the state: From sanctuary to resettlement. *Migration and Society*, *4*, 31–46.

Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & van Heur, B. (2019). Migration and the infrastructural politics of urban arrival. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 1–32). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mehl, P., Fick, J., Meschter, D., Neumeier, P., Osigus, T., Glorius, B., Bürer, M., Gasch, S., Schneider, H., Kordel, S., Spenger, D., Weidinger, T., Schammann, H., & Younso, C. (2023). *Geflüchtete in ländlichen Regionen Deutschlands*. Thünen-Institut für Lebensverhältnisse in ländlichen Räumen. https://www.thuenen.de/media/publikationen/project_brief/Project_brief_2023_22.pdf

Monforte, P., Maestri, G., & d'Halluin, E. (2021). 'It's like having one more family member': Private hospitality, affective responsibility and intimate boundaries within refugee hosting networks. *Journal of Sociology*, *57*(3), 674–689. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783321991679

National Audit Office. (2023). *Investigation into the Home for Ukraine scheme, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the Home Office*. https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/investigation-into-the-homes-for-ukraine-scheme.pdf

Newham London. (n.d.). *English indices of deprivation 2019*. https://www.newham.info/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

Oxfordshire County Council. (n.d.). *Oxfordshire insight: Deprivation*. https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/deprivation-dashboard

Phillimore, J., Reyes-Soto, M., D'Avino, G., & Nicholls, N. (2022). "I have felt so much joy": The role of emotions in community sponsorship of refugees. *Voluntas*, *33*, 386–396. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00349-3

Prabhat, D., Rifath, R., Singleton, A., Ziegler, R., Powell, A., & Sedacca, N. (2022, May 26). Reconsidering Asylum: Is it for those who need protection? *Border Criminologies*. https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2022/05/reconsidering

Quinn, B., & Syal, R. (2024, February 19). Closure of UK family scheme for Ukrainians described as 'cruel' move. *The Guardian*.

Reset. (n.d.). *Homes for Ukraine toolkit: Understanding the Homes for Ukraine programme*. https://resetuk.org/toolkits/homes-for-ukraine-toolkit

Schillebeeck, E., Oosterlynck, S., & de Decker, P. (2019). Migration and the resourceful neighborhood: Exploring localized resources in urban zones of transition. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 131–152). Palgrave Macmillan.

Tomlinson, J. (2022). Bureaucratic warfare: Administrative justice and the crisis of the 'new bespokism.' *Journal of Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Law*, *36*(3), 178–201. http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4119575

Townsend, M. (2022, March 26). UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme risks operating as 'Tinder for sex traffickers,' say charities. *The Guardian*.

Tryl, L., & Surmon, T. (2023). *Welcoming Ukrainians: The hosts' perspective*. More in Common. https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/welcoming-ukrainians

Turcatti, D. (2024). *Response to the 2023 Homes for Ukraine parliamentary inquiry*. COMPASS. https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/publication/response-to-the-2023-homes-for-ukraine-parliamentary-inquiry

UKVI, & Home Office. (2022). *Guidance: Apply for a visa under the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme*.

Vicol, D. O., & Sehic, A. (2022). *Six months on: The UK's response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, and how the government can better protect refugees*. Work Rights Centre. https://www.workrightscentre.org/media/1246/ukraine-report-six-months-on-27-september-2022-final.pdf

Wessendorf, S. (2022). 'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab051

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

Wright, R., & Strauss, D. (2022, March 15). UK scheme to house Ukraine refugees draws 120,000 offers in 24 hours. *The Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/c2a2a7e6-9d46-4178-ae25-3fa978250161

Zamore, L. (2022, March 3). Europe's open door for Ukrainians reinforces a double standard on refugees. *World Politics Review*. https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/for-europe-refugees-from-ukraine-are-welcome

Ziersch, A., Walsh, M., & Due, C. (2023). 'Having a good friend, a good neighbour, can help you find yourself': Social capital and integration for people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *49*(15), 3877–3899. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2177628

About the Authors

Silke Zschomler is an affiliate research fellow at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Social Research Institute, University College London. As a social scientist with a multidisciplinary background, she is interested in the lived experience of migrants and those seeking sanctuary and refuge, and her research is situated at the nexus of migration and displacement, place-based inequalities, urban multiculture and diversity, and language/language learning. Methodologically, her work is centred around ethnography, participatory and collaborative approaches, and the coproduction of knowledge.

Mette Louise Berg is a professor of migration and diaspora studies and co-director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at UCL's Social Research Institute. She is a social anthropologist by background; her early work was on Cuba and the Cuban diaspora. More recently she has worked on diversity and conviviality and the UK asylum system. She is the founding co-editor of the journal *Migration and Society*.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8570
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8570

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

"We Stretched the Rules": How Street-Level Bureaucrats in Schools Shape Newcomers' Access to Resources

Heike Hanhörster [1] and Cornelia Tippel [2]

[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.

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

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; Brodkin, 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 (Brodkin, 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 Brodkin (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. Brodkin (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 & Brodkin, 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 außerfamiliärer 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., & Keskinkılıç, 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.

Børsch, 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., & Brodkin, 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

Brodkin, 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.

Häggström, F., Børsch, 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.childyouth.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 857 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 Tippel 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.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8765
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8765

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Keeping Faith: Faith-Based Organizations as Urban Migration Infrastructures for Illegalized Migrants in Rotterdam

Carola Vasileiadi and Thomas Swerts

Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Correspondence: Thomas Swerts (swerts@essb.eur.nl)

Submitted: 30 May 2024 **Accepted:** 25 September 2024 **Published:** 18 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

In recent years, scholarship on arrival infrastructures has refocused attention to the importance of the local level as the main site where the social in- and exclusion of newcomers is negotiated. However, this focus on newcomers has relatively overlooked the plight of long-term residents like illegalized migrants (IMs) who are "stranded" or "stuck" in their cities of residence. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) have historically functioned as sanctuaries that provide services and resources to IMs. Based on ethnographic research at the Pauluskerk in Rotterdam, we argue that the processes whereby FBOs are able to negotiate and contest the in- and exclusion of IMs in hostile environments can better be grasped by conceptualizing them as "urban migration infrastructures." By introducing this term, we open up the debate about the relative orientation of migration infrastructures beyond arrival and emphasize their relational and spatial embeddedness within broader "infrastructural fields." On the one hand, our analysis demonstrates that FBOs mediate access to material resources via providing shelter, healthcare, and possibilities for volunteering. On the other hand, we show that FBOs provide immaterial resources by stimulating a sense of belonging, assisting IMs legally, and engaging in political advocacy. Extending the lessons learned from this case study, we argue that FBOs need to constantly navigate the symbolic space between in/formality when engaging in infrastructuring work towards IMs. Our findings simultaneously indicate that the unique role that FBOs play as "safe havens" in hostile political environments comes under pressure as local governments incorporate their efforts into local reception policies.

Keywords

faith-based organizations; illegalized migrants; migration infrastructures; sanctuary cities

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

On 29th of February 2024, the Protestant church "Pauluskerk" in Rotterdam organized the third edition of the "Right to Rest" (Recht op Rust). The "Right to Rest" was conceived as a protest in solidarity with homeless people, including many illegalized migrants (IMs), by erecting tent camps on symbolic places like the Central Station and the City Hall. The third edition took place in the Wijkpark located in "Oude Westen," a super-diverse neighborhood where 70% of the inhabitants have a migration background. The chosen date was symbolic, as a representative of the church explained, "for a lot of people it's nice to have an extra day…but for others it is an extra day to survive." During the protest, a soapbox stage (*zeepkist*) was installed where solidary citizens, professionals, bureaucrats, and IMs alternated taking the floor. Ayoub, an undocumented man, gave an emotional testimony stating how he was a long-term resident of the city and how "tired" he was of constantly being on the move and living on the streets. "I am looking for a home, I just want to go home," he repeated like a mantra. Free food was provided by a neighborhood community kitchen and at the end of the night tents were set up in the park to make sure that all participants had a place to sleep. As the press release made clear, the goal of the action was to:

> [O]ffer…unconditional shelter for one night, which we demand from the Municipality of Rotterdam….Not everyone is welcome in regular overnight shelters. This leaves many undocumented migrants and migrant workers on the streets….We show the city what we want: a city where everyone can find rest, feel safe, have space to meet each other, and take care of each other. (Pauluskerk, 2024d)

While their action drew public attention to the "right to rest" for homeless IMs in a hostile environment, it also prefigured the Pauluskerk's vision of the sanctuary city. At the same time, the fragility of the tents as a form of "shelter" symbolizes the ambivalence of sanctuary practices in hostile urban environments.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) like the Pauluskerk have long been recognized in the scholarly literature as spaces of urban sanctuary that provide protection to people on the move (see Bauder, 2017). In a globalized world wherein the hyper-mobility of transnational elites stands in sharp contrast to the forced (im)mobility of the precarious poor, FBOs evoke their religious mission to offer refuge to IMs in Western countries (Bauman, 1998; Lippert & Rehaag, 2013). Although the sanctuary practices wherein FBOs are involved in differ, the oppositional stance they take towards exclusionary national policies is a common denominator (Squire & Darling, 2013; Yukich, 2013). Hence, existing scholarship on sanctuary cities treat urban sanctuary as "an important political critique of the nation-state from within" that tests the limits of state sovereignty (Darling & Bauder, 2019, p. 9). FBOs are hereby conceptualized as spaces of confused sovereignty whose sanctuary practices are directly opposed to—and largely beyond the reach of—formal state logics (Nagel & Ehrkamp, 2016).

However, the "well-intentioned forms of pastoral support or charity-like work" that FBOs are engaged in can inadvertently contribute to the hostile politics of waiting and the reproduction of anti-migrant hostility (Bagelman, 2016, p. 6; Mosselson, 2021). Furthermore, the criteria that FBOs use to provide access to support well-defined target groups can reinforce categorical fragmentation between IMs as "deserving" and "undeserving" (Swerts & Nicholls, 2021; Yukich, 2013). The meaning of sanctuary practices becomes even more blurred when FBOs become incorporated into formal migration policies. This is well illustrated by the

case of the Netherlands, where the national government has attempted to regulate irregular migration via stringent external and internal bordering policies over the last two decades. Most notably, the 1998 Linkage Law (Koppelingswet) excluded IMs from service provision by linking welfare state access to citizenship status (Hajer et al., 2024). FBOs who had historically provided sanctuary towards IMs were thereby forced to comply or risk being criminalized (Kox & Staring, 2022).

Cities have become crucial sites where migrant irregularity and in/formality are constantly being produced, negotiated, and contested (Darling, 2017; Swerts, 2017). The concept of arrival infrastructures (Meeus et al., 2019) provides a useful lens to investigate how FBOs help channel IMs through the urban landscape by selecting, giving direction to, and retaining or accelerating certain migrants. However, the focus on arrival and newcomers in this literature has relatively overlooked how FBOs engage in infrastructuring work by providing sanctuary to long-term residents like IMs who are "stranded" or "stuck" in their cities of residence. Furthermore, the tendency in this literature to privilege studying informal spaces and initiatives for newcomers overshadows the interrelations they have with formal organizations like FBOs (Loomans et al., 2024; Schillebeeckx et al., 2019). Building on the existing work on migration infrastructure(s) (Hall et al., 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), we try to overcome these shortcomings by introducing the term "urban migration infrastructures" to highlight the relative orientation of migration infrastructures beyond arrival and emphasize their relational and spatial embeddedness within broader "infrastructural fields."

By adopting an urban infrastructural perspective, we can grasp the unique yet ambivalent role that FBOs play in navigating and maneuvering between formality and informality in the quest to provide services towards IMs in a highly differentiated infrastructural field. FBOs are an integral part of what Felder et al. (2023) have called the "assistance circuit" of service provision towards IMs. Churches, libraries, community centers, and homeless shelters thus function as social infrastructures, or the physical sites and facilities within this circuit that enable IMs to access resources and networks (Klinenberg, 2018; Wessendorf, 2022). Institutionalized infrastructures tend to be interconnected to non-institutionalized infrastructures like camps and squats since "informality is what makes a certain space immediately accessible, and also what allows the transit through it" (Bovo, 2020, p. 27). At the same time, infrastructuring work can have a more formal or informal character depending on whether service provision is situated within or beyond the legal boundaries set out by the state.

In this article, we rely on ethnographic research at the Pauluskerk in Rotterdam to argue that FBOs operate as urban migration infrastructures for IMs. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we situate our contribution within the literature on urban sanctuary and arrival infrastructures. Second, we outline the relational and spatial embeddedness of the Pauluskerk in the Rotterdam infrastructural field. Third, we demonstrate that FBOs mediate access to material and immaterial resources to IMs in a hostile urban environment by strategically navigating back and forth between formal and informal infrastructuring work. Finally, we argue that the unique role that FBOs play as "safe havens" in a hostile political environment can come under pressure as local governments increasingly seek to incapsulate sanctuary practices into local reception policies.

2. Conceptualizing FBOs as Urban Migration Infrastructures

2.1. The Role of FBOs in Negotiating Urban Sanctuary

Over the past few decades, people on the move who defy state restrictions on mobility have been systematically subjected to criminalization, stigmatization, and illegalization (De Genova & Roy, 2020). In a globalized world wherein national sovereignty is severely eroded, the stringent governance of irregular migrant mobility has become a symbolic arena for nation-states to re-assert their continuing relevance (Schinkel, 2009). Elected governments in Europe and North America have rhetorically adopted a strict stance on irregular migration, promising their electorates to "end the problem" once and for all through deterrence and migration enforcement (McNevin, 2017). To turn tough talk into tough action, a multiplicity of governmental actors at various scales is involved in the attempt to curtail the mobility of IMs within and beyond state territory. Illegalization depends on bordering practices involving the creation of physical borders and symbolic boundaries between "legal" and "illegal" migrants (Fassin, 2011). State distinctions legally sort and categorize people on the move into desirable/undesirable, thereby justifying forms of legal violence like apprehensions, detentions, and deportations (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). Internal bordering practices also proliferate at the subnational level, as precarious legal status cuts access for illegalized residents to various social benefits and services associated with the welfare state (Fauser, 2024).

Due to these developments, European cities have become urban borderlands where "the dividing line between insiders and outsiders, citizens and non-citizens, and the growing number of fine-tuned categories of non-citizens, along with divisions of racialisation and ethnicisation, class, gender, sexuality, and health" is enacted, (re-)produced, and contested (Fauser, 2024, p. 2478). Struggles over who fits into or falls outside national citizenship and belonging are increasingly re-scaled to the urban level (Darling & Bauder, 2019). On the one hand, scholarship on internal bordering practices has highlighted how urban actors like city governments, police forces, and NGOs are enlisted by national governments to implement restrictive migration policies (van der Woude & Staring, 2021). On the other hand, scholarship on sanctuary policies and practices has highlighted how, under certain conditions, urban actors create a "safe space where migrants will be at least temporarily protected from political authorities whose aim is to remove them from their territory" (Bauböck & Permoser, 2023, p. 3673). Such sanctuary practices range from formal actors like municipalities making use of their discretionary power to create bureaucratic firewalls to informal actors like migrant self-organizations engaging in anti-deportation campaigns (de Graauw, 2021; Kocher & Stuesse, 2021). Urban borderlands are thus essentially two-faced, as they visualize the capacity of the city to expel and absorb IMs into the social fabric.

FBOs have been historically at the forefront when it comes to providing urban sanctuary to people on the move since the Middle Ages (see Bauder, 2017). This ancient tradition underwent a revival in the eighties in North America and Europe when Christian churches provided sanctuary to migrants facing deportation (Lippert & Rehaag, 2013). In the US context, the New Sanctuary Movement involved hundreds of churches that evoked their moral mission to "break the law" by offering sanctuary to Central American migrants (Yukich, 2013). In the Netherlands, the first sanctuary initiatives that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s were also primarily taken by FBOs that were dissatisfied with asylum decisions taken by the state and with IMs sleeping rough (Kox & Staring, 2022). This has led the existing literature to mainly interpret the role that FBOs play in providing urban sanctuary as a facilitative one, stressing how their inclusive practices defy direct orders

from state authorities (Squire & Darling, 2013; Yukich, 2013). However, critical scholarship has argued that sanctuary can reinforce anti-immigrant hostility by increasing dependency of IMs on care (Bagelman, 2013). Furthermore, certain scholars (Bauder et al., 2023) argue that the application of concepts of sanctuary in the migration literature risks perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives. We therefore pay explicit attention to the relational and often conflictual processes whereby the meaning of sanctuary is locally negotiated and—at times—gets jeopardized (Lambert & Swerts, 2019).

2.2. Towards an Urban Infrastructural Perspective on FBOs

In recent years, scholars in migration studies have increasingly adopted the conceptual language of "migration infrastructure(s)" to unpack the processes of mediation that facilitate and condition mobility (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). In urban studies, the concepts of "migration infrastructure" and "arrival infrastructures" have been used to capture how newcomers' mobility is mediated in cities (Hall et al., 2017; Meeus et al., 2019). Adopting an infrastructural perspective promises to capture arrival as "the move from the margins to becoming part of the social, economic, and cultural fabric in which migrants end up, thereby also shaping the place that they are joining" (Wessendorf, 2022, p. 175). This move is facilitated by a variety of "infrastructures" in the city that selectively offer access to resources, thereby shaping the mobility trajectories of people on the move. Despite the promise this perspective entails to see the role that cities play vis-a-vis migrant mobility in a different light; the literature that takes inspiration from this perspective interprets the meaning of arrival infrastructures in vastly different ways (see Bovo, 2020). As Bovo contends, these different interpretations converge regarding the temporariness of arrival infrastructures "which may not necessarily be linked to further settlement" and their functionality to "be accessible for newcomers and allow further transit" (2020, p. 30). Conceived in this way, however, the concept fails to capture the blocked mobility trajectories of immobilized IMs who are forced to settle themselves long-term in their cities of residence due to legal and bureaucratic obstacles (Nimführ & Sesay, 2019). Furthermore, the assumption that migration infrastructures are primarily oriented towards further transit is hard to rhyme with the historical function that FBOs have played for IMs in providing sanctuary and opportunities for settlement.

In an attempt to delineate the concept on arrival infrastructures, Meeus et al. (2020, p. 13) emphasized the need to adopt a "multi-actor" and "multi-sited" perspective on arrival infrastructures since newcomers tend to make use of "a network of arrival infrastructures distributed over the city rather than just one arrival infrastructure." This network includes "a variety of actors, including architects and urban planners, state-employees, citizens, civil society organisations, newcomers, and more established migrants" and "variety of housing typologies (including asylum centres and squatting), shops as information hubs, religious sites, facilities for language classes, hairdressers, restaurants, international shipping, and call centres" (Meeus et al., 2020, p. 14). Building on the insights of the Chicago school, the related literature on arrival neighborhoods argues that such infrastructures tend to be concentrated in specialized neighborhoods that provide newcomers with access to resources (Schillebeeckx et al., 2019). While we agree that connections between actors and places need to be taken seriously to grasp how migration infrastructures function, the broad range of actors and spaces included risks turning anything and everything into a potential arrival infrastructure. Furthermore, conceptualizing aggregated networks of migration infrastructures as arrival neighborhoods risks reifying the neighborhood level while overlooking networks that reach beyond the neighborhood.

To overcome these shortcomings, we put forward the notions of "urban migration infrastructures" and "infrastructural fields" in this article. The concept of urban migration infrastructures is better attuned to the complexity of IMs' mobility trajectories because it keeps the relative orientation and functionality of migration infrastructures in urban settings open. Therefore, it is able to critically investigate how such infrastructure are implicated in migration processes beyond arrival such as settlement, transit, and exit. Building on the work of Wessendorf (2022) and Kloosterman et al. (1999), we argue that we need to consider how urban migration infrastructures are spatially and relationally embedded within what we propose to call the infrastructural field. For Bourdieu, fields denote "arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize different kinds of power resources" (Swartz, 2020, p. 322). The interconnected services across different actors and localities that together make up the "assistance circuit" for IMs constitute such a field (Felder et al., 2023; Schiller et al., 2023). In the Rotterdam case, this infrastructural field is highly differentiated as it is characterized by the tension between state infrastructures that try to formalize—and thereby control—sanctuary and make it conditional upon return. Characteristics and dynamics within such infrastructural fields help to explain why actors operating in a hostile environment need to learn how to strategically maneuver the liminal space between in/formality (Darling, 2017; Swerts, 2017).

3. Methods

In this article we aim to generate insights into how FBOs engage in infrastructural work towards IMs in hostile environments based on an ethnographic case study of the Pauluskerk in Rotterdam. The Pauluskerk can be considered a "critical case" to study this question due to the unique position it occupies within the Rotterdam infrastructural field as an FBO who was involved in providing sanctuary to IMs before, during, and beyond the LVV (Landelijke Vreemdelingen Voorzieningen; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Data collection for this article occurred via participant observation and interviewing. In 2024, Carola Vasileiadi did four months of participant observation at the Pauluskerk by doing weekly evening shifts in the shelter of approximately 7 hours, taking part in group activities like cooking sessions, communal dinners, meetings with churchgoers and volunteers, and attending public events. During participant observation, informal conversations with residents and unstructured interviews with volunteers took place. Fieldwork findings were written in a notebook after visits to the church which were often about informal conversations and observations during volunteering shifts. These notes led to more general statements, while personal ones without formal consent were avoided. Visual ethnographic data like photographs which help to "set the scene" and analyze infrastructure processes were also gathered during participant observation (van den Scott, 2018). In terms of interviewing, Thomas Swerts was involved in coordinating several interviews with migrants (10) and employees at the Pauluskerk (5) on sanctuary practices in 2018. In addition, authors 1 and 2 performed structured interviews with three employees, including the pastor-director, of the Pauluskerk and two interviews with representatives of the municipality who are involved with the LVV to discuss local policies and practices towards IMs more in depth. Formal interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Anonymity was guaranteed throughout the research and this article does not mention names, age, or ethnic characteristics that could be traced back to respondents.

Critical reflections on positionalities played a crucial role during the fieldwork in navigating social dynamics and underlying power imbalances between the researcher and IMs (Moralli, 2024; Swerts, 2020). Before entering the field, the authors openly discussed the research process and aims transparently with the church. Carola Vasileiadi is a young female scholar who offered to support the practices of the church as a volunteer in order to build trust among volunteers and residents and spend a prolonged intimate time in their private everyday space (Cîrstea & Pescinski, 2024). This positionality required constant reflexivity and renegotiation as the power differences between a researcher with institutional backing and vulnerable IMs could influence interactions, the information shared, and the knowledge generated. Volunteers carefully informed Carola Vasileiadi about the residents' behavior and situation before approaching residents themselves. In this way, we tried to take into consideration the vulnerable position of our respondents. Being a female researcher among predominantly elderly male residents added another layer of complexity (Vanderbeck, 2005). Some residents occasionally sought attention through jokes and their intentions were sometimes unclear, further highlighting the need for careful navigation of these dynamics. Despite the many differences in identities, conversations often veered into everyday life topics. Similarities and mutual interests were found, reflecting the development of an informal but transparent relationship.

4. FBO's Infrastructuring Practices of Sanctuary in Rotterdam

In this section, we argue that FBOs like the Pauluskerk provide material and immaterial resources respectively referring to tangible benefits that are enabled through accessing shelter, healthcare, and other support services and intangible benefits that are mobilized via social networks, information flows, and recognition. By making this distinction, we neither intend to imply that material resource provision is devoid of symbolic qualities, nor that immaterial resource provision is independent from physical infrastructures. We rather do so to analyze how FBOs like the Pauluskerk strategically navigate the differentiated infrastructural field in Rotterdam to make material and immaterial resources available to IMs. More in particular, we argue that the conflicting logics of the Pauluskerk's vision on sanctuary and the local government's emphasis on conditional aid and (voluntary) return stimulate the need to strategically move back and forth between in/formality. This resonates with the literature on "social shadow work" which points out that FBOs and other faith-based solidarity practices towards IMs often take place informally under the radar (Van Dam et al., 2022). While we regard the distinction between formal and informal infrastructuring work to be blurry and messy, we uphold this distinction to point out how FBO's sanctuary practices can be situated within an infrastructural field dominated by the state. Formal infrastructuring work pertains to organizational practices and service provision towards IMs that are well situated within the legal boundaries set out by the state and often involve cooperation with state actors. Conversely, informal infrastructuring work pertains to organizational practices and service provision towards IMs that take place despite of or without explicit state authorization and exceed or go against legal frameworks (see Figure 1).

4.1. The Relational and Spatial Embeddedness of the Pauluskerk Within the Infrastructural Field

In relational terms, the embeddedness of FBOs within the infrastructural field is shaped by the ongoing efforts of the Dutch national government to get to grips with the local presence of IMs in cities like Rotterdam via the criminalization and formalization of sanctuary practices (Hajer et al., 2024). Since the implementation of the Linkage Law in 1998, societal organizations and churches were subsidized by municipalities to offer emergency shelters, although against national policies to exclude IMs from public

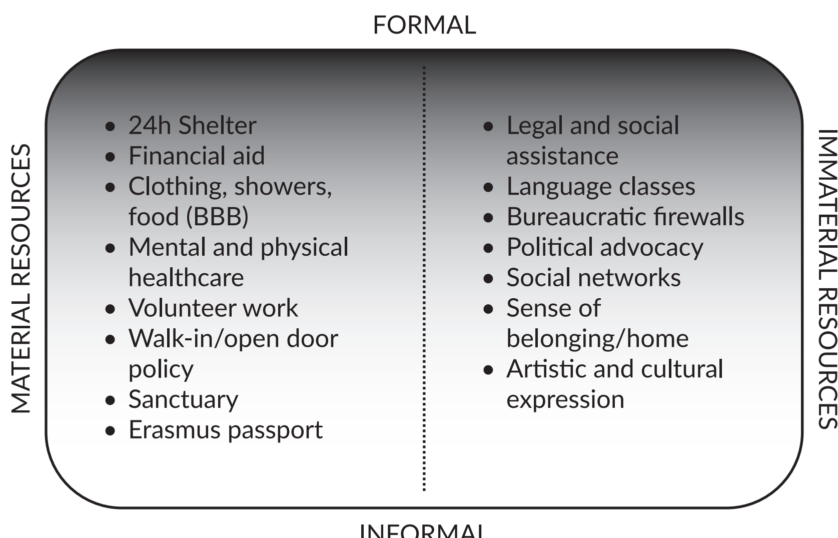


Figure 1. In/formal infrastructuring work and access to resources for IMs.

services. In a 2014 report by the European Committee of Social Rights, the Council of Europe subsequently condemned the Dutch state for this situation and after the FBO Church in Action (Kerk in Actie) filed a complaint, this political crisis resulted in the installation of Bed, Bath, Bread (BBB) policies (Kalir, 2017). To tackle the sprawling sanctuary practices that ensued, the Dutch state curtailed and integrated these BBB practices with the roll-out of the nationally coordinated LVV program in 2018. Within this program, access to shelter became conditional upon IMs cooperation to work towards "a sustainable future solution" that could lead to regularization, onward migration, or departure. While cities oversaw its local implementation of formal policies, the national government dictated cooperation with voluntary return as one of the main conditions to get access to service provision for IMs (see Kuschminder & Dubow, 2023).

Rotterdam was one of five municipalities that collaborated with the national government, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, and the service for return and departure in this pilot. Compared to other Dutch cities, Rotterdam is characterized by its strict and hostile political climate towards IMs where service provision gets problematized as risking a pull effect (*aanzuigende werking*). The Rotterdam counselor holds the national government responsible for financing the LVV and consistently maintains that there is no funding available for IMs from the city of Rotterdam. Hostile architecture, the removal of benches and fining sleeping outside exemplify municipal measures taken to combat the "threat" that IMs pose to public order and safety (Algemeen Dagblad, 2024). The Pauluskerk joined the LVV pilot indirectly as a partner and reception location for the Nico Adriaens Stichting, a care organization who entered a direct contract with the municipality and also received the funding for participation in the LVV. In their public communication, the Pauluskerk explained this decision by stating that the church "decided, despite justified hesitation, to participate constructively in the pilot" while "emphasizing that the new arrangement must not degenerate into a glorified deportation scheme" and that "the starting point is and remains the interest of undocumented people themselves" (Pauluskerk, 2024a). When the Municipality cut the number of beds from 75 to 45 in January 2024, the Pauluskerk effectively stopped being a part of the LVV. A representative of the municipality involved in the LVV reflected on tensions between partners as follows:

> The LVV is a kind of partnership of actors with different backgrounds and visions. And well, I think especially the Paulus Church and [mentions organization X]. They just have a certain ideology, of course, in their minds about how they want to help people and what they think is humane aid. And so does that always match with how we as a local government look at that or how the national government looks at that. Where we say, illegal existence in the Netherlands is not a perspective....So there are definitely tensions around this. (Municipal representative 1)

Despite this retreat from the LVV due to conflicting visions, the Pauluskerk still occupies a central position within the infrastructural field (see Schiller et al., 2023). This has to do with the fact that in 2023, more than 90% of their total annual budget of roughly 1.6 million euros came from private funds and donations (Pauluskerk, 2023). Since then, the church decided to provide permanent shelter for elderly (55+) IMs. The Pauluskerk's service provision necessitates considering interconnections with other infrastructures in the city:

> What exactly is our role in the whole of facilities and institutions and organizations in this city? I think you have to be informed by that. It's not that you always have to make yourself dependent, but you do have to take advantage of the knowledge of the environment, of the context. If, for example, the municipality of Rotterdam treated undocumented people like other citizens in this city, we would have to adopt a much less fierce tone. If [mentions others non-state actors] would advocate and campaign for the rights of undocumented in public space, we could neatly join in instead of taking the lead. (Employee 1)

Based on an analysis of the contact details of 26 collaborating organizations that the Pauluskerk has on file, Figure 2 below shows how the church's network radiates outwards across the city. Each organization works with their own target groups, clients, and flows of money. Yet they share a common goal to direct their sanctuary practices towards people excluded from the services of the welfare state. To co-ordinate between forms of service provision within the Rotterdam infrastructural field, the core actors meet four times a year at the Pauluskerk.

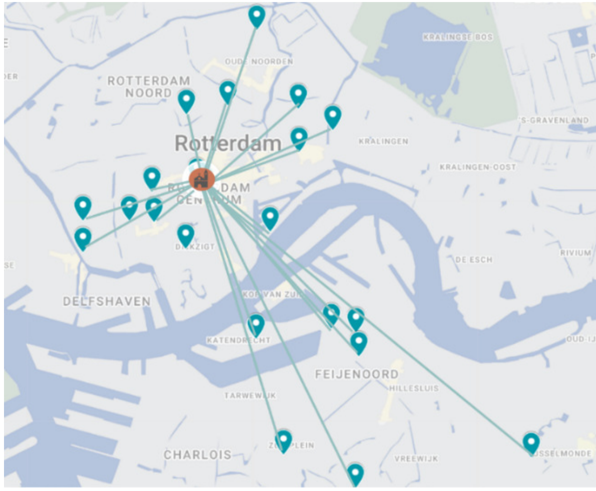


Figure 2. Relational embeddedness of Pauluskerk. Twenty-six partner organizations, some of them have multiple purposes for food distribution (13), healthcare (9), clothing (6), housing and shelter (5), legal aid (7), psychosocial aid (3), return (3), education (1), and domestic violence (1).

In spatial terms, Figure 2 illustrates that the relational networks of the Pauluskerk reach well beyond the neighborhood where the church is located. These networks extend to the regional, national, and transnational scale. However, for the purpose of this article, we choose to focus on the local scale since these networks are particularly important with regards to enabling local access to resources to IMs. The spatial embeddedness of the Pauluskerk in the city center within walking distance of the Central Station is crucial to understand its nodal position within the infrastructural field in Rotterdam. As a place of transit, the urban area surrounding the Central Station has always been known for attracting marginalized residents who suffer from drug use, mental health problems or illegalized status. When the old church had to make way for a new high-rise building, the developer agreed to erect a new building symbolizing "a crystal that has fallen of a rock" in exchange for the land. The building stands out in the urban landscape and is designed as a welcoming space centered around a "church square and open house" (see Figure 3). Despite this welcoming design, employees of the church explained that the Pauluskerk is also a place that people are often a bit ashamed of since it symbolizes the "last resort" for people who experience trouble fending for themselves.

As Respondent 3 indicated, the presence of the Red Cross "three doors down" in the same street facilitates the referral of IMs with medical problems. Likewise, the church collaborates with solidary restaurants and ethnic entrepreneurs from the nearby West Kruiskade for food provision. Despite such benefits of its spatial embeddedness, the neighborhood has also been gentrifying as more high-rise buildings arise and businesses, shops, and restaurants are settling in. While the streets are crowded with commuters and tourists, the Pauluskerk confronts passers-by with, as one of our interviewees put it, "the raw Rotterdam, the naked Rotterdam in a sense, the hurt Rotterdam, also, you could say the Rotterdam of the street." Hence, residents regularly voice concerns over nuisances caused by the Pauluskerk's visitors. However, other residents respond to its presence by becoming involved as one of the 200 volunteers (Pauluskerk, 2024b). While the municipality is committed to polishing away the reality of IMs, the Pauluskerk aims to "stand beside people who live on the margins" and "be there, for everyone who is vulnerable, including undocumented people and [others] who fall outside the established order" (Employee 1).

4.2. Material Resource Provision

The Pauluskerk relies on its relational and spatial embeddedness to provide material resources to IMs like shelter, healthcare, and physical security (see Figure 1 for overview). Examples of material resources that are accessible for visitors during the day include showers and washing machines, clothing, and food. Residents

Figure 3. Spatial embeddedness of Pauluskerk. Photo courtesy of Weedaarchitecten, 2012.

in the shelter have access to 12 two-shared bedrooms, two kitchens, bathrooms, and a communal area and receive 60 euros per week for living costs. Figure 4 below depicts a typical shelter and the kitchen for residents.

Enabling access to material resources requires the Pauluskerk to navigate strategically between formal and informal infrastructuring work. Between 2018 and 2024, access to shelter for a period of up to six months for IMs at the Pauluskerk became subjected to the LVV's formal criteria. Access to shelter required IMs to cooperate with a "realistic" process aimed at finding a "durable solution" ranging from getting a residence permit, migrating to another country, to return to the home country. IMs who got a bed in the church were also offered counselling. The downside was that the church was not allowed to supervise them as they were labelled as a shelter institution. The residents were accommodated by the church but supervised by a partner institution in the city. Additional access criteria included age, being from an "unsafe" country, not having participated in a LVV shelter, having a connection with Rotterdam and the absence of the right to stay in an asylum center, an EU residence permit, or having a Dublin claim. The implementation of these criteria reinforced the precarious and conditional nature of sanctuary at the Pauluskerk (see Bauder et al., 2023). Formal infrastructuring work involved more nighttime surveillance due to safety risks and controlling measures to get a grip of who uses their services like participants having to sign in and out every time they left the church as residents were not allowed in the residency area during the day. Employees and volunteers painfully stressed how they had to refuse IMs at the door with whom they had built trustful relationships and who had been secured of shelter in the church before the implementation of the pilot. This led one volunteer to state that "you have to grow calluses on your soul otherwise you won't be able to continue." However, employees also frequently engaged in informal infrastructuring work by using their discretionary power to stretch the criteria, granting access even when IMs "were not really qualified." In addition, they sometimes put up bureaucratic firewalls to protect IMs by not saying "where that person lives, so they just see how they're going to issue that [return] invitation" (Employee 2).

Physical safety is another issue that constantly requires negotiation between in/formality, since drug use, dealing, and mental health problems frequently escalate into violence. To combat these risks, formal rules have been implemented like the prohibition of alcohol. Informally, however, volunteers tend to turn a blind eye towards it. The Pauluskerk tried to cope with safety issues by installing a specific volunteering team, called "Team Attention" (*Team Aandacht*), to be present in the visiting area to avoid escalation. The building was also made safer by installing a safety alarm and cameras, implementing a security key system for residents, and

Figure 4. Shelter and kitchen. Photos taken by Carola Vasileiadi.

having a night guard. An employee acknowledged that while at first it was a no-go to work with the police, this changed:

> Well, they [the police] did say "we are not going to ask people in here for an ID card or do things like that. We only come in really targeted if we're looking for someone for a crime and ask if we can go in." (Interview 2)

Hence, to safeguard the physical safety of its visitors, and residents, the Pauluskerk made informal agreements with the police allowing them to intervene in circumstances of imminent security threat without jeopardizing sanctuary.

Since the Pauluskerk left the LVV, the fourth floor has been reserved for the long-term hosting of elderly IMs who are unlikely to exit the country and have little perspective to perceive a residence permit (Staring et al., 2022). Informal access criteria are based on age (55+ years old), length of residence (in the Netherlands for 15 years or longer), not having a support network, and medical problems. The church's criteria of "deservingness" to access this shelter demand constant informal infrastructuring work to negotiate their in- and exclusion (Aru & Belloni, 2024; Yukich, 2013). A Pauluskerk employee legitimized these criteria by arguing that they "do not have an unlimited number of sleeping places so we want to dedicate those sleeping places to the most vulnerable…elderly people, undocumented people and homeless people with medical problems." Residents express that they prefer the situation now that the church stepped out of the LVV because the regulations are more relaxed which makes them feel more welcome. They expressed hope they can stay as they have nowhere else to go. Even though these sanctuary practices instill hope among elderly IMs who are in limbo, they fail to provide long-lasting solutions for the underlying issues of dependency on care and insecurity for the future that elderly IMs experience (Bagelman, 2013).

The "stranded" group of elderly IMs is especially in need of medical attention, since they often suffer from health issues like diabetes, kidney problems and knee problems resulting from living on the streets. A nurse employed by the church is practically in charge of healthcare provision and street doctors employed by another organization offer appointments four times a week, referring clients to specialists if necessary. The service includes a physiotherapist on Tuesday mornings, a dentist on Fridays, and a psychologist on Thursday evenings. This way, the medical service of the Pauluskerk has about 2500 consultations per year, helping about 250 people (Pauluskerk, 2024b). The Pauluskerk also created an informal "Erasmus Passport" which indicates that the person is known by the church, has the right to medical emergency care and costs can be declared by the organization CAK (see Figure 5). An employee of the Pauluskerk noticed that even though the passport is not legally valid, it facilitates IMs' uptake of medical rights.

Due to the Linking Act, IMs are not allowed to work and mostly end up working in the informal economy under precarious labor conditions. While the Pauluskerk cannot legally employ them, the church engages in informal infrastructural work by allowing IMs to volunteer for cleaning shifts, handing out coffee, and cooking for visitors. Through volunteering, IMs make an active contribution to the Pauluskerk as an employee explained:

> Some of our visitors, they develop into volunteers, pillars of the Pauluskerk even, but [we] cannot give them an employment contract. They also often depend on the Pauluskerk which is very different from other volunteers. What [we] can do is accommodate someone in occasional cases. (Interview 1)

Figure 5. Erasmus passport. Photos taken by Carola Vasileiadi.

The Pauluskerk thus informally "repays" IMs for their volunteering by offering accommodation, reimbursing monthly expenses, providing legal assistance, and on occasion, giving a bike when needed. As an IM volunteer explained to Carola Vasileiadi, volunteering to cook and clean is good for his wellbeing because it keeps him busy and "out of his head." Volunteering also stimulates a sense of responsibility and agency among IMs.

4.3. Immaterial Resource Provision

The Pauluskerk also provides a wide range of immaterial resources towards IMs (see Table 1). As discussed above, immaterial resource provision again requires infrastructuring work that navigates between in/formality. Examples of immaterial resources that rely on the mobilization of institutional knowledge by employees and volunteers include social assistance, socio-legal aid, and political advocacy. Informally, residents and visitors find a sense of home and belonging and create safe spaces for artistic self-expression in an otherwise hostile urban environment. Although we focus on the provision of immaterial resources here, the infrastructuring work involved is intimately tied to physical spaces in the building. Figure 6 below depicts a participatory art installation created at the Pauluskerk as well as the "living room" for residents.

Every day from nine till nine the Pauluskerk opens its doors for on average 250 visitors (Pauluskerk, 2024b). The first and second floor constitute a welcoming public area where volunteers serve food at five, and coffee until nine in the evening. The space subtly invites visitors and residents to socialize with each other. Stepping

Figure 6. Art installation (left; photo courtesy of Kunsthal, 2022) and resident living room (right; photo taken by Carola Vasileiadi).

into the building, one encounters people playing games or chatting around the tables, while others sit alone or sleep with their heads on the table. The area encourages companionships and building a social network while overcoming a sense of social isolation. In the Pauluskerk, people can just come and go and be as they want. As one employee put it, "there is no other place like the Pauluskerk" in the hostile environment of Rotterdam. This has to do with the fact that the Pauluskerk is a low threshold, accessible safe space:

> The idea of our open house here is that people can be there as they want. And if that means they don't want any help at all, just a cup of coffee, that's fine. If it means they want to sleep with their head on the table all day, fine….So we are not going to impose and we don't need anything from them, but they are always welcome to ring the bell, to ask for help or offer something. So that it's a low threshold safe place then, that's what we try to do. (Interview 1)

While some residents can be found downstairs socializing in the visiting area, others prefer to stay upstairs. The third and fourth floors have a communal space serving as a living room for residents (see Figure 6). During the volunteering shifts, the living rooms are mostly used by volunteers while residents retreat to their private rooms. As one volunteer commented, the wallpaper of a Dutch landscape with a windmill and the colored chairs can give the impression of a rather sterile "dentist waiting room." Nevertheless, residents develop feelings of belonging and being "at home" through relationships that develop over time with volunteers. For example, volunteers check the medical condition of residents and sometimes engage in practices of care like nursing their feet and nails. The kitchen also offers opportunities for informal and spontaneous encounter. Here, practices of care can be observed when residents check in with each other to see whether they have eaten and make coffee or cook pancakes for each other. Some residents call each other "brother" or "best friend" while a resident calls one of the volunteers his "father." Residents also find room for self-expression during cultural and artistic activities like writing, singing, guitar lessons, photography, and a Dutch language café. During a gathering in the church, an IM stated that "art is what makes him human" (23rd of May 2024). Informal infrastructuring work therefore revolves around practices of care, encounter, and self-expression.

In terms of formal infrastructuring work, the Pauluskerk offers socio-legal aid to IMs on a weekly basis. During these weekly consultation hours, trained social workers use their institutional knowledge to build towards a sustainable perspective with for example support regarding CV building and the search for housing. Legal aid also helps IMs navigate the complicated legal and bureaucratic procedures they face in, for example, renewing their asylum requests. IMs have the right to legal assistance but often lack the financial resources or proof of income. Although they can ask for free advice at the legal desk, social lawyers struggle due to the lack of compensation from the government. An employee explained that most people have exhausted all legal remedies when they come to the Pauluskerk in the hope they can help them. When individual legal cases are too complicated, employees refer IMs "to Vluchtelingenwerk [Refugee Work] or ROS….And for some people I try to provide legal guidance, for instance I was just at an appointment with the lawyer for a visitor of ours." Because the Pauluskerk cannot take on all the cases themselves, the employees hold monthly meetings with a lawyer to assist some of their clients.

Finally, the Pauluskerk engages in political advocacy for the right of (homeless) IMs to access long-term accommodation, care, and regularization. It is important to recall here that the Pauluskerk operates largely independently from state fundings. This increases the autonomy of the Pauluskerk to "speak freely" and take

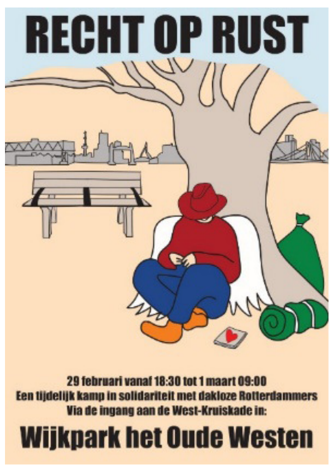


Figure 7. "Right to Rest" announcement (left; Pauluskerk, 2024c) and tent camp in Wijkpark Het Oude Westen (right; photo taken by Carola Vasileiadi).

a stance against state policies. In this regard, an employee argued that the church sees itself as a "public advocate" for IMs that tries to "represent their interests in the public sphere" by raising public awareness and taking a stance against exclusionary policies. As another employee mentioned, one of the main tasks that the church fulfills for IMs in Rotterdam is "advocacy, advocacy, advocacy." Creating political awareness is stimulated, for example, by exhibiting artistic photos and stories about the everyday life of IMs in public spaces. A group of long-time city residents also form an expertise team in the church to tell their story at public events and in the media. Influencing policymakers depends on public protests like the Recht op Rust actions (see Introduction and Figure 7). By actively turning public space into a "frontstage for citizenship," the Pauluskerk makes visible the situation of IMs and makes calls for recognition and solidarity (Swerts, 2017; Swerts & Oosterlynck, 2020). Supported by the church, IMs at the protest spoke up to tell their stories, stressing that they are Rotterdammers too. They thereby accentuate how irregularity can take on a long-term nature beyond arrival and give rise to claims to urban citizenship based on inhabitance (Purcell, 2003). The visibility and interaction with other residents that ensued offers a way of connecting and building community with neighborhood residents and other initiatives in the city.

5. Conclusion

Ever since people on the move have become immobilized and illegalized due to mobility restrictions, FBOs and other local actors have stepped in to create urban sanctuary (Bauder, 2017). The rise of sanctuary cities in North America and Europe has been extensively documented by now (Darling & Bauder, 2019). The tendency in the literature to highlight progressive, liberal cities as prime examples of "the sanctuary city," however, relatively obscures how FBOs strategically negotiate the inclusion of IMs in less welcoming urban environments. This is especially important since right-wing populism is on the rise and solidarity initiatives towards IMs are increasingly criminalized (Rygiel & Baban, 2019). The lessons learned from examining the case study in Rotterdam can therefore potentially be extended to other European cities characterized by anti-immigrant hostility (Mosselson, 2021). Recent attempts by the Dutch state to formalize, control and curtail the sanctuary practices of the Pauluskerk came into conflict with the church's religious mission to protect IMs (see Hajer et al., 2024). The church initially cooperated with the LVV initiative that aimed to make access to service provision for IMs dependent on voluntary return (Kox & Staring, 2022). However, the

church simultaneously circumvented the exclusionary logic of state‐defined criteria for service provision "from within" through the covert continuation of informal service provision and, more recently, overt protest to the state.

Building on the literature on migration infrastructure(s) (Hall et al., 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), we argued that adopting an urban infrastructural perspective is key to fully grasp how FBOs function as places of sanctuary for IMs who are "stranded" or "stuck" in hostile urban environments. On the one hand, we contend that the notion of "urban migration infrastructures" is better equipped to grasp the blocked mobility paths of long‐term undocumented residents than perspectives that focus on short‐term arrivals (Loomans et al., 2024; Meeus et al., 2019, 2020). On the other hand, we argued that the ability of FBOs like the Pauluskerk to facilitate access to material and immaterial resources to IMs depends on their spatial and relational embeddedness within a differentiated "infrastructural field" (Schiller et al., 2023; Swartz, 2020). The central location of the Pauluskerk in the vicinity of transportation hubs and its welcoming architecture confirm the importance of emplacement and physical accessibility to serve as a "safe haven" (Schillebeeckx et al. 2019; Wessendorf, 2022). Furthermore, the Pauluskerk's multiple outward relations with partner organizations as well as municipal actors that extend all over the city fuel the service provision within the Rotterdam "assistance circuit" for IMs (Felder et al., 2023). Zooming in on infrastructuring work, we highlighted that the Pauluskerk must maneuver between in/formality to provide material and immaterial services due to hostility that characterizes the infrastructural field (Swerts, 2017). Material resource provision encompassed providing shelter, food, showers, safety, and volunteering, while immaterial resources ranged from social contacts, a sense of belonging to legal assistance and political leverage.

At the same time, our findings indicate that the role that FBOs play as "safe havens" comes under pressure as national and local governments increasingly seek to incorporate their efforts into local reception policies or criminalize service provision towards IMs all together. Further research could explore the "limits to sanctuary" that seem to arise as sanctuary practices become professionalized or cooptated by municipal actors. While FBOs try to be a beacon of hope for IMs in a hostile urban environment, their sanctuary practices risk increasing the dependence of IMs on service provision while perpetuating the state of being in limbo (Bagelman, 2013; Mosselson, 2021). Infrastructural fields could also be mapped even more comprehensively by more explicitly exploring the state perspective, state‐society interactions and how networks reach beyond the local scale. It could also be fruitful to study how changing relations within urban infrastructural fields lead to shifting patterns of in/formality in service provision and differential outcomes for irregular migrant mobility. Moreover, the rolling back of sanctuary city policies and the effects that this might have on IMs' access to resources should be investigated in further detail. While we have tried to consider the subjective experiences of IMs regarding accessing forms of service provision, follow‐up research should be done to document this more systematically while paying attention to its impact on mobility trajectories. Research that aims to support urban sanctuary in hostile environments needs to acknowledge such tensions because, as one of our respondents from the Pauluskerk put it, "we are no angels that can perform miracles" but just try to "help where there is no helper."

Acknowledgments

We thank the employees, visitors, and residents of the Pauluskerk for their participation. We also thank the members of the PRIMUS group and the participants of the 24ste NSV Dag van de Sociologie in Nijmegen for their useful feedback.

Funding

This research is part of the URBIMM (Urban Migration Infrastructures for Irregular Migrant Mobility; www.urbimm.eu) funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) Talent Programme—Vidi Scheme under grant number VI.Vidi.221S.108.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Algemeen Dagblad. (2024). *Publiek op jarig CS mist de bankjes*. LinkedIn. https://nl.linkedin.com/posts/pauluskerk-rotterdam_publiek-op-jarig-cs-mist-de-bankjes-kopt-activity-7170341233926598656-Yt9q

Aru, S., & Belloni, M. (2024). Deserving or undeserving? Governing 'migrant irregularity' and squatting in Amsterdam. *Cities*, *153*, Article 105199.

Bagelman, J. (2013). Sanctuary: A politics of ease? *Alternatives*, *38*(1), 49–62.

Bagelman, J. (2016). *Sanctuary city: A suspended state*. Springer.

Bauböck, R., & Permoser, J. M. (2023). Sanctuary, firewalls, regularisation: Three inclusive responses to the presence of irregular migrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *49*(14), 3671–3688.

Bauder, H. (2017). Sanctuary cities: Policies and practices in international perspective. *International Migration*, *55*(2), 174–187.

Bauder, H., Dreher, N., Lujan, O., & Asolo, O. (2023). *Decolonizing migration studies: The case of hospitality, sanctuary, and solidarity*. TMCIS; CERC.

Bauman, Z. (1998). *Globalization: The human consequences*. Polity Press.

Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 23–32.

Cîrstea, A. M., & Pescinski, J. (2024). "Intimacy as method": Ethnographic reflections on equitable knowledge production in migration research. *Migration Studies*, *12*(3), Article mnae020.

Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography*, *41*(2), 178–198.

Darling, J., & Bauder, H. (2019). *Sanctuary cities and urban struggles: Rescaling migration, citizenship, and rights*. Manchester University Press.

De Genova, N., & Roy, A. (2020). Practices of illegalisation. *Antipode*, *52*, 352–364.

de Graauw, E. (2021). City government activists and the rights of undocumented immigrants: Fostering urban citizenship within the confines of US federalism. *Antipode*, *53*, 379–398.

Fassin, D. (2011). Policing borders, producing boundaries. The governmentality of immigration in dark times. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *40*, 213–226.

Fauser, M. (2024). Mapping the internal border through the city: An introduction. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *47*(12), 2477–2498.

Felder, M., Fneich, S., & Stavo-Debauge, J. (2023). Social workers and irregular migrants in the assistance circuit: Making sense of paradoxical inclusion. *Social Inclusion*, *11*(3), 116–127.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(2), 219–245.

Hajer, M., Vasileiadi, C., & van Liempt, I. (2024). *The legal and policy infrastructure of irregularity: Netherlands*. I-CLAIM.

Hall, S., King, J., & Finlay, R. (2017). Migrant infrastructure: Transaction economies in Birmingham and Leicester, UK. *Urban Studies*, *54*(6), 1311–1327.

Kalir, B. (2017). State desertion and “out-of-procedure” asylum seekers in the Netherlands. *Focaal*, *2017*(77), 63–75.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*. Crown.

Kloosterman, R., & van der Leun, J., & Rath, J. (1999). Mixed embeddedness: (In)formal economic activities and immigrant business in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *23*(2), 252–266.

Kocher, A., & Stuesse, A. (2021). Undocumented activism and minor politics: Inside the cramped political spaces of deportation defense campaigns. *Antipode*, *53*(2), 331–354.

Kox, M., & Staring, R. (2022). ‘If you don’t have documents or a legal procedure, you are out!’ Making humanitarian organizations partner in migration control. *European Journal of Criminology*, *19*(5), 974–993.

Kuschminder, K., & Dubow, T. (2023). Moral exclusion, dehumanisation, and continued resistance to return: Experiences of refused Afghan asylum seekers in the Netherlands. *Geopolitics*, *28*(3), 1057–1078.

Lambert, S., & Swerts, T. (2019). ‘From sanctuary to welcoming cities’: Negotiating the social inclusion of undocumented migrants in Liège, Belgium. *Social Inclusion*, *7*(4), 90–99.

Lippert, R. K., & Rehaag, S. (2013). *Sanctuary practices in international perspectives: Migration, citizenship, and social movements*. Routledge.

Loomans, D., Lennartz, C., & Manting, D. (2024). A longitudinal analysis of arrival infrastructures: The geographic pathways of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands. *Population, Space and Place*, *30*, Article e2747.

McNevin, A. (2017). Learning to live with irregular migration: Towards a more ambitious debate on the politics of ‘the problem.’ *Citizenship Studies*, *21*(3), 255–274.

Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & Van Heur, B. (2019). *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Meeus, B., Beeckmans, L., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2020). Broadening the urban planning repertoire with an ‘arrival infrastructures’ perspective. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 11–22.

Menjívar, C., & Abrego, L. (2012). Legal violence: Immigration law and the lives of Central American immigrants. *American Journal of Sociology*, *117*(5), 1380–1421.

Moralli, M. (2024). Research as care: Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research. *Qualitative Research*, *24*(3), 751–770.

Mosselson, A. (2021). Cities of sanctuary in environments of hostility: Competing and contrasting migration infrastructures. *Antipode*, *53*(6), 1725–1744.

Nagel, C., & Ehrkamp, P. (2016). Deserving welcome? Immigrants, Christian faith communities, and the contentious politics of belonging in the US South. *Antipode*, *48*, 1040–1058.

Nimführ, S., & Sesay, B. (2019). Lost in limbo? Navigating (im)mobilities and practices of appropriation of non-deportable refugees in the Mediterranean area. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *7*, Article 26.

Pauluskerk. (2023). *Financieel Jaarverslag 2023*. https://www.pauluskerkrotterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/financieel-Jaarverslag-2023.pdf

Pauluskerk. (2024a). *Ze verdampen niet!* https://www.pauluskerkrotterdam.nl/vluchtelingen/bed-bad-en-brood

Pauluskerk. (2024b). *Pauluskerk in cijfers*. https://www.pauluskerkrotterdam.nl/contact/pauluskerk-in-cijfers

Pauluskerk. (2024c). *Recht op rust*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/company/pauluskerk-rotterdam/posts

Pauluskerk. (2024d, February 9). *Save the date – Recht op rust* [Status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=768185452021343&id=100064896842510&_rdr

Purcell, M. (2003). Citizenship and the right to the global city: Reimagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *27*, 564–590.

Rygiel, K., & Baban, F. (2019). Countering right-wing populism: Transgressive cosmopolitanism and solidarity movements in Europe. *American Quarterly*, *71*(4), 1069–1076.

Schillebeeckx, E., Oosterlynck, S., & De Decker, P. (2019). Migration and the resourceful neighborhood: Exploring localized resources in urban zones of transition. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. Van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 131–152). Palgrave Macmillan.

Schiller, M., Awad, I., Buijse, N., Chantre, M., Huang, Y.-C., Jonitz, E., van den Brink, L., & van Dordrecht, L. (2023). Brokerage in urban networks on diversity and inclusion: The case of Rotterdam. *Cities*, *135*, Article 104219.

Schinkel, W. (2009). 'Illegal aliens' and the state, or: Bare bodies vs the zombie. *International Sociology*, *24*(6), 779–806.

Squire, V., & Darling, J. (2013). The 'minor' politics of rightful presence: Justice and relationality in city of sanctuary. *International Political Sociology*, *7*(1), 59–74.

Staring, R., Boeseveldt, N., & Kox, M. (2022). *Vechten met het Leven. Een kwalitatief onderzoek naar de leefomstandigheden van ongedocumenteerde oudere migranten in Nederland* (1st ed.). Boom criminologie.

Swartz, D. (2020). Pierre Bourdieu: An intellectual legacy. In P. Kivisto (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of social theory* (pp. 317–342). Cambridge University Press.

Swerts, T. (2017). Creating space for citizenship: The liminal politics of undocumented activism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *41*, 379–395.

Swerts, T. (2020). Power and empowerment. In H. F. Wilson & J. Darling (Eds.), *Research ethics for human geography: A handbook for students* (pp. 59–66). Sage.

Swerts, T., & Nicholls, W. (2021). Undocumented immigrant activism and the political: Disrupting the order or reproducing the status quo? *Antipode*, *53*, 319–330.

Swerts, T., & Oosterlynck, S. (2020). In search of recognition: The political ambiguities of undocumented migrants' active citizenship. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *47*(3), 668–685.

Van Dam, S., Maes, S., Schrooten, M., Broeckaert, B., & Raeymaeckers, P. (2022). De rol van religieus of levensbeschouwelijk geïnspireerde solidariteitsinitiatieven in armoedebestrijding. In J. Coene, T. Ghys, B. Hubeau, S. Marchal, P. Raeymaeckers, R. Remmen, W. Vandenhole, G. Van Hecken, & L. Van Praag (Eds.), *Armoede en Sociale uitsluiting: Jaarboek 2022* (pp. 329–344). Acco.

van den Scott, L.-J. K. (2018). Visual methods in ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *47*(6), 719–728.

van der Woude, M., & Staring, R. (2021).Guest editorial: Transforming borders and the discretionary politics of migration control. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *10*(3), p. i–viii.

Vanderbeck, R. M. (2005). Masculinities and fieldwork: Widening the discussion. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *12*(4), 387–402.

Wessendorf, S. (2022). 'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189.

Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, *48*(1_suppl), 122–148.

Yukich, G. (2013). Constructing the model immigrant: Movement strategy and immigrant deservingness in the New Sanctuary Movement. *Social Problems*, *60*(3), 302–320.

About the Authors

Carola Vasileiadi is a PhD candidate at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam. She is currently conducting research for the URBIMM research project on urban migration infrastructures for illegalized migrants in Rotterdam and Thessaloniki.

Thomas Swerts is an assistant professor in Urban Sociology at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam. His research focuses on the nexus between urban and migration studies with a focus on undocumented migrants. He currently coordinates the URBIMM research project (URBan migration infrastructures for Irregular Migrant Mobility).

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8674
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8674

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Temporalities of Arrival: Burundian Barbershops as an Arrival Infrastructure in a South African Township

Nomkhosi A. Mbatha and Leah Koskimaki

Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Correspondence: Nomkhosi A. Mbatha (3601053@myuwc.ac.za)

Submitted: 13 May 2024 **Accepted:** 11 September 2024 **Published:** 9 December 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

Migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to the diversity of the informal economy in urban South Africa. However, they have faced xenophobic violence and discrimination in urban spaces such as townships, which were previously designated only for Black people during apartheid. This article explores how arrival infrastructures in the township informal economy have enabled or hindered economic opportunities for those who have newly come to South Africa. Based on qualitative research on practices of solidarity and conviviality with migrant informal traders from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Malawi in the township of Umlazi in Durban, South Africa, in 2023, the article specifically focuses on Burundian migrants' barber businesses as a node in the arrival infrastructure. These barbershops act as informal social spaces that provide access to "connectors" who help with networks to acquire labour, social, and material resources. These include local knowledge and information about new locations to construct a barber business or introductions to property owners. This article argues, however, that informal market and business spaces are often temporary for migrants who are always on the move, continually arriving and re-negotiating their belonging due to multiple waves and threats of xenophobic violence. Therefore, the barber business represents a temporary structure for futuring in uncertain times.

Keywords

arrival infrastructure; barbershop; Burundian; informal economy; migration; South Africa

1. Introduction

Emmanuel is a 27-year-old man who fled his country of Burundi for South Africa. To avoid being caught by police while crossing borders, he hid in the tyre compartment of a long-distance truck, travelling via Tanzania,

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. His only contact in South Africa was a distant cousin in Cape Town, who guided him through the journey using Facebook Messenger on a cell phone. He narrated how he navigated his way around after arrival:

> When I finally got to South Africa from Burundi, after days of travelling, the truck left me at Manguzi, [a small rural town in northern KwaZulu-Natal], but I could not understand nor speak isiZulu [which is commonly spoken there]. My cousin told me not to call him again now that I had arrived, and that I should go to the mosque and ask for help—that they would even give me a job like washing dishes in a restaurant, working as a car guard, or in a salon. He said I could choose any job from what they give me. He said that now that I am in South Africa, his job was done. Looking around, I heard a call from the mosque for afternoon prayers because we are Muslim. I followed the sound of the call down the road, but I could never see nor reach the mosque.
>
> At night, the police found me where the truck had left me. I had 30 US dollars, which I gave them along with my passport. After driving around, they bought me food [with the money], and took me to a taxi rank where there were a lot of [shipping] containers used for informal shops like salons and barbershops. They left me at the door of a container where I slept. Now that I can understand English, I can recall that they kept asking me how they could help. In the morning, people started to open and set up their businesses, and I finally found someone I could talk to in Kirundi or Swahili. He said he would connect me [*uzongixhumanisa* in isiZulu] to someone working alone in a barbershop in Durban who could give me a job, and if he agreed, he would give me transport money….[Eventually] I moved to Durban and started working at the market as a barber. During my working hours and after work, I met other guys from Burundi who had spent more time in South Africa, and we would discuss other job and business opportunities together.

Speaking to one of the authors of this article, Nomkhosi Mbatha, in isiZulu, a South African language that he learned after arriving in South Africa, this translated narrative describes how he left Burundi without many contacts or plans. Upon arrival in South Africa, unfortunately his cousin cut ties with him. However, the police, from whom he had tried to run away, actually helped Emmanuel by buying him food with the money he had handed over, and by taking him to a market where he would find other Burundians. This encounter with the police initiated a process for him: He met someone who helped him work in a barbershop, and from there he met other Burundians who later helped him find a better-paying job. His daily interactions in the market with other Burundians helped him access resources and information. “One of the guys got me a Congolese driver's licence, and that is when I got a job delivering pizza—until [I had an] accident, which forced me to return to the barber business,” he said.

Emmanuel's narrative is one example of the many different and difficult journeys that migrants from African countries take to South African cities, seeking asylum and better opportunities. His story is also an example of how migrants often become connected to a new place on arrival through the informal economy in urban townships where they pursue livelihoods, share information, and access financial, material, and social resources. In this article, we will describe the significance of the Burundian barbershop as a key node within this “arrival infrastructure” in the informal economy of the urban township of Umlazi. This is significant given the existence of xenophobia in township spaces, which have been described as unwelcoming to migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. We focus on three aspects of Burundian men's barbershops in this arrival

infrastructure: as important spaces for social mobility and solidarity, which allow migrant men to access informal networks and business opportunities in this potentially hostile community; as spaces of “informality” which allow for different kinds of connections, inventive relations, and entrepreneurial endeavours; and as temporary structures for futuring in uncertain times.

2. Migrant Context in South Africa

South Africa is a major destination for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. Burundi is part of the East African Community and remains stuck in cycles of war. South Africa played a role in peace and conflict resolution in Burundi (Boshoff et al., 2010), and, between the end of apartheid in 1994 and 2001, approximately 2,000 Burundians applied for refugee status in South Africa (Crush et al., 2005). After apartheid, South Africa passed the Refugees Act in 1998, which was “compatible with international refugee and human rights law” (Khan et al., 2021, p. 50). However, despite the policy for refugees to live in communities rather than be placed in camps, asylum seekers are left in “limbo,” facing long delays or obstacles in acquiring refugee status or renewing papers. This liminality renders them vulnerable, and unable to access formal healthcare, employment, and social grants (Alfaro-Velcamp et al., 2017; Hoag, 2010; Khan et al., 2021; Moyo & Botha, 2022; Sutton et al., 2011). While the actual refugee statistics cannot be fully ascertained due to irregular migration, the UNHCR (2024) reports that around 9,900 Burundian refugees currently live in South Africa.

Because they lack access to formal employment and face challenges in acquiring or renewing documentation, migrants often turn to building livelihoods in informal economic spaces (Akintola & Akintola, 2015; Sidzatane & Maharaj, 2013), which, however, also exposes them to xenophobic violence (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010; Tawodzera & Crush, 2023), often termed “Afrophobia” (Neocosmos, 2010; B. Nyamnjoh, 2016) due to the racialized discrimination towards African migrants. Xenophobic incidents reported in the Umlazi township include attacks on Congolese, Burundian, and other migrants, and the continued use of derogatory names (Magwaza, 2018; Rulashe, 2019).

3. Migrant Infrastructures

In recent literature, the term “migrant infrastructure” has been used to describe the institutions and actors that facilitate mobility (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), and the “‘moorings,’ or physical and organisational architectures, responsible for structuring, mobilising and giving meaning to movement through their particular arrangements” (Lin et al., 2017, p. 167). Xiang and Lindquist (2014) define different infrastructures in the migration process as social, commercial, regulatory, technological, and humanitarian. Kathiravelu (2021, p. 647) argues that such infrastructures are not “neutral intermediaries,” and emphasises an examination of “infrastructural injustice” to acknowledge the “effect on social, material and political outcomes.” Reflecting on infrastructural justice is particularly important for the lives of irregular and illegalised migrants in South Africa, who rely on informal urban spaces of arrival.

“Arrival infrastructures” have been defined as “those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated” (Meeus et al., 2019, p. 1). Although earlier literature focused on the role of migrant networks in cities, Wessendorf and Gembus (2024, p. 2) argue that more work needs to focus on “place-based opportunity structures” because “where someone arrives matters hugely regarding the potential of forming social relations.”

We focus on the urban scale as important for a "politics of place" in enacting migrant solidarity (Bauder, 2020) and for access to support (Darling, 2021; Zill, 2023). In South Africa, the concept of arrival infrastructures has been helpful in describing, in the work of Nyakabawu (2023), how Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town access resources, accommodation, job openings, internet access, and social support. However, drawing from Felder et al.'s (2020) notion of this "Janus-faced" aspect of arrival infrastructures, Nyakabawu (2023) also offers examples of how such networks can be dangerous for vulnerable migrant newcomers due to misplaced trust, including unexpected charges for accommodation or exposure to drug addiction, resulting in homelessness and food insecurity.

In this article, we also build on Simone's (2004) concept of "people as infrastructure," to describe the emerging "social compositions" (p. 411) and collaborative ways in which diverse people connect and seek opportunities in Johannesburg. Newcomers are a part of the fabric of cities, where, he argues, they "have an opportunity to use their working-out arrangements for coexisting with others, both new and old residents, as a platform on which to initiate new entrepreneurial activities and residential practices" (Simone, 2011, p. 386). Therefore, rather than focusing on terms such as social capital or networks, the notion of social infrastructure can help conceptualise the "flows, movements, congestions and internments of people and things" (McFarlane & Silver, 2017, p. 463) within these nodes and spaces of arrival.

Arrival infrastructures are also material; for example, the barbershop itself, as we show, is set up in "containers," or else made of tin and boards or tents, and can be taken down and moved around (Sibeko, 2020). Meeus et al. (2020, p. 16) allude to how the infrastructure of an "improvised 'shipping container'" is visible as a sign of their "permanent temporariness." The welcoming set up of barbershops, as we will show, also facilitates meetings and the exchange of information; this follows Hans and Hanhörster's (2020, p. 80) emphasis on how the transfer of resources requires in-person "encounters" and "physical proximity." At the same time, digital infrastructures such as cell phones and internet access also play an essential role for newcomers to access information and resources (Hans, 2023; Nalbandian & Dreher, 2023; Wessendorf, 2022; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024).

4. "Informal" Arrival Infrastructures and the Potential for Solidarity

Wessendorf and Gembus (2024, pp. 5–6), writing on the European context, offer examples of both formal and informal arrival infrastructures; formal infrastructures, they write, might include "educational settings, libraries, community centres, sports facilities and places of worship," while more informal spaces could be "cafés, hairdressers or nail salons," which are also often migrant-run businesses (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020). Hall et al. (2017, p. 5) also show how "micro-economies" of diverse neighbourhoods in the UK create spaces for migrants to "land" themselves and access "institutional and public spaces that provide various forms of care and association" (Hall et al., 2017, p. 9).

However, in the township studied in this research, Umlazi, spatial inequality, dense urbanisation, lack of formal municipal support, and challenges in accessing permits and employment make migrant arrival infrastructures more informalized, temporary, unpredictable, and yet also even more important for survival. Meeus et al. (2020, p 15) describe a "dialectical" relation of arrival infrastructures, built "simultaneously and interdependently 'from above' and 'from below.'" Various actors, resources, and material and social compositions emerge within the informal economy "from below," in the way newcomers try to access friendships, resources, and hospitality.

Hence, Simone (2011, p. 2) describes "collective orientations to both the local and the translocal that are not easily mediated through conventional forms of organization and planning." The workings of this formality and informality in Johannesburg's Park Station neighbourhood have been described by Zack and Landau (2022) as a fluid "enclave entrepot" where "migrant entrepreneurs...transform parts of the city into a migrant-run mobility infrastructure." This scene includes a diverse range of actors such as "transport operators, smugglers, government officials and police officers operating at or beyond the law's edge" (Zack & Landau, 2022, p. 2339). In another example, using an infrastructural and "multi-scalar" examination of migrant shops and public spaces in Bellville, Cape Town, Tayob (2019, p. 51) describes "the porosity between formality and informality, where the seemingly local spaces of this informal trade are not restricted to the specific site." The transfer of migrant remittances from South Africa also reveals the intersection of "formal" and "informal" systems in migrant banking, digital, and remittance infrastructures (Cirolia et al., 2022).

Therefore, if "where someone arrives matters" (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024, p. 2), informal economic spaces in Umlazi can facilitate and orientate newcomers towards business niches and offer protection and social support. As Bovo (2020, p. 27) argues, the informality "is what makes a certain space immediately accessible, and also what allows the transit through it." Economic spaces in South Africa can also facilitate sharing and transactions with and between migrant communities (Maringira & Vuninga, 2022; Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023; Moyo & Zanker, 2020). As we have argued elsewhere (Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023), the informality of such spaces allows for conviviality and solidarity to emerge through creating infrastructures of friendship through sharing and trust between migrants and others.

Arrival infrastructures are therefore spaces where migrant solidarity can be enacted as well as contested. Migrant solidarity research has examined various practices and policies of inclusion at the urban scale, in North American contexts as well as in European cities after the "refugee crisis" (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Bauder, 2020, 2021; Darling, 2021). Such spaces help give rise to what Meeus (2017, p. 100) describes as "infrastructures of solidarity," while Hans (2023, p. 387) emphasises how this solidarity in arrival infrastructures arises out of "the sense of connection brought about by collective migration histories, shared experiences of everyday life."

Due to the relative lack of municipal support for migrants in cities (Landau et al., 2011), the South African context of migrant solidarity differs in many ways (Koskimaki & Mazani, in press). Examples include "instrumental" and "contingent" solidarity within migrant communities (Rugunanan, 2022), and solidarity and conviviality as a survival strategy (Chekero, 2023; H. M. Nyamnjoh, 2017), often involving localised vocabularies of support, hospitality, and cohesion (Bauder et al., 2023; Chekero & Morreira, 2020; Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2023). Solidarity between migrant communities finds ways to emerge in arrival infrastructures through knowledge sharing and friendship; Makanda's (2021, p. 128) research in Yeoville, for example, explores how Burundian, Congolese, and other migrants "know one another in their neighbourhood and report to one another any new arrivals," with one participant sharing, "as neighbours, we develop friendship with newcomers on how best we can help each other." At the same time, newcomers have to navigate around formal and informal networks and sometimes "unspoken" social worlds of their businesses.

Finally, Meeus et al. (2019, p. 14) write that "arrival in the arrival infrastructure is always temporary, but its length is in negotiation." As we will show, while barbershops are spaces of potential solidarity for newcomers, their informality also poses challenges for migrants arriving and hoping to stay. Migrant

temporality literature has shown how waithood and liminality create uncertainty, waithood, and disruption in the life course (Cwerner, 2001; Griffiths et al., 2013). In South Africa, migrants in urban South Africa often “shun” solidarity, avoiding obligations and social intimacies (Landau, 2019), forging mere “communities of convenience” (Landau, 2017) due to the temporariness and vulnerability of migrant life. Migrant experiences of liminality also engender new kinds of strategies of survival in South Africa (Kihato, 2013; Machinya, 2020; Mbatha & Koskimaki, 2021; Nyakabawu, 2021). Conceptually, barbershops as social and material arrival infrastructures are temporary, as they are being broken down, built and rebuilt, and moved around. Newcomers navigate “futuring vectors” through the barbershop “that point towards potential, desirable or undesirable future becomings” (Meeus et al., 2020, p. 15). They may be forced or compelled to continually move their barbershops around for safety or due to shifting opportunities. Given this background, we describe the way in which barbershops in Umlazi are temporal nodes in the arrival infrastructure for many migrants as they arrive and navigate through the spaces of Umlazi.

5. Barbershops

Barbershops have been written about in various geographic contexts as spaces of sociality and networking. Literature in the US has described the role that barbershops play in African-American contexts (Harris, 2017; Marberry, 2005), as places where Black men are free to escape social expectations (Bozeman, 2009). The everyday conversations and social exchanges between barbers, customers, and young men in these spaces are based on a culture of inclusion (Alexander, 2003; Shabazz, 2016) and serve to share information and knowledge (Ellams, 2021; Nedd, 2010). In South Africa, men’s barbershops and women’s salons have contributed to townships due to their accessibility and artistic displays of popular trends (Sibeko, 2020). In her research in Johannesburg’s Bree Street, Matsipa (2017, p. 41) argues that migrant women’s salons allow for dynamic entrepreneurship and “zones of intimacy, care, and economic and cultural exchange.” Migrant salons and barbershops in Cape Town have become convivial spaces for migrants (Maringira & Vuninga, 2022; Murara, 2020) and create opportunities to participate in economic social spaces and attract South African customers (Koelble, 2003; Maringira & Vuninga, 2022).

The barbershops that we describe in Umlazi are either shack-type structures that are made out of timber and iron, shipping containers that are fitted with furniture and converted into a barbershop, or foldable tents made out of waterproof material. Many Burundian barbershop businesses are highly visible in Umlazi due to their signage walls filled with painted faces with different haircuts or posters of well-known international musicians and actors such as Will Smith or 50 Cent. Burundian men use the spaces to teach newcomers the art of cutting hair, which allows them to develop and pursue livelihoods. Barbershops are also spaces where men can express masculinity and socialise together regardless of their social position, and often taxi drivers, professionals, or unemployed men can be found there for haircuts.

6. Research in the Umlazi Township

Umlazi is a township that is situated in KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, which is a port city on the east coast of South Africa. The township was a reserve for Black people during the apartheid’s government Group Areas Act (1950), which enforced segregation and designated residential areas according to race. After 1994, it became a diverse residential area with high levels of crime, unemployment, and poverty. There is a visible gap between the middle-class residents and the poor, with a lack of service delivery, crime, and vandalization of

state infrastructures (Mottiar, 2021). The majority of residents in Umlazi are isiZulu-speaking South Africans and other South African ethnic groups such as amaXhosa. It also is home to a large number of migrants from the African continent and South Asia. Many migrant research participants shared concerns about violence and xenophobia, which have also been highlighted in media reports and studies discussing unemployment in Umlazi (Magwaza & Ntini, 2020). Some outbreaks of violence are motivated by crime, discrimination, and scapegoating of migrants for social ills (Rulashe, 2019).

This article is based on ethnographic research of the first author, Nomkhosi Mbatha, with migrants as well as South Africans in the informal economic spaces of Umlazi. The broader research topic focused on practices of solidarity among migrants from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, and Somalia in Cape Town and Durban. The study received ethical clearance from the University of the Western Cape, where we work and study, and the Toronto Metropolitan University, which is hosting the project that funded this research. From this research, we focus on narratives and experiences of Burundian barbers in 2023 and 2024, whose names have been changed to protect their identities. As a South African isiZulu-speaking woman from Umlazi, Mbatha had to negotiate her positionality in masculine migrant spaces. She approached participants in the barbershops using English as a language of communication but found that many migrants preferred to communicate in isiZulu and expressed that they struggled more with English. Data for this article was obtained through Mbatha's interviews and observations in several barbershops that are situated by a train station, road intersection, and schools. Mostly frequented by both South African and migrant men, they emerged as spaces of sociality, where people would stop and greet or even share a beer or cold drink over conversation about families, the expansion of their businesses, available accommodation, reflections on previous soccer matches, or what had happened in the tavern where they normally congregate during weekends to share beers.

7. Connectors in the Township

Migrant infrastructures are composed of social networks, civil society, state departments, technology (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), as well as "brokers," which Lindquist et al. (2012) refer to as state officials and migrants themselves who mediate between different parties. In an arrival infrastructure, Hanhörster and Wessendorf (2020, p. 4) refer specifically to "arrival brokers" who "take on an instrumental role in newcomers' settlement" and who might have "arrival expertise and be willing to help" (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024). In the context of Umlazi, we find the term broker is less useful due to the informality of their services and exchanges; we rather propose the term "connector," drawing from "*abantu abanoconnection*" in isiZulu, which participants used to refer to "people with connections" who "make things happen" and can be trusted. This trust can be observed through their regular customers, who would stop by to pay their debts or ask the Burundian barbers to look after their belongings. On one occasion, Mbatha observed a barber babysitting a local boy child who had been left by his mother while waiting his turn.

Enzo is a Burundian barber who has lived in South Africa for over 15 years. The barbershop provided him social mobility, as it allowed him to build his business over time and then in turn help newcomers. His work in helping other migrants led to him being referred to as a connector. When he first arrived in South Africa, he built his network with another man who has since retired. When Enzo's barbershop tent hosted four other barbers, he helped set up another tent next to his to accommodate the newcomers. At the time of research, five other barbershop tents were operating nearby, but research did not show much competition amongst

them. Rather, they worked together and supported each other to stay safe and grow their businesses. Enzo was trusted partly due to his being more established. He often helps other Burundian barbers when they have challenges and face hostility. For instance, Enzo shared news about a gang that demanded money for a rental. He also connected them to a prominent businessman, who one participant described as having "been to Burundi and Tanzania so we can speak Swahili with him. He knows the challenges we have experienced and has seen what our country is like. So, he said we can use this space, and he is friendly." Because this businessman is highly revered in the township, Enzo and the other Burundian barbers shared that they felt some sort of social protection in that space.

However, despite the permanence that Enzo tried to create by setting up the shop in well-decorated and furnished containers, he and others had to move the shops continually due to exposure to violence. He shared that due to the growing number of Burundians in the area, they faced a xenophobic attack and had to move out of the containers to more makeshift and mobile tents. He explained:

> We saved some money and got containers. The community here burned them during the xenophobic attacks, but we were able to recover and move them to a different site. Because there was no other business next to us, they burned them to the ground, and that is when we saw that working in the tents was better.

Since arriving at the area, the group of Burundian barbers changed spots three times due to xenophobic outbreaks. They explain that they still return because this is their business.

Clement is another "connector" who has been living in South Africa for almost 10 years. He mentioned that "if a person comes to us and tells us that he is new and is looking for a job, we give him a job. But if we are full, we refer him to others." Clement's arrival was also facilitated by a range of connectors. Enzo confirmed this in a follow-up interview, saying that "a person you first meet upon arrival has an obligation to help you, either with accommodation, food, or a job."

While many migrants usually receive help from their own countrymen, Clement had established contact with Tanzanians prior to leaving home through his uncle who had lived in Tanzania, and who also facilitated his move to South Africa. When he worked as a barber in the city centre, he met a lot of customers from the township who encouraged him to move there, after which he was introduced to a man they call "uBaba" as a sign of respect, who is a South African from Umlazi. He explained:

> We used to work in town when we arrived. There were many customers from this area who asked us, why don't we go to the township. Someone shared information with us, and we met uBaba, who set up this place for us. We came to the township because our customers wanted us to.

He was called uBaba, meaning "father," during the interviews to protect his identity as a person who has procured spaces for the barbershops operated by Clement's network.

Clement's network included Alex, Yves, and Yusuf, three new young men in their early 20s who had just arrived in South Africa, and did not communicate well in English or isiZulu. Clement had been able to provide work for them; for example, Alex and Yves work about 500 meters away from him, and Yusuf works about three

kilometres away. Alex and Yves' shack is a new construction set up in between other businesses, and Clement made sure that their business was close to a bus stop and busy T-junction with high foot traffic. Clement also arranged a space for Yusuf via a homeowner who agreed for the barbershop tent to be placed in front of their house. After six months, Yusuf's tent was no longer there, and in its place was a small shack made out of bricks and connected to the house's fence. There, two new Burundian barbers, also in Clement's network, had set up a shop. A constructed shack is deemed more profitable for homeowners because it assures them income once it is leased to migrants, and it is more protected from crime and violence. Bricks are also a sign of greater permanence; however, any barbershop is temporary. The tent is a reflection of their temporality because it can be burnt down, or the migrants may have to vacate at short notice.

We return to Emmanuel's narrative in the article's introduction. His experience showed how he accessed support through such arrival "connectors." As he shared, he had met some men in an encounter at the market, who then connected him with someone in Durban. He also received help from the police, who despite being part of the formal township regulation, did not inquire about his "legality," but rather assisted him in finding food and meeting other migrants. The man who helped him acquire a Congolese driver's license also acted as a connector because he had to contact various actors who would help Emmanuel get the license to get the job. While he did not provide explicit information as to how he acquired it, it is challenging and expensive to receive a South African driver's license, and the Congolese driver's license would help him to more easily and quickly get a driving job. Emmanuel's current barbershop is behind a school; he explained that he had to get the permission of the school principal to set up shop there. However, like Enzo, Emmanuel remained in a liminal space and was constantly having to renegotiate his sense of belonging. He shared that he is planning to leave because of crime in the area, as he has been attacked twice in his shop. Emmanuel seemed to be separated from Clement's or Enzo's networks, which experience a certain degree of protection by other connectors because of their financial and social status.

The lack of social protection creates a life of always being on the move and arriving. The barbershop is temporary because of its vulnerability to vandalism and crimes, often motivated by xenophobia. Emmanuel has anticipated moving several times due to the violence from local thieves who have attacked him twice and left him for dead. He feels uneasy because at any time he might get robbed, and he worries about how he would recover his money and assets, such as cutting machines and cell phones. The option of starting over somewhere else has always lingered in his mind, and opportunities have been presented by men in his network that are outside Durban elsewhere in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. On the other hand, Enzo and the other barbers feel protection from connectors. This can be regarded as a "solution for temporary presences," which allows them to engage and "diversify other futuring vectors" (Meeus et al., 2020, pp. 16–17). The informality of the urban space also therefore shapes this life of temporariness for migrants (Darling, 2017).

8. Resources

Hobfoll (2011, p. 339, as cited in Phillimore et al., 2018, p. 217) defines resources as "objects, personal characteristics or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources." These conduits are the focus of this section on the kinds of resources that are valued in Umlazi. In the migrant context, "arrival resources" can be "social, economic, and cultural," and are often transferred to newcomers by more established migrants (Wessendorf,

2022). Examples are “housing, education, health services and social networks” (Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024, p. 3; see also Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020). The “transfer” of such resources is also often mediated through “encounters,” which Hans and Hanhörster (2020, p. 80) describe as “unexpected and spontaneous social interactions in (semi-)public spaces.”

When we compare the resources described in some European infrastructures of arrival, such as Wessendorf’s discussion of the library and other institutions, with the ones in Umlazi, we cannot compare the same space, whether formal or informal. A library in Umlazi is a meeting place for school children to find books for homework and has no access to the internet. Many shopkeepers in Umlazi work behind burglar bars to protect themselves from crime. Community centres that had been set up by the municipality are accessible; however, migrants were not found around them. Resources provided by the state did not serve migrant needs. In the absence of formal access to resources, a barbershop has become a welcoming space of solidarity for migrants to access social connections, informal accommodation, employment information, language learning, understanding of social relations, and digital infrastructures.

Information is a valuable resource and currency to the migrants who arrive in the township. One of the most important resources for migrants is informal job and skills acquisition. Both Emmanuel and Enzo’s arrival narrative revealed that they came into the township with no barbering skills; however, the skill and knowledge to do so was provided by those with arrival expertise. Everyone has a role in sustaining the business that will help other newcomers in the future. Barbershops and other migrant businesses require trust and solidarities created with other migrants and South Africans. For instance, Clement has vocational skills, which include bricklaying. However, there is an unspoken notion that certain construction businesses like bricklaying are reserved for Malawians, whom the locals trust and support in that field, while Zimbabweans often venture into welding. This information helps newcomers filter into businesses that are conducted by their countrymen. Again, migrants learn to navigate the boundaries of respect to allow each community to prosper within a business opportunity they have identified. Clement clarified that these boundaries are also shaped by language barriers; when migrants arrive, they usually prefer to speak their home language. Once a person can fully comprehend the township language of isiZulu, they can negotiate to join a craftsmanship of their choice.

Accommodation and access to business spaces are not always visible and thus require access to these networks or “encounters.” While it may be easy for local people to find accommodation, migrants find accommodation through networks and word of mouth. Some landlords who lease to migrants operate behind the scenes to protect themselves from violence and harsh judgement from local people. This follows Hans and Hanhörster’s (2020) emphasis on the encounter and physical proximity for facilitating resource transfers. For instance, Clement and other barbers in his shop obtained accommodation through a Mozambican-heritage man named Ricci, whose South African mother owned flatlets in the township. At barbershops, Mbatha observed discussions about the rates and safety of available rentals.

Cell phones are an essential arrival and navigational digital resource. For instance, Enzo mentioned that he could fix phones, and some of the old broken phones came in handy for newcomers who did not have phones. The phone contributes to the safety of newcomers. Another use of phones involves the sharing of photographs of the destination, which, however, can also be misleading. Emmanuel shared that on his journey to South Africa, “I thought Maputo was Durban because of the tall buildings and the beaches because of the pictures

I had in my phone, until I was told it's not." Also, internet and data connection are not a freely accessible resource in the township, and many times migrants struggle to access these due to high-priced data plans. Burner phones and old mobile phones are also often used to limit unexpected data costs and for protection against thieves who steal phones.

Finally, phones are used for other social connections, such as simply playing music. Similar to Murara's (2020) research on Congolese and Rwandan sociality in salons in Cape Town, music (in this case played on the cell phone's radio) can attract customers and mark the barbershop's presence. People sit together, talk, and listen to music, sharing information and personal stories. Clive and Yves play a lot of music to distinguish themselves from the businesses around them. Since they have not mastered the isiZulu language, the music promotes their establishment. While the world has gravitated towards the use of applications like Spotify and iTunes to play music, old cell phones without these applications are used for storing music and connecting to portable speakers.

Mbatha observed that a migrant's ability to speak isiZulu seemed to indicate deeper belonging. Not being able to grasp isiZulu meant one was still new. Migrants also use Google Translate and other translation apps on their phones to learn the language and communicate. Yusuf, as a Burundian newcomer, was working alone in a tent that was placed in one of the intersections. He had been struggling to communicate in isiZulu with his clients and with other businesses, as well as ride on public transport and shop without any difficulties:

> Because I have to ask people what haircut style they want, if there is a word I do not understand, I use Google Translate. I am in KwaZulu-Natal—I am forced to use Google Translate to communicate in IsiZulu, and it also helps me to build relationships with other people.

Knowing isiZulu and being able to respond provides him with access to further information and knowledge about surroundings that can only be obtainable from locals. Using Google Translate helps him understand the language better in the absence of language learning centres, which are not available in the township.

Cell phone communication applications are another important digital resource that facilitates migrant arrival. WhatsApp was important for the expansion of Clement and Enzo's network, as well as to assist those who had legal challenges. Clement shared how a newcomer was arrested, and the members of their WhatsApp group communicated that money was needed for legal fees. WhatsApp was also used to welcome newcomers and provide information about resources. Emmanuel's travel journey, cited in this introduction, was facilitated via Facebook Messenger. He maintained communication with his contact using the application on the cell phone even without access to a local SIM card. Although the cell phone may appear to serve different purposes for these men, what is more important is that they are able to use it to familiarise themselves with the nuances of the township, seek help from their networks, and be able to provide guidance.

Resources that are provided to migrants during the arrival process are critical in shaping how or whether they will settle into the township life or move onwards to other destinations. Accommodation that is offered by different landlords exposes migrants to township culture and social dynamics, in that Burundians and other migrants share rented rooms with South Africans, which helps them to learn isiZulu and form friendships. Friendships formed with locals outside of work help them to understand the taxi routes, the best places to start another business in areas with high foot traffic, and which WhatsApp groups to join to learn about crime and

get notified of any looming xenophobic outbreaks. Acquiring such resources creates a sense of belonging. Also, Burundians share information and other resources amongst themselves, which highlights shared experiences and arrival-specific knowledge (Hans, 2023, p. 387) critical for overcoming a life of precarity.

9. Conclusion

The barbershops operated by Burundians in Umlazi act as material and social arrival infrastructures, that help to create a sense of belonging for migrants, in addition to creating a space to access resources and solidarity. This article shows that arrival infrastructures emerge in different ways in different urban contexts. Unlike some of the more formal arrival infrastructures described in European cities or urban centres, in the townships, newcomers access solidarity and resources through more informal spaces. The process of arrival may seem informal, but newcomers become embedded in formalised relations, such as those with the connectors who assist migrants in accessing or pursuing their entrepreneurial endeavours.

The barbershop is a node within this arrival infrastructure that transforms the material conditions of migrants through economic opportunities and social protection for their livelihoods. Building connections and solidarity with South African locals and more established migrants helped to facilitate the transfer of resources for Burundians. Being a migrant or South African connector in the arrival process means fulfilling the obligation of linking newcomers to new jobs and other economic activities. Such activities also act as an investment into barbering skills for the newly arrived migrants who do not have these skill sets. In addition to helping them maintain their livelihoods, these connections afford them social protection to continuously run the barbershop. Some migrants access technology to navigate other positionalities, like learning the local language, finding safe passage, and accessing new networks.

However, the barbershop is also an example of permanent temporariness. Meeus et al. (2019) write that "arrival in the arrival infrastructure is always temporary, but its length is in negotiation." In Umlazi, this research with Burundian migrants shows how they have never truly arrived, because of the different waves of xenophobic attacks and crime that compel them to always renegotiate their belonging, move on, and start over again. Information is a valuable currency that strategically helps migrants to overcome this uncertainty. As informal as they are, these infrastructures are also embedded in a created formality, negotiated through encounters with various actors who play different roles in the township economy.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the participants of this research for sharing their experiences. We would also like to thank the thematic issue editors and anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, which helped to shape this article.

Funding

This research was supported by the Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective (Soli*City) partnership, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Agustín, Ó. G., & Jørgensen, M. B. (2019). *Solidarity and the 'refugee crisis' in Europe*. Springer.

Akintola, O. O., & Akintola, O. (2015). West Africans in the informal economy of South Africa: The case of low skilled Nigerian migrants. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, *42*(4), 379–398.

Alexander, B. (2003). Fading, twisting, and weaving: An interpretive ethnography of the Black barbershop as cultural space. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*(1), 105–128.

Alfaro-Velcamp, T., McLaughlin, R. H., Brogneri, G., Skade, M., & Shaw, M. (2017). 'Getting angry with honest people': The illicit market for immigrant 'papers' in Cape Town, South Africa. *Migration Studies*, *5*(2), 216–236.

Bauder, H. (2020). Migrant solidarities and the politics of place. *Progress in Human Geography*, *44*(6), 1066–1080.

Bauder, H. (2021). Urban solidarity: Perspectives of migration and refugee accommodation and inclusion. *Critical Sociology*, *47*(6), 875–889.

Bauder, H., Dreher, N., Lujan, O., & Asolo, O. (2023). *Decolonizing migration studies: The case of hospitality, sanctuary, and solidarity* (Working Paper No. 2023/03). Toronto Metropolitan Centre for Immigration and Settlement; Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration. https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement/tmcis/publications/workingpapers/2023-03-WP-Bauder-Dreher-Luhan-Asolo.pdf

Boshoff, H., Very, W., & Rautenbach, G. (2010). *The Burundi peace process. From civil war to conditional peace* (Monograph 171). Institute of Security Studies.

Bovo, M. (2020). How the presence of newly arrived migrants challenges urban spaces: Three perspectives from recent literature. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 23–32.

Bozeman, T. S. (2009). *The good cut: The barbershop in the African American literary tradition* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Georgia State University.

Chekero, T. (2023). Borders and boundaries in daily urban mobility: Practices of refugees in Cape Town, South Africa. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *42*, 361–381.

Chekero, T., & Morreira, S. (2020). Mutualism despite ostensible difference: HuShamwari, kuhanyisana, and conviviality between Shona Zimbabweans and Tsonga South Africans in Giyani, South Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, *55*(1), 33–49.

Cirolia, L. R., Hall, S., & Nyamnjoh, H. (2022). Remittance micro-worlds and migrant infrastructure: Circulations, disruptions, and the movement of money. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *47*(1), 63–76.

Crush, J., & Ramachandran, S. (2010). Xenophobia, international migration and development. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *11*(2), 209–228.

Crush, J., Williams, V., & Peberdy, S. (2005). *Migration in Southern Africa*. Global Commission on International Migration.

Cwerner, S. B. (2001). The times of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *27*(1), 7–36.

Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography*, *41*(2), 178–198.

Darling, J. (2021). Refugee urbanism: Seeing asylum "like a city." *Urban Geography*, *42*(7), 894–914.

Ellams, I. (2021). *Barber shop chronicles*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2020). Between hospitality and inhospitality: The Janus-faced 'arrival infrastructure.' *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 55–66.

Griffiths, M., Rogers, A., & Anderson, B. (2013). *Migration, time and temporalities: Review and prospect*. Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

Hall, S., King, J., & Finlay, R. (2017). Migrant infrastructure: Transaction economies in Birmingham and Leicester, UK. *Urban Studies*, *54*(6), 1311–1327.

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*(3), 381–391.

Hans, N., & Hanhörster, H. (2020). Accessing resources in arrival neighbourhoods: How foci-aided encounters offer resources to newcomers. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 78–88.

Harris, T. (2017). The barbershop in Black literature. *African American Review*, *50*(4), 547–553.

Hoag, C. (2010). The magic of the populace: An ethnography of illegibility in the South African immigration bureaucracy. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, *33*(1), 6–25.

Kathiravelu, L. (2021). Introduction to special section 'Infrastructures of injustice: Migration and border mobilities.' *Mobilities*, *16*(5), 645–655.

Khan, F., Mbatani, S., & Marais, C. (2021). Trusting democracy: The law can work for refugees, but what the system needs is an 'injection of humanity.' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *56*(1), 48–63.

Kihato, C. W. (2013). *Migrant women of Johannesburg: Life in an in-between city*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Koelble, T. A. (2003). Building a new nation: Solidarity, democracy and nationhood in the age of circulatory capitalism. In D. Chidester, P. Dexter, & W. Junes (Eds.), *What holds us together: Social cohesion in South Africa* (pp. 143–172). HSRC Press.

Koskimaki, L., & Mazani, P. (in press). Migrant and refugee solidarity in urban South Africa. In H. Bauder & M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Urban migrant inclusion & refugee protection, Vol. 2: Global perspectives of sanctuary, solidarity, and hospitality*. IMISCOE Springer.

Landau, L. B. (2017). Friendship fears and communities of convenience in Africa's urban estuaries: Connection as measure of urban condition. *Urban Studies*, *55*(3), 505–521.

Landau, L. B. (2019). Shunning solidarity. Durable solutions in a fluid era. In M. Bradley, J. Milner, & B. Peruniak (Eds.), *Refugees' roles in resolving displacement and building peace. Beyond beneficiaries* (pp. 153–167). Georgetown University Press.

Landau, L. B., Segatti, A., & Misago, J. P. (2011). Mobility and municipalities: Local authorities, local impacts, and the challenges of movement. In A Segatti & L. B. Landau (Eds.), *Contemporary migration to South Africa. A regional development issue* (pp. 81–104). World Bank.

Lin, W., Lindquist, J., Xiang, B., & Yeoh, B. S. (2017). Migration infrastructures and the production of migrant mobilities. *Mobilities*, *12*(2), 167–174.

Lindquist, J., Xiang, B., & Yeoh, B. S. (2012). Opening the black box of migration: Brokers, the organization of transnational mobility and the changing political economy in Asia. *Pacific Affairs*, *85*(1), 7–19.

Machinya, J. (2020). Migration control, temporal irregularity and waiting: Undocumented Zimbabwean migrants' experiences of deportability in South Africa. In C. Jacobsen, M. Karlsen, & S. Khosravi (Eds.), *Waiting and the temporalities of irregular migration* (pp. 96–112). Routledge.

Magwaza, S. (2018). *Addressing xenophobic violence in Umlazi suburb—Perceptions of a migrant family* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Magwaza, S., & Ntini, E. (2020). Causes of xenophobic violence in Umlazi suburb—Perceptions of a migrant family. *African Journal of Development Studies*, *10*(2), 27–57.

Makanda, J. (2021). Conceptualisation, construction and negotiation of inter-migrant support and care among Congolese, Burundian and Zimbabweans in Yeoville, Johannesburg, South Africa. *African Renaissance*, *18*(1), 115–137.

Marberry, C. (2005). *Cuttin' up: Wit and wisdom from Black barber shops*. Doubleday.

Maringira, G., & Vuninga, R. S. (2022). Beyond xenophobia: Migrants–locals in socio-economic spaces in Cape Town, South Africa. In C. Isike & E. M. Isike (Eds.), *Conflict and concord: The ambivalence of African migrant/host relations in South Africa* (pp. 145–156). Springer Nature.

Matsipa, M. (2017). Woza! Sweetheart! On braiding epistemologies on Bree Street. *Thesis Eleven*, *141*(1), 31–48.

Mbatha, N., & Koskimaki, L. (2021). No time to relax: Waithood and work of young migrant street traders in Durban, South Africa. *Social Dynamics*, *47*(3), 422–438.

Mbatha, N., & Koskimaki, L. (2023). Making life liveable in an informal market: Infrastructures of friendship amongst migrant street traders in Durban, South Africa. *Migration and Society*, *6*(1), 43–56.

McFarlane, C., & Silver, J. (2017). The political city: "Seeing sanitation" and making the urban political in Cape Town. *Antipode*, *49*(1), 125–148.

Meeus, B. (2017). Challenging the figure of the 'migrant entrepreneur': Place-based solidarities in the Romanian arrival infrastructure in Brussels. In S. Oosterlynck, N. Schuermans, & M. Loopmans (Eds.), *Place, diversity and solidarity* (pp. 91–108). Routledge.

Meeus, B., Beeckmans, L., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2020). Broadening the urban planning repertoire with an 'arrival infrastructures' perspective. *Urban Planning*, *5*(3), 11–22.

Meeus, B., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2019). Migration and the infrastructural politics of urban arrival. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 1–32). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mottiar, S. (2021). Shaping a township: Self-connecting as 'counter conduct' in Umlazi, Durban. *Journal of the British Academy*, *9*(Suppl. 11), 93–106.

Moyo, K., & Botha, C. (2022). Refugee policy as infrastructure: The gulf between policy intent and implementation for refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa. In P. Rugunanan & N. Xulu-Gama (Eds.), *Migration in Southern Africa: IMISCOE regional reader* (pp. 77–89). Springer.

Moyo, K., & Zanker, F. (2020). *Political contestations within South African migration governance*. Arnold Bergstraesser Institute. https://www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/sites/default/files/political_contestations_within_south_african_migration_governance_moyo_and_zanker.pdf

Murara, O. (2020). *'Performing diversity': Everyday social interaction among migrants from the Great Lakes Region and South Africans in Cape Town* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of the Western Cape.

Nalbandian, L., & Dreher, N. (2023). Current methodological approaches in studying the use of advanced digital technologies in migration management. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, *5*, Article 1238605.

Nedd, A. V. (2010). *The Black barbershop: Intersection of sexuality, masculinity and gender expressions* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Smith College.

Neocosmos, M. (2010). *From foreign natives to native foreigners. Explaining xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and nationalism, identity and politics*. African Books Collective.

Nyakabawu, S. (2021). Liminality in incorporation: Regularisation of undocumented Zimbabweans in South Africa. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, *44*(1), 1–15.

Nyakabawu, S. (2023). Migrant arrival infrastructures and their impact on Zimbabweans' mobility and integration in South Africa. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, *46*(4), 288–300.

Nyamnjoh, B. (2016). *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at resilient colonialism in South Africa*. African Books Collective.

Nyamnjoh, H. M. (2017). Navigating 'ngunda'/'adoro' and negotiating economic uncertainty amongst mobile Cameroonian migrants in Cape Town (South Africa). *Critical African Studies*, *9*(2), 241–260.

Phillimore, J., Humphris, R., & Khan, K. (2018). Reciprocity for new migrant integration: Resource conservation, investment and exchange. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(2), 215–232.

Rugunanan, P. (2022). Migrating beyond borders and states: Instrumental and contingent solidarities among South Asian migrant informal workers in South Africa. In P. Rugunanan & N. Xulu-Gama (Eds.), *Migration in Southern Africa: IMISCOE regional reader* (pp. 25–38). Springer.

Rulashe, P. (2019, May 14). Refugees affected by xenophobic attacks in South Africa in need of urgent support. *UNHCR*. https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/stories/refugees-affected-xenophobic-attacks-south-africa-need-urgent-support

Shabazz, D. L. (2016). Barbershops as cultural forums for African American males. *Journal of Black Studies*, *47*(4), 295–312.

Sibeko, X. (2020). *'I make signs': A rhetorical analysis of Katlehong's informal enterprises and 'high-end' wall communications as a reflection of conflicting township identities* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Johannesburg.

Sidzatane, N. J., & Maharaj, P. (2013). On the fringe of the economy: Migrant street traders in Durban. *Urban Forum*, *24*, 373–387.

Simone, A. (2004). People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, *16*(3), 407–429.

Simone, A. (2011). The urbanity of movement: Dynamic frontiers in contemporary Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *31*(4), 379–391.

Sutton, R., Vigneswaran, D., & Wels, H. (2011). Waiting in liminal space: Migrants' queuing for Home Affairs in South Africa. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, *34*(1/2), 30–37.

Tawodzera, G., & Crush, J. (2023). 'A foreigner is not a person in this country': Xenophobia and the informal sector in South Africa's secondary cities. *Urban Transformations*, *5*, Article 2.

Tayob, H. (2019). Architecture-by-migrants: The porous infrastructures of Bellville. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, *42*(1), 46–58.

UNHCR. (2024). *Burundi situation*. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20the%20population,the%20respective%20country%2Dlevel%20programmes

Wessendorf, S. (2022). 'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 172–189.

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.

Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, *48*(s1), S122–S148.

Zack, T., & Landau, L. B. (2022). An enclave entrepôt: The informal migration industry and Johannesburg's socio-spatial transformation. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2333–2351.

Zill, M. O. (2023). Navigating constraints, finding freedom: Exploring asylum seekers' access to urban arrival infrastructures. *Urban Geography*, *45*(7), 1127–1147.

About the Authors

Nomkhosi A. Mbatha is a PhD candidate at the University of the Western Cape. Her research project focuses on the practices of solidarity and conviviality in informal economy social spaces in Cape Town and Durban. She is also a PhD research trainee at the Human Sciences Research Council. Her research interests also include the informal economy and youth livelihoods.

Leah Koskimaki is a sociocultural anthropologist and senior lecturer at the Institute for Social Development (ISD) at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, where she also is a founding member and coordinator for the Migration and Mobilities Interdisciplinary Collective in Africa (MMICA). She is also a co-investigator on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) partnership project titled "Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective."

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8524
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8524

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

From Tolerating Informality to Formalizing Prohibition: Religious Practices of West African Migrants in France (1960s–2020s)

Laura Guérin

École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris Val de Seine, France

Correspondence: Laura Guérin (laura.guerin@paris-valdeseine.archi.fr)

Submitted: 28 April 2024 **Accepted:** 9 October 2024 **Published:** 12 December 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

This article addresses the concept of arrival infrastructure through religious practices. More specifically, this article is about the visibility of Muslim religious practices of West African migrants in France from the 1960s to the present day. The article is mainly based on ethnographic fieldwork on foyers conducted in the Paris region from 2016 until 2022 but also draws on archival research undertaken in the Paris City Archives. Foyers are a specialised housing system consisting of hostels for (post)colonial—mainly African—male migrant workers created in the 1950s. From the 2000s, foyers underwent significant transformation: their architecture and legal framework changed with the foyer giving way to the *résidence sociale* (social residence). African migrants were no longer the only residents in these new facilities, and their socio-spatial practices were closely monitored by building managers. Prayer rooms and mosques that existed in foyers disappeared following the transformation, leading to more informal religious spaces and practices. This article is constructed chronologically and aims to focus on the blurred frontier between formal and informal religious practices and their transformation across time: from being tolerated, or even encouraged, by policymakers and foyer managers to the progressive disappearance of collective religious activities in foyers or social residences. This article highlights the negotiations, conflicts, and tensions between residents, building managers, neighbours, and policymakers and their spatial consequences for everyday religious practices in the very tense post-2015 Paris attacks context marked by rising Islamophobia.

Keywords

arrival infrastructure; France; housing; Islam; religion; West African migration

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

This article aims to interrogate the concept of arrival infrastructures understood, as proposed by Meeus et al. (2019), as "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future or translocal social mobilities are produced as much as negotiated" (p. 1). The article thus examines the spaces that migrants use and live in and more specifically aims to interrogate the concept of arrival infrastructures through the analysis of Muslim spaces of worship. The purpose of this article is not to analyse how the arrival infrastructure is built by stakeholders but to understand how historical and political contexts shape such infrastructure. The case of West African migrants living in the centre of the French capital, Paris, allows us to propose a socio-historical analysis of Muslim religious spaces as a way to understand the evolution of the West African arrival infrastructure. The article analyses how practices of worship, and accordingly, the existence of spaces of worship, are obliged to navigate the shifting relationships between different actors and the general context, as well as between formal and informal practices. In this article, we aim to move beyond the formal–informal dichotomy and explore a spectrum of practices from formal to informal to highlight the processes of formalisation and local negotiation between actors (Biehl, 2022; Fawaz, 2017). Indeed, this article discusses literature addressing how urban policies are dealing with informal practices in urban spaces. Some authors, such as Fawaz (2017) in her work on Beirut, and Schillebeeckx et al. (2018) in Belgium, aim to enrich and guide planning policies using an informality framework or by highlighting the importance of local knowledge. But in this article, we want to highlight how urban and housing policies produce informality through the consequences of discourses and political acts on spaces and spatial practices. In other words, this article does not seek to define what is and what is not (in)formality, but to examine, through a socio-historical analysis, how the political response to a social or spatial practice determines its formal or informal character.

In order to understand the links between formality and informality, religious practices, and arrival infrastructures, we propose to analyse the case of West African migration in France and the presence of Muslim religious practice in Paris within a special habitat: the foyer. Migrant worker foyers represent a unique model of reception and accommodation housing dedicated to immigrant workers and were created by the French government in the 1950s. The foyers were designed to accommodate men from former colonies coming to the metropole to work, and hosted predominantly men from North Africa, mainly Algeria, and West Africa, mainly Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal (Bernardot, 1997; Sayad, 1980; Timera, 1996). Built in the heart of working-class neighbourhoods, near factories that employed migrant workers, or created through hasty conversion of former barracks, foyers are visible in all major French towns, including Paris and its immediate suburbs. Foyers today still mark the French urban space, despite the fact that from the late 1990s, the buildings were converted into social residences, a specific type of social housing dedicated to low-income groups (Béguin, 2015; Mbodj-Pouye, 2023). The architecture was completely transformed to abide by new laws and regulations on access to buildings and their by-laws. Large collective spaces (dormitories, bathrooms, kitchens, and multipurpose rooms) designed in the 1960s and appropriated over the years by foyer residents were transformed into studio units, affecting directly the daily practices of the residents. In this article, we will in particular delve into the consequences of this transformation on the practices of Muslim worship in the foyers for both residents and neighbours.

Indeed, the literature highlights the role of urban spaces and habitats in the organisation of migration and the integration of new arrivals (Beeckmans, 2022; Boccagni, 2022, 2023; Meeus et al., 2019; Wessendorf,

2019). Moreover, being part of the "spatial turn," several researchers have studied the particular role that religious practices play in the daily routine of migrants and in the production of arrival spaces (Knott, 2010). In the literature, spaces of worship appear to be places of encounter used by newcomers to gather information, as well as by long-established migrants to create a place for daily socialisation (Bava, 2005; Beeckmans, 2019; Portilla, 2018; Timera, 2008). Timera (2008) highlights the role of religious practices in the West African diaspora in France as a structuring element for intergenerational solidarity between long-established migrants and newcomers. In the French context, religious spaces in foyers play a key role as they allow a vast diversity of Muslims to meet every day in the same building, producing a central space for worshippers, as churches may do in other national contexts (Beeckmans, 2019; Portilla, 2018). The importance of the foyer for religious practices also arises from the fact that there are few mosques in French cities, and especially in Paris. Indeed, over the decades, foyers became crucial places for Islam (Timera, 2008). This article wishes to contribute to the literature with a case study on a Parisian foyer and its architecture. We want to highlight how Muslim religious spaces have changed over time, over a span of more than 60 years, transforming *de facto* the potential arrival infrastructures that are foyers. We will emphasise in particular the changes in terms of the type of actors, spaces, and dynamics at play when borders between formal and informal are negotiated. In addition to examining the role of religion in migrant reception, the aim is also to study the changes that have taken place over the decades for the actors in question, and the impact of the architectural transformation of foyers, as well as changes in the wider context (anti-immigration discourse, the construction of a "Muslim problem" since the 1980s [Hajjat & Mohammed, 2013], and political positioning following the 2015 attacks). This article, constructed chronologically, is thus also a contribution to documenting the presence of Islam in France and its political treatment from the original vantage point of a sociology of architectural space and its uses.

Our article therefore seeks to retrace the history of Muslim worship practices in a Parisian foyer built in 1969 and converted into a social residence in 2011. By structuring the history in five phases, we want to shed light on the links between arrival infrastructures and religious practices, while also highlighting how changes in the political, economic, and social context, as well as the architectural context of the building, led the various actors involved to navigate between formal practices or favour informal use of spaces. The article embraces an ethnographic approach, and aims to bring to the fore the relationships between various actors, in particular foyer residents, foyer managers, and policymakers at both the city and national level. The hypothesis is that by observing foyer spaces and the religious practices that take place there, it is possible to grasp the dynamics and transformations in general policies regarding the visibility of Islam in France and the role that foyers can play as arrival infrastructures.

The article starts with a brief presentation of the methodology and fieldwork undertaken during the study on which the article is based, and then unfolds the history of the foyer and its spaces of worship in five phases, starting with the creation and the early years of the foyer (1st phase), the decade of the 1990s when the foyer became a public problem (2nd), its transformation into a social residence (3rd), the post-attack context (4th), and finally recent developments (5th).

2. Methodology

This article is based on the ethnographic study of a social residence, formerly a migrant worker foyer, undertaken as part of my doctoral thesis in sociology, and understood as an ethnography of buildings, that is,

"a fine-grained ethnographic research of the envisioning, construction, and use of building projects" (Lopez, 2011). The research took place between February 2016 and March 2020, and then continued with repeated visits in the years that followed. During the ethnographic study, I undertook observation of spaces, whether individual (studio units) or collective (corridors, halls, and multipurpose rooms). Moreover, my presence over extended periods allowed me to meet several residents, with whom I was able to conduct recorded interviews, as well as engage in a substantial number of informal discussions.

The residence's resident population was composed of only men, most of whom were Soninké and Muslim and hailed from the Senegal River Valley region, in particular from Mali. These residents, aged between 18 and 80, with or without residence permits, for the most part were employees or retirees from the restaurant and construction sectors. The vast majority of those who arrived before 2011, the year when the foyer became a social residence, and so had lived in the former foyer, for more than 40 years for the eldest among them. Their daily practices in the building are thus part of the neighbourhood's routine of life. My research was mainly structured around frequent meetings with residents, and especially with their representatives, who were also residents elected by their peers to bring everyday problems to the attention of the residence management and lead negotiations. I also met on several occasions with the residence's imam, who had officiated there from 2011 to 2016 (the year in which the mosque was shut down), and who although not residing in the residence, came there frequently even outside of prayer hours to visit numerous members of his family who did live there.

Between 2016 and 2020, I was also able to observe the daily work of the residence manager, employed by the management establishment and present on a daily basis, and have several discussions with him, as well as with other occasional workers (social workers and maintenance and technical personnel). This component of the study was complemented with a series of semi-structured interviews, undertaken in 2022 as part of the ReROOT project, with managers of other social residences converted from former migrant worker foyers, aimed at shedding light on their professional practices.

To better understand religious practices and how these have evolved over the past decades, the article also draws on archival research undertaken in the Paris City Archives. In particular, archival documents on the construction of the foyer in the late 1960s and on its conversion in the 2000s were used to highlight the architectural evolution of the building, and especially of the spaces used for religious services. My ethnographic study also allowed me to observe how several local conflicts crystallised around the presence of a mosque within the residence, eventually resulting in the mosque being shut down following a police raid. These events which took place in 2016, and are described in more detail later in the article, allowed me to observe the decisions taken by the Paris Prefecture, the head office of the managing establishment, and an association of neighbours of the foyer organised specifically to close down the place of worship. This ethnographic study is thus based on multiple methods (observation, interviews, and archival research), as well as encounters with a plurality of actors whose interactions will be highlighted throughout the article.

3. Results

This section of the article is structured chronologically to retrace the history of the Parisian foyer's worship space from when it was initially built to the present day.

3.1. From the Establishment of the Foyer to the Mosque Creation: Tolerating Informal Appropriation

During the Second World War, major French towns suffered great destruction from wartime bombing. Post-war, there was an acute shortage of housing that affected almost all social classes. Families, whether French or foreign, lived in insalubrious and over-crowded housing or in furnished hotels situated on the periphery of urban centres, and in particular of Paris, where slums sprung up (Lévy-Vroelant, 2004; Pétonnet, 1985). While unsanitary living conditions were the reality for a majority of people living in France at the time, conditions were particularly bad for low-income and immigrant communities. During the 1950s and 1960s, the cohorts of foreign populations grew due to the action of the French government and large companies who massively recruited workers from abroad, particularly from the French colonies of the day. The opening of borders to workers, moreover, facilitated both their migration and their recruitment. The immigrants rebuilt France while having themselves to put up with extremely precarious living conditions. This context gave rise to migrant worker foyers.

The foyers were built under the impetus of the government, in particular the Ministry of the Interior, and their main objective was the temporary housing of immigrant workers who were considered by these institutions as temporary guests on their territory. The first foyers were built in the late 1950s and were exclusively dedicated to North African workers, in particular Algerians. These foyers were managed by Sonacotra, a company partially run by the state. They offered living spaces organised around units of life, with very small individual rooms, and kitchens and bathrooms that were shared by several residents. The buildings were checked on a daily basis by former colonial military personnel and the practices of residents were strictly regimented to limit political meetings and action (Bernardot, 1997; Hmed, 2006). In effect, until 1962, when the Algerian War ended and Algeria gained its independence, the French government actively limited political action in the metropole and considered foyers as potential spaces for political agitation.

A few years later, a new type of migrant worker foyers emerged, still under state mandate but now managed by non-profit associations and this time dedicated to West African communities, especially communities from the Senegal River Valley region (the border region between Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal). Unlike Algerian immigrants, West African workers were not considered politically dangerous by the public authorities, and the construction of foyers was thus governed by other objectives such as that of maintaining collective life in order to facilitate the migrants' return to their country of origin (Béguin, 2015; Mbodj-Pouye, 2023). The Esperet report presented to public authorities in 1964 spoke of African workers as making few demands with regard to their working conditions, referring to their weak participation in unions and political movements. Thus in 1968, the Paris Prefecture recommended that for West African workers, given that they had a "very rich collective life [that] most of them wished to maintain when abroad, or at least in Paris…foyers should include communal spaces and especially kitchens allowing them to congregate in groups of ten, twenty or thirty, based on affinity" (Préfecture de Paris, 1968, p. 28). The assimilationist project of French integration policies was not yet perceptible here (Favell, 2016), as it was understood that these workers would sooner or later leave.

Thus, in the late 1960s, we can observe the emergence of two types of migrant worker foyers hosting communities divided by geographic origin in different types of buildings. The Parisian foyer of this study has characteristics of foyers referred to as West African by foyer managers and policymakers. It was built in the late 1960s and offered only collective spaces. Unlike other foyers that were old buildings quickly

transformed, the Parisian foyer was constructed from scratch, and thus its spaces were specially designed by architects to meet the needs (or expected needs) of West African migrant workers. Therefore, the basement and ground floor were composed of multipurpose rooms, a café, and external spaces, while the upper floors were divided between dormitories containing four to eight beds, shared showers and toilets, as well as a shared kitchen on each floor with an eating area. The Parisian architecture thus promoted a collective way of life to maintain what policymakers perceived as an African lifestyle. The building designs drawn up in 1968 that are found in the building's construction permit files did not show any spaces for worship, but over the next years, the migrants made the building their own (Lefebvre, 1974). In fact, the foyers produced by the French government quickly became spaces that were appropriated by their residents on a daily basis through the creation of food and arts and crafts markets offering African products, and the development of hosting practices to accommodate young migrants from the diasporas living in those buildings (Daum, 1998; Timera, 1996). Indeed, the foyers offered a space for sleeping, for socialising, and for worship open to all new arrivals whether or not they resided in the foyers, thus playing the role of an arrival infrastructure. The importance of the foyer for the diaspora was reinforced in 1974, the year in which economic borders were closed and an obligatory visa was introduced for entry and settlement on French soil. The foyers, hastily built to temporarily house workers who were supposed to stay just a few years to rebuild France, became perennial living spaces for these migrants whose possibilities for international movement were increasingly restricted by ever stricter legislation.

3.2. From the Growing Problematisation of Islam to the Social Residence

Over the course of decades, foyers became spaces of life and of encounter for the West African diaspora. Former residents who had wished to and managed to bring their families to France continued to go to foyers on weekends to visit friends and family, and also to benefit from activities held there. In fact, the vast collective spaces, conceived by the French institutions to "maintain" the rich "collective life" of West African communities were appropriated by the latter. Informal business activities, as well as craftwork, such as tailoring, shoe repairs, and metalwork, emerged, with products being produced and sold in the large square courtyard of the Parisian foyer or in nearby workshops. In addition, the collective kitchens sold traditional dishes at very low prices throughout the day. These activities turned foyers into central commercial and cultural facilities for the diaspora, providing access to African products in France. This cultural centrality was reinforced by the progressive development of religious activities. Indeed, Parisian inhabitants I interviewed date the establishment of a mosque in the building, within a multipurpose room situated in the basement, to the 1980s. That date coincides with the establishment of other mosques inside foyers observed during the 1970s and 1980s (Kepel, 1991). Indeed, the closure of borders in 1974 expanded the stay of many workers towards longer-term migration, or even made permanent their presence if they took recourse to family reunification. There was thus now a greater need to integrate religion into their lives in France. Given the paucity of mosques in town and the fact that sermons there were delivered in French or Arabic, the biggest collective room in the Parisian foyer was appropriated by inhabitants to create a mosque. Indeed, foyers were then the only space that could offer spaces of worship with sermons in Soninke or Fula, the main languages spoken by migrants from the Senegal River Valley. This language issue was particularly important for recent arrivals who didn't speak French yet. These foyer mosques were thus not just spaces of worship, but also places of intergenerational and diaspora encounter, exchange, and mutual assistance.

Thus, from the first decades, prayer rooms and mosques contributed to turning migrant worker foyers into arrival infrastructures and meeting spaces for people in the neighbourhood. Initially, the emergence of Islam within the confines of the foyer was viewed as a boon by foyer managers who hoped to use the role of control that religion could exert as a "factor of social regulation" (Barou, 1985). Management establishments, influenced by control practices of the colonial period (Bernardot, 1997; Hmed, 2006), thus tried to use older residents and religious leaders to canalise younger residents who infringed foyer by-laws. Furthermore, as Marcel Maussen explained:

> [Foyers managers] were motivated both by the idea that helping immigrants to retain their religion and culture might facilitate their return to the countries of origin, and by the idea that helping Muslims to create and equip elementary religious spaces was not fundamentally different from helping to provide for other socio-cultural needs. (Maussen, 2009, p. 117)

However, during the 1980s and 1990s, religious practices in foyers, as had business, craft, activism, and community activities before that, increasingly diverged in the spatial practices residents adopted from the initial goals set out by managing bodies, and above all from new expectations arising from the shifting politics of those goals during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, the systemic crises that afflicted the French economy during the 1970s and rising unemployment changed the discourse on the need for immigrant labour. Moreover, the figure of the undocumented migrant—the *sans-papiers*—emerged following the closure of borders, and this fuelled a discourse around the illegality of young migrants. Lastly, within an international context that from the late 1970s was characterised by anxiety and interrogations around Islam, Muslim religious practice progressively entered the public debate and became a political issue (Hajjat & Mohammed, 2013; Kepel, 1991; Maussen, 2009). Thus, during the 1990s, media and political discourse problematised Muslim religious practice, and particularly its visibility in public space. The wearing of distinctive religious signs and open-air prayers increasingly became the focus of debates about Islam in France (Khemilat, 2018). In this transformation of public discourse, the foyer seemed to symbolise a range of public issues through the way it embodied the space simultaneously of Muslim worship, of administrative illegality, and of the presence of now-contested foreign labour.

The presence of informal religious spaces which had been tolerated or even encouraged by foyer managers began to appear problematic to the latter from the 1990s on. Progressively, public authorities and foyer management began to question the very existence of migrant worker foyers. A 1996 parliamentary report, titled the Cuq report after the right-wing deputy who presented it to the National Assembly, in particular cemented the negative image of foyers. In it, foyers were presented as "spaces of lawlessness" (Cuq, 1996, p. 30) and the informality of business, craft, and religious practices as illegal. The tolerance or indifference that institutions had shown towards the spatial appropriation by residents that had characterised earlier decades faded away, and the Cuq report proposed the "dismantlement" (Cuq, 1996, p. 30) of the foyers to "give a strong political signal to French and immigrant public opinion of political will for integration, for rejecting cultural isolation, and for fighting against illegal immigration" (Cuq, 1996, p. 27). In other terms, the Cuq report recommended the formalisation of what could be done and what could not be done within foyers, proposing moreover that the foyers be converted into social residences. In 1997, the Management Plan of Migrant Worker Foyers (*Plan de Traitement des Foyers de Travailleurs Migrants*) enshrined this conversion which was to cover all of the almost 700 foyers in France (Béguin, 2015; Guérin, 2021; Mbodj-Pouye, 2023).

3.3. The Foyer's Conversion, Attempted Formalisation, and the Regimenting of Practices

The Parisian foyer fell under this national plan and was therefore converted into a social residence. Renovation work began in 2008, and in 2011 its residents returned to a completely transformed building. Shared dormitories, bathrooms, and kitchens had disappeared and were now replaced by studio units. And only four multipurpose rooms remained in the building's basement. The conversion was seen by management as a means of "retaking control over the foyer," to borrow the words of one of my interviewees, a building manager. Therefore, the new social residence was not just marked by architectural changes, but also by changes in its by-laws. Usage conventions were introduced in 2011 stipulating what was allowed in the new buildings, set times were designated for activities, and there were rules about who could participate in these. Thus, as explained in the space usage convention, two of the multipurpose rooms were available throughout the week for diverse activities, like recreational activities, informational meetings, literacy classes, worship services, under the responsibility of the association and its president; the other two rooms were only accessible on weekends. By contrast, passageways (entry halls and corridors) were not to be used for any of the above-mentioned activities. The need to have a resident association at the fore derived from the fact that public authorities, under the 1905 law on secularism (*laïcité*), could not finance spaces of worship. Thus, while religious practices could be authorised, they could only be formalised through the intermediation of an association and not directly through the management establishments (which were mostly funded by public authorities).

Nonetheless, the residence's everyday life resumed after the residents returned, and when I entered the Parisian residence in February 2016, I discovered a diversity of uses of its collective spaces, as well as its passageways, which sometimes contravened the terms of the accommodation convention—the *convention de mise à disposition*—which was still in effect. While the multipurpose rooms were still only accessible on the same terms (the entire week for rooms 2 and 4, and only on weekends for rooms 1 and 3), daily practices which in the view of the managers broke the rules of the convention could be observed. First, "common spaces" near the basement rooms were often used for collective prayers, especially on Fridays. No carpets were laid out permanently in these spaces, but given how the room reserved for worship was too small to accommodate the 210 residents who came for prayers, the nearby spaces, spaces of foot traffic, were used by some for prayers. This first infraction to the rules was intensified by the second infraction, particularly problematic for the managers: the use of the spaces of worship by many non-resident worshippers, most of them from nearby neighbourhoods, as the arrondissement where the residence was located did not have any mosque. During prayer hours and on Fridays, the space used for worship expanded beyond the rooms to which worship was supposed to be confined according to the convention, into the corridor outside the basement collective rooms, and even into the central courtyard when the weather was fine.

This informal bending of the rules was possible thanks to relative lenience from the building manager who turned a blind eye, except "when the boss comes," as the building manager often said. He would then ask that the laying of prayer mats be restricted and that the loudspeaker used for the call to prayers be hidden: "You get rid of that for me when head office arrives, ok?" he instructed a resident responsible for the call to prayer, referring to the big loudspeaker set up in the staircase. In 2016, daily adjustments between residents and the manager allowed for the bending of rules and negotiation without "head office" involvement, as well as a certain ambiguity, or even uncertainty about where the line lay between formal and informal. Such negotiation, or encroachment (Bayat, 2010), was visible in how passageways were divvied up and lined with

small plastic cones to mark out a path from the multipurpose rooms to the building exit, thus ensuring that residence workers could move about even during prayer time. The space dedicated to worship was the space outside of the cones. The negotiation between inhabitants and the building manager was then visible spatially in the residence, embodying to what extent informal practices could be tolerated and by whom within the management establishment.

However, during the course of 2016, an increase in management staff presence (from the head office) at the residence, for union meetings or training sessions in rooms 1 and 3 (accessible to residents only on weekends), put management staff face-to-face with residents' infractions. At the same time, a group of neighbours set up an association to mobilise against what they called in a leaflet "noise disturbance" caused by the foyer, taking issue in particular with the crowds of people entering and leaving the building on Fridays, the day of prayers. During the first semester of 2016, the building manager received letters weekly complaining about the residence and its inhabitants from the association of neighbours or sometimes even from local political groups in the municipal opposition. As a consequence, management structure tightened control of the spaces, as did the prefecture, mandated by the former to manage crowds and worshippers coming from outside the residence, and to ensure that security regulations (number of people per room) were respected. On several occasions, the prefecture came to observe and count the number of people coming in and out of the residence on Friday evenings.

3.4. The Post-Attack Context: The Closing of the Multipurpose Rooms and Collective Mobilisation

On Monday, 23 May 2016, a police raid took place in the foyer. I wasn't present at the time and arrived the morning after to visit my interlocutors. About 30 police officers accompanied by dogs had entered the residence for identity checks of its residents. According to the police services quoted by the managers, there were multiple motives for this "operation" including suspicion of trafficking of drugs, arms, and identity papers, as well as suspicion of prostitution taking place inside the residence. The identity checks, carried out in the common space, led to the arrest of about 30 people who did not have their papers in order, and who were held directly at the Administrative Detention Centre. Of the 30 undocumented persons arrested, some were later deported (mainly towards Spain) and others were freed in the month following their arrest, some with an order to leave the French territory, known as an OQTF or *Obligation à Quitter le Territoire Français*. However, the police operation also led to the closure of the four multipurpose rooms, a decision taken immediately and justified by the contraventions to the residence convention and the establishment's security regulations due to the overcrowding in the space of worship. This decision was based on previous prefecture visits on Friday evenings.

Indeed, the presence of worshippers from the neighbourhood seems to have been particularly perceived by the management establishment and public authorities as posing a problem, including for safety reasons as it resulted in large crowds, especially on Fridays. And while negotiation between residents and the building manager had been possible in the daily life they shared, mobilisation by the neighbourhood association and the more frequent presence of "head office" staff in the residence put a spotlight on contraventions to rules, and especially on the informality of such practices. The collective mobilisation against the Parisian space of worship followed a succession of similar actions in the region (Guérin, 2021), and is to be understood in the particular context that followed the 2015 attacks. In the months after the attacks, there was a rise in discourse against the visibility of Muslim religious practices, in particular against open-air prayers (Galonnier,

2021; Khemilat, 2018), and this was mobilised by the local opposition to municipal authorities to establish movements of contestation. The residence and its imam were thus reproached for not having sufficient control and oversight over the worshippers attending the mosque, and suspicions were raised about the presence of "bearded men," a term used by many of the management staff to refer to radicalised individuals. The closure of the multipurpose rooms meant a new phase in the life of the residence and its worship room: that of prohibitions on collective practices of worship. Starting in June 2016, a rent strike was called demanding that the multipurpose rooms be reopened, and that residents be allowed to continue to pray and receive people from the neighbourhood in the residence.

Alongside the collective mobilisation, another conflict emerged among my interlocutors related to semantics. Indeed, the imam, who had been responsible for sermons since the residence opened in 2011, during our interviews spoke of how the worship room was a central part of not just the building's history, but also the history of the neighbourhood: "There has been a mosque here since the 1970s; since the building was built, there has been a mosque." This appeal to history reinforced, of course, his stance as an imam, but also made a case for the space to be opened to the local community and diaspora communities. Indeed, on the multiple occasions when the imam had been reproached by the building manager because of complaints from neighbours or concerns from the prefecture, the imam, seconded by the residents, defended the use of the term "mosque," which according to my field research, implies a reach that goes beyond the simple walls of the residence and offers a visible space of worship to neighbours and the community. On the other hand, the term "mosque," which was used by managers and policymakers in the 1990s, was progressively dropped in the 2000s and 2010s, first in official discourse and then in the everyday language of the residence managers. The rent strike thus had the goal of reopening the space of worship, and also to defend the mosque as a symbol to maintain the residence's openness and its role as an arrival infrastructure. Indeed, ever since the conversion of the foyer into a residence, the sole collective activity that remained and that welcomed non-resident visitors was worship, and in particular the Friday sermons in Soninke and French. In other terms, the space of worship was one of the last remaining places that welcomed worshippers, whether new arrivals or not, and contributed to keeping the building open to its neighbourhood community. The rental strike continued until 2018 and gave rise to multiple negotiations with management in order to find an agreement that would allow the collective rooms to be reopened and the setting out of rules for their use acceptable to all parties.

3.5. "This Is not a Mosque": Accepting to Close to Keep the Power of Decision

As explained, during the closure of the multipurpose rooms, residents and management (accompanied by the neighbours' association and the prefecture) clashed in particular over the use of the word "mosque" and the opening to the wider neighbourhood that the word implied. The word was not used by the managers to refer to the Parisian space of worship; they rather used the term "prayer room" implying thus that it was reserved for residents. This semantic choice in 2016 clashed with that of the imam and the residents' representatives who, for their part, preferred the word "mosque." Nonetheless, during the social movement and strikes of 2016 and 2017, and faced with the slow pace of negotiations, the positions of the representatives shifted and they came to reposition themselves. Indeed, the unequal balance of power, despite a few months of highly attended strikes, pushed the representatives to make concessions in the hope that the rooms would be reopened. Thus, the residents' demands for the reopening of the rooms and the definition of their use progressively shifted:

> If the problem is people from outside, we must then not allow people from outside. He [the imam] now agrees with us, it is to protect the prayer room. (excerpt from an interview with the Parisian chief representative, Parisian residence, March 2018)

> We were wrong before. Now: End the Friday prayers, this is a social residence, it is not a mosque. One must recognise the facts. (excerpt from an interview with a foyer representative, Parisian residence, April 2018)

These two statements from foyer representatives during informal conversations in their respective lodgings illustrate the shift in their position from 2016, when remaining open to non-residents and using the term "mosque" seemed non-negotiable, to 2018, almost two years after the standoff with management started. To "protect," as they said, the space of worship, and above all, to continue to hope it would reopen, it was necessary to declare that doors would be closed to outsiders and thus put at risk the arrival infrastructure that the foyer had represented in the life of the neighbourhood.

This position gained momentum in 2018, when several representatives in other residences started to limit entry to prayer rooms, or even to buildings, during prayer hours to limit crowds and reduce the risk of management taking measures against them. Being accessible to outsiders and large crowds entering and leaving during prayer hours were not new phenomena in 2018; what was new was the hardening of policy by management, as illustrated in the residence case, and it is this that seemed to transform the discourse, as well as the control of spaces of worship by the representatives, as it became necessary to abandon the mosque to "protect" the prayer room. Faced with a growing desire to regiment, or even render invisible, Muslim religious practices in the city, attempts to bend the rules and develop informal worship practices diminished as the balance of power grew in disfavour of the residents. In order to protect other practices also deemed problematic by public authorities and management, such as that of hosting guests in the residence (Guérin, 2022), residents and their representatives accepted the challenge to the religious reception infrastructure side of the foyer so that the foyer could remain a residential reception and arrival infrastructure.

Thus, in 2024, the multipurpose rooms are still closed, rent payments have resumed, and hope for the outcome of the negotiations seems to have died out. Worship practices are now confined to the studio units, and the collective dimension, particularly important during the month of Ramadan, is only observed between people sharing the same studio or individuals with close ties.

4. Conclusions

By retracing the history of a Parisian foyer and its space of worship, this article has attempted to shed light on the sequence of steps that worship practices have navigated between tolerated informality and attempts at formalisation by management, followed by daily informal infringements, before being totally prohibited. Beyond the fluctuations, the analysis of the tensions between formal and informal practices also informs us about the actors, the spaces, and above all the contexts of worship practices. While it is true that the renovated buildings of the social residences provided less space for worship, it was mainly the progressive construction of public debate around the visibility of Islam in the city that led to the elimination of the residence's common spaces. The history retraced in the article shows how the room for manoeuvre for residents to produce informal practices to maintain a worship space, and consequently the arrival

infrastructure that the foyer represented, was reduced. It also raises the question of what happens when arrival infrastructure is closed or its resources transformed. What happens to the infrastructure as a whole when one dimension disappears?

Through this analysis of a religious space, we can highlight the progressive transformation of the openness of the foyer and its role as an arrival infrastructure. Indeed, the reduction of the space available for religious practice and the evolution of the words used to describe such practice over the decades shed light on the transformation of the role bestowed on the foyer (and later social residence) by the government and the managers. From temporal community-based housing facilities for temporal migrants to representing parts of the city that concentrated a large number of problematic issues. This chronology aims to highlight how the evolution from tolerated informality to prohibition explains the history of the Parisian religious space, and more generally the relation between the French government and its postcolonial migrant workers. Through the lens of (in)formality, this case study shows how the status of a practice is produced by the political response it receives. In other words, religious practices didn't change per se (praying together in collective rooms) but the political context progressively changed and shifted its discourses on the practices. From being tolerated, they became informal and then prohibited.

On a more theoretical level, this article aims to contribute to the arrival infrastructure literature by shedding light on the key role of the socio-historical perspective not only to grasp the dynamics of slow transformations but also to better understand the ethnographic context of fieldwork. It participates in a broader discussion on the importance of historical approaches in arrival infrastructure research which seems fruitful for discourse analysis as well as for material aspects of the infrastructure such as architecture (Räuchle, 2019). More generally, this article wanted to highlight how the ethnographic study of spaces and their materiality can illustrate and help us seize the broader dynamics at stake, complexifying what can be understood through the concept of *laïcité* (secularism) in the French context. By analysing the local regulation of religious practices, this article shows how the actors deal with the concept of *laïcité* in situ. This general concept, which is used to define the distance between French politics and religious institutions, is questioned in this very specific context allowing us to see its blurred frontiers (local negotiation, spatial accommodation).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the people who participated in this research, especially inhabitants for opening the door of their homes to me. I also thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.

Funding

The research was partly funded by the H2020 ReROOT project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101004704.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality.

References

Barou, J. (1985). L'Islam, facteur de régulation sociale. *Esprit*, *102*(6), 207–215.

Bava, S. (2005). Variations autour de trois sites mourides dans la migration. *Autrepart*, *36*(4), 105–122.

Bayat, A. (2010). *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press.

Beeckmans, L. (2019). Mediating (in)visibility and publicity in an African church in Ghent: African religious place-making and solidarity outside the urban regularity. In L. Bialasiewicz & V. Gentile (Eds.), *Spaces of tolerance: The changing geographies of religious freedom in Europe* (pp. 180–198). Routledge.

Beeckmans, L. (Ed.). (2022). *Making home(s) in displacement: Critical reflections on a spatial practice*. Leuven University Press.

Béguin, H. (2015). *Héberger des migrants ou gérer des logements?: L'Aftam et ses "foyers d'Africains noirs" (1962–2012)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Université Paris Est.

Bernardot, M. (1997). *Une politique du logement: La Sonacotra (1956–1992)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Université Paris 1.

Biehl, K. (2022). Spectrums of in/formality and il/legality: Negotiating business and migration-related statuses in arrival spaces. *Migration Studies*, *10*(2), 112–129. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnac005

Boccagni, P. (2022). At home in the centre? Spatial appropriation and horizons of homemaking in reception facilities for asylum seekers. In L. Beeckmans, A. Gola, A. Singh, & H. Heynen (Eds.), *Making home(s) in displacement: Critical reflections on a spatial practice* (pp. 139–154). Leuven University Press.

Boccagni, P. (Ed.). (2023). *Handbook on home and migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Cuq, H. (1996). *Mission parlementaire sur la situation et le devenir des foyers de travailleurs migrants*. Assemblée nationale.

Daum, C. (1998). *Les associations de Maliens en France: Migrations, développement et citoyenneté*. Karthala.

Favell, A. (2016). *Philosophies of integration: Immigration and the idea of citizenship in France and Britain*. Springer.

Fawaz, M. (2017). Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection. *Planning Theory*, *16*(1), 99–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095216647722

Galonnier, J. (2021). Barbes et foulards: Les marqueurs genrés de l'islamophobie. In É. Lépinard, O. Sarrasin, & L. Gianettoni (Eds.), *Genre et islamophobie* (pp. 157–179). ENS Éditions.

Guérin, L. (2021). *L'appropriation spatiale comme résistance habitante. Ethnographie de résidences sociales issues de foyers de travailleurs migrants* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Université Paris 8.

Guérin, L. (2022). Cohabiter dans un studio de travailleurs migrants: "Arts de faire" et stratégies quotidiennes. *Espaces et sociétés*, *2022*(3), 35–50.

Hajjat, A., & Mohammed, M. (2013). *Islamophobie. Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le "problème musulman."* La Découverte.

Hmed, C. (2006). *Loger les étrangers" isolés" en France: Socio-histoire d'une institution d'état: La Sonacotra (1956–2006)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Université Paris 1.

Kepel, G. (1991). *Les banlieues de l'Islam: Naissance d'une religion en France*. Éditions du Seuil.

Khemilat, F. (2018). La construction des prières de rue comme problème public. *Confluences Méditerranée*, *106*(3), 81–94.

Knott, K. (2010). Religion, space, and place: The spatial turn in research on religion. *Religion and Society*, *1*(1), 29–43.

Lefebvre, H. (1974). La production de l'espace. *L'Homme et la société*, *31/32*, 15–32.

Lévy-Vroelant, C. (2004). Le logement des migrants en France du milieu du 19ème siècle à nos jours. *Historiens et Géographes*, *385*, 147–165.

Lopez, S. L. (2011). *The remittance landscape: Space, architecture, and society in emigrant Mexico* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. UC Berkeley.

Maussen, M. J. M. (2009). *Constructing mosques: The governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Amsterdam. https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=23a73a23-c3f0-4b47-ab62-9e06b5e608f5

Mbodj-Pouye, A. (2023). *An address in Paris: Emplacement, bureaucracy, and belonging in hostels for West African migrants*. Columbia University Press.

Meeus, B., van Heur, B., & Arnaut, K. (2019). Migration and the infrastructural politics of urban arrival. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 1–32). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_1

Pétonnet, C. (1985). *On est tous dans le brouillard*. Galilée.

Portilla, A. (2018). Une famille dans l'église. Sociabilités des classes populaires immigrées aux États-Unis. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, *2018*(5), 42–53. https://doi.org/10.3917/arss.225.0042

Préfecture de Paris. (1968). *Logement collectif à caractère non lucratif des travailleurs à Paris et dans les trois départements limitrophes*. Archives Nationales.

Räuchle, C. (2019). Welcome to the city? Discursive and administrative dimensions of Hamburg's arrival infrastructures around 1900. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 33–52). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91167-0_2

Sayad, A. (1980). Le foyer des sans-famille. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, *32/33*, 89–103.

Schillebeeckx, E., Oosterlynck, S., & de Decker, P. (2018). Migration and the resourceful neighborhood: Exploring localized resources in urban zones of transition. In B. Meeus, K. Arnaut, & B. van Heur (Eds.), *Arrival infrastructures: Migration and urban social mobilities* (pp. 131–152). Palgrave Macmillan.

Timera, M. (1996). *Les Soninké en France: D'une histoire à l'autre*. Karthala.

Timera, M. (2008). *Faire et défaire les identités avec le religieux. Migrations, ethnicité, "race" et religion* [Unpublished habilitation]. Université Paris 7 – Denis Diderot. https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01497321/document

Wessendorf, S. (2019). Migrant belonging, social location and the neighbourhood: Recent migrants in East London and Birmingham. *Urban Studies*, *56*(1), 131–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017730300

About the Author

Laura Guérin is a sociologist with a PhD from the Université Paris 8 Saint-Denis, France. Her research focuses on social housing and West African migrations in France, with an emphasis on the role of architecture in the inhabitant's everyday life. She is currently working at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris Val de Seine where she teaches social sciences for architecture.

Urban Planning
2024 • Volume 9 • Article 8480
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.8480

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Digital Arrival Infrastructures: Housing Platforms and Residency Governance in Berlin's Rental Sector

Leah Aaron

Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, UK

Correspondence: Leah Aaron (leah.aaron.16@ucl.ac.uk)

Submitted: 22 April 2024 **Accepted:** 16 August 2024 **Published:** 31 October 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

This article explores how notions of formality and informality in housing are produced in relation to digital infrastructure and localized bordering regimes. Drawing on a research diary project conducted with "International" migrants in Berlin, Germany, I draw on scholarship in Digital Geography and Migration Studies to frame digital platforms as "arrival infrastructures," which allow "Internationals" to negotiate the legal process of becoming formally resident in the city. Rather than entry into the long-term "formal," rental sector, the opportunity to codify residency status becomes the decisive factor in determining housing choices. It also determines the type of housing platforms which are used to seek accommodation in the city and influences digital behavior. My contribution in this article is twofold. Firstly, I advance an understanding of housing in/formality as a concept which is formed according to one's own positionality in relation to State mobility regimes. Secondly, I describe how the interface of platform-mediated rental sites becomes a site of knowledge production about norms and behavior within an unfamiliar housing system. This is accomplished through the proposal of a typology which classifies platform services according to the ways in which they used to negotiate residency governance regimes: large and long-term housing platforms; "medium-term" platform-mediated rentals; platforms rented and shared; and supplementary tools. I conclude by highlighting the need for further research into the role of rental platforms as a bordering technology, especially in the European context.

Keywords

Berlin; housing; informalities; middling migrant; platform real estate; privileged mobilities; registration; sublet; tenant

© 2024 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the platform has emerged as a core technology of the digital economy. Platforms capture value and generate revenue by providing an arena for goods and services to be traded between various types of user. A key characteristic of platforms is that they embed themselves within previously "informal" sectors of the economy, regularizing transactions which would once have been difficult to trace (Richardson, 2020). Consequently, they have been framed as both social (Rodgers & Moore, 2020), technical (Srnicek, 2017), and economic (Andersson Schwarz, 2017) infrastructures, whose "logic" governs increasingly large aspects of contemporary urban life in cities across the globe. In this article, I draw on this infrastructural framing of the platform to explore the ways in which "Internationals," "middling" migrants (Conradson & Latham, 2005) in Berlin, Germany, leverage the platform as infrastructures for exchange within the rental market. In a city where housing is extremely scarce, different platforms gear themselves toward more and less formal sectors of the rental market. These are enmeshed with social media groups and messaging app "communities." I argue that these platforms form a socio-technical "infrastructure," which allow "Internationals" unfamiliar with the city's competitive rental sector a way to find accommodation by leveraging the technical. This infrastructural framing also allows me to demonstrate how this "International" group comes to form its own concepts of housing formality and informality in relation to Berlin's vast secondary rental market (Häußler, 2022). These are not formed with reference to normative housing trajectories but to digital platforms and their own positionality as ambivalently "privileged" migrants, linked to the governance of residency and to local-level border regimes (Gargiulo, 2023; Lebuhn, 2013a).

Platform services are constrained in different ways by residency governance regimes. Although middling migrants in Berlin are afforded relative flexibility in their housing choices in comparison to other migrant groups, often thanks to professional jobs and/or "strong" passports (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024), their position in relation to local border regimes produces specific conditions of precarity. Platforms provide a means not only to access physical space but also Registration (*Anmeldung*), a bureaucratic status which "performs the existence" of residing at a specific address (Gargiulo, 2023). Drawing on data generated from a research diary project with "International" Berliners, I argue that Registered status predicates access to the long-term, "formal," rental sector, because the platforms which cater to this section of the market use identity verification features which require registration to work. Further, I claim that concepts of "formality" within Berlin's secondary housing market can be understood in reference to Registration. Preferential visa regimes mean that those without EU-Citizenship, or who are excluded from schemes such as the "working holiday," visa, are under more pressure to complete Registration than others. I show how visa status affects housing preferences, such as rent price and location, as well as digital behaviors.

Two central advantages of platforms as a technology are their interoperability and their ability to be adapted by their users (Helmond, 2015). I show that platforms operating in the rental sector are connected to one another not only technically, but also socially, forming a multi-platform socio-technical urban infrastructure. Further, I demonstrate how these platforms are embedded with the state at the federal and local level, through the laws and bureaucratic structures which govern residency through "registration" in a particular locale. These localized border regimes (Gargiulo, 2023; Lebuhn, 2013a) act as constraints against which newcomers, as well as platform services, adapt, extending Mancinelli and Germann Molz's (2024) contention that middle-class mobilities are enacted with as well as against the State. Although middling migrants in Berlin are afforded relative flexibility in their housing choices, in comparison to other migrant groups, thanks

to largely professional jobs and secure visa statuses, their position in relation to local border regimes produces specific conditions of precarity. These experiences begin at the platform interface and are further exacerbated by intersectional experiences of discrimination.

The article proceeds as follows: First, I give an overview of the current rental crisis in Berlin and trace the emergence of a secondary market governed by alternative "sub-rental" contracts. Then, I turn to the platforms, contextualizing their emergence within debates around the current shortage of affordable housing in Berlin and the exacerbating role of "privileged" migration. In the section thereafter, my attention turns to the role of local government bordering regimes in constituting this digital arrival infrastructure, drawing on scholarship which frames registration as a central technique through which the governance of border regimes is outsourced to the local level (Gargiulo, 2017; Lebuhn, 2013a; Lebuhn & Holm, 2020). Finally, I synthesize this with the empirical data, building up a rough typology of platforms according to the way in which their use is constrained by residency governance regimes. These are large and long-term housing platforms; "medium-term" platform-mediated rentals (PMRs); platforms rented and shared; and supplementary tools. I then conclude by calling for further research at the intersection of Digital Geography and Migration Studies which engages more fully with "PropTech" platform use (Fields & Rogers, 2021).

2. Housing in Berlin: *Hauptmiete* and *Untermiete*

The city-state of Berlin currently faces both a housing shortage *and* a housing affordability crisis. Its Senate has estimated that the city will require 197,000 new homes by 2030 in order to cope with rapid population growth (Senatsverwaltung für & Stadtentwicklung, Bauen und Wohnen, 2019). However, even with new-build completion at around 17,000 new homes per year (Lindenberg, 2022), the specific dynamics of tenure allocation give rise to vast inequalities. Berlin is a city characterised by low-rates of owner-occupation (around 17%) even for Germany, the "nation of renters" (Aalbers, 2016; Investitionsbank Berlin, 2022). Most policy debate has been focused on the provision of long-term rental contracts (*Hauptmietverträge*). This type of contract is directly between one or several "head" or "chief" tenants (*Hauptmieter*) and the landlord (*Vermieter*). They are often open-ended, with rent rises minimised or controlled. However, in a context of rising rents, strict affordability criteria for new contracts leaves *Hauptmietverträge* increasingly out of reach for many Berliners. The ongoing housing shortage has given rise to a vast secondary market of sublets, where long-term contract holders (*Hauptmieter*) sub-lease all or part of their home to an *Untermieter* (subtenant). These subletting arrangements (*Untermietverhältnisse)* are leveraged by a vast array of different actors, from individuals looking to rent out their flat while they spend time abroad, to companies renting out "furbished" apartments on a month-by-month basis. *Untermietverhältnisse* are highly heterogenous. While some are arranged completely verbally without the landlord's knowledge, others might be standardised, lengthy documents sent out by a serviced apartment company's legal department. The least formalised *Untermietverhältnisse* allow subtenants to live in the property without formally occupying it—this is an important aspect which will I return to throughout this article. Unlike *Hauptmietverträge*, which are federally regulated by Germany's civil code (*BGB §535–§548*, 2023), *Untermietverträge* exist directly between the "head" tenant and subtenant. Subtenants are much more easily evicted than "head" tenants, even under the most formalised contracts.

This growth in the use of *Untermietverträge* has developed in parallel with the accelerating digitisation of Berlin's Real Estate market. This has emerged in turn against a backdrop of increasing in-flows of

transnational mobility to the city, partly incentivised by the Federal government's push to address worker shortages through skilled migration (Die Bundesregierung, 2024). Digital platforms now play a central role in facilitating the exchange of both *Hauptmietverträge* and *Untermietverträge*, with the distinction between the two often unclear to the user. The relative flexibility of *Untermietverträge* means that they are characterised by fine gradations of rights, protections, and legality. Platforms follow an economic logic which monetises the exchange of an object rather than the object itself (Srnicek, 2017). The most popular platforms in Berlin, *Immobilienscout24* and *WG-Gesucht*, allow users to filter and sort listings by housing characteristics (size, rent price, or area). However, it is much harder to distinguish between different types of provider (e.g., "furbished" room providers, chief tenants, private landlords, or large housing companies) or to establish what the legal basis for occupation would be. Users are left to assess this through clues in the listing's text or images.

3. Rental Platforms: "Arrival Infrastructures" for the "Middling" Migrant

The figure of the "middling" migrant has emerged in recent years in concert with a growing interest in the way various forms of capital facilitate and constrain transnational mobilities. Studies of middle-class mobilities such as retirement migrants (Botterill, 2017) or digital nomads (Hannonen, 2020) emphasize that despite the heterogeneity of these groups' motivation for spending time abroad, their relatively privileged status "often hides financial insecurity, employment and visa obligations, or housing insecurity" (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024, p. 190). Structures of the State designed to enforce the social contract through residency emerge as sites of "friction," which continue to contour how "middling" migrants are able to move through and across geographies (Cresswell, 2014; Tsing, 2005). Whilst they might be able to leverage privileges such as strong passports or desirable professional skills in order to negotiate residency, "middling" migrants often remain excluded from the welfare regimes enjoyed by citizens (Cook, 2022). Moreover, the forms of social and cultural capital they carry make it easier to live and socialize in prestige languages such as English, impairing their ability to accrue cultural knowledge necessary to negotiate institutions and infrastructures in the long-term (Barwick, 2022; Garcia, 2015).

Popular accounts attribute the current shortage of available homes in Berlin's rental sector to migration-fuelled population growth as well as affluent mobilities such as tourism (Guthmann, 2021; Hollersen, 2022; Mayer, 2013). Since the launch of *AirBnB* in Germany in 2013, the impact of short-term (ST) "holiday" style PMRs (ST-PMRs) have been the subject of extensive debate and controversy because of their relationship to increasing flows of affluent ST mobility (Aguilera et al., 2021; Coyle & Yeung, 2016; Gutiérrez et al., 2017). However, their role as facilitators of longer-term mobilities or permanent settlement in European housing markets has attracted less attention. Moreover, the intensive focus on ST-PMR's has distracted scholars from the diversification of the market. *AirBnB* now exists in Berlin alongside multiple "medium to long-term" digital housing providers like *Habyt*, *HousingAnywhere*, *Wunderflats*, or *SpotAHome*, all of which adopt different approaches to revenue generation. While some, like *Habyt*, offer serviced apartments with an *AirBnB*-style interface, others, like *Wunderflats*, make money by providing a space for "multi-sided market exchange" between landlords and tenants (Andersson Schwarz, 2017; Habyt, 2023a; Wunderflats, n.d.). These services exist alongside—and often advertise on—platforms which cater primarily to the long-term housing sector, whose existence long predates that of "disruptive" *AirBnB*. *Immoscout24*, and *WG-Gesucht*, two of the most well-known of these in Berlin, both of which have been around since the late 1990s (Rother, 2000). While discourses around *AirBnB* in Berlin link it to consumption-led, "taste-based"

gentrification and associated negative externalities, including urban displacement (Duso et al., 2020; Polat, 2015), the lack of attention on the emergence of the platform housing sector as a whole means that little is known about the way these platforms facilitate access to different housing arrangements. The current pressure on the rental sector in Berlin has also highlighted the importance of the platform as a stopgap for "middling" and affluent transnationals who can afford its elevated prices while they wait to access the formal rental sector (Novy, 2018).

Platforms operate "in the shadow" of formal rental regulations (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2022). Maalsen (2020a) and Maalsen and Gurran (2020) have highlighted how the high visibility of digital rental platforms makes them available to users far outside their geographical locale, making it theoretically possible to find accommodation from anywhere on the globe. Most rental platforms in Berlin offer multi-lingual interfaces, making them accessible to those without German language skills. In the absence of social connections, which Bernt et al. (2022) emphasize have particular importance in urban housing markets in Germany, they promise to quickly and efficiently facilitate access to accommodation. However, their position as commercial entities designed to extract revenue, combined with extreme imbalances in supply and demand in Berlin's rental sector, make this promise largely illusory in practice. Premium subscription programs, the processing and analysis of user data, and paid-ad space are commonplace means by which housing platforms in Berlin seek to generate profit. As Nasreen and Ruming (2021) point out, these profit motives would incentivize longer and more intensive use of housing platforms rather than quick securing of accommodation.

4. Registration, Residency, and Secondary Housing Markets

Registration is a bureaucratic process which allows governments to keep an up-to-date tally of the number of residents within a given area by recording changes of address. It is practiced in several European countries including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. In these jurisdictions, being "registered" is equivalent to occupying a property, ontologically preceding "the material condition of living somewhere" (Gargiulo, 2023, p. 68). As such, in the years since the Schengen Agreement, it has emerged as a tool to "outsource" the governance of non-citizen residents to local government actors. In the German context, Registration is a necessary perquisite to gain access to an array of essential services, including receiving government correspondence, ordering a SIM card, opening a bank account, or joining the library (Lebuhn, 2013a, 2013b), in part because of Germany's continued reliance on the traditional post (Distel, 2022). Since 2015, the registration process has required written permission from an apartment's owner, which is then checked against a land-registry database at an in-person appointment at a local government office (BMG, 2013).

Rental platforms have been seen to be generative of novel informalities (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2022). As Gillespie's (2010) now-classic paper argues, the term "platform" does extensive rhetorical work in sidestepping responsibility for platforms' content. Although landlords and *Vermieter* alike are legally required to provide the documents necessary to Register, in practice this is poorly enforced. Landlords retain powers of veto in allowing tenants to sublet. Many tenants therefore sublet their apartments with the explicit caveat that Registration at the property will not be possible. While the most well-known platforms, like *WG-Gesucht*, do little to police the large volume of "no Registration" listings on their pages, others in the "medium to long-term" space make the Registration an explicit part of their market positioning. For example, *Habyt* and *HousingAnywhere* both state that they offer only Registered accommodation on their FAQ page.

Remaining unregistered can have advantages. For those with EU passports, living without registration means no changes in tax residency as well as continuing to benefit from their home country's health insurance regime. Those who can enter Germany visa-free, such as US, UK, Australian, or New Zealand citizens, might be able to continue to work remotely for up to six months, leaving the EU once their tourist visa has expired. For those without these privileges, however, remaining invisible to the State can curtail one's ability to become embedded with institutions and infrastructures to an intolerable degree (Horton & Heyman, 2020). Both shared living and sub-tenancy arrangements can be difficult to negotiate and produce feelings of vulnerability (Clark et al., 2018; Ortega-Alcázar & Wilkinson, 2021). This is exacerbated by the legal structures which govern shared housing in Germany, in which head tenants dictate the terms of tenancy to other occupants or sub-tenants (Nöllke, 2023). Credit-referencing reports like the SCHUFA, a mandatory document for applying for most apartments, collect data on financial arrangements made within German territory (SCHUFA, 2023). Not being registered precludes access to the SCHUFA and other documents which can only be sent to a Registered address, such as letters from the tax office. Students are also unable to access the funds in the blocked account required to be opened for their visas—the amount currently required is €11,208 (Auswaertiges Amt, 2023). The following sections draw on empirical material to consider how the material condition of housing is negotiated for digitally, alongside, and sometimes secondary to, Registration.

5. Methodology

Digital practices are difficult to study in part because they are largely non-verbal, carried out through haptic gestures and touch. The insights in this article are drawn primarily from a research diary project, a method which aims to externalise the "emic perspectives"—the ephemeral and mundane thoughts and feelings of digital users—across a period of time (Shankar et al., 2018). By adapting the "Diary: Diary-Interview" method (Latham, 2003; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977), participants were given space to reflect on the fluctuating nature of housing platform use, which tended to follow a pattern of high intensity followed by fatigue. The durational nature of the method also allowed me to track how participants' understanding and expectations of the housing system in Germany shifted over the course of the project. By the end of our time together, participants who were new to Berlin had shifted their understanding of what constituted a "formal" housing arrangement substantially, coming to reference it in relation to their own needs.

The research diary projected was conducted over a period of 14 days in Summer 2022. Six participants were involved, with an additional five participants supplementing this material with a one-hour semi structured interview. They were recruited via social media groups and email lists catering to "Internationals" in Berlin, a byword for educated "middling transnationals" (Barwick, 2022). Diarists completed an initial 30-minute intake interview, where they were asked about their experiences with housing in Berlin as well as elsewhere. Over the following 14 days, they were then sent a daily prompt via message asking them to reflect on their housing search that day. The intention was to capture the potentially hidden effects of "digital labour," the affective and repetitive work of clicking and checking the platform on a mundane level (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013; Maalsen, 2020b). Following completion of this period, a follow-up interview was conducted. Here, participants were asked to comment on selected diary entries. Interviews took place mostly online, with one participant preferring to meet in person. Diary entries were sent via message, email and voice message, transcribed, and thematically analysed along with the interview material. What emerged from this process

was that the need to obtain or maintain Registered status determined the housing search's affective dimensions, correlating with increased feelings of stress.

The level of in/formality which participants could tolerate was also related to the institutional and social connections which underpin urban citizenship (Lebuhn, 2013a). Of the 11 participants in the study, 10 had citizenship from outside the EU and were on time-limited visas. Five had been living in the city for over two years, two had resided there on and off again for long periods, and three were new arrivals who had never lived in Berlin. Those with pre-existing connections to Berlin were more likely to have access to services which required Registration to access but not to maintain, such as bank accounts, or indeed social connections to homeowners or "chief tenants" at whose apartment they could register.

All those participating in the study had completed higher level education or equivalent. Participants' employment status had an effect on which platforms they favoured, as those with more secure employment were generally aiming to enter the long-term rental sector. Freelancers working in the arts ($n = 2$) those in postgraduate education ($n = 1$), and those on ST contracts ($n = 1$) were largely confined to shared and ST housing, as were those who had recently moved to Berlin to start a new job ($n = 2$). This meant engaging with platforms geared towards the shared and sublet sector. Only those in secure work—"working in tech" or consultancy—made intensive use of *Immoscout24*, which positions itself as offering entry into the long-term rental sector.

Table 1 lists all of the platforms participants used to seek housing over the course of the project.

The diary project revealed a rough typology of platform use, which depended on participants' required tenure type, required tenure length, and Registered/Unregistered status. Further analysis of the company information available for each of the 13 platforms mentioned in the project, as well as an additional 98 other digital housing entities currently operational in Berlin, allowed me to refine this further. The discussion is structured into four sections, which give an overview of how platform use is constrained by Registration as a residency regime. These are: large and long-term housing platforms; "medium-term" platform-mediated rentals (PMRs); platforms rented and shared; and supplementary tools.

Table 1. Platforms used by participants.

Platform	Used by × participants ($n = 11$)
Immoscout24.de	11
Kleinanzeigen.de	10
Facebook Groups	10
WG-Gesucht.de	9
Reddit page u/berlinsocialclub	3
Habyt	2
Immonet	2
Immowelt	2
HousingAnywhere	1
Wunderflats	1
WGCompany.de	1

6. Large and Long-Term Housing Platforms: *Immoscout*, *Immowelt*, and *Immonet*

Housing platforms which are geared towards entry into the long-term rental sector offer a range of automated identity verification and credit checks (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2022). These promise to make the process more convenient whilst reducing risk for landlords and estate agents. Yet these services usually require Registration,which "performs" occupancy in German territory (Gargiulo, 2023), in order to engage with them. It was through their use of *Immoscout24*, *Immowelt*, and *Immonet*, Germany's three largest housing platforms, that participants learned that they would not be able to enter into a long-term rental contract as a "head" tenant without first entering into a more informal one in which they could register:

> I wasn't even here [in Berlin] and already I had an *Immoscout24* premium membership. But then I mostly stopped applying on *Immoscout24*, because I figured that it wasn't really going to help. Even if I got any responses on *Immoscout24*, they were all really far away for one. But even if I got any responses, I did not have a SCHUFA, I didn't have any of that. It was really frustrating. (Participant A)

Housing platforms theoretically open up the practice of searching for housing from anywhere (Maalsen, 2020b). In practice however, a lack of formal residency in the location where housing is sought acts as a significant barrier. Whilst the SCHUFA credit check can be ordered online, it requires a registered address in order to confirm the applicant's identity (SCHUFA, 2023). Participant A had been advised by friends already in Berlin that an *Immoscout24* premium subscription—*MieterPlus+* was necessary in order to remain competitive on the platform, as it allows users to receive notifications of new listings first. However, compared to other premium user profiles, theirs attracted less attention. Without registration they were unable to produce a SCHUFA. They attempted to mitigate this handicap by applying to listings in more peripheral districts, further from valued amenities:

> It's never a matter of oh, it's close to a park, because that's not a choice that you can make anymore….I do know of people my age who would prefer to live like, within the more densely populated areas, but they couldn't find a place and now they're living on the outskirts. And they do dislike the fact that when they go out, there's nothing. (Participant A)

Immoscout24 and its competitor platforms, like *Immowelt*, incorporate tenant identity verification technologies which are embedded within national apparatuses of the regulation of non-citizens. Participants quickly come to see how these services enact barriers not only to entering the formal rental sector, but to living in desirable areas of the city, reifying existing exclusions experienced by migratory housing seekers (Bernt et al., 2022). Through engagement with these larger platforms, users begin to understand the importance of Registration within their new life in Germany as well as a barrier to accessing housing.

7. "Medium-Term" PMRs: *Habyt*, *SpotAHome*, *HousingAnywhere*, and *Wunderflats*

Sites like *Habyt*, *SpotAHome*, and *HousingAnywhere* have similar interfaces and functionality to ST-PMRs like *AirBnB*. However, they avoid the restrictions on the misuse of residential dwellings in Berlin by only offering rental periods of over 30 days (Zweckentfremdungsverbot-Gesetz—ZwVbG, 2013, § 1—§ 6a). They thus frame themselves as offering "medium- and long-term" furnished living (HousingAnywhere, n.d.).

This was seen as these “medium-term” platforms’ central advantage, as in contrast to *AirBnB*, booking a property also confers “guests” legal residency, with Registration an explicit guarantee (Habyt, 2023b). However, their listings are generally more expensive than those seen either on “long-term” or “rented and shared” housing platforms. Four participants made use of medium-term PMRs over the course of the project, with the explicit aim of securing or maintaining Registration. Those with the requisite funds viewed the high rental prices quoted on the platform as worth paying in order to extricate themselves from the problems associated with no registration. For example, no registration meant that Participant F was unable to apply for his work visa, meaning he was unable to start the job he had relocated to Berlin for:

> So eventually I found an apartment on *HousingAnywhere*. I first saw an apartment in *Moabit* which was beautiful…but unfortunately, I didn’t get it. And I had opportunity lined up to get something from *HousingAnywhere* for 900. It’s terrible, like 15 meter apartments, somewhere like in some horrible little place, but it was, I think 900. And it was immediate and could get *Anmeldung* [Registration]. It was three months or something like that. (Participant F)

This framing of medium term platforms illustrates Novy’s (2018) point about the potential for ST-PMRs to function as a housing stopgap as well as a tourist amenity, and illustrates longer-term changes in the sector as it responds to policy changes and post-COVID working and living patterns (Aguilera et al., 2021). Although investigations into middle-class mobilities such as “digital nomads” have highlighted the role short- and medium-term housing platforms play in facilitating living and working abroad (Mancinelli & Germann Molz, 2024), less is known about *why* and *how* people make use of housing platforms in response to local regulations, or across disparate mobile groups. In Berlin, the rental sector is predominated by long-term tenancies, meaning that there is a lower rate of turnover in the market compared to cities like London where tenancies generally run for twelve months or less. The rise to prominence in recent years of this new group of “medium-term” PMRs could be explained in terms of these migratory precarities. By only allowing “stays” of over 30 days, they operate within a regulatory framework of “temporary furnished apartments” and not holiday lettings, a middle space on a hierarchy of renter protections. Thus, they respond both to the increasing regulation of the ST-PMR space and to novel forms of precarity generated at the intersection of rental crisis and visa regulations.

8. Platforms Rented and Shared: *WG-Gesucht* and *WG-Company*

Shared rental housing platforms were considered to be the most accessible for those without Registration, whose status prevented them from accessing the required documents to make use of “formal” rental platforms and who might lack the funds to utilise ST-PMRs. All participants made use of this form of site, not out of any particular desire to live with others but as an accessible means to becoming Registered. *WG-Gesucht.de* and *WGCompany.de* were cited as the most important platforms designed to facilitate the selection of flatmates based on shared affinities and approaches to sharing space (Maalsen & Gurran, 2020; Nasreen & Ruming, 2021). However, the discrepancy between the supply of Registered living situations on the platform and the demand for them created power asymmetries. These were seen to be enacted through the repetitive and emotionally taxing work involved:

> It just seems like you can’t have any personality or like, be a body that actually takes up space. And I get frustrated. It really feels like they want such specific people or they don’t want to bother and have just,

> like, a statue. But at the end of the day, they have all the power so I just have to try and like, remove myself from it. (Participant B)

In contrast to ST-PMR style platforms, this set of sites is primarily "facilitative," generating revenue through ad space rather than by taking commission and offer little in the way of arbitration should things go wrong (Nasreen & Ruming, 2021). As such, while rental prices might be lower than on ST-PMR sites, monetary savings are offset by the degree of affective and repetitive work involved in selecting listings and self-positioning oneself as the "ideal" flatmate (Maalsen, 2019, 2020b). Rented and shared housing platforms in Berlin reflect the city's renter-dominated system of housing provision as well as its history as a hotbed of communal living experiments (Hannah, 2017). *WG-Gesucht* and *WGCompany* were both founded in the late 1990s and are primarily text based. *WG-Gesucht* offers the ability to filter by price, "temporariness," location and room size, as well as through generic categorisation of different styles of living arrangement which remain uncodified in the Anglophone world, such as the *Zweck-WG*, a flatshare in which only physical space is shared. Entering into the "informal" shared housing sector requires significant self-positioning work, in particular around the theme of attitudes towards the sharing of domestic space (Heath et al., 2017; Maalsen, 2019; Maalsen & Gurran, 2020). Consequently, not only is significant work is required to successfully obtain Registered housing on these platforms, but there is also a sense of Registration as a kind of asset, which can be traded in exchange for compliance with the "rules" of the flatshare:

> I kind of felt like if I applied to more ads of this kind, I was kind of going to have to cater to what the other person wants. Depending on how they write the thing, especially on WG-Gesucht, I alter my message to them accordingly….It's more like you're having to cater to their demands, and possibly when you do live together, it can be the same way….I've seen a lot of people be like "It's going to be temporary for a month and then we'll see how it goes. (Participant A)

Descriptions such as these were common among those interviewed and were felt to be emblematic of a more general power dynamic. New roommates, or indeed any nominally temporary occupant, are reliant on the existing tenant to correspond directly with the landlord in order to become registered (BMG, 2013). To participants, therefore, these existing tenants hold a prerogative over their access to much-desired services. Participants framed their "self-positioning work" primarily in terms of how to conceal their growing frustration at not being able to secure Registered housing in a context of precarious residency status. That recent migrants tend to be forced into more unstable accommodation is of course a longstanding concern in Urban Studies (Abrams, 1955; Glass & Pollins, 1961). The data here shows that the digitisation of rental housing exchange regularise these longstanding tendencies, not only through the functionality and design of the platform (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2022) but in terms of how choices between platforms are made.

9. Supplementary Tools

In addition to those discussed above, participants engaged with a further set of digital tools in order to develop their understanding of how these platforms fit together and thereby conduct "self-positioning work" most effectively (Maalsen, 2020b). A common theme here concerned how to navigate housing discrimination and overcome issues associated with Registration. Reddit emerged as an important digital platform used for this purpose, specifically the subreddits *u/berlinsocialclub* and *u/berlin*. Selecting new tenants on the basis of shared social, economic, or ethnic background is common, particularly in shared living situations (Clark & Tuffin, 2015;

Clark et al., 2018). Housing discrimination in urban housing markets in Germany is widespread. It has been framed as stemming from a desire to encourage appropriate "social mix" and avoid problems associated with urban segregation (Hanhörster & Ramos Lobato, 2021; Münch, 2009).

Using housing platforms on one's own means that there is little way of comparing the "success" of one application to those of others, although showing users their relative "chances" when viewing a listing is an important revenue generation strategy for *Immoscout* and *WG-Gesucht*. To most participants, who had experienced little friction when looking for accommodation in their home context, encountering barriers to accessing housing was a new experience. Reddit functioned as a way to compare their experiences with others'. In so doing, they came to understand themselves as subjects of a discriminatory housing system. The u/berlin subreddit allowed them to access tools and resources which promised to make the search for housing more efficient.

Four participants described making extensive use of the "wiki," an assembled body of knowledge pinned to the page summarising the forum's tips to help non-German users navigate Berlin's rental sector on *u/berlin*. It was described as a place to ask for advice and to debate current issues in Berlin's housing landscape. As such, it emerged as an important adjunct to the platforms discussed above, expediting the process of learning how to appear as a desirable tenant in a new and unfamiliar context, which was otherwise a process of trial and error. *u/berlinsocialclub* helped participants to navigate the problematics of registration by directing them towards specific housing platforms. It directed them to use "housing hacks" (Maalsen, 2022) such as telegram bots with access to platform APIs. It also functioned as a place where suspicions about potential housing discrimination could be confirmed:

> I don't know if you, you also saw this on the Berlin Reddit, the Social Club, that somebody posted an experiment that they had done. I mean, I've heard this already before. But this was just like, maybe that was pretty recently, actually, that he had an Indian name and his girlfriend had a German one. And they were doing the exact same application, and she would get called [back]. (Participant H, Interview 2)

Of course, this is a variation on a classical sociological field experiment commonly deployed in housing studies to measure housing discrimination (see Carlsson & Eriksson, 2015; Sawert, 2020). Similar instances were described by two other interviewees (it was not possible to verify whether they were discussing the same post). The use of experiments such as these indicates a familiarity with social science methods—which are also now widely deployed commercially in market research and service design (Grant, 2018). It also suggests the extent to which digitized housing discrimination has become problematized for this demographic of "Internationals," who tend to intervene individually rather than engage with local politicians or campaign groups. This reflects longstanding divides between themselves and the German-speaking political and media landscape to whom they are ambivalently "tourist" or "migrant" (Garcia, 2015). Here, *Reddit* acts as a supplementary resource and crowdsourced directory which gives a coherent shape to multiple and competing digital housing platforms.

10. Conclusion

This article has highlighted the way digital housing platforms are embedded within State regimes which regulate the presence of foreign nationals. My aim in doing so is to reignite debates around the role of

Registration in Germany as an everyday bordering practice (Lebuhn, 2013a, 2013b). I have explored how the literature on the digitization of the shared and "informal" rental sector might be extended in concert with a more contextualised understanding of the politics of mobility in the German context. Registered status has an impact on how digital platforms are selected and the way in which they are used. Further, registration is one criteria by which we might measure housing "formality" within Berlin's platform-mediated temporary and shared rental sector. However, the limited scope of this article means that there has neither been the space to discuss the ways in which other forms of regulation may affect housing platform use, or to engage with what Maalsen (2022) has called the "ambivalences" inherent to digitised housing informality, such as the potential for increased flexibility of tenure. However, the insights presented here point us in the direction of several further areas of research.

The first of these echoes and extends Gargiulo's (2017, 2023) call for further investigation into Registration as a bordering technology. This article has demonstrated that the necessity of registration for foreign nationals in many EU states is being leveraged commercially by digital housing platforms. However, the extent to which this plays out in similar ways in contexts which also have a form of Registration, such as Italy, is not known. Further, given the embeddedness of Registration within State and non-State services, the extent to which it is being instrumentalised in the service of revenue-generation by digital platforms outside the residential rental sector remains unclear. This could extend and deepen the existing scholarship around "migration industries" in Berlin beyond those seeking asylum (Bernt et al., 2022), allowing for a fuller picture of the commercial world involved in facilitating mobilities in Europe.

A second direction to explore would be the ways in which informal housing practices in the German context are structured through norms relating to shared housing practices. I have briefly alluded to the ways in which the history of shared living in Germany is intertwined with post-1968 "New Left" movements. Further research might investigate how these historic approaches to the sharing of space has impacted the design of housing platforms in the DACH-L region. A productive line of enquiry might seek to address these issues comparatively, with particular reference to the Anglo-American context. This study has shown how rental platforms are conceived as interrelated by their users in highly situated ways. The degree to which rental housing platforms explicitly position themselves as interconnected entities or "infrastructures" of housing provision across various contexts, and the ways in which this serves specific commercial interests requires further exploration. Further empirical work is needed in order to understand how these connections manifest technically, materially, and socially, generating new housing norms in the German context. Understanding more about how housing platforms are embedded with the governance of mobility are an important step in forming interventions which can equitably address the inequalities generated within secondary housing markets.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Susan Moore and Dr. Andrew Harris for their support developing this article. I extend my thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments.

Funding

This research has been supported by an Economic & Social Research Council 1+3 Studentship (grant number ES/P000592/1).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Aalbers, M. (2016). *The financialization of housing: A political economy approach*. Routledge.

Abrams, C. (1955). *Forbidden neighbors: A Study of prejudice in housing*. Harper.

Aguilera, T., Artioli, F., & Colomb, C. (2021). Explaining the diversity of policy responses to platform-mediated short-term rentals in European cities: A comparison of Barcelona, Paris and Milan. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *53*(7), 1689–1712. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X19862286

Andersson Schwarz, J. (2017). Platform logic: An interdisciplinary approach to the platform-based economy. *Policy & Internet*, *9*(4), 374–394. https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.159

Auswaertiges Amt. (2023). *Eröffnung eines Sperrkontos in Deutschland für Studierende vor der Einreise*. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/sperrkonto/375488

Barwick, C. (2022). Labour or lifestyle? Understanding urban incorporation of European middling migrants. *Global Networks*, *22*(3), 466–482. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12363

Bernt, M., Hamann, U., El-Kayed, N., & Keskinkilic, L. (2022). Internal migration industries: Shaping the housing options for refugees at the local level. *Urban Studies*, *59*(11), 2217–2233. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211041242

BMG. (2013). *Bundesmeldegesetz vom 3. Mai 2013 (BGBl. I S. 1084), das zuletzt durch Artikel 3 des Gesetzes vom 19. Juni 2024 (BGBl. 2024 I Nr. 206) geändert worden ist*. https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bmg/BJNR108410013.html

Botterill, K. (2017). Discordant lifestyle mobilities in East Asia: Privilege and precarity of British retirement in Thailand. *Population, Space and Place*, *23*(5), Article e2011.

Carlsson, M., & Eriksson, S. (2015). Ethnic discrimination in the London market for shared housing. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *41*(8), 1276–1301. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.965670

Clark, V., & Tuffin, K. (2015). Choosing housemates and justifying age, gender, and ethnic discrimination. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *67*(1), 20–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12054

Clark, V., Tuffin, K., Bowker, N., & Frewin, K. (2018). A fine balance: A review of shared housing among young adults. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *12*(10), Article e12415. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12415

Conradson, D., & Latham, A. (2005). Transnational urbanism: Attending to everyday practices and mobilities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *31*(2), 227–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183042000339891

Cook, D. (2022). Breaking the contract: Digital nomads and the state. *Critique of Anthropology*, *42*(3), 304–323.

Cresswell, T. (2014). Friction. In P. Adey, D. Bissell, K. Hannam, P. Merriman, & M. Sheller (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of mobilities* (pp. 107–115). Routledge.

Die Bundesregierung. (2024). *Fachkräfteseite*. https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/de/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR2HAM7Xu2mva4LXd61pAANqsJ4dOSHLSJSzED6F-W58BhDcz3hYfAT4t04_aem_eXVyB9z0Hbu75xlee3z3Jg

Distel, B. (2022). *Digitalwüste Deutschland?* Bundeszentrale fuer Politische Bildung. https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/digitale-gesellschaft-2022/505684/digitalwueste-deutschland

Duso, T., Michelsen, C., Schaefer, M., & Tran, K. D. (2020). *Airbnb and rents: Evidence from Berlin* (DIW Berlin Discussion Paper No. 1890). DIW Berlin. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3676909

Ferreri, M., & Sanyal, R. (2022). Digital informalisation: Rental housing, platforms, and the management of risk. *Housing Studies*, *37*(6), 1035–1053. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.2009779

Fields, D., & Rogers, D. (2021). Towards a critical housing studies research agenda on platform real estate. *Housing, Theory and Society*, *38*(1), 72–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2019.1670724

Garcia, L.-M. (2015). At home, I'm a tourist: Musical migration and affective citizenship in Berlin. *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, *2*(1/2), 121–134. https://doi.org/10.1386/jucs.2.1-2.121_1

Gargiulo, E. (2017). The limits of local citizenship: Administrative borders within the Italian municipalities. *Citizenship Studies*, *21*(3), 327–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2016.1277982

Gargiulo, E. (2023). Registration as a border: Shaping the population at the local level in Italy. *Geopolitics*, *28*(1), 439–463.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of "platforms." *New Media & Society*, *12*(3), 347–364.

Glass, R., & Pollins, H. (1961). *London's newcomers: The West Indian migrants*. Harvard University Press.

Grant, W. (2018). *101 UX principles: A definitive design guide*. Packt Publishing Ltd.

Guthmann, P. (2021). *Berlin auf dem Weg zur Mega-WG*. Guthmann Immobielen. https://guthmann.estate/de/blog/berlin-auf-dem-weg-zur-mega-wg

Gutiérrez, J., García-Palomares, J. C., Romanillos, G., & Salas-Olmedo, M. H. (2017). The eruption of Airbnb in tourist cities: Comparing spatial patterns of hotels and peer-to-peer accommodation in Barcelona. *Tourism Management*, *62*, 278–291.

Habyt. (2023a). *Contract details*. https://help.habyt.com/support/solutions/folders/103000307922

Habyt. (2023b). *Is it possible to do a registration of the address?* https://help.habyt.com/support/solutions/articles/103000055913-is-it-possible-to-do-a-registration-of-the-address

Hanhörster, H., & Ramos Lobato, I. (2021). Migrants' access to the rental housing market in Germany: Housing providers and allocation policies. *Urban Planning*, *6*(2), 7–18. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v6i2.3802

Hannah, M. G. (2017). *Dark territory in the information age: Learning from the West German census controversies of the 1980s*. Routledge.

Hannonen, O. (2020). In search of a digital nomad: Defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology & Tourism*, *22*, 335–353.

Häußler, M. (2022, December 20). Unerlaubte Untervermietung in Berlin: „Eine Wohnung zu kündigen ist unsolidarisch." *Berliner Zeitung*. https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/unerlaubte-untervermietung-in-berlin-eine-wohnung-zu-kuendigen-ist-unsolidarisch-li.294326

Heath, S., Davies, K., Edwards, G., & Scicluna, R. M. (2017). *Shared housing, shared lives: Everyday experiences across the lifecourse*. Routledge.

Helmond, A. (2015). The platformization of the web: Making web data platform ready. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), Article 2056305115603080. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603080

Hollersen, W. (2022, November 25). Berlin und die Wohnungsnot: „Panikattacken und Existenzängste gehören zum Alltag." *Berliner Zeitung*. https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/berlin-und-die-wohnungsnot-panikattacken-existenzaengste-gehoeren-zum-alltag-li.288273

Horton, S. B., & Heyman, J. (2020). *Paper trails: Migrants, documents, and legal insecurity*. Duke University Press.

HousingAnywhere. (n.d.). *Home*. https://housinganywhere.com/renting-out-private--United-Kingdom

Investitionsbank Berlin. (2022). *IBB Wohnungsmarkt Bericht*. https://www.ibb.de/media/dokumente/publikationen/berliner-wohnungsmarkt/wohnungsmarktbericht/ibb-wmb-zusammenfassung-2021.pdf

Kuehn, K., & Corrigan, T. F. (2013). Hope labor: The role of employment prospects in online social production. *The Political Economy of Communication*, *1*(1).

Latham, A. (2003). Research, performance, and doing human geography: Some reflections on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *35*(11), 1993–2017. https://doi.org/10.1068/a3587

Lebuhn, H. (2013a). Local border practices and urban citizenship in Europe: Exploring urban borderlands. *City*, *17*(1), 37–51.

Lebuhn, H. (2013b). Urban citizenship, border practices and immigrants' rights in Europe: Ambivalences of a cosmopolitan project. *Open Citizenship*, *4*(2), 12–21.

Lebuhn, H., & Holm, A. (2020). Strengthening urban citizenship in Berlin: Three modes of claiming and expanding rights, resources, and recognition at the local level. In B. S. Turner, H. W. Wolf, G. Fitzi, & J. Mackert (Eds.), *Urban change and citizenship in times of crisis* (pp. 81–101). Routledge.

Lindenberg, H. (2022, March 29). Klotzen allein reicht nicht—Der Wohnungsneubau muss Quantität und Qualität, Klimaschutz und Bezahlbarkeit vereinen. *Berliner Mieterverein e.V*. https://www.berliner-mieterverein.de/magazin/online/mm0422/klotzen-allein-reicht-nicht-der-wohnungsneubau-muss-quantitaet-und-qualitaet-klimaschutz-und-bezahlbarkeit-vereinen-042214.htm

Maalsen, S. (2019). I cannot afford to live alone in this city and I enjoy the company of others: Why people are share housing in Sydney. *Australian Geographer*, *50*(3), 315–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2019.1613026

Maalsen, S. (2020a). "Generation share": Digitalized geographies of shared housing. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *21*(1), 105–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1466355

Maalsen, S. (2020b). "We're the cheap smart home": The actually existing smart home as rented and shared. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *24*(8), 1383–1402. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2022.2065693

Maalsen, S. (2022). Hacking housing: Theorising housing from the minor. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *23*(1), 163–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2022.2059846

Maalsen, S., & Gurran, N. (2020). Finding home online? The digitalization of share housing and the making of home through absence. *Housing Theory & Society*, *39*(4), 401–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2021.1986423

Mancinelli, F., & Germann Molz, J. (2024). Moving with and against the state: Digital nomads and frictional mobility regimes. *Mobilities*, *19*(2), 189–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2023.2209825

Mayer, M. (2013). First world urban activism. *City*, *17*(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.757417

Münch, S. (2009). "It's all in the mix": Constructing ethnic segregation as a social problem in Germany. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, *24*(4), 441–455. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-009-9160-2

Nasreen, Z., & Ruming, K. (2021). Struggles and opportunities at the platform interface: Tenants' experiences of navigating shared room housing using digital platforms in Sydney. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, *37*, 1537–1554. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-021-09909-x

Nöllke, M. (2023). Ihr Mieter möchte untervermieten. In M. Nöllke (Ed.), *Vermieter-Ratgeber: Mietvertrag, Nebenkosten, Kündigung und Mieterhöhung* (pp. 165–171). Haufe. https://doi.org/10.34157/978-3-648-16799-1_10

Novy, J. (2018). "Destination" Berlin revisited. From (new) tourism towards a pentagon of mobility and place consumption. *Tourism Geographies*, *20*(3), 418–442. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1357142

Ortega-Alcázar, I., & Wilkinson, E. (2021). "I felt trapped": Young women's experiences of shared housing in austerity Britain. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *22*(9), 1291–1306. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2020.1829688

Polat, D. K. (2015). Migrants and the city: Gentrification, ethnicity and class in a Berlin neighborhood. In E. Z. Guler (Ed.), *New opportunities and impasses: Theorizing and experiencing politics* (pp. 76–87). Dakam Publishing. https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/full-record/WOS:000469908100007

Richardson, L. (2020). Coordinating the city: Platforms as flexible spatial arrangements. *Urban Geography*, *41*(3), 458–461. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1717027

Rodgers, S., & Moore, S. (2020). Platform phenomenologies: Social media as experiential infrastructures of urban public life. In M. Hodson, J. Kasmire, A. McMeekin, J. G. Stehlin, & K. Ward (Eds.), *Urban platforms and the future city* (pp. 209–222). Routledge.

Rother, R. (2000). *Surfen ins WG-Zimmer*. Die Tageszeitung: taz. https://taz.de/!1195064/

Sawert, T. (2020). Understanding the mechanisms of ethnic discrimination: A field experiment on discrimination against Turks, Syrians and Americans in the Berlin shared housing market. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *46*(19), 3937–3954. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1577727

SCHUFA. (2023). *SCHUFA FAQ fuer Privatpersonen*. https://www.schufa.de/faq/privatpersonen

Senatsverwaltung für & Stadtentwicklung, Bauen und Wohnen. (2019). *Stadtentwicklungsplan Wohnen 2030*. https://www.berlin.de/sen/stadtentwicklung/planung/stadtentwicklungsplaene/step-wohnen-2030

Shankar, S., O'Brien, H. L., & Absar, R. (2018). Rhythms of everyday life in mobile information seeking: Reflections on a photo-diary study. *Library Trends*, *66*(4), 535–567. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2018.0016

Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform capitalism*. Wiley.

Tsing, A. L. (2005). *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press.

Wunderflats. (n.d.). *Rent out your furnished apartment with Wunderflats*. https://wunderflats.com/content/en/landlord

Zimmerman, D. H., & Wieder, D. L. (1977). The diary: Diary-interview method. *Urban Life*, *5*(4), 479–498. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124167700500406

About the Author

Leah Aaron is a PhD candidate at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. Her current research builds on this article, focusing on the role of the digital and migratory housing trajectories in Germany.

URBAN PLANNING

ISSN: 2183-7635

Urban Planning is an international, peer-reviewed open access journal of urban studies aimed at advancing understandings and ideas of humankind's habitats — villages, towns, cities, megacities — in order to promote progress and quality of life.

The journal is founded on the premise that qualitative linked to quantitative approaches provide mutually sympathetic outcomes for adding knowledge to the complex and polyhedral system par antonomasia as the city is.

www.cogitatiopress.com/urbanplanning