Dierk Borstel, Jennifer Brückmann, Laura Nübold, Bastian Pütter, Tim Sonnenberg (eds.)

Handbuch Wohnungs- und Obdachlosigkeit

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Homelessness has received political and interdisciplinary academic attention in recent years. In Germany in particular, addressing and countering homelessness is a major field of social work practice and other disciplines. Covering, bringing together, and integrating the many different perspectives on this topic is undoubtedly a significant challenge. However, the *Handbook on Housing and Homelessness* (Handbuch Wohnungs- und Obdachlosigkeit) appears to take on exactly this task by providing a comprehensive overview of empirical research as well as theoretical and practical perspectives on homelessness.

In more than 50 contributions across over 800 pages, a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives and facets of homelessness are addressed. The content ranges from historical and conceptual analyses to studies of living conditions and coping practices of people experiencing homelessness, to intersectional analyses and insights from and reflections on practice. The book is edited by Dierk Borstel, Jennifer Brückmann, Laura Nübold, and Tim Sonnenberg (all Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts) as well as Bastian Pütter (Bodo e. V. Dortmund).

The handbook is structured into nine sections:

- Part I: Homelessness – Living conditions and coping practices
- Part II: Quantitative research approaches
- Part III: Homelessness in society
- Part IV: Social science perspectives
- Part V: Philosophical perspectives
- Part VI: Historical perspectives
- Part VII: Social work in homeless services – theoretical perspectives
- Part VIII: Homelessness within homelessness services
- Part IX: Reflections from practice

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Overall, the book demonstrates, in an impressive way, the disciplinary diversity of the field of homelessness in theory and research. Although the contributions are grouped thematically, their categorisation is not always easy to follow, and the individual chapters do not develop coherent or cumulative lines of argument. Nevertheless, the ambitious attempt to provide a comprehensive and systematising overview with a wide range of theoretical, practical, and empirical perspectives on homelessness is largely successful. At the same time, this also highlights the fundamental challenge of systematising a field of research in which, as the editors themselves emphasise, coherent and consecutive theoretical efforts have so far been limited.

In the following, given the scope and variety of the handbook, I will provide a brief overview of the sections with only selected insights into specific contributions.

The first two parts address homelessness from different empirical perspectives. They include both qualitative and reconstructive research approaches that reveal patterns of orientation, everyday practices, and action strategies, as well as studies that aim to quantify homelessness. For example, Nora Sellner's contribution (pp. 43 ff.) elaborates on the internal logic of everyday practices and different coping strategies of people experiencing homelessness. In contrast, the presented quantitative research approaches and studies focus, in part, on methods for counting homeless people in different cities. These include, for example, street counts, such as the widely discussed homelessness count in Berlin carried out as part of the so-called "Night of Solidarity" (pp. 189 ff.). While some contributions primarily examine the planning and implementation of these counts and remain largely at a descriptive level, others place a stronger emphasis on methodological reflection, such as weighing scientific quality criteria against practical research requirements. The latter is an interesting contribution to current discussions on counting homelessness both on national and international levels.

Parts III and IV, in contrast, examine social structures and processes that cause and accompany homelessness as well as further theoretical perspectives. Key topics include growing social inequality, developments in the housing markets, processes of discrimination, stigmatisation, and criminalisation of people experiencing homelessness. At the beginning, Christoph Butterwegge, for example, critically discusses changes in the housing market in Germany caused by increasing privatisation and the continuous withdrawal of the state from these markets, as well as the related decline in social housing, which are identified as key drivers of housing insecurity (pp. 271ff.). This is followed, among other topics, by a critique of widespread individualising interpretations of homelessness and a discussion of how social narratives, institutional routines, and legal regulations can contribute to the consolidation of social exclusion. In the following part of the volume, classism

is examined by Christina Möller and Max Holtkamp (pp. 417 ff.) as an instrument of social inequality that, on the one hand, has analytical potential but, on the other hand, at least when based on classical class concepts, risks excluding marginalised groups and reproducing exclusions. At the same time, it is criticised that classism-critical analyses often remain limited to the micro and meso levels and to questions of recognition, while macro-analytical links to capitalist structural contexts partly fall out of view (pp. 417ff.). The noteworthy contribution from Jan A. Finzi addresses stigmatisation, intersectionality, and housing insecurity. He identifies a lack of theoretical approaches to homelessness and, based on the concepts mentioned, develops his own approach as an analytical model. This model may need to be further differentiated, but it aims to address key questions in the field, such as an insufficient understanding of the target group and the lack of suitable analytical instruments (pp. 449ff.).

Parts V and VI offer additional perspectives on housing and homelessness from philosophical and historical viewpoints, some of which are rarely discussed in the academic field and practice. For example, Jürgen Hasse looks at housing beyond the widespread notion of fixed domestic housing. Instead, he asks about the nature of home and housing and about the extent to which homeless people "dwell"-dwelling is understood as a complex activity that goes beyond mere use of houses and includes a symbolic relationship to oneself and to the social world (pp. 487ff.). The notable contribution by Wolfgang Ayaß, on the other hand, examines homelessness during the period of National Socialism in Germany, when homeless people were persecuted, forcibly sterilized, and deported to concentration camps – with the support of welfare organisations and accompanied by corresponding media coverage (pp. 553ff.).

The seventh section presents theoretical analyses from social work perspectives. Some of the contributions are characterized by a fundamental critique of established interpretations of homelessness as well as intervention strategies. At the same time, social work itself becomes an object of analysis, particularly with regard to its role in reproducing exclusion, especially through individualising, normalising, and disciplining practices. Among others, Roland Anhorn's contribution deserves particular attention (pp. 567 ff.). He discusses homelessness as a specific form of social exclusion that is primarily produced by the functional principles of capitalist-organised markets, whereby homeless services largely serve to stabilise these conditions. Following this, pathologizing and criminalising practices are criticised in relation to individualised explanations of homelessness.

The eighth and, finally, the ninth and last parts provide insights into the practice of homeless services, both on the basis of field studies and through reflections from practice perspectives. In the former, the contributions range from the presentation

and discussion of the Housing First concept for particularly disadvantaged homeless people (pp. 669ff.) to the opportunities and limits of empowerment, using street newspapers (pp. 715ff.). The reflections on practice highlight the tensions between professional action, political constraints, and legal requirements.

Overall, the handbook is highly convincing as a broad collection of different perspectives that offer diverse theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into homelessness. It becomes clear that multidisciplinary analyses are necessary for a holistic understanding of the topic. Particularly compelling is the wide range from both practice-oriented and basic research, as well as theoretical reflections. Of special note are the in-depth theoretical contributions that address topics that often remain underrepresented in the discourse on homelessness. Some of the critical theoretical works break with established and partly normative narratives within the field of addressing homelessness. In addition, the basic research presented offers a valuable complement to the often more established practice-oriented research in the field. Throughout many contributions, intersectional perspectives are introduced, making the complexity of the issue visible and the different dimensions affected. In a large share of the contributions, the practice perspective of social work is also taken into account and addressed, which makes the book highly interesting for social work practitioners.

At the same time, the handbook is less convincing as a coherent and integrative overall narrative. Most contributions stand largely on their own and build only occasionally on one another. Theoretical, empirical, and practical connections are not systematically linked within the handbook. A clearer synthesis and integrative discussions would have benefited the volume as a whole. However, this does not diminish the substantive value of the individual chapters. The handbook is of a high standard and offers added value for different target groups. A further noticeable issue is the lack of consistent use of terminology and definitions, which may be rooted in the large number of contributions and perspectives and is difficult to resolve. The resulting lack of precision in some places is also a further indication of the complexity of the research and practice field itself.

Overall, due to the diversity of contributions and perspectives, the handbook is suitable for a broad audience. It addresses teaching, practice, and research alike, even if not every contribution will be of equal interest for all readers. As an overview volume, the handbook is clearly recommended to give broad access to the topic of homelessness.

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