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Social workers as street-level policy entrepreneurs

Inbal Aviv[1] | John Gal[2] | Idit Weiss-Gal[3]

[1]Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

[2]Social Work, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

[3]Social Work, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Correspondence
John Gal, Social Work, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.
Email: john.gal@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract

Knowledge on street-level bureaucrats as policy entrepreneurs is in its infancy. This article contributes to this emerging field by examining three cases of successful efforts by social workers employed by local social services in Israel to introduce local policy change. These processes varied in the issues that they addressed and the length of time that the policy process took. In each case, a small number of low- and meso-street level community social workers were identified as policy entrepreneurs. Despite their limited resources, formal authority and political capital, the social workers invested efforts over long periods of time into furthering policies they believed would help the communities they worked with. The strategies adopted included seeking legitimacy; creating and disseminating knowledge; participating in policy arenas; and generally eschewing subversive tactics. The interplay between professional affiliation and institutional context informed their motivation to address specific social problems and the strategies they adopted.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Of the diverse policy actors involved in the formulation and the design of public policies, street-level policy entrepreneurs (SLPEs) have been identified as playing a crucial, yet often overlooked, role (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018). This article contributes to the effort to better understand the role of SLPEs in bringing about the adoption of local social policies by focusing on the interplay between professional and institutional affiliation. It draws upon three case studies of the policy entrepreneurship of social workers employed by local social services in Israel. In each of these cases, street-level social workers initiated, and eventually succeeded in bringing about, policy change that extended the boundaries of their professional activity on the municipal level. The case studies offer insights into questions pertaining to the motivations and strategies of SLPEs during the policy formulation process.

1.1 | Street-level policy entrepreneurs

With the expansion of the policy formulation process to additional actors and its devolvement to the local level as a consequence of the governance process (Bonoli et al., 2019), attention to the role of street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) in formulating and designing policies, has been forthcoming (Cohen & Klenk, 2019; Durose, 2007). Moving away from Lipsky's (1980) emphasis on the importance of discretion in the way in which SLBs interpret and implement policies, this literature has focused on efforts by SLBs to consciously shape policies' design and, in doing so, to become "street-level policy entrepreneurs" (Cohen, 2016; Gunn, 2017).

John Kingdon's (1984) discussion on the place of policy entrepreneurs as key actors in placing issues on the agenda of policymakers set the stage for a growing discourse on the role of these individuals (Rawat & Morris, 2016). Policy entrepreneurs are typically seen as "energetic actors who work with others in and around policymaking venues to promote policy innovations" (Mintrom, 2019, p. 1). They are described as individuals who further policy change because they have the capacity to exploit opportunities due to their knowledge, power, and tenacity. Moreover, they relate to the cognitive bases of policymakers, are aware of the importance of timing policy advocacy efforts, and adapt to their environment to exploit or create windows of opportunity (Cairney, 2018).

An emerging body of literature has shown that SLBs can also been portrayed as policy entrepreneurs. Initially, SLBs identified as playing the role of policy entrepreneurs, were described as bureaucrats seeking "to develop or adopt policy innovations intended to improve the implementation processes they prosecute and to entrench these innovations in the day-to-day activities of bureaucratic peers" (Arnold, 2015, p. 309). However, SLBs can do more than just improve implementation processes. They can, and do, act to influence the design of policy (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2011; Lavie et al., 2018; Lavie & Cohen, 2019). SLPEs are typically ambitious street-level state-employed professionals who are willing and able to invest time, energy and their reputations in bringing about policy change. They well understand the bureaucratic context and the needs of actors within it, are astute at identifying opportunities to further their agenda, and have the capacity to work with others to achieve their goals, particularly given the fact that they often lack the political power or formal status usually associated with policy formulation. Crucially, they have the tenacity to endure throughout the policy process, contributing to its various stages and developments (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018). The SLPE discourse has described the advantages and disadvantages of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs, has identified the conditions conducive to their policy engagement and has noted the various strategies that they adopt in their policy efforts.

Members of different professional groups can be found among the low- and higher-level professionals within administration hierarchies who become SLPEs. These include nurses, doctors, teachers, police officers, health development workers, engineers, local environmental inspectors, and social workers (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Durose, 2007; Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Lavie et al., 2018). While all of these share in common an effort to influence policy, they obviously differ in the policy fields in which they are active and the issues that they address. We contend that their engagement in policy is also impacted by their professional and institutional affiliation.

Despite the substantial advances that the SLPE discourse has made in recent years, key questions pertaining to the contexts within which SLPEs work, their roles in the policy process and the strategies that they employ remain unanswered. Additionally, given the fact that SLBs are affiliated to different professions, the impact of professional affiliation and its interplay with institutional affiliation, on the activities of SLPEs has yet to be explored.

1.2 | Social workers as policy entrepreneurs

Due to their role as front-line professionals in social services, social workers have always figured prominently in studies on SLBs though it is their use of discretion that has dominated in these (Evans & Harris, 2004; Gofen, 2014; Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018). As is the case for other SLBs, the policy role (if at all) of street-level social workers has usually been seen as narrowly emphasizing individual efforts to influence the form that the implementation of

policies takes. These efforts are not generally perceived as seeking to bring about formal change in policy designs or to initiate new policies but rather to thwart, what they perceive as, the unjust aspects of existing policies (Hoybye-Mortensen, 2015; Ostberg, 2014; Trappenburg et al., 2019). With this, the role of street-level managers, among them social work managers, in articulating lacunae in existing policies has recently been identified (Gassner & Gofen, 2018).

This lack of emphasis in the SLB literature on the specific policy role of social worker SLBs is unfortunate for, due to their proximity to the subjects of the policies that they implement, social workers are acutely aware of the positive and negative implications of these policies. Assuming that individual's problems are inevitably linked to their environments (Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2008), the social work professional discourse has traditionally regarded bringing about beneficial changes in those environments through policy interventions an integral part of social workers' professional role (Hare, 2004; Klammer et al., 2019). Indeed, a common core principle in codes of ethics in social work is a commitment to advocating policies which benefit service users (British Association of Social Workers, 2014; National Association of Social Workers, 2017).

Since the 1980s, the engagement of social workers in policy formulation processes has been the subject of a growing and substantive body of normative, theoretical, and empirical discourse in the social work literature (De Corte & Roose, 2020; Feldman, 2020; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013; Jansso, 2014; Nouman et al., 2020; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2014). This literature has identified diverse routes through which social workers, individually and collectively, have sought to influence social policies. One major focus of this discourse has been on "policy practice," on-the-job activities by individual social workers on behalf of their clients with the aim of influencing policy design (Weiss-Gal, 2017a). The research has revealed that street-level social workers engage in policy processes as part of their job, albeit to a limited extent, that this takes diverse forms, and that various strategies have been adopted in order to further policy goals (Weiss-Gal, 2017b). It has also identified factors associated with these. In particular, professional training alongside personality factors are associated with the motivation of social workers to engage in policy formulation and the strategies that they employ. Moreover, engagement in policy by social workers is facilitated by the organizational culture of their place of employment and crucially by management support for their policy practice (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2015).

The dominant tendency within the policy practice scholarship has been to view policy engagement by social workers as one of their options to further the well-being of their clients. In most cases, this has been seen to take the form of a single action or a small-scale effort to intervene in one of the stages of the policy process, generally on the local or organizational level. Research findings underscore that social workers' policy engagement is typically informal and indirect (Weiss-Gal et al., 2020). As such, the integration of knowledge on those cases in which individual social workers have played a policy entrepreneurship role, actively and intensively engaged in efforts to promote policy change directly and formally over a long time period, has the potential to enrich significantly this discourse.

In short, though social workers have been the specific subject of research in the emerging SLPE literature (Lavie et al., 2018; Lavie & Cohen, 2019), the impact of the normative foundations of social work and the types of strategies and skills that members of this profession adopt when seeking to further policy change is understated in this discourse. At the same time, while there are indications that some frontline social workers do engage in furthering specific policy goals intensively and over long periods of time, in the policy practice discourse in social work this has not been conceptualized as a distinct topic for research, nor has the term "policy entrepreneur" been employed in the social work literature.

In Israel, the context within which this study was undertaken, social workers are the providers of social services operating within local authorities. Employees ranging from management to front-line workers within these services are required by law to be qualified social workers and to hold, at the very least, a recognized BSW degree. They are employed directly by the local authorities though the Ministry of Welfare is the source of most of their funding and it regulates their work. These local social service departments typically comprise primarily of social workers specializing in diverse population groups or needs. These are either case workers, who focus on providing services to individuals and families, or community social workers (CSWs) (Spiro et al., 1997). Over the last two decades, policy practice

has also been a growing subject of interest in the social work discourse in Israel. It is an integral part of a social workers' professional responsibility (Israel Union of Social Workers, 2018), and has been formally identified by the Ministry of Welfare as one of the tasks of local social services (State of Israel, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, 2010). Policy practice is currently taught in all schools of social work and in continuing training programs under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare (Schwartz-Tayri et al., 2020).

1.3 | The current study

Existing knowledge in public administration and in social work indicates that frontline social workers engage in diverse activities aimed at influencing policy to better serve their clients (Lavie & Cohen, 2019; Tzadiki & Weiss-Gal, 2020), yet the knowledge on the policy entrepreneurship of members of this profession is limited. This study seeks to contribute to the SLPE discourse by exploring the role of social workers as SLPEs. More specifically, it endeavors to better understand the distinctive motivations and strategies that affect the policy engagement of SLPEs affiliated to this profession. Three cases in which social workers employed by local social service departments, the largest employer of social workers in Israel, succeeded in bringing about local policy change, are studied. Given that the literature identifies this policy level as that where social workers' policy activity is most pronounced (Tzadiki & Weiss-Gal, 2020), the cases are all local policy initiatives. The focus on successful cases enables us to study the engagement of social workers during the full course of the policy process. The examination of these three cases sheds light on these research questions: Which social workers were involved in policy change? What was the SLPEs' role in initiating the policy process? Which strategies did the SLPEs adopt?

2 | METHODOLOGY

A case study methodology was adopted in order to facilitate a deep analysis of the role of social worker SLPEs. This enabled us to contextualize the study, to follow the evolving roles of the social workers throughout the policy formulation process, to identify the social worker policy entrepreneurs and the strategies they employed, and to assess the end-result of the efforts (Yin, 1994). The criteria for choosing cases in this multiple-case study were that the policy change process in which social workers were involved reached completion and that it led to change in municipal policy. All took place in three cities in central Israel.

Interviews and document analysis were employed. The interviews and the data collection were carried out between November 2015 and January 2018, after approval from the Tel Aviv University Institutional Review Board. Thirty-seven semi-structured interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the interviewees. All of the interviews (except for three, in which the interviewees did not consent) were recorded and transcribed. In the three interviews where recording was not permitted, the meetings were summarized in writing during the interviews. The 34 interviewees included: social workers (28), an organizational consultant, politicians (2), and urban planning professionals (2). Three of the interviewees were interviewed twice. The interviewees were selected with the assistance of an SLPE in each specific case.

The documents included meeting summaries (83), minutes of steering committees, city councils, and district planning board meetings (35), press clippings, internal correspondence between professionals in the local authorities (29), letters from city residents to the local authority (14), social service department data reports (3), an invitation to a seminar (1), and PP presentations (8). Some of these were provided by the interviewees themselves, while others were obtained through the Internet or municipal archives. Based in these sources, the analysis of the cases consisted of three stages (Kaufman, 1998). Initially, the authors created detailed and chronological descriptions of each of the cases. In the second stage, the cases were analyzed with a focus on the interventions by the social workers and a better understanding of the context within which these took place. Finally, a comparative analysis of the three cases

was undertaken in order to identify similarities and differences in the actions of the social workers. Due to the need for brevity, a limited number of the interviews (see Appendix) and documents are referred to in this article.

A process of identifying cases suitable for this study was based on the predefined case selection criteria. An application was made to the director of the social service section of the Federation of Local Authorities in Israel, requesting the names of local authorities in which, to her knowledge, social workers had been involved in policy innovation at the municipal level. The social service department directors of the relevant local authorities were then contacted. A total of nine queries were sent. The cases chosen varied in the policy spheres in which the social workers were involved, the policy involvement processes, the strategies employed, the partners in the processes, and the policy change outcomes.

3 | THE CASES

3.1 | Case 1 (C1): Local urban planning policy

This case describes activities by social workers intended to mitigate the detrimental impact of urban renewal upon residents of low-income neighborhoods (Geva & Rosen, 2016; Trop, 2017). Over a 7-year period (2007–2014), four social workers sought to convince the municipal leadership to incorporate safeguards into the approval process of major urban renewal projects in low-income neighborhoods. These were intended to prevent cases of infringement on the rights of the residents of these neighborhoods by real estate corporations. The efforts culminated in the inclusion of social workers coordinating public participation in the urban renewal administration and, crucially, to the adoption of a requirement that developers address the social impact of urban renewal plans as a condition for approval of these plans.

3.2 | Case 2 (C2): Promoting women's employment

Beginning during a period of economic downturn (Bank of Israel, 2004), this case describes efforts by social workers to place employment-related activities for women on the municipal agenda. Between 2002 and 2015, three social workers endeavored to bring about the adoption of local policies intended to train and integrate low-income women into the labor market. Prior to this policy entrepreneurship, the municipality refrained from engaging in labor market policies, these being left to the state Employment Service. The policy engagement by the social workers led to the establishment of a municipal employment center offering work insertion programs for women and the mayor's agreement to appoint a municipal employment officer.

3.3 | Case 3 (C3): Establishing social services for migrant workers

This case describes a campaign by social workers to adopt local level policies to address the needs of foreign migrant workers. The efforts of social workers to affect these policies began in 1996 following a large influx of migrant workers to the city (Bartram, 1998; Kemp & Raichman, 2004). A small group of three social workers, among them the head of the social services, engaged intensively in this policy process, which in 1999 led to the establishment of an aid center for the foreign community as an integral part of the social services department. The adoption of this policy was exceptional given that the central government refused to offer social services to migrant workers or to fund activities on their behalf. The center established in the city was the first of its kind in the country and was funded entirely by the municipality (Minutes of the Municipal Finance Committee meeting held on May 26, 1999).

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | The social worker SLPEs

In all of the cases, a small number of front-line social workers were directly and consistently involved in the policy process (4 in C1, 3 in C2, 3 in C3). Given the long-time span of C1 (7 years) and C2 (15 years) cases, there were inevitable personnel changes during the policy process. However, the social workers were replaced by others, who continued to play a policy role. The social workers in all three cases can be identified as SLPEs (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2003). They were street-level professionals who invested resources (time, knowledge and efforts) into furthering a policy that they strongly believed would help the communities they worked with. The social workers sought diverse avenues to affect policy and were involved in all the stages of the policy formulation process, ranging from agenda setting through suggesting policy options and formulating policies and furthering their legitimation and implementation. They persevered over long periods to ensure that the problem and the desired policy remained on the agenda, and they eventually succeeded in convincing local decision-makers to adopt their policy initiative.

All of the SLPEs were CSWs and graduates of specific CSW training programs in schools of social work. In Israel, CSWs are employed by most social local services and engage primarily in community development, in identifying social problems in the community and organizing community participation in local institutions (social work regulation number 2.4, 1999, section 21).

Not surprisingly given the predominance of women in the social work profession, almost all the SLPEs were female. The SLPEs were predominantly frontline social workers. Three held meso-level positions within the social services and two were heads of the local social services.

4.2 | Initiating the policy process

In all the three cases, the social workers identified a social problem which required a local policy solution. In each of the cases, the problem they identified and the policy goals they sought were beyond the traditional boundaries of the social services' field of activity at the time. Nevertheless, after having observed the impact of the social problem on the vulnerable groups they served, the social workers concluded that the situation required the intervention of the social services and a policy solution on the local level. The impetus to push for policies to protect the rights of residents of low-income neighborhoods in C1 was a consequence of anxieties that residents shared with social workers active in their neighborhoods regarding the urban renewal processes taking place in their areas of residence (Interview 1 [I1]). This was a result of the unfettered growth in market-led initiatives to gentrify these neighborhoods beginning in the 1990s (Trop, 2017). One of the social workers shared her concerns with the local authority's community social work supervisor and this led eventually to the initiation of the policy process. In C2, the growth in unemployment and its impact on the lives and livelihoods of service users alongside dissatisfaction with very limited initiatives to address this by the state Employment Service, led a social worker working with single-parent families to inform the director of the community work department that a key unmet need of single mothers was assistance with finding gainful employment (I7). In C3, the influx of 60,000 documented and undocumented migrant workers and strict state policies intended to prevent these workers from staying in the country permanently, including very limited access to social security systems and social services (Rosenhek, 2002) by migrant workers, had led to initial discussions in 1996 by the city concerning the potential repercussions of this (minutes of the 16th City Council, August 18, 1996). However, these discussions led nowhere. Alarmed by the unmet needs of the migrants, in early 1997 the leadership of the social services asked the mayor to allocate resources for a study of the characteristics of the city's migrant workers (I9). Preferring that the state address the issue of migrant workers rather than the city, the mayor denied their request (I9, I11). However, the sentiment within the social service administration was different and the

administration director decided to allocate resources and to assign a community social worker to the migrant worker sphere (I9, I10, I11).

Notably, despite the SLPEs' initiatives to identify problems and place issues on the municipal agendas, the social workers were often required to exert on-going efforts to ensure that the issues remained on the agenda, either in the face of opposition within the municipality bureaucracy or in the wake of high-level personnel changes within the administration or in local politics. Thus, in C1 the momentum towards policy change came to a standstill when the city director-general, who had expressed readiness to address the impact of urban renewal on low-income residents, abruptly left his post after a crisis erupted with the mayor. In C3, after efforts to convince the mayor to undertake steps to provide social services to migrant workers stalled, the director of the social service administration sent a list of proposals for local social policies towards migrant workers to the two most prominent mayoral candidates in the upcoming 1998 municipal elections (I11). He then invited each of the two mayoral candidates to his office in order to press for the formulation of municipal policy regarding these workers (I11).

4.3 | Strategies

The social worker SLPEs adopted a wide range of strategies in the three cases in their efforts to further their policy agendas. These were seeking legitimacy; creating, documenting and disseminating knowledge; participating in policy-formulating arenas; and generally eschewing subversive tactics.

4.3.1 | Seeking legitimacy

Given the hierarchical structure of local government, frontline social workers lacked both the authority and the resources to engage in the policy process without receiving the explicit support of their superiors. This was clear to the SLPEs in two of the cases. In C1, after having learnt from meetings with CSWs about complaints by residents regarding urban renewal, the community social work supervisor decided to act. In 2009, convinced of the severity of the issue and despite its being beyond the usual scope of the social services, she attained approval from the director of the social service administration to appoint a CSW to the role of municipal coordinator (I1, I4). Similarly, in C2, after being convinced of the problems facing low-income mothers concerning integration into the labor market, the head of the community work department convinced the director of social services to incorporate employment policies in the department's agenda (I8). An additional source of legitimacy in both of these cases was the Ministry of Welfare. Early on in the process, the social workers discussed the social problems that they were seeking to address, and received the go-ahead to embark on the process, from the ministry (I5, I7). In doing so, they not only attained legitimacy for their policy initiative but also funding for activities related to it. By contrast, in C3 the SLPEs consciously avoided seeking legitimization of their efforts to further social services for migrant workers. This was due, in part, to the fact the lead SLPE was the head of social services and enjoyed access to material resources and political capital. He also assumed that, given the sensitivity of the issue, officials at the Ministry of Welfare would be unwilling to express support for the initiative (I12).

4.3.2 | Creating, documenting and disseminating knowledge

This strategy was employed by the social workers at various stages of the policy formulation process in all the three cases, though its goals differed across cases and over time. Initially, the knowledge acquired helped convince the SLPEs themselves that the issue was severe enough to justify initiating a policy process (I7, I11). The knowledge that they created quantified the impact of the problem and identified its root. Once convinced, the SLPEs employed their

knowledge to persuade decision-makers and professionals within local government of the relevance of the issue, to ensure that it remained on the municipal agenda, and to construe themselves as experts on the subject (I11). Finally, their knowledge pertaining to policy options served as a means for pushing the process ahead towards the adoption of policies.

The knowledge sources and the forms that this knowledge took also differed. Relevant service user communities were a major basis for this process. A tactic employed by the social workers was to draw upon the knowledge of members of the affected communities during on-site tours. On one occasion early on in the policy process in C1, the municipal coordinator and the urban community worker organized a tour for the city's director-general of neighborhoods slated for urban renewal (I2). Residents joined the tour and talked about their troubles and the problems that existed between neighbors due to the urban renewal process (I2). Following the tour, the director-general instructed that a proposal for including the social dimension of urban renewal in planning processes be formulated jointly by the city development authority, the social service administration, the strategic planning administration, and the community councils, together with the administration responsible for municipal procedures.

A more systematic gathering of information from residents was when the SLPEs engaged in community mapping and needs assessment of needs, a basic tool in community social work, to create knowledge drawn from their clients. In C2, after learning of the labor market problems of low-income mothers and the lack of services for them, the community work department head began mapping the needs of single mothers (I7). On the basis of these findings, she realized that the social services were dealing with women experiencing unaddressed financial problems. She concluded that there was a need for municipal policy that dealt specifically with issues of women's employment, and that the local authority, by way of the social service division, had to provide services to help women find paid employment (I7). A similar strategy was employed in C3. At an initial stage in the policy process, the newly appointed migrant worker coordinator (a social worker recruited by social services for this task and an SLPE in this case) began a community mapping process: "I went into the community, met with everybody that I could, including central figures in all the groups. I also met with journalists, advocacy organizations, and the principal of the school in the neighborhood" (I11). Her findings indicated that the migrant workers suffered from overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, exploitation, lack of health insurance, alcoholism, lack of personal security, at-risk and endangered children, and homelessness. Prostitution and drugs were rife in the neighborhood in which most of them resided and this led to the deterioration of personal security. The resulting report recommended devoting increased resources to the neighborhood in an effort to halt the development of crime, xenophobia, interethnic tension, environmental neglect and negative migration (*Social Service Division Needs Mapping*, presentation).

External experts were another crucial source of knowledge. This was particularly the case in C1. In 2013 the municipal coordinator commissioned a report from an urban planner on the optimal implementation of urban renewal in a neighborhood. The commissioning of the report emerged from a need to formulate a proposal for implementing urban renewal tailored to the neighborhood's specific characteristics (I2). It noted that the city's urban renewal process lacked a coherent policy on consultations with residents. There were no guidelines as to when to talk with residents, or regarding who should present the plan to them. The planner advised appointing an official responsible for local data collection and analysis, resident guidance, and community program implementation in accordance with the project stages (*Towards Integrated Urban Renewal*, presentation, June 2013). Concurrently, the director of one of the city's community councils hired an urban planner to offer social and community recommendations for one of the neighborhoods slated for urban renewal (Hasson, 2014). This emerged from the community council's objection to the city's investing funds in physical planning without addressing related social issues (I2). The resulting report was critical of urban renewal in the city and its potential impact. After it was sent to senior officials in the municipality, the consultant met with the municipality director-general, and it was agreed that the director-general would conduct a tour of urban renewal sites (I2).

The knowledge garnered by the SLPEs was disseminated in direct meetings with stakeholders, decision-makers and elected officials. In addition, they organized seminars for their colleagues and potential collaborators within the bureaucracy in order to enlist support for their policy efforts. Thus, in C2, a SLPE organized a municipal seminar for

the social service division staff on the subject on employment and social work (I7). Following the seminar the social workers decided, with the support of the division director, to appoint a steering committee, coordinated by a CSW, and comprising of social workers from each of the city's social service departments (I7). The committee's task was to identify women in need of employment assistance, refer them to a workshop, and guide them through the process of joining the labor market. In C3, the SLPEs organized a seminar for municipal employees on the problems associated with migrant workers and managed to convince both the mayor and the director-general to address the participants (I11).

4.3.3 | Participation in local policy formulating arenas

Social workers in the three cases sought opportunities for them and their service users to actively participate in policy arenas in order to further their policy goals. This entailed either participating in existing local institutions that determined policy or in creating new forums to contribute to this process. In doing so, they sought to establish close working relationships within the corridors of power with other local professional groups. In C1, the community social work supervisor and the municipal coordinator established a municipal committee comprising of social workers and representatives of the local authority's planning and infrastructure administration (the city engineer and the director of the planning division). The assumption was that dialogue with the parties responsible for urban renewal would engender a better understanding of what was going on in the city in terms of planning and social affairs. More concretely, the two SLPEs hoped to gain the support of professionals in the planning administration for public participation in the urban renewal process as a way to address the social implications of this process (I1). Another example in C1 is the social workers' participation in a discussion on urban renewal in the local planning committee, when the committee chair invited representatives of the social service administration to participate in the deliberations. The head of the administration described the CSWs' efforts to promote cooperation with the planning and infrastructures administration, and expressed her concern about the limited ability of low-income populations to cope with the complex processes engendered by urban renewal. She made the case for the incorporation of social aspects in planning processes. The response by the committee members was positive and it was decided that the committee chair would convene a roundtable to consider improving the process (minutes of the municipal planning committee meeting, January 22, 2012). In C2, a major achievement was the establishment of an employment roundtable which brought together local government and employers to discuss employment options for women in the local economy (I7, I9).

In all the cases, but particularly in C1, gaining access to relevant arenas entailed lengthy struggles and turf battles that necessitated processes of softening up opposition within the local bureaucracy. One reason for this lack of accessibility derived from disagreement over the role of social workers in domains and policy processes not directly linked to the provision of social services (I1). In addition, the refusal to incorporate social workers in these arenas was often embedded in a conflict over the place of social considerations in processes generally the domain of other professionals (I1). In C1, the head of the urban renewal administration, expressed this sentiment explicitly: "we insisted that there is no place for a social say at this stage, it is a planning issue" (I3).

Framing the policy goals as being congruous with those of local government was a tactic employed by the social workers to help overcome this opposition. In C1, the SLPEs framed the assessment of the social impact of urban renewal programs as a policy that would not only benefit residents of low-income neighborhoods but would actually facilitate the city's efforts to promote urban renewal projects. In C3, the situation of the migrant workers was portrayed by the SLPEs in meetings with city officials as "a social problem that the city needs to deal also because it is expedient… it is a problem that will deteriorate the city… these are transparent people, detached from any normative networks" (I12).

Another route for participation was to seek direct access to decision-makers either formally or informally. Thus, social workers endeavored, and often managed, to meet leading municipal officials, the directors-general or mayors of the cities in the cases, or to raise the problems and policy options with local elected officials. In C3 particularly,

the SLPE met with the mayor on a number of occasions in an effort to convince him to adopt a policy of providing services to migrant workers.

Finally, the SLPEs in C1 sought to ensure the participation of service users in the policy formulation process in different ways. In this case, social workers sought to establish a public forum on urban renewal that included representatives of the neighborhoods affected by the process. However, the SLPEs encountered growing opposition to this among officials in local government. One of the social workers described it thus: "We began to talk about public participation… I remember the city engineer saying that public participation is a good thing but very problematic…. Slowly we noticed that the more we got into public participation, the more we sensed the push-back [from official in the planning and engineering department]" (I1).

More effective were direct meetings between residents and decision-makers at windows of opportunity in the process. In C1, following a suggestion by the coordinator that members of the steering committee on urban renewal meet with residents, a meeting took place in which the committee members learned first-hand from the residents how the urban renewal processes had affected their lives. At one of the steering committee meetings, the mayor expressed an interest in meeting with developers. The municipal coordinator immediately followed up by urging him to meet with the residents as well (I2). At the meeting with the residents, the mayor learned how developers knocked on doors and made offers to the residents who were unfamiliar with the details and unable to cope with knowledge into which they had no insight. He also heard about the residents' concerns that disadvantaged populations, such as the elderly, were being exploited by the developers.

4.3.4 | Avoiding subversive tactics

Though subversive tactics are regarded as a legitimate tool for policy advocacy by CSWs, the SLPEs generally refrained from employing this type of tactic throughout the policy process. They consciously avoided encouraging residents or elected officials to put pressure on decision-makers. In C2, this was justified because: "… inciting residents to engage in social action is a dangerous strategy. Nor should we encourage council members to put pressure on the mayor to add resources to the social service. We don't do that. … Social workers cannot be disloyal to the system, it is a trap. You can't be a municipal employee and, at the same time, encourage activists to work against the municipality" (I8). Similarly, the SLPEs sidestepped working directly with advocacy organizations perceived as radical. In C1, an SLPE noted that "work with [the advocacy organization] is only on specific issues. [The advocacy organization] is seen as a radical left-wing organization so it is very difficult to work with them openly and achieve legitimacy. That is why we consciously decide not to work with [the organization]" (I6).

Nevertheless, at certain points during the policy processes, as a last resort, the SLPEs determined that risky subversive tactics were justified. In C1, an SLPE attended a meeting of a regional planning committee and openly opposed the municipality's request for approval of a large urban renewal program because the residents of the neighborhood had not been informed of it. Criticism of the SLPE's action was fierce and she was strongly reprimanded for her opposition to the city's proposal. Nevertheless, the municipality's program was not approved (I3). Another subversive tactic employed by a SLPE in C3 was leaking information to the press. She sought to embarrass the municipality director-general by revealing comments that he made describing the migrant workers as a threat to the city. The SLPE said: "I committed an offense. I went to the journalist and told her to listen to what the director-general said" (I11). His comments were reported in a newspaper article published a week later.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study found that in all the three cases, front-line social workers played a key role in the policy process and acted as policy entrepreneurs (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018). These social workers did not focus on improving the

implementation of existing policies, nor did they limit themselves to specific ad-hoc policy activities or adopt the indirect, informal and discreet forms of policy engagement targeted at the social service level that are generally described in the policy practice literature in social work (Weiss-Gal et al., 2020). Rather they were SLPEs, energetic actors engaged in on-going and diverse policy activities, working with others in and around policymaking venues, and directing efforts and resources in order to engage in direct, overt and formal policy practice (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Lavie & Cohen, 2019; Mintrom, 2019). These efforts led to the adoption of local policy changes, which reflected innovative policy ideas: Integrating social considerations into urban planning, incorporating employment policies into local social services, and providing social services for migrant workers (among them undocumented migrants) despite the lack of central government legitimation or support.

The findings revealed that all the SLPEs were CSWs. Alongside engaging community development, community social work has regarded furthering social justice by affecting policy as a core professional principle (Popple, 2015; Sjöberg et al., 2018; Weil, 2013). Studies show that CSWs in local social services in Israel are more involved in policy practice than other social workers (Weiss-Gal et al., 2020), are required to do so according to their job descriptions (Weiss-Gal & Levin, 2010), and have a stronger social change ideology in comparison to direct social workers (Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2014). Beyond their more generic social work training, CSWs are taught to adopt diverse strategies in their efforts to organize communities and to attain change that has a positive impact on members of those communities.

More specifically, the study findings appear to reflect the way in which components of the fundamental ethos of social work, and particularly community social work, were reflected in the social workers' actions as SLPEs and the obstacles that they need to overcome. A key element in the professional education process of social work is the capacity to define private and community issues as public problems (Shdaimah & McCoyd, 2012). Indeed, in each of the cases, despite the fact that the impetus for their intervention was knowledge regarding the hardship faced by individuals within the community, the social workers realized that the difficulties faced by these individuals reflected wider social problems that affected the extremely vulnerable client groups (residents of low-income neighborhoods undergoing urban renewal; unemployed single mothers; foreign workers) to which they belonged. Moreover, the social workers recognized that addressing the problem required collective interventions on a policy level and that they needed to advocate for policy change, despite the fact that the issues were beyond the existing boundaries of their professional responsibility.

The strategies that the social workers adopted as SLPEs, some of which were also identified by Lavie and Cohen (2019), can be linked to the core strategies of community social work. These strategies typically emphasize systematic and comprehensive identification of community needs, establishing close relationships with the community, increasing community participation, creating alliances, building effective relationships with other professionals, and engaging in advocacy (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Of these, the policy entrepreneurs in this study employed community mapping as a means of gathering knowledge in order to identify problems and place them on the agenda, created settings for collaboration with other professionals as a means for enhancing their participation in the policy process, and integrated service users in the policy process.

The SLPEs' efforts to advocate for policies reflecting their professional community social work ethos often conflicted with the perceptions of the professionals within the bureaucracies in which they operated. The insistence on incorporating service users in the advocacy efforts in C1 and the SLPEs' adherence to the adoption of local solutions to the social problems facing the vulnerable groups that they worked with rather than counting upon national policy responses in C3 generated disagreement and even hostile reaction on the part of decision-makers and other professionals within local government. They adopted various strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Clearly it was not only their professional ethos and training that defined the policy engagement of the social workers as SLPEs but also the contours of the bureaucracy within which they sought to advance their policy objectives (Anderfuhren-Biget et al., 2014). Acutely aware of the institutional norms and structures within which they were required to advance their policy agenda, the social workers compensated for their lack of significant political power or resources (apart from C3) by adapting their advocacy efforts to the dominant political culture within local

government. They generally adopted "inside" strategies (Hoefer, 2014) linked to the established routines and arenas in the local authority and shied away from actions that could be interpreted as subversive, preferring to seek avenues to be integrated into the formal policymaking process. They invested major efforts in seeking legitimacy for their policy involvement from the social services in which they were employed and in two of the cases from the Ministry of Welfare. Here they enjoyed strong support for their efforts from their supervisors and department directors. This reflects the fact that, in the Israeli case, all the professionals within the social services (including the directors) and the Ministry of Welfare are social workers and share a common professional ethos (Nouman et al., 2020).

The SLPEs spent time and effort accessing the decision-making forums within the municipalities and overcoming opposition to this on the part of other professionals. Distancing themselves from those civil society organizations perceived as radical and avoiding public criticism of local government, they preferred an approach that was long-term and based on convincing decision-makers of the importance of adopting policies to address the problem they identified. Nevertheless, the SLPEs did resort to subversive tactics when they sensed that these efforts had reached a dead-end or that the well-being of their service users was threatened.

Three limitations can be identified in this study. First, it draws upon a limited number of case studies, all of them in large cities in a single country. This case method approach facilitates a deeper analysis of the cases but obviously does not enable us to generalize from them. Second, all three cases ended with the adoption of the policy proposal advanced by the SLPEs and thus we cannot conclude that the lessons learned are relevant to cases in which the SLPEs did not achieve their goals. Finally, apart from documents and secondary sources, retrospective interviews were a major source of data and these inevitable suffer from obvious limitations.

In sum, the study underscores the impact of specific professional traits on the policy entrepreneurship of SLBs. The focus in this study was on a specific professional group—low- and meso-level social workers who became SLPEs. When SLBs are driven by a strong professional commitment to invent policies to tackle a severe community problem, have the skills required to engage in policy processes, and enjoy organizational legitimation, they can become policy entrepreneurs. In these cases, the SLPEs are willing to engage in an intensive and drawn-out policy process that goes beyond specific or partial policy activity or indirect and informal policy practice. The study shows that social workers' professional norms and principles and their commitment to the communities they support induce them to initiate policy processes and to employ diverse strategies in order to further policy change. By focusing on social workers employed by local government, the study contributes to knowledge on SLPEs within the public administration discourse in that it identifies the crucial interplay between professional affiliation and the institutional context in which the SLPEs work. This context shapes their preferences for "inside" strategies, which enable them to seek policy change within the contours of the local government system rather than influence it from without. The social workers engage in efforts to help their communities through changes in local policies but, at the same time, seek to be perceived as legitimate professional partners by other professionals and politicians in local government. Clearly, studies undertaken in different national contexts, which focus on SLBs from other professional groups and on social workers not employed by the state will enrich the conclusions of this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID


John Gal https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7610-2498

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APPENDIX A: List of interviewees

Interviewee	Interviewee's role	Date of interview
Case 1		
I1	Community social work supervisor	27.6.2016
I2	Municipal coordinator	20.1.2016; 3.3.2016
I3	Director of the urban renewal administration	17.3.2016
I4	Social service administration director	27.6.2016
I5	National inspector for community development	7.4.2016
I6	Urban social worker in one of the Community Council	17.3.16
Case 1:		
I7	Director of the community work department	4.5.2016
I8	Director of the social services since 2015	10.3.2016
I9	Employment center coordinator	21.9.2015; 8.11.2015
Case 3:		
I10	Director of the regional social service division	15.9.2016
I11	Migrant worker coordinator	18.11.2016
I12	Social service administration director	13.10.2016 11.1.2018