Geoforum 138 (2023) 103671

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

Bridging infrastructure: Conceptualising non-state organisations in complex refugee settlement service landscapes

Thea Hewitt [a,*], Nicole Cook [b]

[a] School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Level 1, 221 Bouverie Street, The University of Melbourne, Carlton, VIC 3053, Australia
[b] School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Social infrastructure
Non-government
Welfare
Immigration
Bureaucracy
Relationality

ABSTRACT

This article conceptualises the work of non-state organisations in the refugee and migrant settlement sector with a focus on universal services, bureaucratic process and social dimensions of settling in a new country. In so doing it augments conceptualisations of 'social infrastructure', to encompass the social, emotional and administrative dimensions of social connection in diverse societies. Drawing on analysis of non-state organisations in the settlement services sector in Melbourne, Australia, we reveal the crucial work of organisations in developing programs and initiatives that recognise the complexity of mainstream welfare services, engage with the intangible social and emotional aspects of service provision, and that contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and expertise of complex and opaque services landscape. Moving beyond conceptualisations of social infrastructure as everyday community spaces, we introduce the concept of 'bridging infrastructure' to denote the work of organisations in interpersonal facilitation of social networks that enable access to wider services; the creation of friendly and welcoming community spaces; and the development of knowledge and expertise about a complex services landscape. Recognising the crucial role of the non-state sector in the dynamic process of humanitarian settlement, we contend that limited conceptualisations of social infrastructure risk removing 'the social' from bureaucratic and non-state services landscapes that support settlement lifeworlds.

1. Introduction

The role of non-state organisations in settlement services provision for humanitarian migrants has become increasingly important in the context of neoliberalism. Through the development of community programs and initiatives delivered across social infrastructure including schools, libraries and community centres, the 'relational work' of non-state organisations in bridging cultural differences between humanitarian migrants and mainstream service providers is a critical dimension of establishing a social life in a new country (Carlsson et al., 2022). While the role of social infrastructure in facilitating social connectivity among diverse and marginalised communities has been increasingly recognised (e.g. Latham and Layton, 2019) these spaces therefore also play an important role in refugee settlement processes. At the same time, the role of non-state organisations is becoming more important as bureaucracies are reconfigured by neoliberal logics of universal services provision, including deterrence and dissuasion. Within this context, the capacities of the non-state sector to support access to settlement services for humanitarian migrants are important dimensions of social infrastructure. Yet the relational work of non-state settlement organisations remains marginalised in research and advocacy on social infrastructure. Much of this work prioritises everyday community spaces rather than relational care work and broader services access that make a social life possible. Developing a clearer understanding of the ways non-state organisations enact social infrastructure to foster social connections and support access to settlement services is the key aim of this article.

Literature on social infrastructure has so far illuminated the critical role that unassuming community spaces play in facilitating the potential for social connectivity 'across difference' (Latham and Layton 2019, p. 3). Deploying ethnographic research methods, researchers have observed social cohabitation in community spaces highlighting the importance of places like community centres, school grounds, sports fields, libraries and parks in fostering diverse forms of sociality (Klinenberg, 2018). The non-state organisations and workers facilitating humanitarian settlement in these same everyday spaces are nonetheless invisible in the accounts of neighbourhood social interactions that dominate the social infrastructure literature. Yet as Hall (2020) argues,

* Corresponding author.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.103671
Received 15 October 2021; Received in revised form 6 July 2022; Accepted 15 December 2022
Available online 23 December 2022

social infrastructure comprises more than physical infrastructure; it also requires the care work of a (gendered) labour force. At the same time, a bourgeoning body of work recognises the multi-dimensionality of the non-state sector moving beyond conceptualisations of the sector as a neoliberal 'shadow state' (e.g. DeVerteuil, 2016, 2017; Trudeau, 2008; Baker and McGuirk, 2019). This literature reveals the capacity for organisations to move beyond co-option under a shadow state to recognise diverse client needs (Jones and Royles, 2020), reprioritising or rechannelling funding to those most needy, and going 'above and beyond' what neoliberal policies prescribe (Williams et al., 2014, p. 2806; See also Power et al., 2022). The nature and significance of the work of non-state organisations in providing social infrastructures that facilitate access to settlement services therefore warrants more attention.

To address this gap, this article draws on qualitative semi-structured interviews with representatives and workers from 18 settlement organisations in Melbourne, Australia. These organisations span a diverse sector providing a range of services and programs in everyday community spaces to support people from refugee backgrounds establish their lives in Australia. Organisations that participated in the research included local governments, generalist charities and a number of smaller community-based organisations. While interviews included questions regarding the philosophies and ethics underpinning the practices of participant organisations (Hewitt, 2019), we focus in this article on the work of organisations in facilitating social connections and relationships that help migrant communities navigate and 'settle into' complex and diverse service landscapes. We also draw attention to the heterogeneity of the sector that continues to provide support for humanitarian migrants at a time when the Australian Commonwealth Government has rationalised and reconfigured ethno-specific services provision towards universal delivery and diversity mainstreaming (Brandhorst et al., 2021).

In the remainder of this article, we first situate non-state settlement organisations within the literature on social infrastructure in a post-welfare landscape, shaped by neoliberal logics and austerity politics. Drawing on feminist readings of social infrastructure, this section highlights the need for conceptualisations of social infrastructure to move beyond a focus on physical places, and recognise and incorporate the labour involved in the facilitation of social and cultural relationships as a key dimensions of this infrastructure. The article then sets out the method in more detail foregrounding non-state organisations, programs and practices through which settlement services are rendered accessible and knowable in the post-welfare state. The third section analyses semi-structured interviews with organisations to develop a conceptualisation of non-state settlement organisations as 'bridging infrastructure'. This denotes both the interpersonal and relational work of organisations in facilitating service access through social networks and relationships, and the accumulated knowledge and expertise held by workers in organisations about the complex and opaque nature of the post-welfare service delivery terrain. In foregrounding the hidden infrastructures that underpin diverse service-related socialities, the concept therefore also moves beyond the place-based focus of 'social infrastructure' to centralise social and emotional dimensions of settlement services work. The article concludes that non-state settlement organisations are a crucial yet overlooked dimension of social infrastructure in diverse cities and spaces.

2. Social infrastructure and refugee settlement

Following a broader infrastructural turn (Dodson, 2017), social infrastructure has emerged as a focus of urban and social geographies of inequality in contemporary liberal regimes. Encompassing the diverse spaces, organisations, and activities that underpin, or uphold social life in the city, social infrastructure forms the 'unsung, bottom-up' (DeVerteuil et al., 2020a, p.2) infrastructure that sustains everyday life. These spaces provide opportunities for socialisation for marginalised and excluded groups in unequal societies. They include for example public institutions like libraries and art galleries, places of commerce like markets and cafes, recreational spaces like sports fields and swimming pools, and transit spaces like bus stops, and train carriages (Latham and Layton, 2019). It is these spaces that Klinenberg (2018, p. 5) describes as 'foster[ing] contact, mutual support, and collaboration' among diverse city-dwellers. Spaces like these are increasingly important in the context of austerity measures and the roll back of state provisioned services under broadening neoliberal and neocolonial regimes. While often fragile, provisional, and fleeting, social infrastructure can act as a 'safe space' for marginalised groups that may be excluded or not easily fit into conceptualisations of 'mainstream society'. Essential for this is the accessibility of social infrastructure to broad sections of society and their non-excluding approach (Deverteuil et al., 2020a).

Social spaces for humanitarian migrants establishing lives in new countries are less well considered in the literature on social infrastructure. Yet it is through the same community settings and spaces that non-state organisations facilitate social connections and interactions, as well as settlement services access for humanitarian migrants. This includes for example, day care and elder care centres (Carlsson, 2021; Carlsson et al., 2022; Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021a) , drop-in centres, churches, and community theatres (Darling, 2010; 2011) sports fields, teams and facilities (Evers, 2010); parks and greenspaces (Rishbeth et al., 2019) schools and other neighbourhood settings (Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021b; Hewitt, 2016; Wilson, 2014). These everyday sites and organisations comprise a diverse sector through which settlement services programs and initiatives facilitate support for humanitarian migrants to establish their lives. In their research with asylum seekers attending volunteer-run, drop-in centres in Sheffield, for instance, Darling (2010, p. 410) shows that drop-in centres are 'structured as a place of caring for others, of responding to the needs of asylum seekers, whether that be for the translation of a Home Office letter, a conversation or simply a place to meet other people'. Similarly, Carlsson and Pijpers (2021a, p.2403) highlight the role of day care centres in facilitating access to care for elders, including 'lowering the threshold to information and advice'.

2.1. Beyond physical spaces: centring social relations

A focus on settlement organisations therefore brings into focus the important work of facilitating social relationships in diverse community settings. Indeed, literature on social infrastructure has been critiqued for its focus on physical space rather than social relations. In this article we are guided by Hall's (2020) feminist reading of social infrastructure which offers an expanded understanding of the spaces and relations which sustain social life. Hall (2020) contends that while much work that engages with the concept of social infrastructure is useful in the way it brings sociality and community into the same macro scale or frame, as physical infrastructure, in doing so it renders invisible the labour of social reproduction that is central to social infrastructure, and which sustains social lifeworlds. Critically, it makes invisible the gendered nature of this work which is primarily carried out by women (and through social roles and occupations predominantly occupied by women), as well as scholarship that highlights and supports this work (Hall, 2020). For Hall (2020) social infrastructure is not a by-product of physical infrastructure, (or the understanding that infrastructure has a social life) and cannot be equated with 'social spaces' or 'community spaces' a trend she identifies in much literature. Rather the social is infrastructural in and of itself. Thus, like physical infrastructure, social infrastructure requires labour to sustain and reproduce itself through continuing repair and rebuilding. Further than the physical sustenance of lifeworlds – social infrastructure includes the 'processes and politics' (Hall, 2020, p.89) which maintain and sustain these lifeworlds, this includes care, love, and intimacy that go into the 'production of people as human-beings' (Pearson and Elson, cited in Hall 2020, p.89).

These insights reflect the 'relational work' performed by workers in the non-state settlement services sector, that is crucial to the facilitation of social relations between newly arrived migrants and services

providers (Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021b, p.212). This work includes 'bridging the social distance and difference in cultural meanings and ideas between services and potential users' (Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021b, p.212) and long-term investment in relationship building tying 'people and places of service provision closer together'. This bridging role is also recognised beyond settlement contexts, including for instance, the work of military charities bridging the 'complex and ambiguous terrain' of welfare services and the wider divide between military and civilian life for ex-service personnel (Herman and Yarwood, 2015). Importantly this includes assisting individuals engage with services that might otherwise be impossible to access.

This bridging role is increasingly important in helping humanitarian migrants navigate a services landscape that is complex and opaque. In the Canadian context, Tastsoglou et al. (2014, p.68), argue refugee claimants are situated within a neoliberal climate of 'deterrence policies' that restrict access to settlement services (see also Baker and Davis, 2018 on 'workfare' policies). Their study with non-state services providers in Atlantic Canada, revealed that the navigation of services by people from refugee backgrounds was an 'excruciating experience' (Tastsoglou et al., 2014, p.71) comprising multi-level systems and inefficiencies; poor communication between government departments and contradictions. In this context, government discourses associating refugees with 'criminality' (see also Klocker and Dunn, 2003 in Australia) and advocacy with a 'lack of patriotism', limit the potential for non-state settlement organisations to expand the scope for humanitarian approaches to migration and settlement (Tastsoglou et al., 2014, p. 70).

In Australia, the setting for this article, fear and suspicion of migrants (rooted in neocolonialism and what Hage, 2003 terms paranoid nationalism), as well as enduring discourses that paint humanitarian migrants as 'bogus', 'undeserving' and a threat to Australian sovereignty have vilified those seeking humanitarian protection in Australia for decades regardless of the validity and legality of their claim or visa status (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Dunn et al., 2004; Fleay and Hartley, 2015; Fozdar and Hartley, 2013; Hage, 2003; Hodge, 2015). This has occurred while national funding and provisions across interlinked housing, education, language and cultural programs have been fragmented, and are increasingly shaped by neoliberal approaches to service and welfare provision (Hewitt, 2019). These tensions are exacerbated through the reconfiguration of ethno-specific services provision towards universal delivery and diversity mainstreaming (Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021a; 2021b), trends that also characterise the Australian context (Brandhorst et al., 2021). It is important to note that while these trends can be witnessed across the state provision of services, the work of public-sector workers should not be seen as lacking individual care and commitment (see Askew, 2009; Clayton et al., 2015).

Despite the increasing opacity and complexity of settlement services delivery, and the ongoing need for organisations to support refugee access to these services, the role of non-state organisations to structure settlement services through community spaces and settings is not well understood in the growing literature on social infrastructure. While social infrastructure offers a revaluation of the crucial role of community spaces as sites of welcome and belonging, the work that non-state organisations do in these same spaces, helping refugees settle into the 'services landscape' remains obscured. Without a clearer understanding of the significance and nature of the work of non-state organisations, their value to the community and the efforts of the workers remain overlooked and vulnerable to funding and locational precarity.

3. Method

Taking inspiration from conceptualisations of institutions as peopled and practiced (Askew, 2009; Mountz, 2003) this research therefore foregrounds organisations in the non-state settlement sector, and the daily work of the people that comprise them. This approach remains alive to the 'expressive [and] participative' (Jones and Royles, 2020, p. 44) aspects of organisations, and their potential to challenge or exceed dominant frameworks allowing a more nuanced reading of the work of organisations, which does not immediately dismiss their generative capacity or the sector they comprise, or focus only on the influence of neoliberalism (DeVerteuil, 2016; DeVerteuil et al., 2020b). In order to capture and study the daily work of organisations and the political and social context in which they are embedded, this research devised a methodology of semi-structured interviews with 34 staff and volunteers from 18 participating non-state organisations[1] within the settlement services sector in Melbourne, Australia. Interviews were interleaved with a close engagement with key government discourses and policy documents regarding settlement services, complemented by participation in 'sector events' including network meetings and conferences.

As a settler-colonial city whose urban and social geographies have been shaped by settlement organisations over the long term, and where dominant policy and political discourse is framed by paranoid nationalism and neoliberalism, Melbourne presents an apposite site for the study of humanitarian settlement organisations. Research participants were based in a range of organisations including those dedicated to the delivery of 'settlement service' contracts from the federal government, faith-based organisations and charities, generalist charities, as well as organisations who focus on the provision of specific services or support for people from refugee backgrounds (for example educational support and homework groups) and local governments. Organisations in the research reflected the complex, hybrid, and heterogeneous nature of the post-welfare service sector where organisations work alongside the state, but in ways that exceed a 'shadow state' framing (DeVerteuil et al., 2020b).

In order to capture the diversity of organisations and the programs and initiatives they deliver, qualitative interviews were used. The interview schedule was organised around three key sections. The first section explored the role of participants in the organisations they were involved with including the tasks and responsibilities that were part of their position as well as a 'typical day' outline. The second focused on decisions, logic, and ethics behind the programs and services that are offered. These questions illuminated the ways in which organisations intersect and negotiate broader narratives and frameworks that shape migration, settlement and citizenship, and provided space for participants to discuss the ethics and ethos they believe informs the work they are involved in. The third section of the interview focused on the relationships that organisations had with others in the sector, including their relationships with funding structures and bodies and different levels of government. This was important in further contextualising the work of organisations, including illuminating the mediating role organisations play between refugee communities and mainstream state structures. Interview data were transcribed using a professional transcription service. These transcripts were then entered into the analytics program NVivo which was used as a tool code the interview transcripts. Interview transcripts were coded thematically, in what was an unfolding and iterative process. Through this methodology the research was able to focus on the work of organisations as understood and presented through the view of participants from inside such organisations. While this focus afforded the research capacity to fully investigate the values, ethics, and philosophies present in the discourses offered by participants regarding the practices of organisations, it was beyond the scope of this research to focus on the experiences of people from refugee backgrounds who are involved with these organisations.

In the analysis that follows we focus on the ways non-state organisations facilitate and nurture connections between communities and

[1] AMES, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Centre for Multicultural Youth, CoHealth, Dianella, Community Health, Edmund Rice Refugee centre, Foundation house, Hume City Council, Jesuit social services, Joining the Dots, Maribyrnong City Council, Migrant resource centre north west, Phoenix youth centre, Salvation Army, Sutherland adult education (anonymised name), VICSEG Newfutures, West Welcome Wagon, Yarra City Council.

state services providers. This includes first, their role in facilitating community capacities to access fragmented and complex services, including the facilitation of social networks between refugees and services providers to enhance access to those services. Second, we highlight the ways organisations cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment through which to meet others and negotiate settlement processes. Third we foreground the work and labour that organisations require/invest in these processes. While much of this work occurs in everyday community settings, settlement services are also about the labour that is required, not just the spaces. To capture these three key dimensions of organisations' roles, we develop the concept of 'bridging infrastructure.' Bridging infrastructure refers to the work of organisations in facilitating access to services, their roles in creating a friendly and welcoming environment and their accumulated knowledge and expertise of the complex post-welfare service delivery terrain.

While this research has posited that organisations play a vital role as social infrastructure, it is important to recognise that there are limits to the capacity of non-state organisations to challenge the normative conceptualisations that shape settlement policy and discourse in Australia and which impact the everyday lives of people from refugee backgrounds settling here. It is important to acknowledge that their work is not completely removed from the broader political context and normative conceptualisations of belonging in Australia that shape settlement of refugee migrants. Indeed, the capacity for organisations to challenge such normative framings are contested (Hewitt, 2019). Shaped by its history as a settler-colonial state, belonging in Australia is closely tied to neoliberal ideals of individual economic productivity and neocolonial ideas about race (Hewitt, 2019). These ideas shape migration and settlement policy, which prioritise English language proficiency, employment, and financial independence as key measures of successful settlement. Federal government funded settlement programs centre these outcomes, positioning them as essential to settling well in Australia. The programs and practices of organisations are not completely removed from the influence of rigid ideas of settlement and belonging in Australia. Indeed, most organisations in the research had a focus on individuals achieving 'settlement outcomes', on learning English, finding a job, and becoming financially independent (Hewitt, 2019). However, as we set out below, their role exceeds these neoliberal ideals.

4. Analysis

4.1. Bridging complex bureaucracies

> one family I met got nine referrals. One they don't know the language, and then they got nine referrals and they don't have enough information and knowledge about why they need to go to nine different services within two weeks or three weeks' time. [They don't know] how to get there, or where those strange places are. (Sylvia, Dianella Health).

This quote, from Sylvia who works for the community health provider Dianella Health, in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne recounts the complex and confusing situation faced by many refugee migrants settling in Australia, needing to engage with an unknown, opaque, and confusing welfare and social service sector, to gain assistance and meet settlement outcomes. Recognising the complexity of the situation, organisations working in the sector, like Dianella Health, play an essential role bringing together refugee migrants and social and welfare services, bridging the divide between these service user communities and the complex bureaucracy that characterises service delivery in the post welfare context. Learning how to navigate the social service sector was part of the impetus behind the welcome events that Dianella Health hold for newly arrived groups in the Hume area. A direct response to the situation of the family discussed above, who received nine referrals for appointments with services over a two-week period, Dianella health, established a series of 'welcome events'. These events bought together people who had recently arrived in Australia, with those who share migration experiences but have been here for a longer period of time and whose skills and knowledge are an important resource through which more recently arrived groups learn to navigate and engage with other services available. Sylvia reflects on the goals of these events:

> we thought if we build the group of people with the right skills and knowledge, that speak the same language, understand or come from same community context, and that would be really good for [recently arrived] people … rather than going to the stranger, like someone go and introduce them, you know that 'I also come from that part of Syria' or 'that part of Iraq', and speaks their language and then put into the same cultural context […] they still need to do that nine referrals but I think that gives the different set of [capacities] to navigate the systems with. (Sylvia, Dianella Health).

Sylvia's account highlights the importance of non-state organisations in fostering social connections and relationships within and between people from refugee backgrounds that help to navigate and 'settle into' the complex services landscape. The bridging role of organisations in creating a space of familiarity through which communities from refugee and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds connect with complex services systems is described by Marika from VICSEG:

> when I [held a position in] the Turkish Women's Association in Victoria, I thought that the ethno-specific organisations at that time did play a bridge between their community, 'cause they establish credibility, and then the mainstream services, and VICSEGs role is very much like that. A bridge and link to a mainstream service and to a community through somebody that's similar to [you], that gets [you].

Participants reveal the crucial, yet hidden work of organisations as they support settlement services users to engage with 'uncertainty' in the 'mainstream' social and welfare service domain (see also Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021b). VICSEG, for instance, an organisation primarily focussed on child and early years services, actively facilitate meetings between different services and members of their programs, in 'case conferencing' meetings which bring the numerous organisations working with particular service users into the same space. Ferne explained these meetings:

> We have a critical role […] in supporting the service system through our case planning mechanism that we've set up. So, we often take the formal role of setting up case conferences with workers, and often with families as well to ensure that everybody is on the same page. And that's become a really critical role. That's one that has been afforded to us by a particular focus of our service in providing supported referrals and […] supported engagement with the services. [case conference meetings have] become really important in the process, particularly in extremely complex situations where there's a lack of clarity about roles, where there's miscommunication about what's happening in the service system, uncertainty about visas, trauma, and I guess, the impact of migration itself, which is often presented in ways, for example, both physiological and psychological ways. (Ferne, VICSEG)

Within such meetings information is shared across organisations and departments, complex administrative and bureaucratic situations hopefully clarified, and future plans for engagement with particular services and organisations decided upon. This facilitation taken on by organisations like VICSEG is a clear example of the bridging role of organisations, bringing people from refugee background into the complex and dispersed social service sector domain.

In addition to case conferencing, many organisations undertake advocacy practices in order to bring refugee service users into contact with the broader service sector. Such advocacy takes the form of small or

everyday kind of assistance; making appointments on behalf of individuals, finding information and resources. This kind of advocacy can be understood as case advocacy, as opposed to class advocacy (though many organisations also practice forms of class advocacy) a distinction commonly drawn in social work literature (Baker and Davis, 2018). Case advocacy, Baker and Davis (2018, p. 540) explain, 'commonly involves representing claimants in their interactions with street-level organisations, providing information about their rights and entitlements, and teaching skills so that they can advocate on their own behalf'. This resonates with the concept of street-level bureaucracy developed by Lipsky (1980). This kind of case advocacy work is undertaken as both a formal part of programs, and quite often in a more informal sense with workers providing help and advice when they could or when they saw it was essential and not available elsewhere. For Sophia at Foundation House, a counselling and support service for victims of torture and trauma, this kind of advocacy work is part and parcel of working closely with service users from refugee backgrounds, and though it may not be what the service is directed at, it is important to their everyday practice and interactions with service users and broader aims of the service:

> Whilst we don't case manage and that's not our role, where it is beneficial for the therapeutic relationship, we do take on a bit of advocacy work
> We do just day-to-day housing advocacy, advocacy with getting access to services. Centrelink[3] is probably a big one because there's always problems with Centrelink, and just even getting a little win like that helps a client feels heard and understood. (Sophia, Foundation house)

While not without limitations (Power et al., 2021), advocacy roles, both formally and informally, can shape the everyday practices of organisations and individual workers around engaging service users with mainstream welfare state structures. The focus on engaging with welfare state structures, and the need for assistance in doing this is exemplified by Addison from the Maribyrnong library service who described the service's growing involvement with Centrelink, and the tailoring of their own English and computer skills classes targeted at newly arrived communities in order to facilitate Centrelink's new online engagement and service delivery approach:

> We've been having conversations with [Centrelink] because [their services] is becoming very much, it's being devolved out of the kind of the bureaucratic sphere and it's becoming much more end user based. It's having a big impact on people who just don't know how to go about navigating the websites, because they're really difficult. And if you haven't got computer literacy, you're really behind the eight ball. So, we talk with Centrelink about 'how can we kind of facilitate better access?', so we're looking at training, having specific training modules on […] how to apply for a working with children's card [online], all those kinds of things. (Addison, Maribyrnong library service)

This kind of active involvement in linking refugee communities with welfare state structures, in a large part arises from the recognition of the difficulty of engaging with such services and managing relationships with them because of complex bureaucratic and institutional structures, and the widely acknowledged inadequacy of the service system to cater for the needs of CaLD communities more broadly, and refugee communities in particular. Indeed, the work of organisations through advocacy and other means *also indicates a gap between refugee communities and welfare state structures, that without the specialised and dedicated help of another organisation to bridge this, means such services cannot be successfully accessed by some communities.* The difficulty in this relationship between communities and welfare state structures was summarised by Ferne:

> I really think that our service system really struggles to work with these communities. And these communities actually struggle to work with the service system too. (Ferne, VICSEG)

4.2. *Bridging relationships: making settlement spaces accessible*

Accessibility in services provision has been conceptualised as a matter of the physical access of populations to the services they need or want to use (Fincher and Iveson, 2008), and is understood as dependent upon geographic proximity, cost, time, and transportation (Dear et al., 1994). Fincher and Iveson (2008, p. 35) have called for an expansion of this narrow view of accessibility as simply a physical concern to include social and cultural considerations, specifically 'a sense of perceived closeness or ease of social access to facilities and services' and the 'perception of a welcoming attitude in the services in a place, or a sense of belonging and entitlement to them' (Fincher and Iveson 2008, p. 35). Building this welcoming attitude and 'spatial atmosphere' (Carlsson et al., 2022) to support access to services is a goal of many programs and organisations including the 'Community Hubs' scheme running in the Hume local government area. Community Hubs are designated facilities located on school campuses that provided dedicated space for programs and activities targeted at migrant and refugee families and communities. Each Community Hub is managed by a 'Hub leader' who coordinates programs and activities. The hubs usually comprise of one or more multi-purpose rooms, childcare or child-friendly spaces, and a kitchen. Creating welcoming spaces and facilitating relationships through which people can learn about available services, or access support from the social welfare sector is a key goal of these community Hubs, as Elizabeth discusses:

> one of the key things that Hubs do is they have playgroups, so they have programs where migrant families might feel, have the, that they're more accessible. A playgroup is more inviting […] And that's a key, that's a real strength of the hubs, is the fact that it's a welcoming safe family friendly environment, so you find mothers feel okay about going there and joining the playgroup. (Elizabeth, Hume CC)

The Community Hubs program provides this 'welcoming attitude' as well as a sense of belonging and entitlement that Fincher and Iveson (2008) identify as essential to creating accessible services, and which might not be felt by these groups with other services. Elizabeth explains how this welcoming environment, and the personal relationships between Hub participants and Hub leaders directly facilitates engagement with the broader welfare service sector:

> You've got a service system, and we've got a good universal system in maternal child health, preschools, but for some people they need additional things to access these universal and specialist programs. And I think that's the space that the hubs fill. So, they come in and they're connected to the service system but through the route of the Hubs. So, I think that that's something that they can do, and they do well, because they are a friendly environment. And there's people there who can connect them to what they need, so there's sort of like an intermediary. (Elizabeth, Hume CC)

While Elizabeth's characterisation of the Hubs as an 'intermediary' further highlights the bridging role of non-state organisations between humanitarian migrants and wider services, it also foregrounds the emotional settings cultivated by organisations within community spaces, as an important dimension of bridging infrastructure. Social connections were seen as critical to overall social and emotional wellbeing of service users, whose lives and movements as people from refugee backgrounds, and often as racialised bodies, were subject to formal and informal limitations (Lobo, 2020). Organisations challenged narrow definitions of services provision, incorporating 'softer' outreach programs into an enlarged understanding of settlement services. Alicia

from the BSL Refugee Child Outreach program for instance, discusses the family excursions run as part of the wider program, one example of many of the initiatives that organisations offer which facilitate these moments of social connection:

> A lot of that is about getting families together and kind of saying you know 'welcome', we're going to the city and do things that you know most of our families haven't done before or haven't had the opportunity to ever have an outing and just have fun. And I think that a lot of services mightn't necessarily offer those 'soft' kind of outcomes because they're seen as a bit fun but the kind of you know anecdotal feedback you get as well around you know 'That's the first experience we've had in six months where we've been able to go out and meet other families and our kids just have, you know have fun' (Alicia, BSL)

Alicia goes on to further emphasise the very real impacts that social connections which can be developed through this kind of programming can have:

> I don't think you can underestimate the ability that social capital has on things like mental health and then even networking in terms of being able to meet people in the community. And it can lead to those more, and you know I guess I'd call those 'soft' outcomes and 'hard' outcomes, like employment and things like that. (Alicia, BSL)

The commitment of organisations to prioritise the social and emotional wellbeing of service users through facilitating social connection sits in tension with prevalent discourses and understandings of settlement and citizenship which inform neoliberal policy around refugee settlement and more broadly around the provision of public services and welfare which are based on 'ideologies of the autonomous self-made-man' (Lawson, 2007, p. 5). Prioritising building relationships and forging social connections as a form of support reflects observations made by Lawson and Kearns (2020) regarding the capacity and role of organisations outside the state to humanise the experience of accessing services, centring the dignity of those using the service and being attuned to emotional and practical needs. This attunement fulfils an important part of the social contract that Lawson and Kearns (2020) argue has been eroded by welfare reform in neoliberal states, and ultimately which the state has failed to deliver.

It is in centring the building of relationships and social connections that organisations are able to support the development of community networks. The facilitation of these interpersonal relationships reveals the infrastructural nature of the work of organisations, attending to the 'immaterial components that sustain life, the market and the state' (Hall, 2020, p.92). Indeed, the incorporation of these family-focussed services (and, for exmple, the location of Community Hubs in school grounds) also speaks to Takahashi, Wiebe, and Rodriguez's (2001) call for those involved in the provision of services (public and third sector alike) to understand and incorporate the daily routines and social networks of service users into organisational structure and practices in order to become better accessible and responsive to the needs of service user groups. In creating friendly, welcoming spaces, and prioritising the building of relationships between services users and organisational staff, organisations are able to bring the complex service sector into the everyday lives of service users. In spaces in which individuals are comfortable, and through familiar relationships, organisations help navigate and negotiate the complex social service sector, making it accessible and appropriate for service user communities from refugee backgrounds.

4.3. The labour, knowledge and expertise of bridging infrastructure

While the focus of organisations is on building interpersonal relationships and creating accessible spaces, they play an essential structuring role as well, providing knowledge, advice, and assistance in a structured/formalised way, the continuity of which is essential to their bridging work. Elizabeth explains the importance of this continuity in the Hub leader role in following up referrals and getting things done outside the Hub:

> Referrals are a really big thing, because people they get to know the Hub leader and they might start to talk about what the needs and the information they need for their family, they can point them in the right direction, help them, they might help them with an appointment or something like that, so that follow up and support is really important. Because what you find is without that relationship people don't follow up on [referrals]. So that support for doing things out in the community is really important for people to actually access those services. (Elizabeth, Hume CC)

As the position of the Hub leader in the Community Hubs program, discussed above, exemplifies the work of bridging is often embodied or taken on by specific individuals in dedicated positions. Hub leaders are essential to creating the welcoming and supportive space of the Community Hub and to ensuring its capacity to get people engaged and enrolled into other services. These leaders act as facilitators, bringing people into the space and connecting them with other services. Similar to the Hub leader, VICSEG also employ individuals in a formalised role to facilitate and assist in interactions between service users and social services in a structured manner. Within VICSEG's family mentoring programs this role is formalised through the position of 'Playgroup leader'. What Ferne described as 'acknowledged community leaders' from the cultural communities involved in the program are employed to run meetings and programs for other community members:

> they use that knowledge and skill to work both with their communities, provide them support around navigating the service system, but also around informing the service system about the real needs of the community. The other thing is that they're also … actually about learning a lot about how the system functions, and the values that inform the system. But also, the values that inform the way in which the system works with the community as well. (Ferne, VICSEG)

The central role of these leaders in assisting others in engaging and navigating the service system is critically supported by the training and preparation of these leaders for such positions which focusses on building knowledge and familiarity with the service system in order to aide others in their engagement with these services:

> firstly, there's a training program, there's a mutual training program, I have to say, where I have introduced the [Playgroup leaders] to the service system, and we've actually gone around and spoken to the service system representatives and got to know them really well, both individually and collectively through membership of various networks. (Ferne, VICSEG)

The formalisation of these roles, through dedicated paid positions and training programs and qualifications speak to the importance of the continuity and presence of these role over the longer term. While roles like Hub leader or Playgroup leader can on the surface be about providing what might be seen as intangible outcomes; making people feel comfortable, creating a welcoming environment, and being attuned to social and emotional needs, it is important to recognise the structured work and knowledge that is essential for this. As this section has shown, by looking at the everyday practices of organisations working in this space, we can see the labour and training that is required for this essential work that is often overlooked.

By acknowledging the labour, undertaken by individual workers, that is required for organisations to play their essential bridging role, we follow Hall's (2020) feminist reading of social infrastructure which highlights the social reproduction work that is undertaken almost exclusively by women is essential and overlooked in conceptualisations of social infrastructure that centre community spaces and physical aspects. Doing this interpersonal work requires knowledge and ties to the refugee and cultural communities (which workers are often personally

involved with) as well as knowledge of the social service system in Australia. Hub leaders, family mentors, and other individual workers with links to service user communities facilitate engagement between these communities and mainstream social service system playing an important intermediary role between service user communities and mainstream bureaucratic services. The role undertaken by these individuals shares similarities with the position of 'transversal enabler', identified by Wise (2009, p. 21) as essential to facilitating positive intercultural encounters through their knowledge of different cultural and social contexts to facilitate engagement and build relationships across difference. The formalising of this role in a number of organisations also speaks to Hewitt's (2016) assessment of the value of the formalisation of this assistance in dedicated positions in institutions like schools. We argue that in the refugee settlement sector these individuals work as vital infrastructure, holding knowledge about the social service sector and the bureaucracy through which it functions, structuring engagement with these services and ultimately bridging the complex service sector.

5. Conclusion

In the context of austerity and neoliberalism, everyday community spaces such as schools, libraries and community centres are undergoing a process of revaluation. Literature on social infrastructure foregrounds the critical agencies of these 'overlooked and undervalued' spaces in facilitating social connections in marginalised community settings (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham and Layton, 2019). The significance of these sites in welcoming humanitarian migrants, and the organisations, programs and initiatives through which settlement services are facilitated have attracted much less attention in these literatures. Yet the 'relational work' of organisations is increasingly important in the context of universalised service provision (Carlsson and Pijpers, 2021b) and a politics of dissuasion (Tastsoglou et al., 2014). Without a clearer recognition of the contributions of organisations and workers to social infrastructure, research contributes to the marginalisation of non-state organisations and the interpersonal care work they provide. This in turn, reinforces policy and advocacy focused on the preservation of physical sites, rather than support for non-state and informal sectors actively involved in facilitation of social networks in community spaces.

In our analysis of interviews with workers in non-state organisations, this article argues that the non-state sector and the care work it provides, call for an augmented conceptualisation of social infrastructure. Through everyday actions and approaches that recognise the complex bureaucracy of mainstream welfare services, that advocate for the needs of individuals and that create accessible, welcoming, and friendly spaces through the work of individuals (Carlsson et al., 2022), these organisations provide an essential social infrastructure that is often overlooked. Roles that attend to and centralise the social and emotional aspects of accessing settlement services can be seen as an essential feature of these infrastructures. Through their work, organisations also have the capacity and ethics to provide services that recognise and reflect the humanity of services users, making space for their social and emotional needs while delivering support and advocacy. Despite the seeming intangibility of this type of work, the knowledge and expertise that organisations hold regarding refugee experiences and the wider services landscape is a further, critical resource in the effective and continuing facilitation of social and services-related socialities. Augmenting the concept of 'social infrastructure' we have conceptualised non-state organisations as 'bridging infrastructure' to better capture the multi-dimensionality of the support non-state organisations provide in settlement processes. We define 'bridging infrastructure' as the interpersonal facilitation of social networks that enable access to wider services; the creation of a friendly and welcoming emotional environment; and the development of knowledge and expertise about the wider services landscape. The article therefore offers an holistic account of migrant and refugee settlement services as a fluid and complex space incorporating diverse organisation that unsettle the boundary between social life and bureaucratic structures.

By foregrounding the work of non-state organisations and their attunement to the social and emotional aspects of settlement services access, the article highlights the potential for studies of social infrastructure to reveal the organisational and care infrastructures that 'bridge' communities and wider services structures to enable social life. Through semi-structured interviews with workers immersed in 'bridging' refugee communities and services networks, our analysis highlights the bureaucratic and governmental dimensions that along with social networks and ethics of care, make a 'social' life possible (Pearson and Elson, 2015). Non-state organisations reveal and shape the shifting boundaries of universal services, bureaucratic process and lived experiences of settling in a new country (Hewitt, 2019). In this case we have revealed the limitations of ethnographic methods, influential in contemporary literature on social infrastructure (eg. Klinenberg, 2018), that celebrate everyday spaces while overlooking the role of the heterogenous non-state sector. From the perspective of humanitarian settlement, the reconfiguration of settlement through a universal services lens makes bridging infrastructure more, not less important. Advocacy and policy initiatives that fail to honour non-state settlement sector as crucial infrastructures therefore risk reinforcing conceptualisation of the social as removed from bureaucratic supports and services landscapes.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Thea Hewitt: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft. **Nicole Cook:** Supervision, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

Askew, L., 2009. 'At home' in state institutions: The caring practices and potentialities of human service workers. Geoforum 40, 655–663. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.05.001.

Baker, T., McGuirk, P., 2019a. Out from the shadows? Voluntary organisations and the assembled state. Environ. Planning C: Politics and Space 239965441984354. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419843541.

Baker, T., Davis, C., 2018. Everyday Resistance to Workfare: Welfare Beneficiary Advocacy in Auckland, New Zealand. Soc. Policy Soc. 17, 535–546. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746417000306.

Brandhorst, R., Baldassar, L., Wilding, R., 2021. The need for a 'migration turn' in aged care policy: a comparative study of Australian and German migration policies and their impact on migrant aged care. null 47, 249–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1629893.

Carlsson, H., 2021. Migrants' pathways to aged care: the role of local relationships of care in facilitating access for super-diverse older populations. Ageing Soc. 1–28 https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X21001240.

Carlsson, H., Pijpers, R., 2021a. Diversity-mainstreaming in times of ageing and migration: implementation paradoxes in municipal aged care provision. J. Ethn. Migr. Stud. 47, 2396–2416. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1857231.

Carlsson, H., Pijpers, R., 2021b. Working towards health equity for ethnic minority elders: spanning the boundaries of neighbourhood governance. JHOM 35, 212–228. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHOM-08-2020-0325.

Carlsson, H., Pijpers, R., Van Melik, R., 2022. Day-care centres for older migrants: spaces to translate practices in the care landscape. Soc. Cult. Geogr. 23, 250–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2020.1723135.

Clayton, J., Donovan, C., Merchant, J., 2015. Emotions of austerity: Care and commitment in public service delivery in the North East of England. Emot. Space Soc. 14, 24–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2014.11.004.

Colic-Peisker, V., Tilbury, F., 2007. Integration into the Australian labour market: The experience of three "visibly different" groups of recently arrived refugees1. Int. Migrat. 45, 59–85.

Darling, J., 2010. A city of sanctuary: the relational re-imagining of Sheffield's asylum politics. Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr. 35, 125–140.

Darling, J., 2011. Giving space: Care, generosity and belonging in a UK asylum drop-in centre. Geoforum 42, 408–417. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.02.004.

Dear, M., Wolch, J., Wilton, R., 1994. The service hub concept in human services planning. Prog. Plan. 42, 173–271.
DeVerteuil, G., 2016. Resilience in the Post-welfare Inner City: Voluntary Sector Geographies in London. Policy Press, Los Angeles and Sydney.
DeVerteuil, G., 2017. Post-welfare city at the margins: immigrant precarity and the mediating third sector in London. Urban Geogr. 38, 1517–1533. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2017.1286840.
DeVerteuil, G., Kiener, J., Mizuuchi, T., 2020a. The service hub as bypassed social infrastructure: evidence from inner-city Osaka. Urban Geogr. 1–19 https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1826751.
DeVerteuil, G., Power, A., Trudeau, D., 2020b. The relational geographies of the voluntary sector: Disentangling the ballast of strangers. Prog. Hum. Geogr. 44, 919–937. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519869461.
Dodson, J., 2017. The Global Infrastructure Turn and Urban Practice. Urban Policy Res. 35, 87–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2017.1284036.
Dunn, K., Forrest, J., Burnley, I., McDonald, A., 2004. Constructing racism in Australia. Aust. J. Social Issues 39, 409–430.
Evers, C., 2010. Intimacy, sport and young refugee men. Emot. Space Soc. 3, 56–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2010.01.011.
Fincher, R., Iveson, K., 2008. Planning and Diversity in the city: Redistribution. Recognition and Encounter, Macmillan, Hampshire.
Fleay, C., Hartley, L., 2015. I Feel Like a Beggar': Asylum Seekers Living in the Australian Community Without the Right to Work. Int. Migrat. Integrat. 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-015-0453-x.
Fozdar, F., Hartley, L., 2013. Refugee Resettlement in Australia: What We Know and Need to Know. Refugee Surv. Quart. 32, 23–51. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdt009.
Hage, G., 2003. Against paranoid nationalism: searching for hope in a shrinking society. Pluto Press Australian, Sydney.
Hall, S.M., 2020. Social reproduction as social infrastructure: Mainstream understandings of social infrastructure largely ignore both the gendered work involved in sustaining lifeworlds and the work of feminist economists. Soundings 13626620, 82–94. https://doi.org/10.3898/SOUN.76.06.2020.
Herman, A., Yarwood, R., 2015. From warfare to welfare: veterans, military charities and the blurred spatiality of post-service welfare in the United Kingdom. Environ. Planning A: Econ. Space 47, 2628–2644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518x15614844.
Hewitt, T., 2016. Rethinking Encounter: intercultural interactions between parents in Australia's culturally diverse primary schools. Aust. Geograph. 47 (3), 355–370.
Hewitt, T., 2019. Geographies of Refugee settlement: Care, Citizenship, and the role of Non-state Organisations (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Melbourne.
Hodge, P., 2015. A grievable life? The criminalisation and securing of asylum seeker bodies in the 'violent frames' of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders. Geoforum 58, 122–131.
Jones, R., Royles, E., 2020. The state, civil society and the shadow state: Analysing three vectors of relationality. Geoforum 114, 40–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.05.017.
Klinenberg, E., 2018. Palaces for the people : how social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life / Eric Klinenberg.
Klocker, N., Dunn, K.M., 2003. Whos driving the asylum debate- newspaper and government represe. Media Int, Aust. Incorporat. Cult. Policy: Quart. J. Media Res. Resour. 109, 71–92.
Latham, A., Layton, J., 2019. Social infrastructure and the public life of cities: Studying urban sociality and public spaces. Geogr. Compass 13, e12444.
Lawson, V., 2007. Presidential Address: Geographies of Care and Responsibility. Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr. 97, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.2307/4620234.
Lawson, L., Kearns, A., 2020. Foodbanks as paradoxes of policy and society. volunt sect rev. https://doi.org/10.1332/204080520X15926573026085.
Lipsky, M., 1980. Street Level Bureaucracy Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services. Russell Sage Foundation.
Lobo, M., 2020. Living on the edge: precarity and freedom in Darwin, Australia. J. Ethn. Migr. Stud. 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1732585.
Mountz, A., 2003. Human smuggling, the transnational imaginary, and everyday geographies of the nation-state. Antipode 35, 622–644.
Power, E.R., Wiesel, I., Mitchell, E., Mee, K.J., 2022. Shadow care infrastructures: Sustaining life in post-welfare cities. Progress in Human Geography 03091325221109837. https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325221109837.
Pearson, R., Elson, D., 2015. Transcending the Impact of the Financial Crisis in the United Kingdom: Towards Plan F—a Feminist Economic Strategy. Feminist Rev. 109, 8–30. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2014.42.
Power, A., Hall, E., Kaley, A., Macpherson, H., 2021. Voluntary support in a post-welfare state: Experiences and challenges of precarity. Geoforum 125, 87–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.07.003.
Rishbeth, C., Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., Darling, J., 2019. Participation and wellbeing in urban greenspace: 'curating sociability' for refugees and asylum seekers. Geoforum 106, 125–134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.07.014.
Takahashi, L.M., Wiebe, D., Rodriguez, R., 2001. Navigating the time–space context of HIV and AIDS: daily routines and access to care. Soc. Sci. Med. 53, 845–863. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00363-4.
Tastsoglou, E., Abidi, C.B., Brigham, S.M., Lange, E.A., 2014. (En)Gendering Vulnerability. Refuge: Canada's J. Refugees 30, 67–78.
Trudeau, D., 2008. Towards a relational view of the shadow state. Polit. Ggeogr. 27 (6), 669–690.
Williams, A., Goodwin, M., Cloke, P., 2014. Neoliberalism, Big Society, and progressive localism. Environ. Plan A 46, 2798–2815.
Wilson, H.F., 2014. Multicultural learning: Parent encounters with difference in a Birmingham primary school. Trans. Inst. Br. Geograph. 39 (1), 102–114.
Wise, A., 2009. Everyday Multiculturalism : Transversal Crossings and Working Class Cosmopolitans. In: Wise, A., Velayutham, S. (Eds.), Everyday Multiculturalism. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, pp. 21–45.