
The Significance of Exclusionary Discourse and Measures : The Example of Hungary¹

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› **Abstract** *This think piece demonstrates how the dehumanising discourse that seeks to legitimise the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people impedes adequate social policy answers to the problem of homelessness. After an account of recent efforts to exclude homeless people from public spaces in Hungary through police sweeps, exclusionary adaptation of public furniture and anti-begging ordinances, it will argue that criminalising and punitive responses to homelessness and a lack of adequate social policy are not independent of each other. Whereas adequate social policies could greatly reduce the problems to which criminalisation is a misguided answer, the lack of such policies contributes to a strengthening of the penal state. Punitive measures gain legitimacy from a discourse that dehumanises homeless people, excludes them from the moral community and blames them for their homelessness. Such discourse further impedes the understanding of homelessness as a structural problem and the development of a sense of community, both of which are prerequisites for the egalitarian reforms necessary to put an end to homelessness.*

› **Keywords** *Exclusion ; homelessness ; public space ; punitive responses ; Hungary.*

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² The City is for All is a grass-roots activist group in which homeless, formerly homeless and non-homeless people work together for social justice and housing rights. The author is a founding member of this organisation.

Introduction

This paper looks at the recently introduced criminalising and exclusionary measures directed at homeless people³ in Hungary, and uses them and their accompanying discourse to demonstrate the interrelationship between criminalising and exclusionary responses to homelessness and a lack of adequate social policy. It contributes to the discourse of this journal on the spatial aspects of exclusion faced by homeless people (see Tosi, 2007; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2008; Huey, 2009). The following will demonstrate the non-applicability to Hungary of Tosi's conclusion that in Europe the 'homeless are not the main focus of measures to control urban space, and are infrequently the explicit target' and that migrants 'perform in some ways, in the control of public space, a role similar to that which is played by the figure of the homeless in the discourse in the USA' (2007, pp.234 and 231). Unlike most Western European countries, large non-European immigrant groups are not present in Hungary and homeless people do have a dominant place in discourse on the control of urban public space (though not in the more general discourse on public safety, which is mostly concerned with Roma people).

I begin by discussing how homelessness has been characterised as an 'urban nuisance', how specific initiatives have sought to exclude homeless people from public spaces and how begging has been criminalised in parts of Hungary, before moving on to consider the significance of these exclusionary measures. The discussion is based on my analysis of these particular responses to homelessness in Hungary.⁴ Although my focus here is on disciplinary measures, these are not the only, or even the dominant, policy responses to homelessness in Hungary, where, for example, there is a system of shelters and day centres and an active non-governmental organisation sector.

³ By 'homeless' I refer predominantly to people sleeping rough or those staying in shelters at night and in public spaces during the day. Such homeless people are the main targets of the described exclusionary measures and the protagonists of the accompanying discourse. However, the discourse often confuses this most visible of homeless groups with homeless people in general, such that the negative attitudes developed towards the former affect the latter as well.

⁴ This involves participant observation of grass-roots activities and reviews of media sources of information (newspapers, online resources etc.) as well as academic texts on the subject.

The Homeless Person as an Urban Nuisance

'I live close to Petöfi Bridge, and if I go out to smoke to my balcony, I see a pleasant⁵ lady who settled at the entrance of the post office. She lives twenty meters from my bedroom' reads one response to the article 'Homeless are being expelled from 15 spaces in Újbuda' (the eleventh district of Budapest) at one of Hungary's most popular online news portals.

'I have to ask: am I living in socialism or capitalism? As far as I know the defense of the individual and of private property are two core components of this system. The value of my flat decreases, I go to the shop only by a roundabout route, sometimes it makes my stomach turn, do I have any rights at all?' Confronted with street homelessness, the commentator is offended not because he lives in a society in which there are people who are forced to live on the street, but because of the inconvenience this fact causes him as he looks down from the balcony of his flat or goes shopping. He is concerned not about the rights of homeless people, but about the rights of those who see them. Both the article's topic (the mayor's plan to address the 'homeless problem' by designating fifteen 'homeless-free zones'⁶ and the quoted comment indicate the degree of social exclusion that homeless people face in Hungary.

This exclusion is further reflected in, for example, the words of a police captain in Budapest who remarked to me that 'we don't let homeless into that square'. He acknowledged the illegality of this, but excused himself by referring to public pressure. This sense of exclusion was also evident in the disdainful smiles of the police officers I called in a subway station because a security guard was beating a homeless person with his truncheon. Or when the arriving ambulance workers exclaimed that 'ordinary people might die now' as (because of me) they now had to deal with 'this', a homeless person, instead.

Do we look at poor people as equally worthy members of our society who deserve our solidarity and some kind of social minimum response, or do we blame them for their situation and accept that they and their children should get worse housing, worse schools, worse health care and live shorter, more miserable lives than us? In the case of homeless people, it is often not even the issue of equal worth that is raised, but whether we consider them human at all.

⁵ Here, 'pleasant' is used ironically to express his disgust at the situation.

⁶ These zones were announced by the mayor in repeated statements and led to increased surveillance of these places by the authorities. However, the zones are not a defined policy (there is no policy document or ordinances to enforce them) and the number of zones has varied in subsequent statements made by the mayor.

Raising this question is sacrilegious. Yet it needs to be raised, as many reactions to homelessness seem to indicate that politicians who initiate exclusionary measures (and local residents who support these) see homeless people living on the streets not as humans, but as some kind of urban nuisance similar to graffiti, stray dogs, potholes or illegal bill posting. Something, an eyesore for the more wealthy, that impedes the “normal” use of public spaces and spoils the landscape.

The exclusionary discourse on homeless people is exemplified by an interview with a popular right wing mayoral candidate who takes pride in his efforts to clean up Budapest: ‘I managed to get rid of illegal advertisements, clean graffiti, we passed a strict ordinance on dogs, we took action against illegal littering, we expelled homeless people, without much public attention’ (Munkácsy and Varga, 2006).⁷ The mayor of the eleventh district, a member of the ‘socialist’ party, has made similar statements: ‘we will start a complex police action, taking firm action against the disruptive homeless, begging, illegal vending and illegal litter’ (V. K., 2009). Even though (in this statement) the mayor did not generalise to include all homeless people but spoke about the ‘disruptive homeless’, the context in which homelessness is raised is nonetheless telling: it seems that homeless people who live on the streets are a nuisance, which – just like illegal litter – need to be removed from public spaces.

The treatment of homeless people as illegal litter is not confined to the discourse, but is illustrated in the practical attempt of one local authority in Budapest in February 2005 to remove the shanties of fifteen homeless people with a bulldozer and a dozen workers, as if they were actually illegal litter. The attempt was prevented by a living chain of human rights activists, mobilised by a conscientious social worker.

In this perspective, homelessness is not an issue of distribution, nor is it an anomaly of the welfare system or the housing market; it is an issue of aesthetics and order. The homeless person is no longer a member of the community who needs that community’s protection, but is a danger from which the community needs to be protected.

⁷ Since then the quoted politician has been elected as the mayor of Budapest.

Exclusionary Public Spaces

This dehumanising attitude is reflected in the iron armrests that are installed on public benches in Budapest with the intention of driving away homeless people. Two inner district mayors took pride in publicly announcing their exclusionary intentions. Public benches that are deliberately made unsuitable for lying down on by means of iron armrests or in other ways are obvious examples of measures that are intended not to fight homelessness, but to fight homeless people.

Most of us do not stop to think about how many of the little details in our urban environment are influenced by this exclusionary purpose: this is why some public benches were changed to single-person public chairs; this explains the design of the seats at bus stops; this is why there are otherwise futile little iron parts between seats at subway stops and in front of the new building of Corvinus University. In the late 1990s one rationale for the introduction of the 'subway police' was to keep homeless people out of subway stations, just as it is a publicly announced goal in the designing of the underpasses for the new subway line that they should not contain any space that homeless people could occupy (Török and Udvarhelyi, 2005, p.70).

The newly installed anti-homeless iron armrests led to much criticism and protest. The deputy parliamentary commissioner for civil rights declared the method inhumane and stated that 'the residents need to tolerate this much inconvenience' (i.e. the inconvenience caused by the presence of homeless people).⁸ In response to the complaints of a grass-roots housing activist, the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Civil Rights published an official report on this issue, which declared 'every administrative measure that responds to homelessness as an aesthetic issue of the cityscape' as unacceptable and 'any measure that would further worsen the circumstances of homeless people' as unconstitutional (OBH, 2006, p.8).

The armrests successfully endured the protest of human rights activists, journalists and the ombudsman. However, a small group of activists, formed with the sole purpose of removing these instruments and other symbols of exclusion, succeeded in detaching many of them. They were later exhibited as a sculpture of a person lying down at a sleep-out demonstration.

⁸ Even though public pressure is frequently evoked to legitimise the installation of iron armrests and other measures aimed at the spatial segregation of homeless people, the only available representative study on this topic (Studio Metropolitana – Double Decker, 2005) proved that the majority of respondents did not agree with the installation of the armrests.

Criminalisation of Begging

Begging and homelessness are frequently connected and confused by those who argue for the criminalisation of begging. In their discourse the figure of the beggar represents the 'disruptive' homeless person, falsely suggesting that most homeless people beg. In fact, homelessness and begging are two different phenomena in Hungary: homeless people more frequently work than beg (Gurály, 2009), with the proportion of those who beg being less than one-third even among street homeless people (Győri, 2008), whereas approximately half of those who beg are homeless (Mezei, 1999). Still, as the quoted pro-criminalisation arguments will show, anti-begging ordinances are, to a considerable extent, also intended to exclude homeless people from certain public spaces.

One example of the confusion of homelessness with begging (and indeed tuberculosis) is the statement of a local authority representative of Szeged (a major city in southern Hungary) arguing for the prohibition of all forms of begging in the downtown area (as quoted in Nagy, 2005):

The situation in Szeged has started to become intolerable: people often stop me on the street complaining that they are being woken up by the outside life in front of their house. Others eat there, sleep there, relieve themselves there, which is unacceptable for several reasons. It is also a health issue. For example, there are serious implications if somebody sits on a bench downtown on which somebody with TB previously sat.

The way in which the same representative reacted when asked in a television interview, 'Why can't beggars be left alone?' is also telling. 'Because those people who would like to see their town pretty and clean have rights too,' she answered.

The mayor of the fifth district of Budapest announced the elimination of 'homeless islands' (spaces occupied by homeless people) and of street begging at the same time, which further demonstrates the blending of begging and homelessness. His statement that the local authority would ensure there was a 'legal basis for pushing out the homeless and beggars' (NOL, 2007) from the district underscores this point. In light of such comments, the frequently made argument that the criminalisation of homelessness is not directed against certain people, but against certain activities, is hardly believable.

According to the current national legislation, begging with children or in a 'harassing way' is prohibited; the latter is broadly defined to include anyone 'who addresses pedestrians or people in public with the purpose of asking for money, or who goes begging house to house, flat to flat'. This regulation in itself would allow action to be taken on begging that involves harassment, no further criminalisation is necessary. In fact, according to the quoted regulation, any form of begging other

than silent begging – no matter how polite – is illegal. Yet several local authorities still found it necessary to further criminalise non-harassing forms of begging, at least in the inner area of their territory, and attempts have been made to do so in the capital as well.

Any form of begging is prohibited in certain areas of Kaposvár, Szeged, Eger, Nagykanizsa, Pécs and Debrecen. In the thirteenth district of Budapest, an ordinance passed in 2006 by the local authority prohibits begging in the whole district between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. Its definition of begging (similar to the ordinances of Eger, Szeged and Pécs) includes ‘implied conduct’, which is especially worrisome with respect to police harassment of homeless people. As an open letter from the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network warns, ‘The open violation of human rights is reasonably presumed, because these by-laws allow for poorly dressed people to be sent away from public spaces, making their humiliation total.’ The difficult issue of legal certainty in relation to identifying ‘implied conduct’ is one of the constitutional counter-arguments put forward in the joint constitutional court petition of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and the Shelter Foundation.

The Significance of Exclusionary Measures

As geographer Don Mitchell (2003, pp.208–9) writes, ‘there is something exceedingly perverse in the above discussion, something easily lost as the details of specific cases are outlined—namely that homeless people and their advocates are driven, in the current urban context, to argue for the right to sleep in public, to lie on sidewalks, to beg on the streets, or to shit in alleys’. These are, indeed, ‘pretty mean’ rights.

The struggle against the segregation of homeless people, iron armrests and the accompanying discourse might sometimes appear fruitless (or even counter-productive)⁹, as the real aim is not to defend but to eliminate rough sleeping. This is true in as much as the final goal is indeed the elimination of homelessness: not because street homelessness is bad for some of the *residents*, but because it is bad for those who *cannot reside anywhere* and are thus forced to sleep on a bench. The real solution is not to make rough sleeping unviable, but to make it unnecessary.

Of course, nothing in this argument is intended to suggest that the inconvenience of being confronted with homelessness is not real. On the contrary, seeing homeless people is distressing. Some people might be distressed because of their negative

⁹ On the critique of this argument, see the ‘Redistribution, Recognition, and the Sovereign Ban’ chapter of Feldman (2004), who shows how economic, cultural and political injustices intervene in the case of homelessness and argues that the struggles for legal recognition and for redistribution might go well together.

attitudes toward homeless people, but, to quote the US Supreme Court, 'mere public intolerance or animosity cannot constitutionally justify the deprivation of a person's physical liberty'.¹⁰ Other people's distress might be caused by empathy with the person who is living on the streets. In this case, it should be obvious that the only appropriate method to relieve or prevent this is to relieve or prevent the first-order suffering to which it is a response (Waldron, 2000) by ensuring that no one needs to sleep rough.

For now, however, this is not the case and some of our fellow human beings are living on the streets. They are harassed frequently, even without the existence of specific exclusionary measures, but such measures could make harassment more frequent, as well as making it appear legitimate and legal. The protection of their security and dignity is an important goal in itself, worthy of the support of any person of good will, but there is a further reason why spatial exclusion and the moral exclusion by which it is legitimised is of crucial importance: punitive measures and the lack of adequate social policy responses are not unrelated.

First, as French sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2001 and 2009) argues, social deregulation and punitive over-regulation go hand in hand, as the state relies increasingly on the police and penal institutions to contain the disorders produced by shrinking social protection. The consequence of the 'minimal state' ideology is not the lessening or weakening of the state, but a fundamental shift in its functions that entails the reversal of a centuries-long process: civilisation. 'It threatens primarily the civilizing and welfare functions which promoted relatively peaceful and relatively integrated national coexistence. The deterioration of the situation that follows may legitimate the strengthening of the [state's earlier] policing functions' (Ferge, 2000, p.183; see also Ferge, 1999a and 1999b).

This means, in the case of homelessness, that exclusionary and punitive measures would be less necessary if it was not the case, that there is simply no social housing policy in most of the Hungarian settlements (KSH, 2006), if the public housing stock was bigger and housing allowances were larger, if there were proper social policies in place to prevent forced evictions and homelessness after divorce, if homeless hostels and overnight shelters were not partially filled 'from above' (i.e. with people

¹⁰ The court decision in *O'Connor v Donaldson* 422 US 563 (1975), which ruled that non-dangerous mental patients cannot be involuntarily confined in mental hospitals, is quoted by Simon (1992) to demonstrate that while in the 1950s courts approved the enforcement of loitering laws 'to protect the decent citizens of the community from contact with those sordid individuals who infest [public spaces] such as the dirty, disheveled, besotted character whose state is but a step short of intoxication or vagrancy' (quoted at p.659), today 'such expressions of official hostility to the homeless may not be given judicial sanction'.

loosing their homes instead of rough sleepers) (Bényei et al., 2000) and if available shelters did not constrain the liberty and privacy of residents to the present extent – in short, if fewer people were forced to live on the streets.

Wacquant's hint (2009) that 'the growing interest in and increased means devoted to law enforcement also come in handy to compensate the deficit in legitimacy suffered by political leaders' is also relevant in this case: homelessness in an affluent society invites a potential legitimization crisis (Marcuse, 1988) that does not allow politicians to ignore the problem entirely. Inaction is therefore not an option and blaming the homeless people and announcing police sweeps is more convenient than acknowledging the failure of social policies.

But exclusionary measures and the lack of proper social policies are linked in another way as well. As Hungarian cultural anthropologists Ágnes Török and Tessza Udvarhelyi (2005) submit with regard to the 'underpass-cleaning rites' of the Hungarian authorities: in the rhetoric that attempts to legitimise the spatial exclusion of homeless people, the notions of 'public' and 'society' become restricted along with the scope of legitimate users of public spaces, and homeless people are excluded from these ideally universal categories, parallel to their exclusion from public spaces.

The moral and territorial exclusion is intertwined here, and the 'abandonment of the universalistic vision of the welfare states is accompanied by the idea of a privileged community' (Tosi, 1996, p.101). Instead of looking at homelessness as a problem of the community, it is seen as a threat from the outside. In this way, homelessness becomes a problem that occurs not within the public but a 'threat that appears from elsewhere' (Kawash, 1998, pp.330–1).

It is true that the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people can 'create a veil of ignorance that is the reverse of the one developed by moral philosopher John Rawls' (Kohn, 2004, p.140). 'Rather than imagining that we do not know our individual characteristics and life situation in order to develop principles of justice, this veil of ignorance ensures that we make political decisions without ever having to think about how they might affect differently situated persons.' (ibid.)

But what is important here is not only how exclusionary measures aim to make homelessness *disappear*, but also how the related discourse makes homeless people *appear*. This dehumanising discourse does at least as much long-term harm by redefining homelessness as an issue of aesthetics and order as the execution of related exclusionary measures would by harassing, humiliating and segregating homeless people, and by hiding the problem. As Tosi (2007, p.229) notes, 'control of public spaces indicates a profound change in the social construction of home-

lessness, which can have serious consequences on policies. Framing homelessness in terms of public order and nuisance subtracts the question of homelessness from social policies.'

If we learn to see homeless people not as human beings but as an inconvenience, if the 'homeless problem' becomes not 'a problem of the economy or the society that produces homelessness; instead, it is viewed as the problem that the homeless create for the economy and the society in which they live' (Kawash, 1998, p.330), then our answers to homelessness will not be to create social and economic changes or to guarantee fundamental rights for everyone, but to conceal the visible signs of homelessness.

This relationship demonstrates, why, among other things, it is of crucial importance to fight against measures that aim to exclude and segregate homeless people, and against the dehumanising discourse that legitimises them. Such measures gain legitimacy from the dehumanisation and moral exclusion of homeless people, which makes empathy, as well as a sense of community and responsibility – the very preconditions of egalitarian reforms necessary to eliminate homelessness, impossible to develop.

We will devise different policies depending on whether we are concerned about the suffering of homeless people or the inconvenience that their homelessness causes others. In this way egalitarian social policies (along with the solidarity on which they are based) and exclusionary measures (along with the immunity to suffering in which they are rooted) are mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, an important component of the exclusionary rhetoric on homelessness is the assumption that social policies are adequate and generous and that homeless people will have somewhere else to go when they are expelled from public spaces. People are homeless precisely because they do not have a home or private property where they can freely exist. In an imagined society in which all space is private, homeless people could not legally exist. Consequently, where there is no adequate homeless assistance system, excluding homeless people from public spaces would mean the prohibition of their existence, as everyone needs to be somewhere (Waldron, 1991). No one would argue in favour of this; even the proponents of segregation are not so cynical as to suggest the mere removal of homeless people from one place to another as a solution to homelessness. On the contrary, there are frequent references to the availability of shelters in their rhetoric.

Thus, it is assumed that there is an adequate homeless assistance system in place to help people off the streets. Consequently, if there are still people sleeping rough, then it is not the lack of adequate alternatives, but the homeless people themselves

that are to blame. That must mean that they are different from us (we, who need decent housing), some kind of strange creatures that for some unclear reason prefer to remain outside in the cold and dirt.

The very idea that shelters are the obvious alternatives to rough sleeping implies that 'homeless people are not fit for regular housing' and thus might reinforce 'prevailing popular ideas that homeless people are of a different, inferior kind – "not like us"' (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007, p.79). These sentiments contribute to the emotional and spatial distancing of homeless people, while the discourse emphasising the individual responsibilities of homeless people is silent about the systematic causes of homelessness. This could be termed a 'manipulative silence' (Huckin, 2002) that diverts attention from necessary social reforms.¹¹

As Mitchell (2003, pp.179–80) writes, measures of exclusion and segregation are possible:

... only in the absence of an understanding that homelessness has extraper-sonal structural determinants. Or, more accurately, troublesome homelessness is seen to reside in those who refuse the numerous social services offered to them to help them negotiate the conditions that make them homeless. Whether homelessness is structurally produced or not, this logic goes, people remain homeless by choice.

The interconnection of the assumed causes of homelessness and its criminalisation is also demonstrated by the related case law of the United States: the courts have upheld anti-homeless statutes based on assumptions of the 'voluntary' nature of homelessness, while recognition of its 'involuntary' nature (for structural reasons or health issues) led to similar statutes being overturned (Daniels, 1997).¹²

¹¹ Accordingly, Tosi (2007, p.229) argues that the framing of homelessness 'in terms of public order and nuisance, takes it out of the area of "positive" policies and this new approach reflects an individualist/social pathology perspective which seeks to make homeless people responsible and even guilty for their own situation'.

¹² Although litigation based on the 'involuntary' nature of homelessness seems to have been successful, Daniels argues that it is ultimately ineffective in achieving meaningful solutions to the problems of homeless individuals: successful cases established only negative rights (the courts did not impose affirmative duties on governments to address the needs of homeless people), which can easily be overturned 'by offering homeless people even the most minimal of alternatives, such as "beds" in emergency shelters, or even a "shelter's floor"' (p.729). For a critique of the related case law and 'the legal construction of homelessness as bare life', see Fieldman, 2004. For a critique of the voluntary–involuntary dichotomy in the case of homelessness, see Wagner, 1993 and 1997.

The spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people will obviously not house people, but exclusionary measures are ineffective even with respect to their own purpose of making homelessness invisible. As long as social policies are unable to provide adequate support to everyone and some of us remain homeless, there will be people who are compelled to live in public spaces. The incidence of rough sleeping will not be reduced by one local authority chasing homeless people to another local authority area or by certain towns pushing homeless people out of their downtown areas; rough sleeping will only disappear when there is no need for anyone to live on the streets.

Likewise, public sanitation could and should be improved by the installation of free, 24-hour public lavatories and by extending the opening hours of day centres (which are mostly open only on weekdays); not by the harassment of homeless people.

'I think that it was a very good idea to install those arm rests. Public benches are not for homeless people to sleep on,' writes a contributor to an Internet forum for social workers. Indeed they are not, 'but homeless people are not to be fought against with armrests either', answered sociologist Zoltán Gurály. Once we realise this, there will be no need for armrests at all.

Afterword

In October 2009 a group of activists held a special 'opening' ceremony for a symbolic public housing flat in one of the busiest squares in Budapest. The protest was organised by the grass-roots activist group The City is for All, in which homeless, formerly homeless and non-homeless people work together for social justice and housing rights.

Surrounded by cameras, the alter ego of the mayor of the eleventh district (a homeless activist in an elegant suit) ceremoniously cut the opening ribbon and gave the keys of the symbolic apartment to a homeless couple. The new inhabitants of the apartment (which was a carpet, a bed and a few other items of furniture on the square) were said to be the last homeless people in the district as everyone else had already been housed in the newly established public housing system.

The purpose of the performance was to raise awareness of the lack of public housing and to parody the mayor of the eleventh district, who had announced a 'zero tolerance' approach on homelessness and the designation of 'homeless-free zones' from which homeless people would be excluded. The pseudo-mayor in the play talked about his 'zero tolerance' policy, which involved the local authority's determination to provide adequate housing to every homeless citizen. Is that not the only reasonable understanding of a 'zero tolerance' policy on homelessness?

After the ceremony, another activist in the group, himself sleeping rough, read out the group's open letter to the mayor: 'You cannot treat us as if we were not humans, citizens of the Republic of Hungary, members of the community. You cannot treat us as if we were garbage.' The letter strongly criticised the plan to establish fifteen homeless-free zones and argued for increased public housing, a ban on forced evictions and the declaration of housing as a human right.

Following this event, which was covered by several online and printed newspapers as well as radio and television programmes, the mayor did not bring up publicly his 'solution' to the 'homelessness problem' again. A few years earlier, the mayor of the fifth district had similarly abandoned his idea of 'stepping up against the homeless' and eliminating the 'homeless islands' which are 'hotbeds of crime', after he was strongly criticised in the evening news and after a group of activists (both homeless and housed) protested in the boardroom against his proposals, wielding banners that made such statements as 'the public space belongs to everyone', 'homeless = human', 'open society', and one which quoted the Hungarian Constitution on the unalienable right to dignity.

Mobilisation can make a difference in exposing the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of such proposals. Politicians might be persuaded to drop their exclusionary rhetoric if it seems that they have more to lose than to gain. It is up to us to make clear that it is housing and not police sweeps that we need.

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