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How Street-Level Bureaucrats Become Policy Entrepreneurs: The Case of Urban Renewal in Israel

Einat Lavee and Nissim Cohen

University of Haifa

elavee@campus.haifa.ac.il / nissimcohen@poli.haifa.ac.il

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Abstract

Under what conditions will implementing bureaucrats act as policy entrepreneurs seeking to change policy? What strategies do these entrepreneurs adopt to increase their influence on policy design? While previous studies argue that street-level bureaucrats can become policy entrepreneurs, the basic assumption is that they will do so through the *implementation* of policy. Using the case of social workers working with disadvantaged populations in the context of urban renewal in Israel, we developed a theoretical model based on in-depth interviews, focus groups and textual source analysis. The model demonstrates that the combination of three factors leads social workers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at *influencing the design of policy* on the individual level, through a process of street-level bureaucrats' policy entrepreneurship. We also draw conclusions about the possibility of applying the theoretical model to other types of street-level bureaucrats operating in other policy domains.

Introduction

In recent decades the environment of street-level bureaucrats has undergone far-reaching changes (Brodkin 2011; 2012; Hill and Hupe 2014; Lipski 2010; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010). With the rise of neoliberal policies, they are now working in an environment characterized by increasing privatization and the withdrawal of the welfare state. As part of these changes, public social service organizations are operating under the influence of the New Public Management wave of reforms that involve improving efficiency, contracting out, privatizing the delivery of services, and adopting private-sector management methods including an outcome-based orientation.

Social workers are street-level bureaucrats whose professional routine has been strongly influenced by this neoliberal ideology (Anonymous). The withdrawal of the welfare state has also led to increased hardship among disadvantaged populations that has translated into direct pressure on public social service providers. In many countries influenced by the neoliberal ideology, poverty and increased inequality have become a common phenomenon (Pierson 2001). Social workers are often the front-line workers who must deal with these issues. The organizational demand to adopt more innovative activities and change traditional modes of practice has becoming increasingly loud, emphasizing the important role of social workers as policy actors who facilitate and enrich the formulation of social policy (Weiss-Gal and Gal 2014). In this changing environment, social workers are often confronted with situations in which they lack the knowledge needed to respond to the pressures arising from their clients' hardships, particularly when they must deal with new areas outside their traditional routines and beyond their professional expertise.

Urban renewal policy, meaning redevelopment occurring mainly in impoverished inner city areas, is a domain in which this reality is clear. These processes cause monumental transformations in the communities and lives of those who reside in the renewed areas (Hyra 2008). The assumption underlying the policy in this field since the mid-twentieth century is that the lower classes who live in these areas would benefit from the renewal of their own houses and the renaissance of their neighborhoods and that their general wellbeing would improve (Altshuler 1969; Lowry 1960; Smith 1971). However, in exploring the outcomes of urban renewal, scholars tend to agree that these changes have a negative effect on the residents of these areas (Lees 2008). In the majority of cases, they are forced to move to new disadvantaged neighborhoods, due to their inability to continue to live in these areas where expenses increase sharply and the nature of the community changes drastically. Moreover, they lack the knowledge and power required to confront the powerful actors driving the renewal processes. Under such circumstances, disadvantaged populations often turn to social workers for help.

However, social workers find it very difficult to respond adequately to this unfamiliar challenge. Is it reasonable to assume that this new reality would change the traditional patterns of professional practices of these front-line workers, leading them to adopt more innovative and entrepreneurial strategies? Specifically, we ask what factors could motivate social workers to act as what are called street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs and what strategies do they adopt to influence policy design? As we will demonstrate, urban renewal is an excellent environment for examining the possible changes in the practices of social workers.

Based on research using the grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006), we argue that the combination of three elements leads social workers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at influencing policy design on the individual level through street-level bureaucrats' policy entrepreneurship: 1) acute crises, 2) lack of effective knowledge in the area, and 3) the demand for policy practice in the context of New Public Management. In the case we explore, Israeli social workers working with disadvantaged populations in the context of urban renewal believe that their clients face severe threats that require an immediate response. However, they often do not possess the required professional, organizational, and political knowledge to address these needs. These circumstances, combined with the requirements of New Public Management, often push them to become part of the political game and influence public policy. Nevertheless, as we will explain, street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs have several characteristics that they can leverage, leading them to engage in unique entrepreneurship strategies.

Street-Level Bureaucrats and Policy Entrepreneurship

Policy entrepreneurs are individuals who exploit opportunities to influence policy outcomes – without having the necessary resources required for achieving this goal alone. They are not satisfied with merely promoting their goals within institutions that others have established. Rather, they try to influence a given reality to create new horizons of opportunity using innovative ideas and strategies. These persistent individuals use innovative ideas and non-traditional strategies to promote desired policy outcomes. Whether they come from the private, public or third sectors, one of their

defining characteristics is their willingness to invest their resources – time, energy, reputations and sometimes money – in the hopes of a future return (Kingdon 1984; Mintrom 2013; Anonymous).

Due to the activeness and assertiveness required for these acts, the literature on policy entrepreneurs among bureaucrats has focused mainly on high-ranking bureaucrats rather than low and middle-level officials. Arnold (2015) lists three factors causing the literature to ignore the possibility that street-level bureaucrats might act as policy entrepreneurs: 1) the assumption that policy entrepreneurs are from the political elite and that the elites determine policy, 2) the assumption that the policy initiatives of the policy makers will be implemented fully (Pralle 2006), and 3) the fact that the majority of the literature dealing with policy entrepreneurs focuses on external entrepreneurs outside the bureaucratic system.

However, in the last decade, several articles have linked street-level bureaucrats with policy entrepreneurs, resulting in a new category called street-level bureaucrats' policy entrepreneurship. This category goes beyond adaptation to reforms in welfare and social policy that create routine patterns of informal practice, in what Brodtkin defines as routine discretion (Brodtkin 2011). It underscores the fact that street-level bureaucrats can adopt entrepreneurial strategies via implementation practices. For example, Arnold (2015) focuses on the implementation of policy in wetland management. Petchey, Williams and Carter (2008) describe policy implementation and cancer treatment in Britain. Durose (2007) deals with policy implementation in neighborhoods.

While these studies indeed demonstrate that street-level bureaucrats can become policy entrepreneurs, they assume that they are using entrepreneurial actions in their implementation of policy and thus its outcomes, but that others have shaped the policy. Thus, in these cases, street-level bureaucrats try to change the outcomes of policies created by others. In this article, we ask whether street-level bureaucrats might use entrepreneurial strategies to influence the *design* of the policy as well.

Indeed, the literature has already discussed policy practice as the deliberate effort to change policy design as a core element of the social work profession (Jansson 2008: 14). Policy practice aims to protect and improve the lives of vulnerable populations, traditionally through political participation in demonstrations, lobbying, and signing petitions. Although policy practice has been relatively neglected in recent decades (Weiss-Gal 2016), the efforts to increase awareness about it have become more common with the rise of New Public Management, when social workers have been called upon to actively influence social policy processes. Such actions have been described as a professional duty and even an ethical obligation. Gal and Weiss-Gal (2013) stress the importance of the individual as one of the factors that affects the policy practice of social workers. In various places around the world, scholars have identified individual characteristics that may impede or encourage involvement in policy practice.

Nevertheless, activities as an interest group are not the only method through which social workers can influence public policy. We maintain that social workers as individual actors can promote changes in social policy through entrepreneurship. Hence, a small number of ambitious individuals can adopt innovative, unconventional methods for achieving their goals. Providing the missing link between policy practice

and policy entrepreneurship is a real need for understanding both of these subjects in a new context.

Urban Renewal in Israel

Despite criticism, urban renewal projects are key elements in government policies in cities worldwide (Lees and Ley 2008) and reflect political agendas (Bernt 2012). Both central and local governments are key players. They promote neoliberal urban policies that are market-oriented, enhancing the partnership between planning and capital, and increasing social inequality (Newman and Ashton 2004).

Like other countries, the Israeli government promotes urban renewal projects, which play a major role in policies to resolve the housing crisis and reduce the overall cost of living (Bouso 2016). In order to improve and promote these projects, in August 2016, after two years of meetings, the parliament (Knesset) approved The Governmental Authority for Urban Renewal Law (2581-2016). According to the new bill, each local government should identify the optimal areas for renewal and building. Moreover, the bill encourages the establishment of a local administration to facilitate these projects and support the citizens throughout the process. However, the bill does not specify how the residents' rights should be protected and what practices should be enacted to ensure support for disadvantaged populations.

Indeed, ensuring residents' rights is far from the reality in Israel today. Examining ongoing urban renewal projects reveals that in most cases, local governments (Riba 2016) and private sector players (entrepreneurs and contractors) (Kashti 2016) are acting in ways that marginalize the residents in favor of increased

profits. The current policy often requires residents, who may not know their rights, to deal directly with private sector players. They often have difficulty confronting these players and their pressures, and make decisions that harm themselves. Examples include signing bad contracts without understanding them and with no legal assistance. Moreover, knowing that their neighborhood is the subject of renewal evokes fears and insecurity that the roof over their heads will be taken away.

With the expansion of the urban renewal phenomenon in Israel, the fundamental and vital importance of public social services, as mediators between citizens and other players in renewal projects, becomes clear. A contemporary report published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services (Bashan 2016) indicates that social workers in public social services are the first (and often the only) source of support for citizens who face difficulties caused by renewal-related issues. However, social workers often find themselves ill prepared to deal with a phenomenon that traditionally was outside their area of professional expertise. At the same time, due to their unique front-line position, social workers might be the first to identify the acute need to protect citizens from the current harmful policy and the changes necessary to ensure the citizens' wellbeing and social inclusion.

Methodology

In this study, we tried to identify the circumstances under which implementing bureaucrats, meaning those involved in putting policy into practice, change their

traditional ways of political participation and engage in policy entrepreneurship activities. For this purpose, we used multiple research methods.

In-Depth Interviews

We began by interviewing front-line social workers and managers of public social services departments. We selected the interviewees based on their involvement in urban renewal projects with their clients. During these interviews, it became clear that we also had to approach other players who might be able to shed light on the theme of street-level bureaucrats engaged in policy entrepreneurship activities. Using a snowball sampling, we asked the interviewees to refer us to others who fit this description and might have another perspective on the subject matter.

Overall, we conducted 28 in-depth interviews: 16 with social workers in the local government (at various organizational ranks), 4 with high-level bureaucrats in the national government, 2 with NGO employees, 3 with architects, and 3 with academics. Interviews occurred in person and via telephone. Their length depended on the interviewee's knowledge and lasted from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours. We recorded the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. We asked the social workers to describe their involvement in urban renewal projects in terms of what they do and how. Specifically, we were interested in understanding their perceptions regarding engagement in policy entrepreneurship activities, their views about the opportunities and barriers to these actions, and their personal experiences in promoting policy initiatives. The goal of the other interviews was to shed light on the phenomenon of street-level bureaucrats engaging in policy entrepreneurship activities in the area of urban renewal.

Focus Groups

Based on our understanding that engagement in political activity such as policy entrepreneurship is a social issue, we explored street-level bureaucrats' perceptions regarding such activity by conducting a focus group with front-line social workers. The focus group included 15 participants, all of whom were involved in urban renewal issues with their clients. The discussion focused on the participants' general perceptions regarding engagement in policy entrepreneurship activities, as well as their personal experiences.

We also conducted one focus group with residents who live in urban renewal areas. We decided to do so based on our initial analysis of the interviews with the social workers, where the theme of the pressure on their clients as a strong motive for their engagement in policy entrepreneurship activities became evident. The focus group included 25 participants, and the discussion centered on their perceptions regarding the necessity of public social workers to promote policy that would ensure citizens' rights within urban renewal. We also recorded and transcribed the focus groups' discussions.

Textual Sources

To explore the research topic in greater depth, we triangulated our findings from the methods above with supplementary textual sources including legislative documents, protocols of the parliament's special committee meetings on the subject of establishing a governmental authority for urban renewal, and print and online press sources such as reports from the media, NGOs and the government on the subject of urban renewal. We chose the 30 texts we analyzed based on their relevance to the research topic.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the transcriptions of the interviews and focus groups using Charmaz's (2006) method of grounded theory. Following Charmaz, we began the data analysis at the beginning of the research and continued throughout the process of data collection. We began with an initial coding of the emerging categories, which kept us open to all of the theoretical directions that the data implied. We then used focused coding to create a strong analytic foundation for categorizing the data. Both authors conducted a focused coding of the data independently. We then compared our results, which led to consensus about the main categories. In this stage, we decided which codes made the most analytical sense. Examples of the categories are: perceptions of a crisis, challenges and constraints, coping strategies, coalitions and interactions, motivations for action, opportunities and advantages, understanding the need for action, and working under New Public Management. Ultimately, we arrived at a theoretical coding designed to identify possible relationships between categories. As this stage developed, we noticed the recurring combination of several main factors leading social workers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at influencing policy design at the individual level.

The theoretical model that emerged from the analysis contained three main conditions that prompt social workers to engage in policy entrepreneurship activities within the context of governmental urban renewal policy. In addition, we identified the strategies they employ in their attempts to influence policy design. Figure 1 depicts the model.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The Conditions Leading to Street Level Policy Entrepreneurship

Three factors emerged as catalysts prompting social workers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at influencing policy design at the individual level: 1) perceptions of an acute crisis situation, 2) lack of effective knowledge in the area, and 3) the demand for policy practice.

Perceptions of an Acute Crisis Situation. People feel they are in a state of crisis when they face obstacles to achieving goals that are important to them, obstacles that seem insurmountable using customary methods of problem solving (Caplan 1961:18). Our findings revealed that social workers feel they are facing a crisis when their traditional methods of implementing policy no longer work. Such situations may arise when they sense that their clients' rights, needs, wellbeing and even personal safety are jeopardized and require their immediate response. The literature has established that in many cases, clients' wellbeing is very important for street-level bureaucrats (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003).

As urban renewal projects in many of Israel's disadvantaged neighborhoods increased, more and more citizens began approaching public social services in their area looking for support and solutions to the difficulties they experienced in their encounters with contractors and business entrepreneurs, who often used manipulation and aggressive marketing strategies (Moran and Tzur 2016). As the phenomenon expanded, social workers began to understand that they were facing a new situation, one in which their clients faced a severe threat that required their immediate response.

A frequent claim of both the activists and residents who participated in our focus group was that they did not have the necessary access to relevant data nor the capacity

to understand it. As one activist said: “Most of the people here just don’t know how to get the needed information to handle this very problematic situation or the basic skills to deal with it.” Similarly, a social worker explained: “It’s disgraceful how this area is handled; the residents are helpless.” Another social worker described this situation as a “disgrace,” saying: “We realized that the tenants were going to get letters from the Housing Ministry, and we were in shock at the Housing Ministry’s stance. The letters were shocking, actual eviction notices, and we said, ‘There is no way we’re going to let the tenants [fend for themselves] and not go to the barricades on this [matter].’” Both the social workers and our other interviewees agreed that the urban renewal was a threat to disadvantaged citizens. One architect referred to these programs as “monstrous.” Another high-level bureaucrat termed the situation an “ecological disaster,” and one academic described it as “one huge catastrophe.”

Faced with this reality, the social workers understood that without their immediate intervention, their clients might face severe damage to their rights, needs, wellbeing and even personal safety: “The developers are very aggressive. They want to profit, to make as much money as they can at the expense of the weak. Disinformation is disseminated in the form of newsletters that a certain developer distributes that contain nearly false content. People have already lost faith totally: [in] city employees, developers, their own neighbors.”

As a result of what they regarded as threats, the street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs realized that they must influence policy design, as one social worker said: “If there’s no policy from on high, you make one; the policy doesn’t take disadvantaged populations into account, and doesn’t see the need that we see. Our job is to go up the

bureaucratic ladder and bring it to the policy makers.” Similarly, another social worker explained, “When the government established the Urban Renewal Authority, I realized that they thought of everything except those who live there. That’s the problem with apartments - people are living there.”

Lack of Effective Knowledge. A second factor that emerged as salient in encouraging entrepreneurship among social workers was the lack of professional and political knowledge required to influence policy effectively. The majority of the participants maintained that they were not trained nor had the required knowledge to respond to the issues that urban renewal raised. Common statements among them were: “We need to engage in this issue, but we have neither the needed information nor the professional tools”... “They don’t teach you how to do this in social work school”... “We have no information. We’re feeling our way in the dark. A lot of pressure, lack of knowledge and frustration. We’re in a very bad place.” One high-level professional summarized: “Social work doesn’t work [in this field]. It doesn’t know how to do it.”

The social workers maintained that one major gap in their knowledge is their inability to read and understand the legal documents needed to support their clients in court: “I simply don’t know how to read legal contracts, have zero understanding about planning programs.” This lacuna encouraged social workers to adopt innovative methods of action.

Another concurrent theme was the lack of political knowledge. The social workers realized that they were unfamiliar with the political arena:

Residents come with expectations, and we can’t respond to many things due to our limitations. Then we realized that it’s much bigger than just our small part in social services, and our local work with City Hall: If we honestly want to make a change

and a genuine response to the residents... These decisions are made at a much higher level.

Not only were they unfamiliar with the political arena, but they also did not know how to maneuver effectively in it: “All these things are a lot of money, a lot of politics, a lot of power relations: It’s City Hall, it’s the Authority, it’s the state, it’s money, it’s land, it’s property taxes, it’s lots and lots and lots of stuff that’s beyond our knowledge.”

Regardless of their level in the organization, most civil servants see themselves as responsible for the implementation of strategic organizational goals (Schwartz 1987). For our social workers, to achieve their strategic organizational goals – assisting their clients – they must have the relevant professional and political knowledge.

Demand for Policy Practice. Finally, the third major factor that emerged from the analysis as motivating street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs was a growing demand for policy practice. Under the influence of New Public Management, the common assumption among Israeli scholars and practitioners is that social workers should become part of the political game and influence public policy more intensively than had been the case in the last few decades (Weiss-Gal 2016). The social workers’ narratives reflected this changing environment:

In our department we have a call, a kind of imperative, a real encouragement about this issue. It’s a changing reality, a process that is taking place among social workers around the country, the understanding that they have to be policy sensitive and understand the implications of policy for their clients.

Interviewer: Is there a change in the demand for social workers to engage with policy practice?

Interviewee: The call for policy practice has indeed increased in the last few years. But in community social work, it has always been part of the job requirement; it’s not new.

As the words of a public social services department head clearly indicate, the social workers believe that to influence policy outcomes, they must engage in policy practice: “Today we’re in a place where we realize that our job as social workers is to be agents of change not only in words, but in deed. There’s a policy of expecting us to deal more with practical matters, but we have neither the knowledge nor the tools [to do so].”

The Strategies of Street-level Bureaucrat Policy Entrepreneurs in the Context of Urban Renewal

Policy entrepreneurs who are street-level bureaucrats have unique characteristics that offer them both advantages and disadvantages. Their main challenges are rooted in the fact that these bureaucrats are usually located relatively low in the organization's hierarchy. In most cases, they do not possess the formal authority or justification to engage in policy design. Their perspective is often less broad than that of high-level decision makers. Usually, they do not have direct formal channels of communication with high-level bureaucrats and politicians, nor have close informal relationships with these high-level decision makers.

Their main advantages derive from their familiarity with the field and their close relationships with those who operate within it, their ability to identify social needs and windows of opportunity for action, and their close relationships with citizen-clients and ability to influence the public. In addition, their professional expertise in their field makes others consider them neutral authorities with broad based knowledge. Therefore, the public trusts them, because it regards them as operating without political interests.

Indeed, after acknowledging both the urgent need to act and the challenges rooted in their position as low-level bureaucrats, several motivated social workers

began functioning as street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs using unique entrepreneurship strategies: octopus-like coalition building, the acquisition of relevant professional and political knowledge, and the provision of professional and political knowledge to their allies.

Octopus-Like Coalition Building. The first strategy our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs used was establishing coalitions. We termed this strategy octopus-like because it involves multiple ways of navigating, operating using various methods, and maneuvering around political and bureaucratic barriers. This strategy is based on multi-directional team building that is cross-sectorial (alliances with players from the public and private sectors and NGOs), inter-ministerial (alliances with players from their own office and other offices in the administrative system), and cross-hierarchical (alliances with high and low-level decision makers) on the local and national levels. Their potential allies are not only politicians and bureaucrats but also members of interest groups or the public.

One important coalition was built with NGOs and legal clinics in academia that provided expertise in relevant legal areas: “Because City Hall doesn’t want to invest money in it, I said that I had to look for NGOs that would help us, as it’s hard to understand the legal language. So we contacted Rabbis for Human Rights, and they assisted us with the law and the Knesset.”

Another important coalition was with city planners and other planning and engineering professionals:

If we were to go to City Hall alone, and sound the social welfare call, they wouldn’t hear it. But we had a window of opportunity, and it was great. We went to the Engineering Department and explained to them that the social welfare problem

clashes with the engineering problem, and they realized that the plan couldn't be approved. In that way, we got to the City Manager and voiced the neighborhood's distress.

Similarly, a high-level professional interviewee attributed the successful influence of one street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneur to her ability in creating such coalitions: "Today, the Engineering Department hears her. When they attend Knesset hearings, they go as partners, and it's beautiful to see. It's not trivial. She works hard, she's smart, and she knows how to 'tango' with them."

Our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs also allied themselves with high-level officials from their organization: "I involved the Community Department Director. I said, 'I want to blow this thing to pieces, and at the level I work at, I can't go all the way.'"

Other allies came from other offices such as the Ministry of Construction and Housing and the Ministry of Interior: "We established a direct line to her [a senior official in the Housing Ministry], so every time she was exposed to a social welfare issue, she was persuaded that the social welfare aspect was important."

Another effort was made to cultivate coalitions with politicians whom the street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs believed were interested in the issue. Leading examples include Orly Levi-Abekasis (a member of the committee on the issue of establishing a government authority for urban renewal) and Elli Cohen (the committee's head): "We initiated a meeting with Orly Levy Abekasis in order to enlist her support for our position paper that we wanted to submit to the Knesset committee."

Understanding the importance of public pressure on politicians, our entrepreneurs also built coalitions with residents and activists within the community:

We said, ‘We have to bring the hard-core residents, our best, and we also have to debrief them.’ We told them, “Listen. You have a one-time opportunity to convince the mayor that social work is needed in these jurisdictions.’

We took clients to the Knesset. First we prepared them, told them what to say. The committee head couldn’t ignore them; he had to give them the floor.

In addition to coalition building, in their efforts to promote policy change, they worked hard to increase their professional and political knowledge. One social worker explained the importance of possessing such knowledge: “You have to be able to read plans, understand how a planning process works. If you come with methodological knowledge, you can effect significant change that benefits the residents. “

Gaining Professional and Political Knowledge. The second strategy our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs used was accumulating the knowledge required for promoting desirable policy outcomes. This knowledge can generally be divided into two categories: professional and political.

Following Hudson (1997), we define professional knowledge as “...information or understanding deriving from theory, research, practice or experiences considered to contribute to the profession's understanding of its work and that serves as a guide for practice” (p. 38). The need to accumulate new knowledge is linked to what Eraut (1985) defines as a limited overlap between the syllabi of training courses and practice-derived knowledge, which is especially true for front-line professions such as social work.

In our case, the social workers improved their through five methods: 1) participating in workshops and conferences in the area of urban renewal: “I took a two-year course called Social Welfare Aspects of Planning, and it was there that I was exposed to everything that goes on at the legislative level;” 2) attending academic courses and consulting with professionals from academia, NGOs, and the public and private sectors in relevant areas: “We work in cooperation with organizations or non-profits, and they give us the parts that we don’t have, for example, they explain to us how to read a bill proposal;” 3) taking part in ad-hoc forums: “I joined the national forum of the social worker knowledge community on urban renewal;” 4) engaging in autodidact ways of learning such as reading professional literature in legislation and planning: “I began reading everything I could put my hands on: first, media articles and then more professional material such as reports of NGOs working in the area of urban renewal;” “I have friends who are lawyers and architects, and I asked them to explain things to me;” 5) arranging public conferences to better understand the community's needs: “We initiated public meeting of residents, round tables, to capture in a more comprehensive way what they need, what are the acute issues, and what they expect from us.”

Political knowledge refers to “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 10; 1993). One of the most important factors in gaining political knowledge is understanding the institutions within which street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs operate, as well as recognizing the players operating in the specific field, their relative power in the arena, as well as their motivations and goals, and their interactions with other players.

Without a comprehensive understanding of the formal and informal institutions, no organized political activity can take place.

Our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs worked hard to increase their cognitive skills, gain access to information in the new field in which they wanted to operate, and had a strong motivation to expand their knowledge in this area. They accomplished these goals by learning from and consulting with people who already possessed such knowledge, engaging in political activity and receiving feedback from these activities, and learning from past political events and the experiences of others: “We learn how to work with Knesset Members, how to approach Knesset committees at the right time, how to enlist the ones who’ll work for us. It requires learning.”

One main source for such knowledge was the social workers' participation in parliamentary meetings and discussions regarding the establishment of the Governmental Authority for Urban Renewal, in which they could directly observe the political power relations, understand the legislative practices and personally experience what happens behind the scenes of policy design. By attending these meetings, they also established relationships with politicians by enlisting them "on the personal level, beyond the committee meetings." Acquiring political knowledge led to further realizations: “Over the course of the committee meetings, we realized that in the meetings, you can’t take the floor for more than two minutes; you have to be very focused. But if you bring them to the field, then it’s a different game, and it has huge significance.”

Furthermore, during the process of gaining political knowledge, the social workers realized that in order to change the reality they must address not only the local

level but also the national level of decision makers: “We began to realize that we needed to act in the political arena, and not just in the local arena, in order to help the residents, because things are stuck, they’re not moving forward, and many of these things are stuck at the legislative level.”

The increased interactions with politicians led street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs to understand that, in the wake of the massive demonstration in 2011 about the increased cost of living, they had a window of opportunity during which the politicians felt pressured to promote social issues, specifically regarding inequality in the housing arena. “The social welfare protests brought about an understanding that the difficulties of the population with which we work don’t stem from improper management on their part, but rather from failed policy.”

The street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs learned that during this window of opportunity, some politicians were more interested in promoting social issues so approaching them might prove fruitful: “I feel that at the moment we’re in a period wherein Knesset Members are thirsty for social workers who’ll present social welfare issues to them, and they lead change at the level of improving the lot of the disadvantaged populations.”

Provision of Professional and Political Knowledge. The third strategy our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs used was sharing their professional and political knowledge with others to improve their potential allies' ability to help them promote the desired changes in policy, given that they did not possess the necessary resources for achieving the desired goal by themselves. Having accumulated this new knowledge, our street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs understood that they should

provide this knowledge to their allies – both decision makers and citizens: “You have to work with the residents themselves: counsel, guide, advocate, everything related to directly working with them, including bringing them to public involvement and planning processes, not from an emotional place, but from a place of knowledge.”

Sharing knowledge proved to be a complex art. It required not only providing the right amount of detail for each person but also, and probably most importantly, convincing them that they needed the knowledge. They also tried to simplify the necessary knowledge: “One problem is that the committees want lots of documents and position papers. The Knesset Members don’t always read all of it, so we went over the [relevant] clauses with [a Knesset member] and explained them to her.”

The analysis demonstrates that street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs invested time and energy in convincing their colleagues that such knowledge was necessary to influence the wellbeing of their clients and the community as a whole.

After creating the necessary motivation to expand their professional and political knowledge, they began providing them with this knowledge through four methods: 1) organizing workshops and conferences about the professional and political aspects of urban renewal: “We learned the subject thoroughly, and we built a public campaign model. We held a public campaign conference, and we hold a similar one in every neighborhood;” 2) developing academic and non-academic courses and encouraging their employees, colleagues and the public to participate: “From what I learned [in the Social Welfare Aspects of Planning course], I understood it as a workshop for residents;” “We formed a relationship with the university, and we formulated an urban renewal curriculum called Academe in the Community;” 3)

arranging department meetings in which they exchanged their news, ideas and on-going activities, and invited professional outsiders to teach various skills such as the ability to understand planning programs and legal documents; 4) establishing websites where citizens could obtain the necessary information online: “We built a website for the residents’ use. It’s organized by stages that we recommend they work according to. Each stage has a public campaign kit [that guides them in] how they should take action at that stage.”

Discussion and Conclusion

We opened with the question of under what conditions implementing bureaucrats would act as policy entrepreneurs. Our grounded theory analysis reveals that the combination of three elements leads social workers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at influencing policy design at the individual level. Using the case study of urban renewal in Israel, we demonstrated how an acute crisis situation, lack of effective knowledge and a demand for policy practice motivated social workers to become street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs in their efforts to influence the design of urban renewal policy. Given the challenges and advantages that arise from their unique characteristics as street-level bureaucrats, these persistent street-level bureaucrat policy entrepreneurs engaged in unique entrepreneurship strategies. They established octopus-like cross-sectorial, inter-ministerial and cross-hierarchical coalitions with various players. They also worked on increasing their professional and political knowledge in the urban renewal context, and provided relevant knowledge to their governmental and non-governmental allies.

These strategies affected policy outcomes significantly. On the national level, their entrepreneurial activities influenced the design of the bill regarding the establishment of the Governmental Authority for Urban Renewal. The final version of the bill contained more safeguards for the residents' needs and interests than previous versions of the bill. On the municipal level, their entrepreneurial activities influenced the local city planning policy. Protections for social welfare were taken into consideration along with business, engineering and architectural considerations. On the organizational level, social services departments allocated specific workers to address issues regarding urban renewal, reducing the potential and actual harm and distress to residents in urban renewal areas, specifically disadvantaged populations.

These practices go beyond what Brodtkin (2011) defined as routine discretion. According to her important observation, street-level bureaucrats not only respond to performance incentives but also use their discretion to adjust it, producing informal practices that are substantively different from—and more diverse than—the original objectives of policy design. The practices of our social workers demonstrate that under certain conditions, street-level bureaucrats may become part of the political game and influence public policy, not by implementing the policy they are given but through their direct involvement in the design of that policy.

Nevertheless, similar to the points already noted in the literature, the motivations of our street-level bureaucrats are varied and sometimes difficult to identify. In accordance with Lipski's (1984) observation, regardless of street-level bureaucrats' concern for their citizen-clients, we should understand their engagement with entrepreneurial activities less as heroic altruism and more as professional survival.

In other words, the case described may reflect a reality where New Public Management imperatives give rise to more selfless and client oriented forms of street-level bureaucracy in which street-level bureaucrats consider their own interests as well as those of their organizations and their clients in decisions about when to engage in political entrepreneurship.

Can we generalize our findings to other policy contexts? Mintrom and Norman (2009) argue that there is a real need for a closer study of the motivations and strategies of political entrepreneurs as well as the interactions between them and their specific policy context. Indeed, there might be many factors prompting street-level bureaucrats' engagement with the practices of political entrepreneurs. As a single case, the situation we presented has specific time, place, and policy elements. Therefore, we do not make the claim that precisely the same dynamic will emerge in all circumstances. Thus, future research should examine the conditions that promote political entrepreneurship among street-level bureaucrats as well the strategies they adopt in various policy domains.

Despite the limitations of dealing with a single case, our theoretical insights may be useful to many other policy domains and types of street-level bureaucrats for several reasons. First, our analytical model is extremely relevant to social workers working in various policy contexts, as urban renewal is not the only situation in which the three factors encouraging political entrepreneurship are present. Second, the analytical model is relevant to other social service providers such as teachers, doctors and nurses who also operate in a challenging environment in which they must meet the needs of disadvantaged populations under the constraints of what they perceive as problematic policy. In such a climate, the managerial culture and language are radically altering the

traditional modes of action (Gregory and Holloway 2005), However, in an era of increasing demand for policy practice (Weiss-Gal and Gal 2015) and the need to confront social injustice, motivated social service providers will actively struggle for change. Finally, the analytical model may also be useful to all types of street-level bureaucrats who work under the new managerialism. For example, although the police and prison guards are not required to practice policy per se, when they become involved in a situation in which their citizen-clients are confronting an acute crisis, and they lack the knowledge to deal with this new challenge, these civil servants feel that their professional and organizational goals and interests are threatened. Such a lack of knowledge places street-level bureaucrats at a disadvantage in their negotiations with other professionals within and outside their own agencies. They are not confident in challenging decisions made by others, and, in some cases, this lack of knowledge exacerbates the difficulty of decision-making by raising the possibility of alternative courses of action (McDonald, Postle and Dawson 2008), such as spontaneously engaging in practicing policy.

Nevertheless, when it comes to public policy, motivation and good will are usually not enough. Traditional participation channels will not always prove effective. Therefore, using non-traditional and innovative strategies may significantly increase the likelihood of success in influencing policy outcomes. Thus, our practical recommendation is the need to encourage street-level bureaucrats to adopt and use political entrepreneurship strategies, as well as to improve our understanding regarding the barriers and challenges they might face in their effort to do so.

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Legislation

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