

Even flows and deferred lives

The logistification of migrant settlement in Sweden

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Abstract

In 2016, rebuilt containers and barracks accommodating so-called ‘newly arrived immigrants’ started to appear in Stockholm, Sweden. People who had been on the move for an extensive time, staying in refugee camps, and transit, reception and asylum centres, found themselves again in a state of deferral, this time within the refuge of the nation-state. This dissertation aims to deepen the understanding of how new thresholds arise and materialise, extending the migration trajectory within the nation-state. To this end, the dissertation attends to conflicting policies, bureaucratic practices and local conditions, focusing primarily on the logic and implementation of the Settlement Act, a Swedish dispersal policy enacted in the wake of the ‘summer of migration’ in 2015. The new law aimed to speed up the transition of ‘newly arrived immigrants’ into the labour market by creating ‘even flows’ between asylum centres and municipal accommodation.

More specifically, this dissertation explores how the practices of deferral are enacted in the implementation of the Settlement Act through three separate empirical domains: 1) calculations of the dispersal and matching system at the state level, 2) municipal management and the dwellers’ experiences of temporary accommodation and resettlement in Stockholm, and 3) the professional and social dimensions of the encounters between street-level bureaucrats and ‘newly arrived immigrants’.

The dissertation builds on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Stockholm between 2018 and 2019. It comprises participant observations and interviews with officials and with ‘newly arrived immigrants’ living in temporary housing. The dissertation brings together and analyses the separate empirical domains by drawing on the concept of the logistification of migration. This analytical lens encourages us to dissect the inclusive yet differential mechanisms in the migration apparatus, paying attention to the temporal management of circulation and mobility, on the one hand, and the ensuing friction and contestation, on the other hand.

The dissertation argues that the logistification of migrant settlement management includes several practices that defer the housing shortage to sustain the acceleration from asylum centres to municipal accommodation, which produces a post-asylum threshold and incessant forced mobility. This continuous circulation of people operates as a filtering mechanism between asylum and integration, leading the ‘newly arrived immigrants’ into housing and labour precarity. Hence, the dissertation points to the linkages between the logistical management of settlement, practices of deferral and differential inclusion.

This dissertation contributes to the growing literature dealing with the logistification of migration by following state policy through its implementation. While large parts of the literature on the logistification of migration have focused on the state level of managing migration and borders, this dissertation pays attention to how the logistification takes shape within the borders of the nation-state.

Keywords: migration, housing, the logistification of migration, temporariness, Sweden, Stockholm