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Street-level bureaucrats as policy entrepreneurs and collaborators: Findings from Israel and Germany

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Abstract
This comparative paper adds to the literature by exploring the connection between policy entrepreneurship and collaboration among street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) in two countries. We asked if SLBs, as policy entrepreneurs, promote collaborative efforts in their work. If so, in what ways? The study was based on qualitative research and in-depth semistructured interviews with 20 SLBs in social services in Israel and Germany. Our findings suggest that as policy entrepreneurs, SLBs use diverse ways of working together, and a higher level of policy change demands a higher level of collaboration. We offer three generic types of SLB policy entrepreneurs: collaborative policy entrepreneurs, collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneurs, and coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs. We suggest administrative cultures and policy styles may shed light on the presence of types of SLB policy entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS
collaboration, comparative, policy entrepreneurship, social services, street-level bureaucrats

All authors equally contributed to the paper.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The literature on street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) and policy entrepreneurship is expanding (Arnold, 2021; Cohen, 2021; Cohen & Klenk, 2019). Collaboration in policy design and implementation is also increasingly discussed in the literature and is a growing phenomenon in practice (Ansell, 2012; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Lahat & Sher Hadar, 2020). However, to the best of our knowledge, SLBs as policy entrepreneurs and their collaborative efforts have not been studied from a comparative perspective. Therefore, we asked the following questions: Do SLBs—as policy entrepreneurs—promote collaborative efforts in their work? If so, in what ways? Are there differences between Israeli and German SLBs in their collaborative efforts?

This explorative and comparative study examined SLBs as policy entrepreneurs in the social services field and their use of collaboration. Since the literature seldom uses a comparative lens, we selected Germany and Israel as interesting yet different cases. In both countries, several sectors are involved in the welfare state. In Germany, the idea of cross-sectoral collaboration is promoted in policy documents and social legislation, and an overall normative policy style is based on collaboration and consensus building (Zohlnhöfer & Tosun, 2021). Collaboration in practice, however, is hindered by a fragmented implementation landscape resulting from a mixed, competitive welfare market, federalism, administrative silos, and an administrative culture based on the rule of law—Rechtsstaat (Kuhlmann et al., 2021; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In Israel, the growing involvement of voluntary and private sectors in the delivery of welfare state services is a comparatively new phenomenon; as such, it still receives a great deal of criticism, but the policy style is reactive and less rigid (Lahat et al., 2021).

To explore the research question in the two countries, we used a qualitative research method based on semistructured interviews with 20 social service workers, 10 in Israel and 10 in Germany. We interviewed SLBs responsible for the implementation of social services who invest their time, energy, and efforts not only in managing and providing these services, but also in changing policy by building and using collaborative arrangements with actors from the private sector, NGOs, public organizations, and the general public.

By focusing on SLB policy entrepreneurs promoting collaborative efforts in their work, this paper brings together different streams of the literature that are interested in similar empirical phenomena but hitherto disconnected and discussed in different scientific communities. The first is the literature on policy entrepreneurs and the characteristics and conditions of their strategies to promote their goals by changing policy. The second is the literature on collaboration, specifically work on SLBs in the welfare state who use collaboration as a tool to provide social services. Notably, SLB policy entrepreneurs who use collaboration to change policy are at the intersection of these two bodies of research.

By integrating these different perspectives into one analytical framework, we make both a theoretical and an empirical contribution to the literature. The analytical framework we propose helps to theorize collaboration among SLB policy entrepreneurs and could be relevant to the wider SLB literature. In addition, it yields a better understanding of how SLBs are likely to use the main asset to which they have preferred access—knowledge of policy deficits and implementation problems—and exploit this knowledge to change policy via collaboration.

Two main findings emerge from our research. First, we pinpoint features of SLBs based on their level of collaboration and their level of policy entrepreneurship and refer to three generic types of SLB policy entrepreneurs. Second, we show a higher level of policy entrepreneurship demands a higher level of collaboration.

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1.1 | SLBs as policy entrepreneurs

Although the image of public sector employees is sometimes rigid, the place of entrepreneurs in public sector organizations is not new. Public employees as entrepreneurs are referred to as those individuals (agents) who are part of an entrepreneurial process. The entrepreneurial process requires both an event and an agent, and it leads to a new concept, idea, process, product, service, or venture (Morris & Jones, 1999, p. 73). Individuals as entrepreneurs are argued to have three main characteristics: innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness (Kraus et al., 2019; Morris & Jones, 1999). However, policy entrepreneurs also have specific goals.

John Kingdon introduced the notion of policy entrepreneurship in his analysis of policy formation and change. In his influential book *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*, he studied how issues become *political* and attract officials' attention. The policy entrepreneur, while not the only factor, plays a major role in this respect.

Policy entrepreneurs actively seek opportunities to influence policy outcomes to advance their objectives. Typically, they strive to alter the status quo and move on to new pastures. Some definitions of policy entrepreneurs emphasize their place in the design and formulation stage of the policy process (e.g., Aviv et al., 2021; Cohen, 2021), while others refer to innovative action in the implementation stage as well (Arnold, 2015). Although they see change as necessary, policy entrepreneurs usually do not have the resources to achieve the desired outcome without help (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018). Creating networks and building alliances is thus one of their core activities, and in this endeavor, they often employ nontraditional strategies. Policy entrepreneurship is not a single activity, but a process that can be ongoing; furthermore, it requires actors to take risks and bring in their resources, such as time, reputation, or money (Cohen, 2021, p. 1).

Kingdon's book, first published in 1984, shares many similarities with Lipsky's *Street level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services* published in 1980 (Lipsky, 2010). Both authors departed from the then-mainstream approach to understanding the policy process. Instead of focusing on the formal policy decision-making structures, they were interested in what happens before (Kingdon) or after (Lipsky) formal decisions are made. Both examined how individual actors and their discretion, their ideas, and their behavior influence official policies. Over the past 40 years, many scholars have adopted and developed their ideas. For a long time, however, the respective research communities remained detached, ignoring the theoretical and empirical insights of the other community (Cohen & Aviram, 2021, p. 430). In the past decade or so, a new body of literature on street-level bureaucrats as policy entrepreneurs started to evolve.

One reason for the disconnection between the two approaches was that policy entrepreneurs were implicitly perceived as actors at the top of their organizations, or at least as actors high in the organizational hierarchy (Arnold, 2021, p. 439). SLBs were classified as actors at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, the mainstream SLB literature did not consider them "political animals" interested in innovation. Here, too, the underlying implicit assumptions were narrow: as a rule, SLBs were described as actors whose actions are directed at *coping within* institutional structures, not at *changing existing* institutional structures.

Recent research, however, has shown that SLBs act as advocates of policy change and invest time and other resources to realize innovative ideas. Lavee and Cohen (2019) suggested the likelihood of SLB policy entrepreneurship increases when the following three elements come

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into play: (1) a sense of an acute crisis; (2) a lack of knowledge to deal with this crisis; (3) a demand for political action. However, SLB policy entrepreneurs differ from classical elite or elite-oriented policy entrepreneurs in many respects. In work on the regulatory adoption of wetland assessment tools, Arnold (2015, 2021) pointed to decisive differences in motivation, constancy, network participant status, and network composition. SLB policy entrepreneurs display a defensive motivation, such that they try to "avoid losing, rather than gaining, important resources or favoured policy dynamics" (Arnold, 2021, p. 447). Gofen et al. (2021) recently confirmed this important difference between SLB policy entrepreneurs and elite-oriented policy entrepreneurs. Furthermore, SLB policy entrepreneurs show greater constancy of efforts; they not only advocate for their policy when the policy window is open, but they also demonstrate perseverance for a long time. Finally, SLB policy entrepreneurs tend to build alliances with less politically powerful actors; this limits the outcome of their efforts, however, and does not provide solutions for a lack of resources.

Collective entrepreneurial action might help to overcome these well-documented problems but this requires SLB policy entrepreneurs who can orchestrate their entrepreneurial activities (Gofen et al., 2021, p. 496). Aviv et al. (2021) examined policy entrepreneurship among community social service workers in Israel and found they were involved in long-term, direct, and formal policy entrepreneurship for the benefit of their served communities; they used varied strategies in different policy arenas. Frisch-Aviram et al. (2018) studied low-level professional bureaucrats who were involved in policy entrepreneurship at the local level in waste separation policies. The authors suggested that local, less-formal, and less-hierarchal modes of governance provide an arena that is more enabling for SLB policy entrepreneurship than more formal hierarchal governance modes.

Overall, research on SLB policy entrepreneurs is still nascent. While SLB entrepreneurship has been studied in different policy sectors (e.g., waste separation, urban renewal, wetlands management, community health), more systematic comparative research is needed, and single-case studies prevail.

1.2 | Collaboration—in general and among SLBs

Collaboration has become a buzzword in the literature on public organizations (Ansell et al., 2020; Stout & Keast, 2021). In part, it is a product of the New Public Management (NPM) era. During the NPM years, public administration organizations enlarged the share of outsourcing and decentralized many services, thus creating a need for organizations to engage with different partners, stakeholders, and sectors. The new governance and post-NPM era has required even more collaboration (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In many respects, the collaboration arrangements try to resolve public organizations' problems of diminishing resources, erosion of public trust, and legitimation (Lahat & Sher Hadar, 2020; Vigoda-Gadot, 2002).

These trends have led to a growing emphasis on coproduction and collaboration governance (Campomori & Casula, 2022; Kekez et al., 2019; Lahat et al., 2021). Collaboration has many definitions and includes diverse modes of governance (Emerson, 2018; Lahat et al., 2021; Stout & Keast, 2021). For example, Emerson et al. (2012) and Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) referred to collaborative governance regimes (CGRs) and focused on the context and conditions leading to collaboration between different organizations in a policy field. In this study, we refer to collaboration in a specific organization and to the involvement of different stakeholders from

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different sectors and various levels of government and the public in the formal and informal arrangements that together and over a relatively long period are involved in the design and implementation of public services and programs (Ansell & Gash 2008; Emerson et al., 2012).

Researchers have also noted the diversified nature of collaboration. For example, Keast and Mandell (2014) and Keast et al. (2007) referred to a range of collaboration intensities rather than to collaboration as an inclusive term. They placed cooperation that includes a limited connection for a relatively short time, with low intensity among the participating actors, at one end of the spectrum; in this case, actors keep their autonomy but become more aware of their goals. At the other extreme, they referred to collaboration that includes a high level of connection over the long term, the blurring of responsibilities of each actor, mutual goal creation, and highly intense connection between the participants. Finally, they placed coordination with medium connection and medium intensity of interaction between diverse actors, who are mainly instrumental in bringing their partners to do the job, in the center of the spectrum (Keast et al., 2007).

The literature has also identified the conditions that lead to collaboration and the mechanisms within the "black box" of collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Diaz-Kope et al., 2015; Emerson, 2018; Thomson & Perry, 2006). For instance, based on Wood and Gray (1991), Thomson and Perry (2006, p. 21) offered an antecedent-process-outcome framework. Similarly, Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 550) referred to a collaborative governance model and to antecedents or starting conditions, including features such as interdependence, previous relations between participants, the need for resources, incentives to collaborate, and the complexities of the issue at hand. Thomson and Perry (2006) identified five elements within the collaborative mechanism itself: governance (e.g., decision-making and ways to facilitate agreements), administration (e.g., formalizing rules, structures, and practices to achieve mutual goals), organizational autonomy (e.g., overcoming the tension between the organization's self-interest and the collaborative goal), mutuality, and norms of trust and reciprocity. Ansell and Gash (2008) mentioned the elements of trust-building, face-to-face dialog, intermediate outcomes, commitment to the process, and shared understanding. They also included leadership and institutional design as important elements influencing the collaborative process.

While the goal of the collaboration is to yield more resources, knowledge, and innovative ideas, as well as more legitimation, it is important to remember its challenges, including the history of power relationships between partners, long and time-consuming processes, the risk of escalating a conflict, the risk of focusing on the collaborative process instead of on the target of the services, and even harming the democratic process (Lahat & Sher Hadar, 2020; McIvor, 2020). However, it is hard to promote policies without collaboration (at some stage) in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) and multisectoral surroundings (e.g., Emerson, 2018; Van der Wal, 2017). Therefore, a better understanding of the ways SLBs, as policy entrepreneurs, promote collaboration is important.

The scholarship on policy practice and policy entrepreneurship among SLBs in social services stresses the importance of collaboration to promote social change. Ellis (2008), for example, argued social service workers who wish to change social policy need the support of others; hence, one of the first steps is "assembling a team" (p. 156). The team members should be chosen strategically and demonstrate at least one of the following traits: the ability to influence other people, competence, the essential knowledge and skills to address the issue, and the motivation to change the unjust social policy. De Corte and Roose (2020) argued that social workers usually do not have the resources to influence policymakers individually; therefore, they usually join forces and resources with other organizations who have a stake in

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the subject they wish to promote. Such coalitions may be temporal or informal but could become more formalized over time. In their systematic review of the literature on SLB policy entrepreneurship, Frisch-Aviram et al. (2020) found that creating networks with partners from different organizations, both within and across sectors, is an essential strategy. Similarly, Nouman and Cnaan (2021) and Aviv et al. (2021) researched social entrepreneurship among social service workers and found that coalition building is an essential strategy to promote entrepreneurship. This strategy includes recruiting policy actors, including politicians, bureaucrats, and other stakeholders, who agree to collaborate to promote social change. In their research on SLB policy entrepreneurship amongst social service workers in Israel, Lavee and Cohen (2019) similarly found that coalition-building is a key strategy. The coalitions they studied were cross-sectorial, involving actors from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors; collaboration was interministerial (from their own office and other offices) and cross-hierarchical (low-level and high-level decision-makers at the local and national levels).

1.3 | Israel and Germany: The study context

The two cases—Israel and Germany—represent very different types of administrative cultures, policy styles, and welfare state regimes. While the two countries went through similar trends in NPM reform, mainly reflected in a growing marketization of the welfare state, they have different administrative roots and represent different welfare regimes.

Germany belongs to a group of corporatist welfare regimes in which social support and care—for children, the sick, the elderly, and the disabled—has long been considered a family responsibility. Compared to other European welfare states, the transformation of the German welfare state to deal with the challenges of the postgolden age of welfare state policy (new social risks and a tight public budget) started comparatively late (see Hinrichs, 2010).

Germany is a continental European federal state whose administrative culture and policy style are based on the Rechtsstaat—the "legal law" or "rule of law" tradition—with a strong bureaucratic orientation and a clear differentiation between the bureaucratic and the political orientation (Kuhlmann et al., 2021; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The German federal system includes decentralization into 16 *Länder*, meso-level units of government responsible for many aspects of public services, and more than 10,000 local communities (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). While in its policy style, Germany is a consensus-oriented democratic system, and collaboration is generally valued, the competitive structures of welfare markets hamper collaborative implementation practices. Similarly, a complex allocation of decision-making and implementation responsibilities across the different levels of the federalized political system impedes (but also necessitates) collaboration in social service delivery (Berzel & Klenk, 2021).

For a long time, Germany was considered a laggard in the NPM movement. Still, in the early 2000s, a paradigm shift took place as reforms and regulatory changes were implemented to introduce competitive tendering, with voluntary and for-profit providers competing at eye-level for state contracts. The new markets, however, were heavily regulated by the state with obligatory quality and performance management for private providers.

The roots of the Israeli welfare state are social-democratic. Still, since the 1980s, Israel has been considered by most scholars as leaning toward a liberal welfare regime, and this has resulted in a shift toward privatization and marketization of social services. Approximately 80% of personal social services are provided by nongovernmental actors, including those in the business sector and nonprofit sector organizations (Benish, 2018; Simonovich et al., 2021).

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The main model for social service provision in Israel is defined as "partial privatization." In this model, the government bodies and local authorities define the composition of services to be provided, provide full or partial funding, and determine service eligibility. Yet non-governmental organizations deliver these services, under the supervision (at different levels) of government ministries or municipalities (Ajzenstadt & Rosenhek, 2000; Bar-Nir & Gal, 2011; Katan & Lowenstein, 2009).

Israel is a small country, compared to Germany (9 million people vs. 80 million), and while there are more than 250 local authorities, administration is relatively centralized, with de facto decentralization to the stronger local authorities (Dery, 1998). The policy style and administrative culture tend to be reactive to social problems (not anticipatory), centralistic, and suspicious of engaging with other actors (Lahat et al., 2021), but the reactive and more informal features of the Israeli culture have led to a more entrepreneurial culture (Davidovitz et al., 2022; Yair, 2014). Because the lines between the central and the local level governments in Israel are blurred, de facto decentralization, accompanied by a lower level of central regulation in social services and the room for innovative and entrepreneurial ways of operation, at least in some authorities, is wider (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018)

Against the literature background, our initial assumptions were: (1) SLBs as policy entrepreneurs will tend to use collaboration to influence policy change. (2) Given the lack of capability in policy design and change, the collaborative effort used by SLBs as policy entrepreneurs will be characterized by high-intensity collaboration rather than just cooperation or coordination. (3) While SLBs in both countries will use collaboration, we will find more tendency toward entrepreneurial efforts in Israel than Germany.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 | Design

The research was conducted using a phenomenological qualitative design (Cresswell, 2013; Eikenaar et al., 2016). Because of the scarcity in comparative studies of work on policy entrepreneurs as collaborators, we chose to focus on two countries reflecting diverse cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), Israel and Germany. Whilst going through similar processes as mixed welfare states in the last decades, they have different welfare regimes, administrative cultures, and policy styles. We chose our research strategy because it provided an opportunity to examine the phenomenon in question, SLB policy entrepreneurs promoting collaborative efforts in their work, from the informants' perspective, based on their subjective experience (Cresswell, 2013).

We started our quest (based on the literature) with the concept of the policy entrepreneur as a collaborator, focusing on individual social services workers working for the public sector who, by investing their time, energy, and efforts, promote collaborative arrangements in the design and/or implementation of policies. The collaboration includes different stakeholders (from the private sector, NGOs, public organizations, and the general public) and/or diverse governmental bodies (local, regional, and central). It takes place for a substantive period and is aimed at helping a group of people. It embraces a motivation to change policy structures and/or processes profoundly to make it clear that the focus of its efforts is on policy entrepreneurship (compared to individual help without changing policies). The collaborative arrangement is acknowledged formally or informally at the local level and can be scaled up to

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higher governmental levels. Our analysis produced a more nuanced picture of collaboration and policy entrepreneurship, as discussed in the findings.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work at Sapir Academic College (Approval No. 26122021).

2.2 | Participants

The research participants included 20 social service workers, 10 from Israel and 10 from Germany (see Table A1 in Appendix A). They were selected using theoretical sampling to include informants affording a maximum potential to learn about the research question (Cresswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). We decided to focus on SLBs working in social welfare services (in the public sector), as they are identified in the SLB literature as classic services provider SLBs (Lipsky, 1980). As noted by Cohen (2021), the identification of SLBs policy entrepreneurs is not an easy task. In our preliminary talks with potential interviewees, we tried to pinpoint the following aspects to help us select our sample: first, we looked for SLBs working at the street level (past and mainly present[1]) of the welfare state and involved in the provision of social services; second, we looked for workers engaged in some kind of policy entrepreneurship, i.e., conscious attempts to change social policies (the language of policy and policy change was not always so definitive); third, we looked for their involvement in collaboration (as explained above); fourth, we sought diversity in the fields of social services and the geographical locations in both countries.

The sampling procedure was based on snowball sampling with an orientation to the concept of "policy entrepreneur as a collaborator" (Cresswell, 2013). We consulted with social service workers and key players from welfare services to track potential informants who demonstrated involvement in policy entrepreneurship and collaboration. We reached out to potential informants and introduced the subject of the study in our attempts to fit the sampling criteria. After acquiring informed consent, we scheduled the interview.

The Israeli sample comprised eight female social services workers and two males. Their ages ranged from 30 to 58 (avg. 46.7), and their level of seniority as social services workers varied from 6 to 34 years (avg. 20.4). Their professional practices were divided into the following fields: addiction and homelessness (3), elderly citizens (1), families dealing with poverty (2), youth at risk (1), and community intervention (3). The German sample included three female social services workers and seven males. Their ages ranged from 35 to 70 years (avg. 49), and their seniority as social service workers ranged from 5 to 45 years (avg. 25). Their fields of practice included persons with disability (2), child and family welfare (2), health (2), unemployment (2), and community intervention and social planning (2) (see Appendix A for more information).

2.3 | Data collection

Data were collected between January and June 2022, using in-depth semistructured interviews with the social services workers, who offered direct, practice-oriented knowledge about their involvement in diverse kinds of policy entrepreneurship (at different levels). The Israeli interviews were conducted by the first and third authors, and the German interviews were conducted by the second author. The interview protocol included open-ended questions

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addressing the involvement of interviewees in policy entrepreneurship and in collaborative efforts. Sample questions from the protocol included: "Did you engage in attempts to change social policies as a part of your professional practice?"; "Did you engage in collaboration-forming as part of your professional practice?"; "Did you attempt to change social policy using these collaborations?"

The interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, most interviews were conducted via Zoom. The participants did not receive any compensation for their participation.

2.4 | Data analysis

The transcribed data drawn from the interviews were thematically analysed, a method used to systematically identify, organize, and offer insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After reading the interviews, the authors performed initial coding, which included identifying units of meaning that offered significant insights. In this process, they identified the categories arising from the codes which addressed the interviewees' involvement in policy entrepreneurship initiatives and their collaborative efforts. The categories were then reorganized and shaped into themes, and the content of the codes was divided into separate units and reorganized based on the themes detected. In the first stage, this process of thematic analysis was performed separately, with the first and third authors detecting themes emerging from the Israeli interviews, and the second author analysing the themes derived from the German interviews. In the next step, the authors consulted and identified common themes that characterized the data drawn from both countries. To enhance the study's reliability, we documented the chain of evidence for each step in the study, from the interview protocol to the data analysis. The three authors read the data (in their country and the summaries of the other country), analysed them, and held consultations. Collecting data from two countries with different administrative cultures and diverse professional fields enabled the triangulation of the information, increasing the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The triangulation of thematic analysis with the literature led to the identification of diverse levels of policy entrepreneurship and collaboration and three generic types of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs based on the interaction between those levels.

3 | RESULTS

The interview transcripts provided rich data on social services workers in Israel and Germany. Our findings suggest that a high level of policy entrepreneurship demands a higher level of collaboration (see Figure A1). In fact, when exploring the phenomenon of collaboration in the context of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs, it is more accurate to refer to ranges of collaboration and policy entrepreneurship rather than the presence or absence of collaboration. However, we can present three generic types of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs, inspired by Keast et al. (2007), that arose from our interviews: (1) collaborative policy entrepreneurs are SLBs actively engaged in long-term and structured collaborations with a defined intention to change policy at the policy formulation and design stage, usually at a higher policy level (central-Federal government level); (2) collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneurs are SLBs promoting medium-level collaborative efforts and less structured coordination to affect policy, usually at a

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lower level (local level), but still aiming to change the policy design stage; (3) coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs are SLBs engaged in relatively short- to medium-term and less formal cooperations designed to improve social services, not aiming to reshape social policy but rather to bring new ideas to the implementation stage.

In what follows, we first present the three types and then reflect on the differences between Israel and Germany.

3.1 | Collaborative policy entrepreneurs

Collaborative policy entrepreneurs included SLBs who were actively engaged in long-term and structured collaborations, initiated with a defined intention to actively change policy in the formulation and design stage, mainly at a macropolicy level (e.g., central government in Israel and Federal government in Germany). This type fit three interviewees in Israel (7, 9, and 10) and two in Germany (13 and 19). These SLBs began their involvement by identifying a social problem in the course of their professional practice which negatively affected the service users in their care. These social problems were identified by the SLBs as linked to an unjust social policy, causing social exclusion, harm, and lack of accessibility to basic social rights. For example, Sara (9), a social services worker in a local municipality in Israel, referred to a case of two elderly people who had an essential service cut because of financial debt: Ingrid (19), formally a social worker working with the unemployed in Germany, became involved in policy change in a period of major labor market reforms which she perceived as unjust because they caused undeserved hardship to a huge number of benefit recipients.

While encountering social injustice drove these SLBs to strive for policy change, they quickly realized this was not something they could do alone. Policy change requires building alliances and coalitions with other people and organizations who share a mutual motivation and operate together to change policy. It was also clear that they lacked some of the skills needed to bring about policy change, such as writing policy briefs and contacting members of parliament.

The participants in the collaborations varied; they included colleagues and supervisors from the same organization, other SLBs from the local municipality, other public sector organizations, nongovernmental advocacy organizations, political lobbyists, the media, academics, and local citizens. These alliances were initiated mainly to gain political power. Therefore, the selection of partners was mostly based on strategic planning for the purpose of collaborating with those who had the expertise and the political power required for policy entrepreneurship. Yossi (10), the head of a department for community social services work in Israel, initiated a collaboration to address the problem of debts. He explained:

> We can't do this alone, the social workers. We need to step aside from the social work arena and search for partners that are not from the same niche because they might see things differently…and that's when I started to involve other functions like lawyers, economists…because my goal was to change policy. The residents themselves can't change the reality until the policy changes.

Those collaborations were formal and included an administrative structure, for example, meeting every month, and they ranged from one to several years (7 years in one case). During that time, the members of the collaboration communicated and met regularly, and this was

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required for the governance of the policy process. They created trust relations based on face-to-face meetings. The partners were aware of their relative strengths and weaknesses; however, in some of these collaborations, the leadership and the governance stayed in the hands of the social services worker—the entrepreneur. In other cases, it was based on a more mutual governance structure in the sense of having equal power in decision-making and letting others lead the initiative.

Collaboration-forming was described as a challenging task, requiring patience and willingness for constant dialog and adaptation. However, the relationships and the important place of the collaborators were based on specialization, meaning collaborations where each participant contributed to the process based on personal expertise, including professional skills, political power, or legal knowledge, as mentioned above. The participants did not always stay in the collaboration; personal obligations, commitment, and interest in the subject played a crucial role.

All examples above were aimed at changing major laws and regulations. In Israel, the collaboration managed to change regulations at the country level for the benefit of disadvantaged populations.

3.2 | Collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneur

The type of collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneur represented a group of SLBs promoting medium levels of collaboration. Their practices of working together, which we call "coordination" based on Keast et al. (2007), were less structured and of shorter duration. Whilst the scale of collaboration was lower than the first type (collaborative policy entrepreneurs), it was still designed to affect social policy at the design stage. We refer to both collaboration and coordination, as some of the examples had a higher level of collaboration than others, but overall, the aspired range of policy change was more limited than in the first case. In Israel, we identified five interviewees who fit this type (1, 3, 4, 5, and 8), and in Germany, we identified four (12, 14, 15, and 20).

Like collaborative policy entrepreneurs, collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneurs identified an unjust social policy in the course of their work and engaged in efforts to change this policy. For example, Miri (5) was a community social services worker from Israel who wanted to change the accessibility policy for persons with disability in her municipality. She specifically mentioned the value of coordination:

> As a young social worker, it was clear that I needed to recruit the municipality CEO if I wanted big budgets and policy change…and when we come to him as a forum of organizations and activists, and not just as 'Miri from the welfare department', it's something big. They can say 'no' if it's just me, but they can't say 'no' to all of us'.

The difference between the SLBs in this type and the SLBs in the previous type was the level and nature of the alliances in which they engaged; most of the activities of collaborative-coordinator entrepreneurs aimed at change in their local environment. The coordination employed by these SLBs was less structured and formal, the type of communication between parties was less frequent, and the administrative structure of the collaborative effort was less formal.

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For example, Amir (4), a social worker in charge of homeless people in his municipality, talked about his coordination with the local police department, actors within the local authority, his supervisor, academia, and the service users themselves. As a result of his efforts to improve services for homeless people, he initiated a local-level policy change to open a unit addressing homelessness in the welfare department in his municipality, a subject that was not on the agenda before his involvement. This coordination was ad hoc and instrumental on a mutual need base and did not involve frequent communication between the parties.

Another example was the case of Sagit (3), a community social worker who initiated a roundtable addressing people with disability in her municipality. This coordination included people with disability and their family members, a nonprofit organization promoting services for people with disability, and employees from different municipality units. The members of the roundtable met once every few weeks or months, on a need basis, to promote issues involving people with disability at the local level. The involvement in the roundtable was not formal or engaging, and the parties often joined or missed appointments in the forum based on their level of involvement in the issue. However, this coordination put the issue of people with disabilities on policymakers' agenda, leading to a change in local policies, such as public events specifically for people with disabilities and changes in local regulations for times of emergency.

In a similar vein, Gerd a project manager from a social integration project in Germany, described organizing and forming local coalitions as one of his core activities through which he achieved the adoption of innovative approaches to (re-)integrate disabled people into the labor market.

3.3 | Coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs

Coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs included SLBs engaged in relatively short-term and nonformal cooperations that had the objective of improving social services but without changing the design of the policy. Therefore, while they mirrored entrepreneurial characteristics, they did not act at the policy agenda-setting stage. We identified two interviewees in Israel (2 and 6) and four in Germany (11, 15, 17, and 18) as coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs.

The SLBs in this type differed from the first two in their entrepreneurial behavior which we classified as entrepreneurship in the implementation stage, not as entrepreneurship in the design phase. It was also characterized by a lower level of collaboration which we classified as ranging from coordination to cooperation.

Coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs were involved in cooperation-forming, but they did not intend to remake social policy. Whilst those in the other two categories were motivated to initiate alliances to gain political power and change policies at the local or central level, these SLBs were driven by a desire to pool their resources and improve the social services to the people in their care. They also aimed at bringing new interpretations to the policy implementation stage. For example, Noa (6), the head of the department of social services in a local municipality, explained the innovative and imperative nature of collaboration in the department's work. She gave a specific example based on cooperation with academia, and while she did not initiate the policy, she (and her team) developed practices for working with poor people and a new model that changed the ways of working with the poor population, not just in her department but in others as well. Thus, policy learning between social services departments influenced policy implementation in this field.

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In some cases, the interviewees said they saw that policy programs suffered from inadequate resources and other shortages, with detrimental effects on the effectiveness of the services they delivered. However, they did not perceive policy entrepreneurship as part of their job, and several clearly stated: "It is just not my job to change policies" (11, 15, 16, 18, and 20).

Jakob (18), a senior manager in a social services provider for childcare protection and family counseling in Germany, was proud to have developed, together with colleagues from other service providers, innovative arrangements for service delivery. But he was surprised when asked during the interview whether he had ever thought about discussing his service delivery innovations with politicians to initiate structural changes in policy programs. Richard (16), who was employed in a local public health department in Germany, explained: "The issues we discuss in our local collaborative networks are highly political. However, all we do is build consensus and *prepare* political decisions; it is the role of politicians to develop strategies to get appropriate measures realized."

One of the Israeli interviewees in this type, Shira (2), was a social services worker providing services to people struggling with addiction. She was committed to the service users in her care and did all that was possible within the boundaries of her job to provide adequate service. She was not occupied in attempts to change social policies at the macrolevel and only focused on her direct service users. At one point, she realized her local unit services were overbooked, with a waiting list. To correct this situation, she decided to put pressure on the Ministry of Welfare to open another unit of addiction services:

> First and foremost, I am engaged in providing therapy to addicts.... During the years, I always said that there is a need to open more units in our area, and the waiting list would just grow more and more....I kept warning about the situation to higher levels and saying that our services become less officiant that way.... It was with me but of course, there was a limit to how much I could actually make it happen.

Shira's efforts were successful, and eventually another unit opened, but she was driven by a desire to improve services, not to change policy; her activities were limited to taking administrative steps (creating a waiting list) and informing the supervisors. She did not take clear action to be involved in the policy agenda-setting stage and lead the change and was not sure if the change could be traced to her efforts.

As for cooperation, her routine work sometimes required networking with other professionals or services for information or assistance, but such communications remained sporadic and did not rise to a higher level of collaboration. Similar to Shira, all the coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs mentioned cooperative work, but their cooperation efforts were ad hoc on a need basis, with relatively little communication or continuity. Interviewees mentioned routine cooperation with other municipal organizations to improve services at the local level, with philanthropic nonprofit organizations, for example, providing food or material assistance to service users in need, with nongovernmental welfare services working with the municipality as out-source contractors, with volunteering citizens, and with academia.

Alex (17), a social services worker in a local youth department in Germany, started his interview by saying, "Cooperation is daily business." However, during the conversation, it became clear that he cooperated only within formal practices that often did not require personal exchanges (writing letters or emails, asking other departments or service providers to

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provide information about clients or programs). Moreover, he never initiated new cooperative networks and only used pre-established structures.

Our impression was that some of the SLBs went beyond their ordinary tasks and demonstrated creative and innovative thinking in their cooperation to improve services for their service users; therefore, we perceived them as entrepreneurs in public organizations. Nonetheless, such efforts do not reflect policy entrepreneurship, as they do not demonstrate a desire to change social policy; this is mainly present in the design and formulation stage, not the implementation stage.

3.4 | Comparison of Israel and Germany

Although sample selection should be considered, when we looked at the differences between countries, we found more examples of the collaborative policy entrepreneurs and collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneurs in Israel than Germany (eight in Israel and six in Germany). In Germany, we found more coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs (four in Germany and two in Israel). What was striking in the German case was that the SLBs were very clear about their role as state agents and the need to be loyal and obey rules. To cope with tensions arising from a policy they perceived as unjust on the one hand and their role as state agents on the other hand, they tried to recruit support from their direct supervisors, understanding this could be essential for the success of their efforts (14 and 19). In most (but not all) cases, these efforts were successful, and they received support. We also came across examples when superiors refused to support. This resulted in policy alienation: two interviewees in Germany (13 and 19) decided to leave the public sector when they realized their ideas about policy change were not supported. Still, it seemed the ideas of loyalty and obedience were more pressing and problematic for German SLBs who had a critical perspective than for their Israeli comparators, possibly because of an administrative culture that does not support non-obedience. Of course, trying to change policy demanded a lot of creativity from Israeli policy entrepreneurs as well, but they usually managed to get their supervisor's support, or at least tolerance.

Another difference was the process of collaboration forming. In the Israeli case, we found the policy entrepreneurs built a strategic coalition thinking about the diversity and skills of the people and organizations who could promote their policy aims. It seemed that for our German interviewees, network building was less strategic and often "just happened," either because SLBs are less strategic than the literature assumes or because appropriate partners were not at hand or were perceived as less approachable.

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our main finding is that whilst the literature suggests SLBs as policy entrepreneurs use collaboration, there is a range of collaborative practices for working together with other actors, and a higher level of policy change demands a higher level of collaboration. We also found differences in the administrative cultures and policy styles of Germany and Israel, and these seem to shed light on the different types of SLB policy entrepreneurs. Our findings have empirical, theoretical, and practical implications.

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Our empirical and theoretical contribution arises first, from the more nuanced picture of collaboration arrangements within the work of policy entrepreneurs, and second, from the comparative findings for Israel and Germany.

Our first contribution speaks to the understanding of policy entrepreneurship. Based on the literature, we assumed SLBs, as policy entrepreneurs, would tend to use collaboration to influence policy change. Indeed, as other studies have suggested (e.g., Ellis, 2008; Frisch-Aviram et al., 2020; Gofen et al., 2021; Lavee & Cohen, 2019; Nouman & Cnaan, 2021), we found collaboration is a cornerstone in the work of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs. However, to the best of our knowledge, ours is the first research to reveal diverse levels of collaboration. In our sample, SLBs who aimed at changing policy at the design stage built more intense collaboration patterns than those who aimed at changing policy at the implementation stage. We found the ways of working together fit the aims of the level of policy, and based on this finding, we suggested three generic types.

The SLBs in our sample who attempted to change macropolicies expressed the highest level of collaboration; we termed them collaborative policy entrepreneurs. These interviewees understood that to change policy, they needed to be able to participate in the policy arena and build strategic collaborations with others. They clearly stated they did not have all the necessary capabilities, for example, lobbying or articulating policy, and they understood the importance of "power," that is, political power. They also understood the importance of timing and "windows of opportunity" (Kingdon, 2011) and agreed to share power with others to promote their policy goals.

The SLBs we interviewed who aspired to change policy at the mezzo level, mainly at the local level, exhibited less intense collaboration. We termed them collaborative-coordinator policy entrepreneurs. These SLBs still based their efforts towards policy change at the design and formulation stage and used collaboration but at a lower level of intensity (shorter time frame, less formal structure, lower level of diversity of participants) to achieve the change (local vs. central/Federal policy change).

The third type aimed to affect policy on a smaller scale in the implementation stage; we referred to them as coordinator-cooperative entrepreneurs. Some definitions would not consider these SLBs to be policy entrepreneurs (Cohen, 2021; for different definitions, see Aviv et al., 2021) because they were less active in the design and formulation stage, whilst others would (Arnold, 2015). We found some innovative and entrepreneurial traits, such as innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness (Kraus et al., 2019; Morris & Jones, 1999). Although they were engaged in a lower level of collaboration, they created new ways of doing things that influenced policy, for example, creating new facilities in another local authority and building a practical model that was copied by other authorities. Our findings, therefore, call for researchers to widen the theoretical lens with respect to the diversity of collaboration arrangements (a range) used by SLBs as policy entrepreneurs to create policy and also with respect to the definition of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs (e.g., including innovative steps that lead to new policies in the implementation stage).

Our second contribution stems from the comparative nature of the study. Whilst caution is needed due to our small number of interviewees, we found clear differences between the countries. First, the tendency for entrepreneurial efforts was higher in Israel than Germany. Second, the place of the supervisor and the supervisor's support was more pronounced in the German case than in the Israeli case. These findings shed light on the value of managers' support for the work of SLBs as policy entrepreneurs and echo other studies noting the importance of managers' support for the work and discretion of SLBs (Davidovitz et al., 2022).

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However, the differences in the degree of freedom of Israeli SLBs compared to German SLBs could be attributed to the administrative culture and the policy style of these countries. Germany is a more regulation-oriented culture of the rule of law (Rechtsstaat), and there is a dichotomy between the place of politicians in the policy design and public employees in the policy implementation. Israel endorses more reactive, functional, and less formal norms and methods (Kuhlmann et al., 2021; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018; Lahat et al., 2021). Whilst the organizational context has been studied (Davidovitz et al., 2022; Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018), our findings suggest the need to expand the study of the influence of country context on SLBs' policy entrepreneurial efforts.

Our work also makes a practical contribution. A major implication of our study is that if social organizations want to encourage policy entrepreneurship among their workers, they should not just consider the skills of SLBs, such as coalition-building, but also think of making changes in the administrative culture to enable innovation and support for this initiative. For example, it seemed harder to become a policy entrepreneur in Germany than in Israel. Thus, some German SLBs decided to leave the system.

Admittedly, the study had some limitations. First, a comparative perspective is not easy to implement. We did our best to sample interviewees from the same field—social services employees at the street level who collaborated and aimed at policy change—but it was not easy to find interviewees who fit the description. Second, the social services are different in the two countries. Third, the idea of collaboration and the limits of collaboration are challenging to study; however, this added an interesting aspect to our findings. Fourth, the study reflects one point in time and a specific sample selection, based on 20 interviews, and cannot be generalized to other settings. But we aimed to better understand the specific question of how SLBs as policy entrepreneurs work, not to generalize our findings (Stake, 2010).

To sum up, the literature on SLBs as policy entrepreneurs are growing, and the place of collaboration in the welfare state is also a prominent topic. Yet the challenges of being a policy entrepreneur and embracing collaboration to change policies remain salient. We used a lens of diversity to explore this phenomenon at the individual and the country level. Therefore, we believe our findings can contribute to the developing literature on the topic and also to practice.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTE

[1] Some of our interviewees could be referred to as street-level management (Gassner & Gofen, 2018).

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APPENDIX: A

TABLE A1 Characteristics of research participants.

Number	Name	Male/female	Age	Role description
Israel				
1	Yael	F	30	Social worker in a program for youth at risk
2	Shira	F	44	Director of services for persons with addiction
3	Sagit	F	36	Community social worker
4	Amir	M	48	Social worker for homeless persons
5	Miri	F	45	Community social worker
6	Noa	F	48	Head of department of social services
7	Shlomit	F	57	Head of administration of social services
8	Rachel	F	58	Head of department for senior citizens
9	Sara	F	58	Head of department for homeless persons
10	Yossi	M	43	Head of department of community social work and volunteering
Germany				
11	Katrin	F	50	Coordinator responsible for community development
12	Simon	M	50	Responsible for strategic social planning

(Continues)

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TABLE A1 (Continued)

Number	Name	Male/female	Age	Role description
13	Henry	M	40	Formally welfare officer for persons with disability
14	Gerd	M	65	Project manager for social integration
15	Peter	M	35	Network coordinator of local health sectors
16	Richard	M	55	Department leader in local health administration
17	Alex	M	35	SLB in child-welfare administration
18	Jakob	M	40	CEO of social service provider
19	Ingrid	F	65	Formally a social worker working with unemployed persons
20	Barbara	F	55	Network coordinator

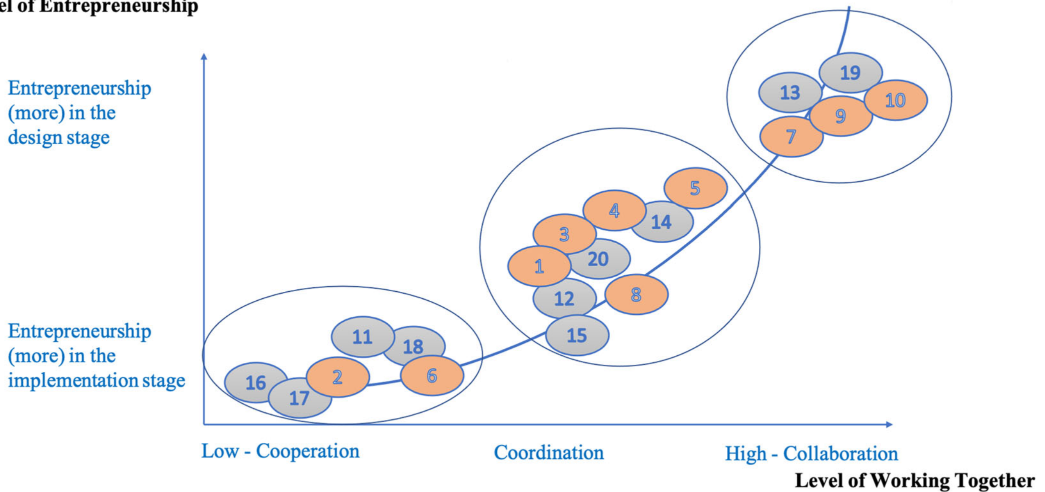

FIGURE A1 Collaboration and SLBs as policy entrepreneurs: Israel and Germany. Israel-Orange/Germany-Gray. *Source*: Authors' analysis.

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Lihi Lahat is a senior lecturer in the Department of Administration and Public Policy at Sapir Academic College and an Affiliate Associate Professor at Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Concordia University, Montreal. Her research interests focus on social policy and public sector employees. Recently, her research areas dealt with regulating personal social services, smart cities and equality, uses of time and policy, and collaborative governance.

Tanja Klenk is a Professor of Public Administration and Public Policy at the Helmut-Schmidt University Hamburg, Germany. Her research interests include institutional and

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organizational change in public and social policy. Recently she has been working on post-NPM and the hybridization of social service delivery, public administration and public policy in the digital area, and accountability.

Noga Pitowsky-Nave, PhD, MSW, is a lecturer and senior faculty member in the School of Social Work, Sapir Academic College. Dr. Pitowsky-Nave completed her PhD in the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her main research interests are social welfare policy, policy practice in social work, civil society and NPOs, and occupational social work.

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