

Filipa Lourenço Menezes (2012)

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

Lisboa: Editora Mundos Sociais, pp.200, €9.00.

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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Josef Hegedus, Martin Lux and Nora Teller (Eds.) (2013)

Social Housing in Transition Countries.

London: Routledge, pp.342, £80.00.

The changes to political and governance structures which swept across Eastern Europe from the late 1980s onwards left in their wake a range of societal challenges which garnered far less attention from commentators and observers than was warranted. Core issues relating to employment, social welfare, poverty and social deprivation and health seem to have been marginalised on the basis that all remnants of the ancient regime had to be flushed out as a new market model was ushered in on the assumption that this was by definition a superior model of economic and social organisation.

Needless to say the evidence has been stacking up over the past two decades that the “magic of the market” has proven to be decidedly uneven in its effects and new problems and social inequalities of a socio-economic nature have emerged which have replaced those rooted in party affiliation and privilege which characterised the previously centralised system of production and consumption. Key social indicators around mortality rates, population health, risk of poverty, and unemployment show how the promised benefits of economic liberalisation have been at best unevenly distributed and at worst captured by elite groups who were well positioned to capitalise on the privatisation policies and stripping of state assets in such sectors as energy, natural resources and telecommunications.

One sector which has been subject to profound changes has been the housing systems of the transition societies. Of all areas of social provision it might have been expected that the basic human need of adequate shelter would have been prioritised in the transition to the market society. However, across most transition societies the desire of governments to develop market economies meant the re-introduction of the concept of private property which effectively set public housing up as fair game for exploitation under the new conditions. Privatisation was often pursued in its most simplistic and crudest form by simply giving dwellings away to sitting tenants. There was little by way of exploring alternatives which might have buffered the fabric of public housing from the most deleterious effects of privatisa-

tion, through for example, stock transfers to not for profit entities such as housing associations and co-operatives, or through disposal of units at market cost to tenants. While there have been some variations on this trend as might be expected, these don't represent structural exceptions, and over time local policy differentiations have been largely eliminated to the degree that the concept of public housing in transition societies has all but disappeared.

A clear outcome of this has been deepening inequality. While some strata were "more equal" than others under state socialism prior to the transition, they were also the ones most positioned to capitalise on the changes and become both richer and more privileged post transition. For instance in Serbia, Russia and Poland households who by virtue of their pre transition "*nomenkatura*" status, became even more privileged post transition when their status could be consolidated through property acquisition.

This book is an attempt to draw together the disparate strands and experiences of how housing systems have fared since the collapse of state socialist regimes of varying complexions and their replacement by market based arrangements. The book is divided into four parts. The first sets the analytical context and provides the tools by which to understand what has been happening. It identifies the similarity of the broad structural changes which have occurred but also points out that the policy responses in different countries were shaped by factors such as the structure of the political system, the role of the state in the economy, and the structure of the financial sector. Part two highlights a range of critical issues which the transition processes have revealed including privatisation and restitution, finance, rents regulation, housing management and social exclusion. The third part presents a series of country case studies detailing the housing experiences in twelve transition societies, and finally part four offers an extended reflection on the challenges facing social housing in post socialist societies. Each of the sections are appealing to the reader in their own right and combined offer insights at different levels: – conceptual; thematic; policy; and empirical. This reviewer found part four to be a particularly interesting approach to concluding the discussion. In a single extended chapter the authors construct a commentary on where public housing has come from and where it is going and in doing so critically appraise the consequences, which have been mostly negative, for concepts such as equity, redistribution, and sustainability. Their use of subheadings to weave the narrative is particularly useful.

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All in all this is a useful reference, which provides a well-organised and accessible source documenting the transformation of public housing in Eastern Europe. The reader can engage with the book on a country by country basis by reading the case studies or gain broader insights into the experiences of the Eastern European Model as a whole through the conceptual and thematic contributions.

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Kristina E. Gibson (2011)

Street Kids – Homeless Youth, Outreach and the Policing of New York’s Streets.

New York: New York University Press, pp.247, \$24.00

For those interested in youth homelessness either from the perspective of research or practice *Street Kids*, a new book by urban geographer Kristina Gibbs, is a welcome addition to the literature. In this book Gibbs presents a detailed ethnographic description and analysis of the lives of young people who are homeless in New York City. She also explores features of the response to youth homelessness, including an in depth focus on street outreach as a practice, and conversely, on the policing of youth homelessness as a revanchist practice

One of the strengths of this book is Gibbs’ effort to historically ground her ethnography and analysis. Discussions of homelessness – the conditions that give rise to it and the response – are often ahistorical, or engage in an analysis that frames the problem in terms of contemporary or recent historical trends. Gibbs reminds us that while neoliberalism, for instance, may shape particular features of homelessness and our response to the problem – the use of policing for instance – it must also be understood that there are deeper historical roots that contribute to how we frame the problem, and most notably, how it is experienced by the young people she has engaged and worked with.

Her analysis of youth homelessness and its relation to ‘the streets’ is thoughtful and engaging. As with many contemporary urban geographers, Gibbs is concerned with the space of the streets, and in this case how young people both construct a sense of self while homeless, but also how those spaces are also constructed and governed externally, and how these forces are continually enacted upon young people who are engaged in street life either because they are absolutely homeless (of the streets), or are housed, but participate in street youth culture (on the streets). She also suggests that street youth are “sandwiched between two powerful social ideologies – the Street (a subjective place laden with concepts of democracy, civil society, danger, romance, chaos and social order) and Youth (a subjective position encompassing social understandings of innocence, development, freedom, competencies, potential, hope and fear)” (p.26). This is crucially important, and a key reminder to those involved in

research, practice or policy that our understanding of, and responses to youth homelessness, must necessarily and always be cognizant of how social frames regarding youth (adolescence and young adulthood), and in the context of homelessness produce unique experiences for young people, and therefore require different solutions. Too often our response to youth homelessness takes the adult system (emergency shelters, day programs, soup kitchens, outreach), and creates “adult homelessness light”; a watered down, age specific version of essentially the same services and approaches, perhaps with an added dose of concern about young people’s penchant for delinquency, moodiness and irrationality.

In thinking about these social frames, Gibbs offers an interesting and thoughtful historical account of youth homelessness in the US. Here she bridges some of the research on the invention of adolescence (ground well covered by researchers such as Nancy Lesko), with a historical account of youth homelessness. The three eras she offers as key to framing paradigms – 1) Immigrant Youth and the Child Saver’s movement, 2) Youth Development, Delinquency and Subcultures, and 3) Street Kids and Youth Geographies, provide a colourful and nuanced account of how cultural norms and trends, research findings and social work practice have evolved steadily from the early days of concern about working class “street Arabs” to the present. This history is interesting, and is also an important reminder that as paradigms, these social frames do not simply go away, or be replaced by the next one, but in many ways are sustained and incorporated in present day thinking and practices. The whole historical discussion provides an important touchstone for understanding what we (and others) do regarding youth homelessness and street culture, and how history frames how we think about such young people and the spaces that we occupy.

While situating youth homelessness within an analysis of geographies of exclusion is an important contribution of this book, it is the ethnographic description and analysis of street outreach as a philosophy and practice that is the core of this work. It is significant, for in spite of the widespread use of street outreach as a way of engaging homeless persons who are not connected to agencies or services, it is an activity that has drawn very little attention from researchers over the years. As with her discussion of youth homelessness, Gibbs provides a thoughtful historical analysis of street outreach, and the social and cultural frames and practices that underlie this work. She seeks to make sense of how neoliberal shifts underlie the ‘outsourcing’ of this important work largely to charitable (and religious) service providers, and the implications this has on the practice. Lack of funding, the heavy use of volunteers, inadequate training, and challenging working conditions mean that workforce retention is problematic, which undermines the knowledge-base that supports effective street outreach practice.

She also explores the actual practice of street outreach in a very nuanced way. That Gibbs herself participated in street outreach for several years strengthens her perspective, and makes her participant-observation ethnographic account that much richer. As a Geographer, she is aware of the spatial dimension to this work, and how the work of outreach staff is both a response to the social production of the 'streets' not only by street youth, the police, but also by outreach workers as well. Her description of doing street outreach, augmented by quotes by colleagues, provides a rich and nuanced description of the work. Much time is spent exploring this practice, and beyond mere description; this allows for a more careful explanation of her analysis of the work.

The theoretical framing of all of this is important, although sometimes there is a sense that this aspect should be more focused. While relevant theoretical perspectives drawn from urban geography are presented, other theoretical perspectives (and theorists) are brought to bear with much less success. Foucault is mentioned briefly, as are another theorists, in ways that may demonstrate the breadth of reading that went in to this work, but do not move the discussion forward in a strong way. Likewise, the discussion of Judith Butler does not necessarily add to the analysis of outreach as performance, and represents a missed opportunity, for an analysis of the gendered nature of the streets, and the very important question of how homeless youth 'perform' their gender(s) is not adequately explored.

The final key theme of this book is to explore the policing of youth homelessness, and its impact on the young people involved, and how the streets as a 'space' are constituted. There is a growing body of work on the criminalization of homelessness, and Gibbs makes an important contribution to this literature. She takes the reader through the impact of Wilson and Kelling's "Broken Windows" philosophy of policing and on what happened in the transformation of New York (Manhattan). This philosophy was adopted and implemented in a most robust – and one could argue, uncritical – way in New York, with full support of the Mayor and Chief of Police William Bratton, to rid the streets of crime and 'disorderly' people, including the homeless. Lest we think that Broken Windows policing is merely a manifestation of neoliberalism, Gibbs reminds us once again of the historical roots of current punitive practices to address poverty and homelessness. The streets have always been contested as 'public spaces', and social norm theory has long had an influence on how we govern such spaces in light of perceived threats by marginalized populations seen to be delinquent or operating in ways counter to 'dominant' social norms.

A key point of all this is that the heavy handed criminalization of homelessness through new laws, through existing practices (arrests for minor offences), and through regular harassment and "stop and search's" – practices for which there is no official record – have had a huge impact on the lives of homeless youth. First,

the efforts to eradicate money making practices such as panhandling (begging) and soliciting funds from transit users, as well as curtailing the use of spaces such as parks, streets and public transit, has had the effect of pushing homeless youth into other activities to earn money, and also displacing them from many key areas of Manhattan. The second major impact has been a shift in the culture of youth homelessness. It can be argued that if it is the persistent visibility of homelessness that produces a law enforcement response, it is the persistent policing of people who are homeless that renders them invisible. Gibbs explores how street youth now very proactively dress and behave in ways that do not identify themselves as homeless. She also relates how the need to be less visible also creates challenges for street outreach, in that it becomes harder and harder to identify homeless youth, and at the same time, many youth in these circumstances may seek to avoid outreach workers altogether, in order to avoid having such an interaction contribute to a very public identification of their homelessness.

All of this leads to some major questions, which Gibbs begins to explore. In light of the impact of revanchist policing on street youth, what does this really mean for street outreach in the future? She has some thoughts on this, but perhaps because of her closeness to the field, she avoids addressing some of the really big questions. For instance, as youth homelessness becomes less visible, what new tactics and strategies are needed? In many cities, including New York, young people who are homeless are being pushed more and more to marginal and distant areas, and those that remain in gentrifying downtown cores are more difficult to identify. How can street outreach, as a practice, adapt? A second consideration is to address the challenges and opportunities that technology has and will have on outreach? She remarks that web-based technology has completely transformed the sex trade and drug dealing, for instance, bringing these activities indoors and underground, out of the view of the police, the public, and most certainly street outreach workers. This presents real challenges for those wishing to make connections with young people and to help reduce their exploitation. If technology has become part of the problem in this case, does it also offer any solutions? Where do we go from here? All of this suggests a need to reconsider the role of street outreach. Is the process of street outreach a means to an end, or an end in itself? While she does explore various points of view as to why we should support street outreach in the end one is not left with a solid justification for the practice. Helping young people make connections with adults is important on one level, but to what end, especially if those adults are poorly trained, and may carry with them their own ideological baggage? How does street outreach contribute to moving young people forward in their lives? More discussion would be helpful here.

Overall, taken as a whole, this is an excellent book that makes an important contribution to the literatures on youth homelessness, urban geography, street outreach and the criminalization of homelessness. Gibbs is a very strong writer who is able to use her narrative skills to bring the content alive, so that we can understand the experience of youth homelessness and street outreach in a very visceral way. Though at times the content is a bit repetitive and in need of editing (for instance, a story about approaching a sleeping girl appears twice), the book is engaging and easy to read. The book is very informative and should be of interest not only to students and researchers, but also to policy makers and those who work with homeless youth. Though the focus is on New York City, its applicability is broad, and could inform thinking in a number of national and local contexts. We need more books on homelessness such as this.

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Ella Howard (2013)

Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp.288, \$45

I came of age in suburban New York in the early 1980s, and trips to the city during this time provided my first encounters with homelessness and the Bowery. Here was a stretch of Manhattan marked by haggard old men, seedy surroundings, and empty bottles of Night Train Express wine were littered everywhere. By then the Bowery, one of the best-known examples of the “skid row” homeless districts that marked all large US cities, had almost passed from the urban landscape. With this passing came a transformation of homelessness into its contemporary incarnation and the ascent of this issue to the social problem most emblematic of the post-industrial city. Ella Howard, in her book *Homeless: Poverty and Place in Urban America*, looks to the Bowery as a link between homelessness past and present, and more broadly, as a window to understanding “the complex relationship between poverty and place in nearly a century of the modern city” (p.5).

Conventional accounts of skid row districts such as New York’s Bowery emphasize their unique place in the urban landscape. Skid row was seen as a distinct ecological niche, akin to a reservation for the homeless that defined US homelessness during the post-World War II era. Central to this ecology was a continuum of housing that ranged from low-cost residential hotels, to cheap “flophouses”, to municipal shelters, and Christian rescue missions for the truly down and out. Bars, cheap eats and soup kitchens, pawnshops and used clothing stores, and other institutions catering to the homeless man (skid row was predominantly, though not exclusively, male in demographics and in orientation), were set amidst dreary commercial areas. Welfare bureaus and charity organizations would steer those in need of relief to skid row, and police would see to it that skid row residents, once settled, would know their place. Here place became an extension of the man; spatial and personal dimensions of failure that represented a cautionary tale to a society in the midst of prolonged prosperity.

In contrast, Howard’s approach to the Bowery is an indirect one, viewing the Bowery through the actions of emissaries from the mainstream—chiefly policy-makers, charities, urban planners, and researchers. She picks up her narrative in the 1930s, when the Great Depression exiled tens of thousands of newly displaced

economic refugees to the Bowery and overwhelmed its ecology. The first two chapters provide a thorough and in depth chronicle of local and federal efforts to address this poverty, which was of an unprecedented scale and urgency. She shows how the demands of this widespread destitution trumped the traditional reservations of charity, and transformed welfare policy, albeit reluctantly. Chapter 3 extends this narrative into the post-World War II era. Here Howard continues to follow the municipal response to poverty and homelessness, and expands this view to include the developing field of alcohol rehabilitation as the state of the art approach to responding to the homeless man. Chapter 4 has skid row on the skids, with grassroots interests battling City Hall to determine the nature of the Bowery's demise, and Chapter 5 scrutinizes the expansive research done on the Bowery by social scientists at Columbia University's School for Applied Social Science Research. The final two chapters examine the resurgence of homelessness in the 1980s, this time bereft of its geographic moorings, and link this resurgence to a Bowery that no longer exists.

Contrary to what is promised in the introduction, it is unclear how this monograph lays out any systematic intersection of poverty and place. The first two chapters, while offering compelling narratives in and of themselves, are more general narratives about addressing Depression-era poverty and homelessness and are largely devoid of specific references to the Bowery. But homelessness in New York City was never interchangeable with homelessness on the Bowery. During the Great Depression, hordes of newly unemployed partook of the Bowery's endemic poverty but not of its subculture, and Howard leaves this juxtaposition unexplored. By the third chapter we are in the 1950s, and the wave of newly homeless that commanded public attention in the Great Depression had receded to again leave the Bowery to a reduced number of more stereotypical homeless denizens. But by here it is clear that Howard has abandoned pretences of clarifying any intersection of place and poverty. Instead, she laments about how policy was dominated by a persistent and pervasive viewing of homelessness as "a group of sick individuals" at the expense of veering away "from serious structural analysis of poverty" (p.114).

Such a bait and switch to the tired trope of individual versus structural causes of homelessness gives this book a thematic drift just as it comes to its two strongest chapters. In chapter 4, Howard finally sets her sights directly on the Bowery, as the battleground of a larger conflict between community interests and New York's planners. True to Theodore Caplow's description of the skid row as "a social system [that] adapts to the external environment by not reacting to it" (1970, p.6), Bowery interests themselves were secondary to the outside interests who were the primary players in this struggle for how the area should be redesigned. Ultimately, this battle royal was fought to a stalemate and granted the Bowery a stay from the wrecking ball whose shadow now casts a pall over the district. Here Howard shows how the

Bowery's inconspicuousness, once its key survival weapon, became a liability as different interests had different designs on this district, and questions of what to do with the dwindling number of aging Bowery habitués were secondary to competing visions of what to do with the Bowery real estate.

To answer questions on how to best clear the burns off the reservation, policy-makers turned to social science. Skid row has always been the object of disproportionate fascination among social scientists, a place where, again according to Caplow "for the price of a subway ride, [the sociologist] can enter a country where the accepted principles of social interaction do not seem to apply" (1970, p.6). Led by Caplow and Howard Bahr, the Bowery became the focus of extensive research in a partnership between New York City and Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research. In chapter 5 Howard turns the tables on the researchers with an in-depth view into the processes and findings of this Bowery project. What results is an even-handed assessment of this largely forgotten body of research, done with the benefit of almost fifty years of hindsight. This leads to new insights on this research for those familiar with this literature and an accessible entrée for those who are not. Particularly impressive is how Howard fits this research in with both the social theories and policy priorities of the time, while pointing out the blinders that ultimately limited this research.

And then, with the onset of chapter 6, the Bowery was gone. It is only after Howard spends most of the chapter delving into the crises and politics of the resurgence of homelessness in the 1980s that she returns to the Bowery to examine its demise. Her explanation is basically twofold. First, she argues that by the 1980s the Bowery was lost to the forces of gentrification and, second, that shifting demographics led to a situation where, as the traditional older white male Bowery population declined, a younger, darker skinned, population of both genders, and often with family in tow, emerged to present a much different homeless population. Neither explanation is particularly satisfying. The Bowery was one of the last in a succession of disappearing skid rows across US cities. As Howard shows, predictions of the Bowery's demise anticipated its demise by several decades, and the more interesting question is how skid row was able to hang on as long as it did. The answer to this lies in the political economy on the Bowery, something that is largely missing in this book. Attention to this would paint a different relationship between poverty and place, one where poverty was lucrative enough for Bowery-based commercial ventures to stave off a succession of attempts to clean up the area. Ultimately, this got more difficult with the declining numbers of homeless (of the old, white male variety).

Viewed in this light, there would not appear to be much continuity between the homelessness on the Bowery and the homelessness that has confounded every New York mayor since Ed Koch. The Bowery, both in place and in person, was a

remnant of Depression-era homelessness that passed away. This contrasts with “new” homelessness that came of age in the “double-dip” recession of the early 1980s. Along with their differing demographics, their geography is different as well. There is a post-industrial geography, not rooted in the social disaffiliation of Caplow and Bahr’s Bowery, but rather in the concentrated poverty and hyper segregation of such New York City neighbourhoods as Harlem and East New York.

Given this, what is the legacy that the Bowery, and homelessness past, leaves to homelessness in a more contemporary era? Howard’s response is to give a whirlwind tour of homelessness in New York City through over two decades and three mayoral administrations before asserting that New York’s skid row policies showed “moderate effectiveness” and “public-private partnerships at work” (p.220). At that point such an assertion seems more like nostalgia than argument, as support in the book for such a position is hard to come by. A closer look at the current state of homelessness would also reveal more specific continuities with the past. For example, in the wake of the evisceration of the single room occupancy (SRO) hotel, a Bowery mainstay that kept many skid row residents from literal homelessness, have come new models of housing in which non-profit organizations are essentially rebuilding this SRO stock. Additionally, just as homeless people on the Bowery aged and gave way to a “new” homelessness, there is now evidence that this more recent generation is now aging and declining. In the wake of this decline, another generation of homelessness appears to be massing, rooted in such dynamics as the Great Recession, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and mass incarceration policies (Culhane *et al*, 2013).

In summary, this book casts some welcome attention on the Bowery, an area that has historically sought to be left alone. At its best, Howard introduces the Bowery as a setting for the efforts of public agencies, private interests and researchers to address homelessness. For these efforts, the book is well worth the read. Howard also attempts to frame these elements in narrative which, instead of providing a grander overview of homelessness, conflates homelessness on the Bowery with the more general poverty of past eras and creates tenuous continuities between skid row homelessness and the more contemporary homelessness that succeeded it. This leaves the reader poring over some good history while searching for a promised intersection that never really occurs.

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Vanessa Oliver (2013)

Healing Home: Health and Homelessness in the Life Stories of Young Women.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp.281, \$29.95.

Vanessa Oliver's *Healing Home* is an in-depth, qualitative exploration into the health of young women experiencing homelessness in the Toronto area. This book aims to explore issues related to the health of the young women, specifically their health status, their own interpretations of their health needs, and importantly, their interactions with healthcare service providers. Employing a narratological or 'storytelling' approach in presenting the women's lives, Oliver integrates the narrative analysis of the young women with wider literature on homelessness, sociological insights, and social policy. The primary dataset of the study is drawn from eight in-depth, life history interviews with young women between 15 and 21 years of age – all of whom were residing in, or in contact with, a Toronto shelter for young women. While existing research on homelessness and health have been inclined to emerge from the biomedical and psychology disciplines (which tend to favour quantitative measurements), Oliver's innovative blend of narrative and sociological exploration provides a compelling insight into homeless women's own interpretations of their situation. This book is a particularly important contribution to knowledge given that the needs of homeless women, and in particular young women, are considered by many researchers to be largely overlooked in research and policy planning (Edgar and Doherty, 2001; Baptista, 2010).

The study is guided by a number of different perspectives and approaches. Feminist theory and feminist political economy, narrative theory, insights related to subjective encounters with social structures, and considerations of neoliberalism and the social welfare state are incorporated in Oliver's analysis. The combined theoretical approaches attempt to expose the multitude of social, cultural and economic constraints (some of which are competing or contradictory), whilst also revealing how women continually shape their own lives as distinct individuals. Oliver continually challenges wider discourses of pathologising poverty and homelessness, and seeks to contextualise the women's narratives in a particular time (age, life course stage, or social and historical context), and in a particular space (socioeconomic contexts, differentiated access to resources, etc.). The prevailing and often

compounding tiers of exclusion such as age, race, class, and sexual orientation that can impact on the women's access to healthcare and housing are also discussed. Further, constructions of gender are explored by drawing upon literature pertaining to gender and homelessness, the 'home' vis-à-vis the role of women, gender performances in the context of street life, and female sexuality. Thus, the reader is offered a multidimensional understanding of "the ways in which relations of gender and power are fundamental to the understanding and practices of health access, health delivery, and health-seeking behaviours of homeless youth" (p.4).

Central to *Healing Home* is the voice of the women themselves. The opening findings chapter offers eight detailed life history narratives of each of the female research participants in which their 'self-stories' are recounted faithfully and sensitively to the reader. Common patterns emerge across the dataset, such as early childhood trauma or abuse, family violence or neglect, enduring poverty, failures in the state care system, mental health problems, self-harm, problematic alcohol or drug use, unstable living situations, or sexual exploitation. Such themes echo much of the existing literature on homeless women (Jones, 1999; Reeve *et al*, 2007; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012). Through these accounts, Oliver provides a textured and multi-layered understanding of the women's lives in which we can begin to grasp their worlds and their needs. It reveals the extent of the deep structural inequalities persisting across the life course, and the way in which the women negotiated and navigated such constraints as they carve out their future. It is through the women's opinions, desires, and ambitions within their narratives that they are, in basic terms, "ordinary young women living under extraordinary circumstances" (p.44). In other words, their homelessness is only one aspect of their unfolding lives and labels such as 'homeless' can eclipse our understanding of their needs.

Following from this, the pertinent health issues for the women interviewed – specifically mental and sexual health issues – are discussed in detail. Depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, self-harm, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), histories of violence or abuse, and problematic drug or alcohol problems featured prominently across their narratives. Other issues relating to body image and physical appearance were seen to cause additional stress and anxiety to existing feelings of stigma relating to their homelessness. Analysis of sexual and reproductive health among the women demonstrated how they did not have an appropriate outlet within which they could discuss normal sexual health questions, worries, or curiosities. Their precarious living situation was seen to further exacerbate their health needs and also impeded their ability to seek help. In situations where women did pursue help for their health issues, many reported negative encounters or experiences. The author concludes that there needs to be "a shift away from traditional models of service delivery and towards creative thinking

that takes health care out of clinical spaces and into streets and shelters” (p.200). The young women need to be afforded greater influence on the design and delivery of health services, Oliver argues, not only as a way of providing more appropriate and sensitive service provision, but crucially, to foster a sense of belonging, of importance, and of empowerment among this marginalised group.

There were some methodological limitations in relation to the research design and recruitment of participants. Notwithstanding the merits of in-depth qualitative research with small research samples, the author’s continuous references to the same eight women as a way of illustrating the arguments throughout the discussion chapters felt limited at times. As such, a larger sample size, longitudinal follow-up interviews, or perhaps triangulation of the existing data with systematic ethnographic observation, for example, would have enriched the discussion even further. It would have been particularly valuable to recruit more than just one migrant woman (i.e. a woman born outside Canada), as it would have expanded our knowledge of the health and housing needs of migrant women in an economically developed nation-state; an area of enquiry which is lacking (Mayock *et al*, 2012). Furthermore, given that the study’s sample was recruited through one single service in Toronto, the research would also have benefited by diversifying the sites of recruitment to capture a broader range of service experiences.

Overall, however, the strengths of Vanessa Oliver’s book are substantial. It succeeds in capturing the women’s heterogeneity, resilience, agency and even their personalities, whilst, at the same time, always remaining rooted in the wider social, economic and cultural landscape. To achieve this – as any researcher in the field of homelessness research is aware – is no easy feat due to the profound complexities inherent within this area of enquiry. The result is a well-developed, theoretically-robust set of arguments, which, through its story-telling style of presentation, makes it captivating and highly readable for both the academic and non-academic reader.

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Ray Forrest and Ngai-Ming Yip (Eds.)(2013)

Young People and Housing: Transitions, Trajectories and Generational Fractures.

London: Routledge, pp.243, £34.99.

This book was published as part of a 'housing and society' series, edited by Ray Forrest, for Routledge. Its focus on young people and housing derived directly from a specially organised seminar held at City University, Hong Kong in 2011 which brought together eleven invited academics working in this area. The background to the seminar was a concern that young people were facing increasing difficulties in accessing appropriate housing across a wide range of societies. The seminar, and book, aimed to explore this assumption, looking at institutional, economic, and cultural factors that may influence this trend. The eleven contributors cover eleven countries, five in Europe (Ireland, Sweden, Greece, Italy and France); four in East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China); Russia; and Australia. The rationale for the selection of the countries is not clear and would have benefited from some explanation, although it certainly provides a rich and interesting volume.

The book begins with an introductory chapter by Forrest, 'Making sense of the housing trajectories of young people'. Forrest's essay provides a wide-ranging and insightful review of what is known about housing for young people, providing both a historical and international perspective. He makes the important point that analysts need to be careful about focusing on a contemporary and ethnocentric perspective. The literature covered in this chapter provides a useful basis for understanding the material covered in later chapters.. For example, it considers the degree to which extended transitions and longer periods in the parental home are problematic or not, and the extent to which structure does or does not influence people's early life-courses (in contrast to theories of individualisation that emphasis the role of culture, lifestyles and personal projects). Whilst most of this discussion focuses on the impact of social and economic change on all young people, Forrest does emphasis the likely differences within youth cohorts, noting that 'the apparently independent may be more vulnerable than the dependent' (p.9), and that the ability to survive changing circumstances will be shaped by access to both material and social resources. Although not explicitly addressed in the chapter, all of these factors are key contextual factors to an examination of youth homelessness, and will therefore be of interest to homelessness researchers.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts; the family, demography, and the transition to adulthood (Chapters 2 to 5); housing affordability and youth housing trajectories (Chapters 6 to 8); and economic change and generational fractures (Chapters 9 to 12). These three themes are not immediately obvious and feel as though they have, to some extent, been imposed upon diverse chapters, although as one reads the volume the pattern becomes a little clearer. Within each section, a number of countries are covered, again with no obvious reason for the country groupings. A more detailed introduction to these chapters would have been useful for the reader.

Within the first part of the book, Chapter 2 (Emmanuel) looks at the role of family and increasing levels of co-residence with parents in the Southern European model in Athens. In a fascinating paper, he argues that both the role of 'familism' and the shift in values, norms and lifestyles associated with the Second Demographic Transition have both exerted influence on young people's housing pathways, with increasing proportions of young people remaining in the parental home, and delayed marriage amongst those aged 19-33. Further, this has occurred across social class, with economic hardship and housing deprivation a feature of the outcome for lower income households. Chapter 3 is complementary to Chapter 2, examining the first steps on the housing ladder in Italy and family intergenerational transfers. Poggio argues for the salience of intergenerational transfers and how they may shape inter-cohort inequality, potentially widening existing social inequalities. This chapter also examines the independent housing options for young people showing how young people with no or restricted family support, including migrants, often have to struggle with both insecure and low paid employment and high housing costs. Chapter 4 takes a broader brush and examines the housing transitions of young people in Australia, looking at both changes and continuities in recent years (Beer and Faulkner). Analysis reveals that young Australians (25-34 year olds) are actually entering home ownership at a younger age than previous generations, but that some are also exiting it soon after, highlighting an increasing risk of default on mortgages. Finally, in this section, Chapter 5 focuses on the living arrangements of just-married young adults in Taiwan (Li). It demonstrates that sharing housing with parents is a major living arrangement for young people when they get married, with more young people dependent on their parents than a previous cohort. This reflects cultural norms and also the resources available to young people, with those with higher economic status more likely to live outside the parental home.

Part II of the book deals with housing affordability and begins with a chapter on young people's housing and exclusion in Sweden (Lieberg). This chapter shows that young people are leaving home somewhat later in life than previously (though still much younger than most European countries), and that increased housing costs and changes in the housing market are factors in this, along with prolonged studies. A (too) short section on homelessness reports that young people with experience of homelessness

usually leave home earlier than their peers. In some contrast, Chapter 7 focuses on homeownership in Hong Kong for the post-eighties generation (Yip). Within a context of familism as the cultural norm, again growing proportions of young people are living in the parental home. Prolonged education, falling salaries and a property boom have made it more difficult for young people to enter home ownership, with differentiation among young people increasing and inter-generational transfers becoming increasingly pivotal for young buyers. Chapter 8 examines the significant housing problems faced by young people in Chinese cities (Zhu). Neoliberalized housing development policy in China has led to 'serious housing affordability problems' for young people, including for the young middle class, to the extent that the author warns there could be a major social crisis if these housing problems are not addressed by government.

Part III of the book is concerned with generational fractures and begins with a consideration of this process in Japan (Hirayama). This chapter (9) demonstrates that economic decline and the rise of a neoliberal housing policy have made it increasingly difficult for young people to participate in the established 'home-owner' society. The author argues that Japan's low fertility rate can be partly explained by reduced opportunities for new family housing/ formation, and it is therefore a social sustainability issue as well as a housing policy problem. Two chapters then follow on the European situation, firstly focussing on the French generational gap (Chapter 10; Bugeja-Bloch) and secondly on young people's trajectories since the late 1960s in Ireland (Chapter 11; Norris and Winston). Bugeja-Bloch demonstrates that there are strong inter and intra- generational inequalities in housing. Norris and Winston focus on headship rates (by young people) since the 1960s, showing how they declined in the 1980s following economic recession but recovered in late 1990s/ early 2000s as the labour market context improved. However, young people borrowed much higher amounts than their predecessors and face much higher lifetime debt-servicing costs than previous generations. The final chapter examines the lived experience of housing among young people in Russia (Chapter 12; Zavisca). Drawing on qualitative work, Zavisca graphically depicts the constrained housing opportunities available to young Russians, (who mainly live in home owner properties headed by parents or other relatives), and describes how they experience the post-Soviet housing order as 'arbitrary and unfair.'

The strength of this book is in the rich detail of the chapters, with most chapters confidently examining change over time as well as documenting the contemporary situation of young people's housing. It is striking how economic change over time (both recession as well as economic and social restructuring), has had a major impact on young people's housing chances across such diverse countries. Equally, social and cultural norms have a strong effect on housing preferences and outcomes. The chapters amply demonstrate how 'leaving home' is a long process, rather than a single point in time (Jones, 1995).

The main limitation of the book is that there are no comparative contributions (save, in part, for the short introduction by Forrest). Whilst it is understandable that this is the case, as the work is not underpinned by a major programme of research/workshops¹, it is disappointing for the reader that analysis was not available on the extent to which countries differed, or were similar, in their approaches to housing young people. Failing this, the thematic sections could perhaps have allowed a small number of authors to address a similar set of questions. Forrest concludes that:

‘If there is a general conclusion it is that the interaction between youth and housing has to be understood in its particular cultural and historical context; that apparently similar trends in relation to the transition to adulthood may have different causes and consequences in different cultures; and that what is ‘normal’ in relation to the pattern of departure from the family home varies temporally and culturally’ (p.14).

A more detailed comparative cross-country analysis would have been able to bring out some of these conclusions more sharply.

It is important to point out to the reader that the book does not explicitly address the needs of marginalised young people in the housing market, nor that of homelessness per se (with the exception of the Swedish chapter). This is both a strength and limitation depending on one’s viewpoint. The book makes a good case of identifying young people as a marginalised group as a whole, and does highlight inequalities within young people. Arguably, however, these points would only have been strengthened if there had been an opportunity to examine the situation of marginalised young people more closely. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the book is a welcome contribution to an important subject area which is likely only to grow in policy importance in the coming years. It will be of interest to both students and academics. It should also be of interest to policy makers who wish to reflect on the impact of housing policies on the position of present and future generations of young people in their societies.

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¹ Although it does inform a Hong Kong research project on ‘Housing the Post-eighties generation’.

Stadt Wien [City of Vienna](Ed.; 2012)

Evaluierung Wiener Wohnungslosenhilfe. Zusammenfassung des Endberichts [Evaluation of the Viennese Homeless Service System: Summary of Final Report].

Vienna: City of Vienna, pp. 112, available online at: <http://www.wien.gv.at/gesundheits/einrichtungen/planung/pdf/evaluierung-wohnungslosenhilfe.pdf>

This is a more than 100 pages “summary” of a 261 pages evaluation report with an appendix of 438 pages with tables covering the Viennese support system for homeless persons. It is in German, but has a (really) short English “Management Summary” of five pages.

When the author of this review read the report he immediately remembered the English saying, “you can’t have your cake and eat it”. In the introduction and the prefaces, the Viennese “step system” which has more than 4 500 places in shelters and transitional accommodation outside the regular housing market is praised for having an internationally acknowledged “excellent reputation” (p. 14), and being an example of European best practice (p. 6). The report shows that the number of places in this “secondary housing market” (Sahlin, 2005) increased between 2005 (when it provided only 2 460 places) and 2011 by more than 80 per cent (see Table 1, p. 18). In January 2011 the Viennese step system had – apart from advice centres and prevention services – 412 places in night shelters, 1 225 places in unspecified transitional accommodation (usually with shared facilities and common rooms), 379 places in transitional accommodation for specific target groups (either targeted on groups defined by gender or age, or on groups with additional support needs because of addiction and/or mental health problems), 279 places in transitional accommodation for families and mothers with children, and 1 089 places in time limited supported housing (where clients have to be more stabilized than in transitional accommodation, but are still seeking to become “housing ready”).

Furthermore, there were 1 076 places in so-called “socially supported housing”, a kind of “safe haven accommodation”, mostly for older homeless people in need of permanent support who can stay there permanently without a tenancy contract. The authors, researchers from an independent research institute, emphasise the “differentiated offer” and show that reaching “housing readiness” by moving “upwards” in

this system is an important requirement for getting access to what is termed in the Austrian discourse, the “final dwelling”; a permanent tenancy in a self contained flat with full tenancy rights. However, they mention as well, that single steps of this staircase system might be skipped and “gliding transfers” might be possible.

The Housing First approach, which has been developed following a critique of the staircase approach and as an alternative to keeping homeless people outside the regular housing market until they are “housing ready”, is presented as a “worthwhile amendment to the intervention options of the Viennese service system for homeless people” (p.104). However, in the same section of the report the discussion about Housing First is introduced as a “radical change of paradigm” and its’ turn away from a treatment first approach is acknowledged as being “a counter-thesis of some elements of the established Viennese step system”. The solution for the authors seem to be some “pilot projects” with the Housing First approach, a peculiar interpretation of the decision of the Viennese City Council that the Housing First approach “should be increasingly realised in future” (SPÖ Wien / Die Grünen Wien, 2010, p.36).

Some readers may ask why this should be done if the Viennese step system works as excellently as it is presented in the report. One reason might be the enormous costs of such a system, but unfortunately the report does not include any more detailed information about the costs of the system (although an annual amount of €43m is mentioned, see p.5) nor on the costs caused by homeless people using non-homelessness services (such as emergency health care and criminal justice services), because they are homeless. Perhaps the money spent in these areas could be spent much more efficiently and the numbers of homeless people could actually be brought down considerably by scaling up the Housing First approach. Other reasons mentioned briefly in the report (p. 84) are some “unnecessary barriers to moving up” in the step system; the problematic aspects of night shelters with long durations of stays, little privacy and the stress of being sent back to the street every day (the number of places in night shelters has more than doubled from 194 in 2005 to 412 in 2011); effects of “shelterisation” in communal temporary accommodation and the question whether skills learned there are of any use for living in a self-contained dwelling after being re-housed. The fact that in the step system, a “successful” stay in supported housing ends with the need to move on to the “final dwelling”, thus disrupting any established contacts with the community in and outside the house, is also mentioned as a critical point. If they ever arrive at this stage homeless people do not only have to move to another place but will as a rule also be left alone without further support in their new and “final” housing situation. Offers for “aftercare” for formerly homeless people in permanent housing are extremely limited in Vienna (p.71).

The evaluation informs us (pp. 66-67) that only slightly more than half of all users of transitional supported housing, and only less than a third of all the 5 188 users of accommodation services for homeless people in Vienna in the years 2009 and 2010, have managed to get a regular tenancy when leaving the service, either in Vienna's large municipal housing stock, or in private rented housing, housing cooperatives, or even owner occupied housing. A particular problem seems to be that old rent arrears in the municipal stock (the City of Vienna is one of the largest landlords in Europe with 220 000 municipal housing units), will lead to complete exclusion from accessing this important source of permanent housing in Vienna (see p.77).

While we know that point in time measures overestimate the duration of homelessness and underestimate the fluctuation in and out of homelessness over a longer period it is nevertheless remarkable that of the 200 homeless people interviewed for the study, 27 per cent had first contacted the service system more than three years ago and a further 40 per cent have been in the system for between one and three years (see Table 93 in the appendix of the study). There are also indications of a considerable proportion of "frequent flyers" moving between different offers without exiting the system.

The study provides a very rich analysis of data, based on 201 interviews with homeless clients, longitudinal data of service use (excluding the night shelters), between 2006 and 2010 for more than 38 000 stays, 31 in-depth interviews with experts, and a short questionnaire filled in by 98 experts employed by service providers. The report describes the system of services for homeless people in Vienna and presents the different services of this system as viewed by the clients; it analyses client profiles and housing/homelessness biographies; the course of utilisation of the service system; the effectiveness of different services; and cutting points with other services for homeless people and other target groups.

There is also a small section on "Housing First – an Alternative to the Viennese Step System?" Obviously the answer to this question by the authors of the evaluation report is "no, or perhaps, but later". Housing First is – for the moment – primarily seen as a small additional part of the menu of options, with pilot projects recommended. However, this author has found a number of good reasons in the report for a "yes", particularly with new evidence that the approach works in European contexts as well as in the US and elsewhere (see Busch-Geertsema, 2013). Given the favourable situation of back-up by the Viennese City Government, and housing options available in the large municipal stock controlled by this Government, scaling up Housing First in Vienna and re-housing homeless people as rapidly as possible into permanent housing with floating support would certainly not lead to replacing all other services for homeless people. But it could help reducing homelessness in Vienna to a considerable extent and diminish

some of the critical aspects of the Viennese step system with its weird conception of “housing readiness” which should no longer be praised as an example of good practice for other European cities.

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Volker Busch-Geertsema and Ekke-Ulf Ruhstrat (2012)

Mobile Mieterhilfe Bielefeld. Ein Modellprojekt zur Aufsuchenden Präventionsarbeit eines freien Trägers in enger Kooperation mit der Wohnungswirtschaft. Evaluation im Auftrag von Bethel.regional in den von Bodelschwingschen Stiftungen Bethel. [Mobile Debt Management in Bielefeld – Pilot Preventative Services with Home Visits to Tenants with Rent Arrears. by a Non-profit Provider in Close Cooperation with Housing Companies]

GISS: Bremen/Bielefeld, Available at: http://www.giss-ev.de/giss-ev/tl_files/giss/upload/PDF/Endbericht_Evaluation_Mobile_Mieterhilfe.pdf

A “mobile” prevention scheme for selected tenants with rent arrears in Bielefeld housed in the largest local housing associations’ dwellings was initiated by a non-profit provider. The scheme ran between August 2009 and July 2012. The evaluation of the scheme was carried out by GISS Bremen in 2011/12. The program intended to complement the mainstream municipal services in Bielefeld for tenants with rent arrears by taking over a number of “clients” and offering them intensive case by case support and individualized visits, and by assisting them to access a range of further supporting services, preferably before they faced their rent contracts being seized because of outstanding rent payments. In this way the scheme cooperated with the local housing company’s administrative services that handled cases that were leading to evictions due to rent arrears – among them the *more difficult* cases for which regular prevention tools seemed to lack efficacy.

The objective of the evaluation itself was to ascertain how the scheme changed the households’ strategies and level of indebtedness; to determine what had led to clients becoming indebted with rents (and other expenses); and what results can be achieved at what price; what makes the scheme work or, on the contrary, what elements of the scheme seem to be problematic. The transferability of the scheme was also explored.

The evaluation was based on the follow-up of the tenants with rent arrears and on field based interviews with the actors involved in the scheme, among them the social workers of the non-profit provider and the social housing provider. Data including data on demographic and social background, financial situation, the amount of rent arrears and other debts were recorded for every individual user of the service. In addition detailed data on all activities undertaken by the service and on the outcomes of these activities was recorded. Clients from a small sample of households who had used the service were individually interviewed about their experiences and impressions after the closure of the scheme. An expert group made up by employees from the housing provider and the mainstream municipal prevention service was included in focus group sessions to apply a so-called 'counter-factual analysis' to assess the potential of the scheme. Thus, a mixture of various evaluation methods was applied. Altogether, over 220 cases (covering 425 persons) were included in debt management activities, and control group data were shared by the municipal prevention service (for 190 cases) for comparison purposes.

The scheme targeted tenants who, in the selected year, could not be reached by the housing provider to settle the outstanding debts. One full time and one part-time professional staff, a volunteer worked on the scheme. The way of working with these households was different from the regular method; the backbone of the pilot activities were home visits and personal contacts with the clients. Not surprisingly, the target group was composed of households with higher risk of poverty: Close to half of them lived with children, the same share was largely dependent on social transfers, and half of them had heads of households over 40. Nearly all tenants had accumulated further debts beyond outstanding rent payments, half of them for the second or further occasion. Over 40 percent of the households were migrants who were facing difficulties both with language and with gathering information about services and transfers in Germany.

According to the non-profit provider's field experience, there were four groups of tenants: (1) tenants who paid their outstanding debts when they saw that the personnel followed up with them and regularly requested to cooperate; (2) migrants and others who were not able to understand the administrative procedures for repayment and requested additional help; (3) tenants with psychological problems and other challenges who had to be visited more often and for whom a step-by-step process was needed to gain their trust; (4) households with very fluctuating incomes, where no income stability could be anticipated. A large majority of the households could be helped at an early stage of the rent arrears (approx. €760 each), allowing for enough time to prevent eviction. Altogether, approximately 90 per cent of the clients got involved in counselling, although for over a third this involvement lasted only for a couple of weeks. One important tool offered by the non-profit provider was assisting households re-plan their financing. It turned out,

however, that close to half of the cases did not need that, a further quarter were not ready to engage with this service; and it was only the remainder that made use of this service. A commonly reported experience of the service provider was that tenants tended to underestimate the seriousness of their problems, and after the crisis had been resolved, tenants carried on the budgeting strategies applied before the intervention. Also, once the crisis had been tackled, tenants tended to stop dealing with the indebtedness issue.

The evaluation points out that there seemed to be various “success” elements of the scheme; these included tailor-made individual services; assertive and repeated contacts and home visits; low levels of bureaucracy; trust based on individualized engagement; and that the staff were generally well-informed about procedures within and beyond debt management. As a result, 90 per cent of all tenants maintained their contracts, over 70 per cent regularly paid their rents, 50 per cent rescheduled their repayment, and over 17 per cent cleared up all outstanding debts. The focus group discussions, which involved the provider and the mainstream debt service’s staff assessing the potential impacts of the scheme, indicated that a quarter of all participating households would have been evicted without the tailor-made mobile service they got. Thus, there were considerable savings made when the investment put into running the program and the costs that would have arisen if the scheme had not run are compared.

To sum up, the scheme contained mainly secondary prevention measures; counteracting evictions as the selected sample of the households was already at imminent risk of homelessness because of rent arrears (Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008). The mobile service’s strength, as opposed to the mainstream provision, was that it incorporated “tenancy sustainment/floating support (for households with high support needs whose actions, e.g. failure to pay rent or anti-social behaviour, place them at risk of homelessness through eviction)” (Pleace *et al*, 2011, p.49). The evaluation itself tried to apply a robust mixture of methods to uncover the perspectives of a diversity of stakeholders engaged in the process. Thus, the research report can be a useful reading for municipal officials and social housing providers designing debt prevention and management schemes, and follow-up procedures for such services.

› References

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Jessie Hohmann (2013)

The Right to Housing – Law, Concepts, Possibilities.

Oxford: Hart, pp.286, £50.00.

The human right to housing represents the law's most direct and overt protection of housing and home. Thus, begins this excellent contemporary examination of housing rights. Jessie Hohmann provides an insightful and sophisticated analysis of the meaning, content, scope and nature of housing rights. She distinguishes between a right to housing (part of the broader human rights common to all), and housing rights (legal rights or entitlements codified into or arising from national domestic law). While rooted in a legal analysis, she draws on a range of disciplines including anthropology, political theory, philosophy, and geography, to create a major contribution to knowledge in this area.

The book is structured in three parts: Firstly, it outlines the right to housing within international and national laws; secondly, it examines the key concepts of housing – space, time and privacy; thirdly, it critically questions the potential of rights to housing to alleviate human misery, marginalization and deprivation. Hohmann questions why, at a time when the right to housing appears in major national and regional human rights covenants, its status as a human right is often greeted with scepticism. Conversely, those who espouse the right to housing appear to be overstating its potential, often failing to recognize its limitations.

Hohmann examines the right to housing as part of the socio-economic rights enshrined within UN instruments. Here, the concepts of security of tenure; availability of services; materials facilities and infrastructure; affordability, accessibility; suitable location; and cultural adequacy are examined. The right to housing within regional human rights instruments, such as the European Social Charter; EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; European Convention on Human Rights; American Convention on Human Rights; and the Arab Charter on Human Rights is carefully explored. Hohmann then examines in detail how the broad right to housing has been interpreted within constitutional law cases in South Africa and India. However, she suggests that in South Africa the transformative aims of the Constitution have

failed to result in actual social change, while in India judicial rhetoric has provided a profound conceptual foundation for the right to housing, but this has proved to be an unstable one to ground a claim for a right to housing.

Hohmann then examines why the right to housing has had such limited impact and remains, on the whole, thin and elusive. She suggests that the problem lies in giving the power to interpret the right to courts. The legal right to housing as interpreted by courts, can, in effect, exclude the suffering of entire groups of people from recognition. She points out that “[A]ny legal interpretation of a human right that fails to adequately embed the right within the social context of real deprivation, marginalization and inadequacy of living conditions that characterize the violation of the right must fall short of the radical and emancipatory potential of human rights” (p.121).

Clearly, the narrow focus of a legal liberal notion of rights conflicts with the broader contextual, political and emancipatory approach. Hohmann argues that courts have failed to properly interpret the right to housing and indeed, other human rights, in three ways. Firstly, there is a failure to properly define the right and the consequent obligations. Secondly, the legal interpretation is overly procedural, so that the substantive element of the right is overlooked. Thirdly, the legal interpretation is inadequately connected to an awareness of the actual social conditions of the violation. Indeed, Hohmann also identifies weaknesses within the UN architecture of rights definition, alongside national constitutional courts and the European Court of Human Rights. However, she points out that bodies like the Council of Europe – European Committee on Social Rights have grasped the contextual nature of housing, and developed much clearer and holistic definitions and benchmarks for rights to housing implementation. This is clearly evident from the decision in *FEANTSA v France* (Case 39/2006, 4 February 2008), where the Committee crafted a definition of the right to housing, set reasonable timeframes for a State to comply, addressed measurable progress indicators, and required evidence of dedication of sufficient State funds.

Hohmann suggests that a lofty principle of dignity, autonomy and equality for all persons through housing does not necessarily translate into an enforceable right (p.126). The tendency for courts to focus on proceduralism, requiring States to “act” rather than deliver is also a major issue. Rights discourses often operate at a high level of abstraction from the conditions of material deprivation. Indeed, Hohmann provides a valuable contextual examination of how the issues of community, privacy, hidden homelessness, identity, and personhood are critical to right to housing interpretations. Similarly, she examines how law manages issues of space, especially in the hidden relationship between the physical contours of living envi-

ronments and the legal rules that structure these spaces. Housing can be a space of social control or a space of social transformation. This contextual examination points to the importance of the right to housing as the base for housing policy.

The final chapter on “possibilities” offers a critical perspective on the right to housing itself. The construction of the right, which emerges from her analysis, is one, which is overly procedural, even programmatic. Coupled with the failure of courts, monitoring bodies and treaty regimes to define the right and give it normative content, “this procedural programmatic bent means that it is difficult to say what the right to housing is” (p. 231). In fact, Hohmann suggests, the legal discussions over the right to housing often appear to proceed blind to the fact that the dispossessed might be those for whom this right was intended. In any case, when the right to housing has been interpreted and applied by courts it has not had a radical effect, and we must ask whether relying on the right to housing to solve problems of homelessness and marginalization is a fruitless exercise.

Hohmann does not reject entirely the legal basis of this right, pointing out that law also plays an important part in the radical potential of human rights through the role it plays in the construction of legal subjectivity. The fundamental principles, which underlie the right to housing, are the most fundamental concerns of human rights. Hohmann contends that despite curial vagueness, overprocedurality and a failure to acknowledge the social context, courts have made determinations on the right to housing without bringing national economies “to their knees.”

Hohmann casts a wider focus to the realization of the right to housing. This draws in questions of the boundaries of the State in relation to rights and regulation. Traditional approaches to autonomy and freedom being achieved in opposition to the State must be reconsidered. The idea that the State creates the conditions where human beings can truly flourish and enjoy freedom and rights must be advanced. The tension between rights reliance and political action is also important. But there is a fear that in developing the ownership of rights by disadvantaged groups they will become bound in to the “tricky art of liberal ideology.” Hohmann concludes this valuable analysis by acknowledging the many varied approaches to rights and critiques of rights. Yet, in reality, she suggests, people do use their human rights to make their own vision of a just and emancipatory world.

One of the key insights of Hohmann is how housing rights must be rooted in the social context of the rights holder and must be geared towards their emancipation and full participation in society. This clearly distinguishes the narrow legalistic and policy approaches. It is different too from the approaches of some housing and homelessness agencies, as a proper understanding of the emancipatory nature of this right would guard against poor social housing and emergency accommodation.

As Hohmann suggests, it is all too easy for the struggle against homelessness and shelter to be translated into a series of mandates for construction companies, developers, and others.

For anyone with any sustained interest in the right to housing this book is invaluable. Well-written, concise, well researched and structured, it is essential reading for lawyers, academics, advocates, and policy makers.

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