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Co-producing Urban Infrastructures of Solidarity

Comment on Homberger et al. (2022)

The study of local border regimes and inclusive practices toward migrants with precarious legal status is often examined from a single perspective. While some studies mainly investigate (and compare) varying municipal policies and the role of local governments toward irregular migrants (»municipal activism«, see Spencer and Delvino 2019), others emphasize the role of non-governmental actors and (urban) social movements. However, so far, researchers have paid little attention to the multiplicity of state/municipal and civil society actors who are co-producing and negotiating local welfare arrangements for irregular migrants within urban settings. To obtain a nuanced understanding, a more process-oriented and relational perspective is required in which the different solidarity practices and actors are not analysed in isolation but rather in their complex interplay. Inspired by Bourdieu's (1989) relational field approach, which avoids a dichotomous distinction of the state and civil society, we can consider urban migrant politics as a localized social field in which various state and non-state actors (each with specific resources and differing power) are involved (Ataç and Schilliger 2022).

The paper of Homberger et al. (2022) is highly illuminating in this respect. The authors develop a multifaceted framework for examining the inclusion of migrants with precarious legal status at the urban level by taking a closer look at the »negotiations over precarity within municipalities« and by capturing the complex dynamics at play.

Firstly, the paper makes a significant contribution by highlighting the complexity inside municipalities. When analysing inclusive urban policies toward migrants with precarious legal status, it is an oversimplification to view »the city« as a uniform actor. Within the municipal administration, very

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different ways can be present for taking and implementing an inclusive approach toward migrants with precarious legal status. They may well contradict each other, so that in fact only some municipal offices and service providers are open to migrants with precarious legal status, while others are less committed in this regard. Furthermore, mayors and city councils may declare it to be a ›sanctuary city‹, but this does not mean that inclusive policies are actually implemented appropriately within municipal administrations. As the example of Toronto (Schilliger 2019, p. 105–107) shows, adopting inclusive policies requires sufficient budget funds, public awareness campaigns, and education measures for officials and employees of public institutions if the inclusive practices toward migrants with precarious legal status are to remain more than just an empty promise. To grasp the implications of inclusive policies ›on the ground‹, more in-depth (ethnographic) research on urban ›street-level bureaucracies‹ would be highly desirable.

Second, Homberger et al. emphasize that it is crucial to include the practices of the variety of civil society organizations in the analysis of cities' inclusive approaches. The solidarity practices of CSOs are often less spectacular and far more invisible than city officials' public declarations of inclusive migration policies or political claims by social movements. While some CSOs provide services on their own (commissioned by municipalities or as independent organizations), others help migrants with precarious legal status to navigate the tricky terrain of bureaucracy (which consists not only of public officials and service providers but also of private companies and welfare institutions). In this context, it is important not to view CSOs from an overly narrow perspective of urban governance by evaluating just their role in the provision of certain municipal social services but to broaden the focus. CSOs can be seen as (co-)producers of an urban ›infrastructure of solidarity‹. This encompasses ›solidarity work and alliance-building, the creation of (counter-)spaces on different scales, the production and sharing of (counter-)knowledge, and the formation of social relations of solidarity and mutual care‹ (Schilliger 2020, p. 532). For example, it is usually only through civil society actors and their outreach activities that migrants with precarious legal status can even be made aware of the rights to which they are entitled within the city. And it is only thanks to the long-established relationship of trust between migrants and certain activists or volunteers that migrants with precarious legal status can actualize their rights and dare to go to a hospital or to enroll a child in school. Facilitating pathways to social services thus also builds on less visible aspects such as safe spaces, sharing knowledge, and the creation of affective and caring relationships (Atac and Schilliger 2022).

My *third* and final comment is a call to examine the negotiations over precarity inside municipalities from an intersectional perspective and thereby

to acknowledge multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities and different axes of discrimination along categories such as gender, class, and race. So far, only a few studies address how bordering practices within cities are experienced differently among migrants with precarious legal status according to their social positioning and situatedness within society. When analysing inclusive frames of local decision makers, as well as practices within local bureaucracies, future research could have a stronger focus on how certain groups are granted or denied access to urban resources according to logics of »everyday intersectional bordering« (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019).

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