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Percursos Sem-Abrigo. Histórias das ruas de Paris, Lisboa e Londres.

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Percursos Sem-Abrigo. Histórias das ruas de Paris, Lisboa e Londres (Homelessness Trajectories. Stories from the Streets of Paris, Lisbon and London) is one of the very few books ever published in Portugal on homelessness. The book, which is based on a PhD thesis completed in 2009, provides cross-national comparative (FR, PT, UK) research on homelessness, taking the concept of risk as a fundamental analytical string. The empirical research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Paris, Lisbon and London in 2005 and 2006. This book is an important contribution to the existing evidence on homelessness in Portugal, not only because of the paucity of research in this domain, but also because of the approach undertaken by the author. To-date, most studies in Portugal have adopted a descriptive focus on the analysis of homelessness situations and trajectories.

In *Percursos Sem-Abrigo. Histórias das ruas de Paris, Lisboa e Londres*, the author develops a cross-national comparative analysis of the trajectories of homeless people, of the perceptions and discourses of different social actors, social workers and homeless people, and of intervention practices identified in the three cities. This cross-national comparative analysis is conducted through a “conceptual lens”, that of risk. This approach enables the author to go beyond the usual descriptive approach towards homelessness and to explicitly identify the interactions between different causal factors. By exploring homelessness trajectories and perceptions through this conceptual lens, the author discusses the how poverty and inequality, exclusion from the housing market, low levels of social protection, unemployment and precarious labour markets, among others, shape the trajectories of the homeless people interviewed and on the expected, and actual, outcomes of intervention strategies adopted in the different cities.

The book is structured around six main chapters. The first chapter is centred on the theoretical discussion of the concept of risk as a cultural and social construct and how it may usefully apply to the analysis of homelessness situations and trajectories. The “Risk of Homelessness” chapter addresses the complexities of defining homelessness, both at a national and at a European level, and the consequences

of adopting different types of definition for building up diverse understandings of homelessness. One of the missing aspects in this initial discussion is the lack of reference to ETHOS, European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, – when discussing European approaches to defining homelessness. Curiously enough, some of the arguments developed in this chapter are directly linked to some of the challenges that the adoption of ETHOS has raised in recent years, namely the possibility to contribute to a more comprehensive awareness of homelessness and housing exclusion situations, and to unveil some hidden forms of homelessness referred to by the author. Another missing element one can identify in this chapter is the lack of accuracy regarding the author's reporting on existing national definitions of homelessness. In fact, there seems to have been no update on this regard between the original PhD thesis on which the book draws and the 2012 publication. This particularly applies to Portugal, where an official definition of homelessness was adopted by the first National Strategy on Homelessness (ENIPSA) in 2009. This first chapter also addresses the challenges arising from the so-called risk dynamics within modernity without ignoring other "less modern" risk dynamics that contribute to our understanding of the structural dimensions of homelessness in Western societies. Finally, the author argues that the widening of social uncertainty and the different ways of "managing risks" in our society may impact on the way social behaviours are labelled and addressed, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. The role of social policies, and particularly of different forms of social support which address the homeless population, is discussed in the final part of this section.

Chapter two focuses on the trajectories of 54 homeless people (47 men and seven women), who were interviewed in the three cities, and who were either sleeping rough or using night shelters. One of the limitations of the approach undertaken is the lack of information regarding the criteria for the selection of the interviewees. The author explores their "journeys" through homelessness, identifying different, but inter-related, factors that shaped their experiences. Based on the views of the homeless people themselves, the author highlights the importance of these men and women's encounters with structural forces such as the housing market, the labour market, poverty and its intergenerational effects, and access to education and training. The role and the functioning of existing social supports are given a special emphasis in one of the sections of this chapter. One of the interesting outcomes of the analysis of these individual pathways is the structuring of systematic interconnections between homelessness trajectories and different types of "capitals" (e.g. health capital, social capital, educational and professional capital). In one table the author shows how different homelessness trajectories impact on

these different “capitals”, identifying the societal and or institutional resources and obstacles individuals face along their homelessness trajectories and which either reinforce or weaken their “capitals”.

However, the housing dimension is only barely addressed by this approach, yet lack of access to housing has been identified as one of the main obstacles within the social support continuum. Moreover, this chapter would have been improved if the author had framed her analysis of the interactions between homelessness trajectories and the conception and operation of the existing social supports within the discussion around models of support, and in particular housing-led versus stair case approaches, on which extensive literature is available. The major components of such a discussion are in fact implicitly addressed by her description of the services provided and by the analysis of the obstacles encountered by homeless people in their trajectories into, through, and out of homelessness.

The focus of chapter three is the perceptions of workers in the homelessness sector regarding homelessness situations and the operation of social support services in the three cities. The interviews were conducted in different services: Public sector services; NGOs; and other private not-for-profit social providers. The author explores the conceptual issues around homelessness in the three cities, which reflect existing national approaches, as well as the difficulties identified in the measurement of homelessness in the respective cities. As regards this approach it would have been particularly useful to have the author’s reflection on the consequences of the persistence, at least in some countries, of a narrow definition of homelessness (e.g. the roofless), both in the development of research in this field, but also in the way policies are being designed and support services developed and implemented. Overall, this chapter provides an interesting comparative overview of service providers’ perceptions of the social support provided in the three cities, but would have benefited from a more critical approach by the author. In contrast to the previous chapters, the author does not provide an interpretation of the discourses by applying the “conceptual lens” of risk and risk dynamics. In this chapter the author opted for a more a-critical exploration of the empirical material, providing a more descriptive overview of the workers’ discourses, which, in many cases, ends up reproducing existing stereotypes on homelessness and on homeless people.

Chapter four focuses on the perceptions of the homeless people themselves and the author explicitly assumes that this comparative overview has been developed through “a predominantly descriptive register.” Accommodation trajectories and strategies are a dominant feature of this chapter. In spite of the intentionally descriptive approach taken, the voices of the homeless people interviewed helpfully illustrate the impact of temporary accommodation “solutions” in the lives of homeless

people. The author provides a lively description of homeless people's diverse daily routines and survival strategies, of their social networks, and of their needs and assessment of the support received. In contrast to the descriptive approach adopted throughout most of this chapter, the author ends the chapter with a short but interesting section where she integrates the dominant perceptions identified in the three cities within a theoretical discussion regarding some of the structural components and trends that shape the lives of homeless people in both their more objective and more subjective dimensions.

Chapter five engages in an intersectional analysis of both levels of discourses, the homeless people's and the workers', identifying relevant perceptions of risks of homelessness with regard to social control practices and social intervention strategies developed in the three cities. The analysis of the "risk dialogues between workers and homeless people" highlight local practices and local circumstances, which shape different punitive responses to homelessness in Lisbon, London, and Paris, within national legal and policy frameworks. The persistence of contradictory discourses among social support stakeholders is the subject of another section within this chapter. The author argues that in the three cities access to social support is still permeated by concepts of the deserving and undeserving poor. These concepts are linked to different risk perceptions of the homeless population: That of deviant individuals (who need to be controlled); and that of victims (who deserve support). These perceptions have direct consequences on the relationships between providers and clients, and on the intervention logics that shape social support practices across the three different contexts. Several perceptions are shared among workers and homeless people, namely the ones related to the constraints felt in the provision of social support (e.g. access to social housing, prevalence of emergency responses and lack of prevention approaches, inadequacy of existing infrastructures). The author argues that although the concept of risk is present in the social support practices implemented, it is mainly used for the identification of causes of homelessness, for identifying the profiles of the homeless individuals, and for prioritizing groups of users in a context of scarce resources. The concept of risk is hardly ever used as a tool for developing prevention strategies and for intervening in the early stages of homelessness trajectories.

The final chapter addresses "*Risk dynamics in modernity and homelessness*". In this concluding chapter, the author summarises the main outcomes of the empirical research and interprets them within the theoretical framework developed in the initial chapters of the book. The author then revisits the complex interactions between different levels of factors that purport to explain homeless trajectories: Structural, relationship, and personal factors. She discusses the association between risk dynamics, composition of homelessness, inequality levels, social policies, and the underlying social and cultural beliefs. The main findings stress the

existence of relevant impacts on the conceptualisation of preventive, social control, monitoring, and social reinsertion measures. The author argues that these impacts are originated by divergences identified in the different utilisations of the concept of risk in the three cities under analysis. However, “in spite of historical, cultural and political diversity it was possible to identify that the conceptual divergences found among the three contexts, including the design of social support measures, end up by converging in field practices” (p. 170).

Percursos Sem-Abrigo. Histórias das ruas de Paris, Lisboa e Londres provides a relevant contribution for the development of research in Portugal and a useful comparative overview of homelessness trajectories, perceptions, and intervention practices in three European cities.

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