

Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory Meets Southern Countries: Towards New Theoretical Challenges

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In the last twenty years, Italy has faced the phenomenon of the so-called ‘forced’ international migration. The increasing numbers of asylum seekers have forced the Italian government to implement and organize a reception system, which has been defined as characterized by emergency and exceptionality (Avallone, 2021). This system implements a widespread reception framework managed by public authorities and is characterized by policies of subsidiarity where different actors, public and private, are involved at various levels of government. Generally, public authorities subcontract third sector actors and NGOs to provide inclusion and integration services to international protection seekers and holders.

Despite central efforts to achieve harmonization on the national level, this scenario entails considerable differences between territories, due to social, economic and cultural reasons, but also to the commitment and willingness to promote paths of integration and inclusion from the street-level workers involved (Lipsky, 1980). The role of these agents, and in particular the discretionary practices they apply in order to cope with the task of implementing a state mandate concerning also the management of the politics of time (Jacobsen et al. 2021) that run within asylum and integration policies and practices is the focus of this contribution. The mobility of migrants is mainly driven by the reception regime: a dispositive that controls the movements and shapes the temporalities of new arrivals (Sanò and Zanottelli, 2022). Migrants are constantly exposed to spatial and temporal uncertainty caused by waiting for documents or not being able to enter the labor and housing market. I will focus my reflection on how the politics of time have been managed by street-level workers involved in the reception system in two medium-sized Italian cities located in the region of Emilia-Romagna, Bologna and Parma, which are acknowledged as ‘virtuous’ systems of urban asylum governance (Bazurli, Campomori, Casula 2020). Despite the central role of a variety of street-level workers – such as social workers, case-workers, police officers – in the refugees’ field have been already investigated (Campomori 2007; Borrelli 2021; Giacomelli 2021; Giudici 2020), less attention has been devoted to the issue of their discretionary power and agency in dealing with the management of the legal and social limbo which caught asylum seekers and refugees while waiting to receive a status – and, therefore, a residence permit – for international protection or while trying to activate paths of work and social inclusion (Della Puppa and Sanò 2021). I argue that street-level workers considered in this

paper use their discretionary power as a tactic (de Certeau, 1984), tracing trajectories which contrast the inconsistency of the Italian integration immigration policies (Barberis and Boccagni, 2014; Di Rosa and Allegri, 2022). While the mechanisms of the reception system stuck asylum seekers and refugees, street-level workers try to use this suspended and dilatated time to implement practices which reflect their integration and inclusion visions and values.

The reflections contained in this paper are the result of a research conducted within the framework of a European project, namely «SiforREF - Integrating Refugees in Society and the Labour Market Through Social Innovation» (funded by EU's Interreg Central Europe Program). The team collected 20 semi-structured interviews (10 in Bologna and 10 in Parma) during the summer of 2019. The research involved policymakers, stakeholders, and third sector workers, who deal with asylum seekers and refugees policy-making and integration services. While the focus of the research was to understand how social innovation was included in the local polices concerning asylum seekers and refugees' integration, during the interviews the dimension of temporalities and the waiting time asylum seekers and refugees have to spend in the reception center emerged intensely. Because of this I decided to adopt the street-level approach lens to analyze narratives of street-level workers, who daily experience the tensions between the implementations of governmental rules and procedures, while answering asylum seekers and refugees needs and requests.