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The interdependency of border bureaucracies and mobility intermediaries: a street-level view of migration infrastructuring

Federica Infantino[*]

*Correspondence:
federica.infantino@eui.eu

Migration Policy Centre,
European University Institute,
Fiesole, Italy

Abstract

Building on the case of visa procedures, this article analyses the relationship between border bureaucracies and intermediaries understood as actors, organisations and knowledge that facilitate, shape, and enable human mobility. I take the street-level view to shed light on the interplay of multiple dimensions and logics, which affects how people are mobile. I argue that the analytical lens of interdependency between dimensions and logics that characterize bureaucracies and intermediaries makes sense of migration infrastructuring processes at the street-level. The case of visa policies and practices, which are characterized by the twofold objective of stemming and spurring mobility, is particularly apt to put forward that intermediaries' socio-economic activities, which bridge borders, by facilitating, shaping, and sustaining mobility, respond not just to the policies and practices that build and reinforce borders but also to those soliciting certain kinds of mobility. The analysis builds on the comparison of ethnographic literature to put forward three empirical situations that exemplify the dynamics of interdependency: Local guides and experts who develop in response to the opacity of bureaucratic procedures and to the distance between visa applicants and state actors; The providers of pieces of documentation, whether counterfeit or 'real-but-fake', who respond to the impossibility of complying with bureaucratic requirements and to restrictive border regimes; Authorized administrative agencies, tour operators, travel agencies, and agencies that facilitate the supplying of specific kinds of workforce, who respond to the objective of soliciting the mobility of tourists, businessmen and workers. The street-level view of migration infrastructuring processes connects the micro-perspective of the trajectory of individuals to macro structures such as policies and drivers of international mobility. The investigation of the effectiveness of these actors and activities in obtaining visas, on which further research could systematically focus, shows that they might produce immobility as well. In a nutshell, (im)mobility also results from the interplay between border bureaucracies and mobility intermediaries.

Keywords: Migration infrastructures, Street-level research, Visas, Border bureaucracies, Ethnography

Introduction

Following the interest of this special issue into the ways in which people migrate, most notably the meso-level actors and organisations that facilitate, shape, enable mobility aspirations, this article proposes a street-level view to analyse the ways in which mobility intermediaries respond to border bureaucracies. Border bureaucracies are sites whereby state apparatuses establish requirements aimed at ordering cross-border movements, determining identities and belongings, categorizing, granting rights or imposing sanctions. In the case of visa procedures, border bureaucracies are characterized by day-to-day interactions between the state, candidates to mobility, and intermediaries who sustain, in multiple manners, would-be migrants and travellers, by making profits out of licit/illicit, formal/informal activities. The street-level view sheds light on practices on the ground and allows consideration of the entanglement between actors, organisations, knowledge, and logics that both implement and respond to visa procedures. In doing so, this article engages with that call for seeing and thinking about migration in terms of 'migration infrastructures', meaning that the understanding of migratory dynamics shifts from migrant behaviours to broader societal developments most notably the spaces of mediation and interplay of multiple dimensions -commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian and social- which carry conflicting and colliding logic of operations (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Migrant mobilities are given significance and direction through the infrastructuring process (Lin et al., 2017). Responses to political features such as border bureaucracies affect the ways in which people are mobile.

Spaces of state and intermediaries' mediation have been deservingly received analytical attention. Pollozek and Passoth (2019) have shed light on the interplay of actors, processes and practices of bureaucratic channelling that characterize the transnational control assemblage in the EU hotspots approach. As Zhang and Axelsson (2021) have noted, bureaucratic channelling takes account of the multiple sites where state and intermediary actors interact. Intermediaries co-produce regulatory spaces by shaping policy change and by setting the agenda, in the case of the regulation of labour migration (Axelsson et al., 2022). This article takes visa procedures as a case of bureaucratic spaces of mediation to question *i)* how dimensions and logics of migration infrastructuring processes interact at the street-level and *ii)* the effects of such dynamics on (im) mobilty. I aim at arguing that the analytical lenses of interdependency and mutual reinforcement between border bureaucracies and mobility intermediaries make sense of the infrastructuring process in day-to-day bureaucratic bordering. This analysis privileges the responses of intermediaries to policy practices, rather than focusing on how policy actors are impacted by migrants' strategies. Migrants' strategies constitute well documented starting points to analyse migratory processes in discussions about the Autonomy of Migration (De Genova et al., 2015; Mezzadra, 2011) and defined as practices of appropriations in the case of visa policies (Scheel, 2017).

Visa policies have a twofold objective namely filtering between desirable and undesirable forms of mobility, to spur certain flows while blocking others, considered to be security and migratory 'risks'. By taking visas as the case for analysis, this article shows the entanglement of different logics of operations that develop in response to both the stemming and the soliciting of mobility while taking account not only of illicit/informal activities but also of licit/formal ones, including those authorized by legal texts.

This analysis builds on my own in-depth fieldwork research, carried out in the last 10 years, on the social and policy worlds that characterize the implementation of visa procedures, including the staff of three Schengen consulates (Belgium, Italy, France) and visa applicants in Morocco (Casablanca), intermediaries in Morocco and Italy. While conducting fieldwork, I have never concealed the nature of my research. I have explained my interest in the day-to-day implementation of visa policy both from the point of view of the state and visa applicants. While researching the strategies put in place to obtain visas, I have also documented illicit practices. Some of them have been overtly disclosed by research participants. Others were observed during fieldwork. To protect the identity of the research participants, I do not give details about locations and dates of research. Long-time immersion in the social and policy worlds of visas has allowed me to develop several contacts and to be perceived as part of that social landscape, therefore building the trust that should characterize the relationship with participants.

In this article, I aim at identifying and analysing larger patterns of micro-practices that are responding to official policies. Therefore, I compare the findings related to the contexts of my own research to ethnographic literature about other specific local contexts. Such a use of comparison allows consideration of similarities most notably in dynamics of interdependency that go beyond the specificities of local contexts, although the many differences and complexities that ethnographic research puts forward. This comparative approach, applied to ethnographic accounts that have studied implementation practices, strategies of visa applicants and the socio-economic activities that sustain applicants, hints at general themes about the ways in which the interplay of state/intermediaries' practices shape mobility, without dismissing the fact that practices on the ground tend to be tailored to local contexts. The back-and-forth movement between data and analysis follows the lines of Grounded Theory Method (Bryant & Charmaz, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which comprises a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry.

The article proceeds as follows: I start by setting the stage of the analytical perspectives on visa policies, practices and their effects. I address the multiple goals of visas, the street-level approach to study practices that both implement and respond to visas, the issue of interdependency between border control and border evasion. Then, I connect mobility intermediaries to bordering practices by shedding light on three types of actors and activities. First, the local guides and experts who provide advice and services. Second, the providers of documents, including counterfeit documents. Third, the agencies that support the mobility of workers who meet specific needs of economic sectors and tourists. Finally, I draw the conclusions and examine the critical policy implications of the street-level view of migration infrastructuring processes.

The filtering work of visas and its effects

Together with the passports, visas represent the administrative and technological instruments at the disposal of the modern nation state to monopolize the legitimate means of movement and to control cross-border movements, a function that constitutes the very 'state-ness' of states (Torpey, 2000). Visas have been defined as one policy instrument of 'remote control' strategy (Zolberg, 1999), for they aim at controlling migration away from the edges of territories and before the actual arrival, as well as an external

mechanism of immigration control (Brochmann & Hammar, 1999). On a global scale, the increasing discrepancies of mobility rights substantiated by visa requirements has led to the observation of a 'global mobility divide' (Mau et al., 2015) and of the overall lack of reciprocity in visa introduction, since countries that face a low number of visa impositions are not among those countries that impose fewer visa restrictions (Neumayer, 2006). In the European context, scholars have put forward the asymmetry that characterizes the supply of short-stay visa (Finotelli & Sciortino, 2013) and the shifting of logics about the introduction of visa requirements, from political concerns vis-à-vis governments towards migratory concerns vis-à-vis the population of foreign states. Visa requirements are introduced not just for public order and foreign affairs concerns but also and especially for the migratory 'risk' that citizens of some foreign states might represent (Bigo & Guild, 2003). Border control shifts in externalized spaces. Because migration control happens already in countries of departure, visa policies displace the filtering work of borders. Borders are not merely aimed at blocking but sifting between desirable and undesirable human mobility while managing 'risks', among which undesirable migration, whether undocumented or lawful, stands as a priority (Infantino, 2021). Consular officials and visa intermediaries can be characterized as elements of the 'global mobility infrastructure' which consists of the physical structures, services and laws that enable some people to move at low cost, low risk and high speed while others travel at high risk, high cost and slowly (Spijkerboer, 2018).

The street-level implementation approach sheds light on the ways in which the filtering work of visas is achieved in the everyday (Alpes & Spire, 2014; Infantino, 2019; Satzewich, 2015; Scheel, 2017). The multiplicity of visa programmes, visa types, legal provisions regulating the conditions and procedures to issue visas, the practices of visa marketing (Dupont, 2022) that include fast-track procedures and simplify application processes and the practices that strengthen administrative burdens, all point to differentiation in the ways in which the state-issued authorization to enter the territory of foreign countries is understood and utilized. Visa policies aim to achieve the twofold goal of attracting and speeding up the mobility of tourists, businessmen, scientists, workers that satisfy the needs of specific economic sectors while blocking asylum seekers (Fitzgerald, 2019), other undesirable migrants and security risks. State bureaucracies and private companies -consulates, embassies and application centres- put visa policies into action, therefore accomplishing that filtering work in the everyday. The day-to-day implementation in local settings is the locus to observe, on the one hand, the filtering work that is achieved by visa issuing and, on the other hand, the ways in which would-be migrants/travellers interact and adjust to it. Within the frame of these interactions, a series of regular and irregular activities that shape, sustain, facilitate the visa applications processes do emerge. These activities support migrants' strategies aimed at circumventing such control or respond to the objective of soliciting certain forms of mobility.

The socio-economic activities that bridge borders, by facilitating and sustaining international mobility, are strictly intertwined to the policies and practices that build and reinforce borders. The political economy of border control developed by the seminal work of Peter Andreas is particularly relevant here. Andreas (2009) has coined the term 'border games' to take account of the interdependency between border control and border evasion and the paradoxical, mutually reinforcing dynamics that characterize the

relationship between law enforcement, prohibitions and illicit markets that span across borders. The policies and practices that aim at halting the mobility of certain individuals open spaces and businesses of illicit alternatives. This case of analysis applies the lens of interdependency to the study of the interplay between border bureaucracies that implement visa policy and migration intermediaries that bridge borders. Therefore, the following sections focus on specific actors and activities that respond to visa procedures, by connecting what they do to day-to-day implementation practices.

Distance, opacity, and the rise of local guides and experts

The concept of "border landscape", which "has come to reflect that sphere of activity which is directly affected by the existence of a border" (Rumley & Minghi, 1991, 3), is an extremely useful one to describe the activities in the surroundings of the sites where visa application processes take place, either state consulates, embassies or privately-run application centres. These spheres of activities tend to transcend local contexts. They develop in response to typical features of implementation processes, well documented in the case of bureaucracies involved in several aspects of migration control including visa issuing. Migration infrastructuring processes take shape also in these border landscapes.

The ethnographic literature that has investigated the ways in which migration and border control is put into practice confirm the insights of empirical, bottom-up implementation literature (Brodkin, 1987; Calista & Palumbo, 1990; Dubois, 2016; Hawkins, 1992). This literature suggests that the Weberian ideal type of rational and legal order does not appropriately represent bureaucratic action. Bureaucratic action is associated to almost magical unpredictability (Eule et al., 2019) that maintains clients in a state of permanent uncertainty (Spire, 2009). Implementing personnel express personal views and ideas that make sense of regulations (Kalir, 2019; Miaz, 2017). In carrying out their daily tasks, they cope with the uncertainty that characterizes their job, especially driven by complexity, ambiguity of law, and 'rule piling'- the state evolution into an apparatus constantly producing formal rules (Hupe, 2019). As a result, implementing personnel develop work routines, within the social contexts of organizations, which convey practical meanings to policies (Infantino, 2021; Yanow, 2004). All those elements account for the opacity of administrative procedures. In the case of visa policy implementation, opacity is powerfully materialized in and reinforced by the difficult access to visa offices and the lack of direct contact. Several architectural and procedural blocking devices characterize visa application processes. In Morocco, the premises of visa offices are surrounded by gates, body scanners, private security guards, policemen. Slots of appointments dictate the pace of entering. Information points are not available, and it is impossible to access the consulates to obtain any kind of information. Visa applicants tend to perceive the application process as rife with obstacles. As is often the case in the field of immigration bureaucracies, language barriers exacerbate the opacity of bureaucratic action. Within this context, local guides and experts flourish, as Fig. 1 shows. These actors inhabit the landscape of visa issuing organizations.

Information on websites tend to be vague, most notably about the specific types of documents to lodge. The distance with consular officers that have administrative knowledge and authorized discretion, which is the power to make decisions also about procedural requirements, are all conditions that leave room to the emergence of a series

Fig. 1 In front of the privately-run visa application centre for the Italian consulate in Casablanca, the person sitting on the chair fills the application form on the applicant's behalf while another one, next to the car, is opening the file application to pre-vet it. *Photo credit*: the Author

of intermediaries. Intermediaries make profit out of their real or pretended knowledge about procedures, the practices of consulates and ways to obtain visas. Their activities build on the uncertainty of visa applicants. Advisers and local experts fill in the application forms, pre-vet the documentation, provide pieces of advice, recommend where to buy insurances, make photocopies, translate documents and so on. These actors manage uncertainty by displaying expertise and control of the situation. Shops that offer photocopying services, translation of documentation, and agencies that sell mandatory insurances partake to such an intricate web of facilitators and might also constitute sites for the collection of advice and expertise. Bureaucratic opacity, distance, applicants' uncertainty and the rise of local guides and experts have been well documented also in the ethnographic research in Senegal (Zampagni, 2016), Algeria (Dupont, 2022), and Cameroon (Alpes, 2017).

Advisers and experts emerge also in response to those situations in which consulates carry on investigations such as interviews to assess the trustworthiness of marriages. In the case of marriage migration, agencies, brokers and virtual spaces take the role of facilitators (Tyldum & Skilbrei this special issue; Cogua-Lopez, 2012). In case marriage migration implies visa applications, consulates carry out interviews with applicants. In the case of Morocco for instance, local advisers and experts provide knowledge about ways to construct a credible story, which is a story that fits ideas of legitimate and romantic love (Infantino, 2014). If it is needed and if it is allowed, they will even take the role of translators during the interviews. It is interesting to note that these kinds of services can be totally ineffective. Fieldwork in the visa sections of the consulate of France and Belgium in Casablanca has shown that visa applicants who tell the same story or reply in standardized manners tend to arouse the suspicion of consular staff. Applicants or their advisers think that it is preferable to use a story that worked previously to increase their chances, regardless of the trustworthiness of their specific marriage story. The attempt at fitting categories or ideas about who is the legitimate applicant guides applicants' storytelling. Advice and expertise can be found in virtual spaces as well. The web is an

unlimited source of practical knowledge about visa application processes. Former visa applicants or people who claim expertise share their knowledge. Facebook groups such as the Schengen Visa Community, a public group of approximately 40,000 members,or Schengen Visa Information, a private group of approximately 3000 members[1] are virtual spaces in which pieces of advice, tips are offered or requested while concerns, successes and all sorts of frustrations are shared. Most of these activities are not profit-driven. However, informal agencies tend to use social networks or even sponsor these groups to advertise their paying services. Some examples are Visa reservations or Dream euro trip, which offer various forms of support through the visa application process.[2]

The business of scheduling appointments to lodge applications is another common and relevant activity that develops in response to procedural burdensomeness. Scheduling appointments is the first and necessary step to apply for a visa. Such a business does not develop when consulates or embassies prove to be extremely efficient. That is the case of fast-track procedures at the consulate of France in Casablanca, typically reserved to businessmen or people of interest from a diplomatic point of view. The efficiency and smoothness of the process of scheduling appointments for desirable travellers does not leave room for the development of activities aimed at facilitating that process. Conversely, because scheduling an appointment can be time-consuming and difficult, some people make a business out of it. At the consulate of France and Italy in Casablanca, officers recall when the lodging of applications was based on the 'first come, first served' principle. Intermediaries used to sell places in lines or used to stay in the line instead of the applicant. At the consulate of Italy, when a booking system was introduced, intermediaries offered to book appointments at the place of applicants or booked large amounts of appointments that they sold later to applicants. In this last case, these activities constitute a barrier to free access to the appointments. By buying slots of appointments, the local experts and advisers create a monopoly that might be an obstacle to mobility. For those who do not ask for their services, it might be very difficult to schedule an appointment and lodge their application.

Since the 2000s, the outsourcing of the visa application process to transnational corporations has become common practice around the globe. These transnational corporations cannot be characterized as enablers of mobility, although in the European context the outsourcing of the visa application process has been portrayed as a means to address the opacity and burdensomeness of visa procedures. The difficulties in obtaining clear information, accessing visa sections, receiving fair treatment have been repeatedly underlined by European institutions, most notably the European Parliament, within the process of adoption of the EU visa regulation -the Community Code on Visas.[3] Schengen signatory states have justified the outsourcing of the visa application process also in terms of facilitation for visa applicants, because the larger resources of the private sector would improve the service by making information and access easily available, among

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[1] See: https://www.facebook.com/groups/SchengenVisaCommunity/ and https://www.facebook.com/groups/SchengenVisaInformation/about/. Accessed on 28/09/2022.

[2] See: https://visareservation.com/flight-reservation-without-payment/, https://www.dreameurotrip.com, Europe Visa (Schengen) https://www.facebook.com/groups/348184656454370/. Accessed on 28/09/2022.

[3] Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (OJ L 243/1 of 15.09.2009).

other things (Beaudu, 2007). Schengen states used the New Public Management frame, based on the belief that market-based modes of regulation represent the solution for the ineffective and inefficient action of public organizations. However, as I have shown in detail elsewhere (Infantino, 2016), private service providers to whom the visa application process is outsourced cannot be considered facilitators for visa applicants. They work in cooperation with governments, incentivised by the business opportunities that carrying out the functions of consulates do represent. Outsourcing to transnational corporations reinforces the distance with the state actors responsible for visa decisions. Workers who interact with applicants -the visa application centres' employees- do not have statutory discretion and lack the professional conditions to exercise state discretion. Neverthe-less, they are involved in the use of 'frontline policy discretion' -the decision-making that direct contact with policy recipients usually entails (Buffat, 2015). The many questions that visa applicants would like to ask to state actors remain unanswered although the websites of private service providers and call centres. The replies are often standard-ized. Private employees lack the administrative knowledge to exercise discretion. Such an argument is very similar to what Hirsh (this issue) has observed in reference to the devolution of border control to carriers most notably airlines employees enforcing EU regulations at airports. Mistakes increase while the applicants' perception of exclusion is reinforced. Privately run visa application centres do not make intermediaries who respond to bureaucratic opacity and uncertainty redundant, as a result. These actors and their activities simply tend to shift from the border landscape surrounding consulate premises to that of visa application centres.

Practical and specialized expertise about visa procedures is an in-demand commodity regardless of its exactness or effectiveness. Visa applicants have recourse to those who claim expertise and build with them a relationship based on trust. Expertise is legiti-mated by the experience, based on long-term contact with visa applicants around con-sulate premises, leading to the routinely handling of several aspects of the procedure. Expertise might stem from personal experience of administrative procedures as well, in case experts are settled migrants in the country of destination or former visa applicants. However, experts do not suffer any consequence from deception. They are kept in busi-ness by uncertainty and hope. Failure can be understood as an issue of luck whereas the payment of the services of experts is considered to be more legitimate than the payment of visa fees (Alpes, 2017).

The providers of pieces of documentation, which the next section analyses, is a sec-ond typical example of intermediaries that develop in response to bureaucratic require-ments, therefore playing a key role in facilitating and shaping strategies of mobility.

Paper borders and the providers of documents

There is a large amount of paperwork associated with applying for a visa. Regardless of the travel or migration purpose for which an application is lodged, the application must contain a series of pieces of documentation. As Anna Tuckett (2019) has put forward, documents and paperwork hold the 'truth'. Encounters with migration law and bureau-cratic processes rather than practices of border crossers produce exclusion or inclusion (Tuckett, 2018), therefore accounting for the illegalization of border crossers. Docu-mentation should support evidence that the applicant meets bureaucratic requirements.

In the case of visa policy, documentation must be provided, although it does not need to imply that the visa will be issued, since bureaucratic action tends to use documentation to objectify rather than to make decisions (Infantino, 2019). The provision of the required pieces of documentation, including counterfeit documents, responds to bureaucratic requirements and cover all sorts of visa applications. The economic activity typically associated with intermediaries in the visa application process is the informal and illicit market of counterfeit documents. However, there also exists another market of pieces of documentation, which is the market of 'real-but-fake' documents.

Alpes (2017) has put forward "document dispatch" that "involves the buying of papers from other mediators or directly from contacts within state institutions or other mediators, or the scanning and graphic production of counterfeit documents" (Alpes, 2017, 76), with an aim at fulfilling the migration aspirations of Cameroonians. Berg and Tamagno (2013) have described "document fixers" that are involved in "assistance in applications for authentic travel documents or production of counterfeit documentation" (Berg & Tamagno, 2013, 191) including passports, any sort of certificate, bank statements, certificates of properties, diplomas, which enables Peruvians to circumvent tightened border regimes in the United States and the EU. These activities respond to the requirements that visa procedures imply and facilitate the evasion of bordering practices. The visa application process induces the production of both counterfeit and real-but-fake documents, i.e. documents that are issued by the relevant institutions or organizations for the purpose of applying for a visa. Real-but-fake documents are especially produced to fit bureaucratic categories. The impossibility to fulfil bureaucratic requirements creates the conditions for what has been characterized as 'forced fraud' (Garcia, 1997). The informality of economies makes the production of some necessary 'papers' practically unachievable. In the case of Morocco, some pieces of documentation might be difficult to obtain: Leasing contracts for farmers, because those kinds of transactions are not based on papers; Salary statements, because of informal economies; Bank accounts, because capitals are not cumulated in banks. Many differences exist between counterfeit and real-but-fake documents. The most interesting relate to the effectiveness. Counterfeit documents are less likely to succeed when compared to real-but-fake documents. For instance, a forged passport or a forged supporting document is more likely to be noticed by state actors rather than a document that is real but obtained under the payment of a sum of money. My fieldwork in visa sections has revealed that a forged passport or a forged hotel reservation might be easier to detect (by using detecting machines or by making telephone calls to the concerned hotel) than a hotel reservation paid to a travel agency, which provides reservations that will be confirmed. As Scheel (2017) has noted in his analysis of visa issuing in the context of biometric border controls, 'real fakes' are nearly impossible to detect.

The tightening of border regimes opens spaces for the use of existing legal pathways, like specific types of visas, to migrate. The production of documents that allow to fit visa categories is central to this strategy. One empirical illustration is the use of work visas to cross borders rather than to work abroad. This empirical illustration stems from the

case of Italian work visas issued to Moroccans. However, I observed the same mechanism in other foreign countries (such as India and Pakistan[4]) and at the French consulate in Morocco. At Italian consulates, to apply for a work visa, one must obtain an authorization delivered by the Prefecture in Italy (the *Nulla Osta*) after an employer (a factory, a firm, or an individual, generally in the sectors of care, agriculture, construction) commits to hiring a certain person and, thus, applies for the auhtorization. Once the hiring authorization is issued, the foreign national can apply for the visa. Work visas are mostly used as legal ways to migrate thanks to the business of real-but-fake hiring authorizations. An employer sells the hiring authorization with the help of an intermediary, often a Moroccan migrant who has legally settled in Italy, like the ones I met during my research in a city in the south of Italy. The intermediary is in contact with the Moroccan migrant, who will use this hiring authorization to be issued the visa. The actors involved in the business of hiring authorizations are threefold: Moroccan nationals, Italian citizens of Moroccan origins or Moroccan migrants who are settled, Italian employers that in exchange of money provide hiring commitments. This chain of actors demonstrates just how forceful the social network can be when mobilized. Contemporary theories on migratory movements argue that the persisting nature of migration is rooted in the existence and activation of social networks (Massey, 1999). These networks lessen the risks inherent to migration and favour the spread of knowledge that shape and facilitate migration. The activities of intermediaries described here adjust to regulatory restrictions. In doing so, intermediaries are capable of evading public policies of control. Actors organize their own mobility by mobilizing all available opportunity structures, among which social networks connecting settled migrants, employers and those wishing to move play an essential role. Because a forged hiring authorization does not appear in the database of hiring authorizations, it is easily detected in the consulate. Although expensive, a counterfeit hiring authorization will never produce mobility. It rather produces profit and deception. A real-but-fake hiring authorization is the effective means to obtaining a work visa. The cost of transactions seems to be related to that of control rather than to effectiveness: the stricter the control, the higher the cost of documentation used to obtain the visa, regardless of their effectiveness.

Dynamics of interaction between border bureaucracies and mobility intermediaries can be observed also in the context of a different goal of visa policy, which is soliciting rather than stemming forms of mobility, as illustrated by two empirical examples in the next section.

Migration infrastructuring and the soliciting of mobility

Documenting illicit activities, which both facilitate and shape mobility, might reflect the interests of receiving countries. To avoid such a policy-driven bias, often supported by countries of the Global North, some scientific literature, including this special issue, takes account of regular and licit activities (Hernández-León, 2008) as well as the migration industry of control (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013). The business of

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[4] As a trainee in the visa section of the consulate of Italy in Casablanca, where my role of researcher was overtly disclosed, one of my tasks has been the processing of work visa applications. I learned about the unfolding of the mechanism described here beyond Morocco, because a consular database contained information about hiring authorizations in other countries.

controlling migration and borders exerts an effect on mobility, by fuelling clandestine forms of mobility. As Andersson (2014, 5) has eloquently put forward, 'it makes profit out of control while forging and fighting illegality'. Regular and licit activities enable mobility by responding not only to restrictive goals but also to the objective of facilitating movements across borders. To illustrate such a dynamic in visa procedures, I build on the cases of temporary work visa programmes and tourism.

In the domain of so-called unskilled work sectors, characterized by the demand of temporary foreign labour and state visa programmes, it is particularly difficult to claim that intermediaries facilitating visa procedures are responding to restrictive border control. As Hernández-León (2020) points out, "document processors" are involved to ensure the successful application for work visas in the implementation of the H-2 visa programme whereby immigrant labour force, mostly Mexican, is provided to US agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The US companies and contracting agencies are paying for the services of document processors. Document processors facilitate the mobility of Mexican workers in the interest of the economic sectors of the country of destination.

Another typical empirical illustration of intermediaries who respond to the soliciting of mobility, by facilitating application processes, relates to tourism and travelling for business purposes –foreign affairs concerns that also characterize visa policies. The case of EU visa policy and practice is exemplary in that respect. The uses of specific kinds of facilitators are legitimate, authorized, and welcomed. Because EU visa policy is also meant to attract desirable travellers, the Community Code on Visas, which is the common EU law that regulates the conditions and procedures to issue visas, provides for the opportunity to use 'commercial intermediaries' such as private administrative agencies, local travel agencies and tour operators as facilitators of the visa application process (Article 45). In doing so, the burdensomeness of the visa application process for desirable travellers is reduced while applying for Schengen visas is less and less perceived as an obstacle to tourism or business travels.

The use of private administrative agencies, local travel agencies and tour operators as facilitators for application processes is not novel. The five original Schengen States (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and Germany) that signed the Schengen Agreement in 1985 drafted the Common Consular Instructions[5] during the negotiations for the Convention Implementing the Schengen Agreement, signed in 1990. The Common Consular Instructions provided for those organizations to act as intermediaries of the applicant (Part VIII, Art. 5). EU visa policy regulations build on the original Schengen process (Infantino, 2021). In effect, the Community Code on Visas replicates the recourse to intermediaries.

Private administrative agencies -often referred to as 'visa boys'- go through the visa application process on applicants' behalf, because of the geographical distance with the consulate or because the visa applicants are prestigious (politicians and top managers for instance). At the consulate of France in Casablanca, these are called *coursiers*, registered people delegated by a very important company to lodge the applications of the company's managers who will go to the consulate only to give their fingerprints. International

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[5] Common Consular Instructions on visas for the diplomatic missions and consular posts, 2005/C 326/01, OJ 2002 C 313/1.

tour operators sell travel packages that include the preparation of documentation and visa application. This is the case of the world leader tour operator Kuoni travel group that offers assistance for passports and visa applications through CIBT Visas.[6] Another example is Thomas Cook India that provides visa application services for business and tourism travels,[7] and the Travel Visa Company that works for Thomas Cook.[8] Local travel agencies and travel agencies contractually linked to international tour operators tend to be a common feature of tourism travels in specific local contexts such as China. Certified Approved Destination Status (ADS) agencies sell travel packages to tourist groups that include the handling of the visa application procedure, which is simplified, since the aim of these agencies is to pre-screen and monitor travellers to avoid visa over-staying. Agencies are also held responsible and sanctioned in case of non-returns. In the context of China, European consulates devise a series of creative strategies and engage in fierce competition to become the travel destination of ADS agencies' packages and process Chinese visa applications (Dupont, 2022). The effectiveness of local travel agencies and tour operators in supporting visa applications depends on their reputation. In the French and Italian consulates in Casablanca, agencies' reputation varies according to the prestige of the clients they handle and their own reputation as a business. Small, local agencies, unknown to consular staff could raise much suspicion and make consular staff think that those tourists are 'fake' tourists, going through an agency to gain credibility. In the case of China, the logic of suspicion that characterizes the regulatory dimensions of visa policy collides with the strong commercial aspects of visas in that country, although visa agents might still see some applicants as would-be migrants who use ADS travel schemes to obtain the Schengen visa (Dupont, 2022). In some countries or in the case of some applicants, the use of local travel agencies might have the effect of raising suspicion and results in immobility.

Conclusions

By taking a street-level view of visa procedures, this article has put forward the interdependency between border bureaucracies and intermediaries who respond to the objective not just of stemming but also of spurring mobility. This analysis has identified three specific kinds of mobility intermediaries. These are local guides and experts, the providers of documentation, administrative agencies, travel agencies and agencies that facilitate the supplying of specific kinds of workers. The emergence of these actors and the development of their activities cannot be fully understood unless they are connected to visa policies and practices. Local guides and experts develop in response to the opacity of bureaucratic procedures and to the distance between visa applicants and state actors. The providers of pieces of documentation, whether counterfeit or real-but-fake, respond to the impossibility of complying with bureaucratic requirements and restrictive border regimes. Authorized administrative agencies, tour operators, travel agencies, and agencies that support the supply of workforce,

[6] See: https://www.kuoni.co.uk/extras/visa-information, https://www.kuoni.ch/fr/consultation/specialistes/kuoni-business-travel/online-visa. Accessed on 28/09/2022.

[7] See: https://www.kuoni.ch/fr/consultation/specialistes/kuoni-business-travel/online-visa. Accessed on 28/09/2022.

[8] See: https://thetravelvisacompany.co.uk/thomascook/?sup=THC Accessed on 28/09/2022.

respond to the objective of soliciting certain forms of mobility. A look at the interdependency between border bureaucracies and intermediaries in migration infrastructuring processes advances the understandings of how people are mobile, by linking the micro-perspective of the trajectory of individuals to macro structures such as policies and drivers of international mobility. The analysis of the effects of such dynamics has shown that some of these activities, most notably the irregular ones, might also produce immobility. In a nutshell, we have seen that (im)mobility also results from the interplay between border bureaucracies and intermediaries at the street-level.

The street-level view of migration infrastructuring that emphasizes the interplay of multiple dimensions and logics, such as the regulatory, social, and commercial ones, is distinct from previous works about strategies and experiences of visa applicants (Gaibazzi, 2014; Jileva, 2003; Scheel, 2017) or actors and economies involved in obtaining visas (Alpes, 2017; Hernández-León, 2020; Zampagni, 2016). This analysis has addressed the issue of interdependency between bureaucracies and intermediaries to shed light on migration infrastructuring processes and their effects on mobility from a street-level perspective. Limitations exist in data collection especially driven by the scarcity and non-exhaustivity of ethnographic accounts. Further research might, on the one hand, apply the street-level analytical lens to study migration infrastructuring and the dynamics of interdependency between multiple dimensions in specific contexts, and on the other hand, it might investigate the determinants of differences (rather than similarities) between local contexts or how contexts play a role in the shaping of the interplay between bureaucracies and intermediaries. Further research might also address the adjustments of border bureaucracies to the practices of mobility intermediaries, to assess the dynamics that escalate the strengthening of border control at the street-level.

Focusing on migration infrastructuring processes at the street-level shifts the analytical attention from migrants' behaviours to societal developments that include state/regulatory practices. The acknowledgement of interdependency entails that the dynamics shaping forms and profitability of intermediaries' activities are interrelated to the policies and practices of migration and border control. Interdependency is relevant for a critical appraisal of border control policies, which tend to consider border evasion to be externally driven. This entails scapegoating to smugglers or any other kind of socio-economic activity that supports mobility, instead of taking account of the ways in which border bureaucracies fuel circumventing practices while increasing risks for people on the move and disorganizing mobility.

Declarations

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