

Seminar 19: (zoom link) Right to the City

Chair: Freek Spinnewijn, BE

Antonin Margier, FR: Beyond the Revanchist City, Which Management of Homelessness? The Compassionate Invisibilization” of Homelessness in Portland (Oregon)



Antonin Margier is associate professor of urban studies at the University of Rennes in France. His work focuses mainly on the geographies of poverty in the neoliberal city.

Perceived as a progressive city, Portland, Oregon (USA) is acclaimed for its livability and its sustainability model, Portland has become an inspiration for many policymakers. But as shown by Goodling *et al.* (2015), these policies produced spatial inequalities and contributed to Portland’s “uneven development”. In 2019, more than 4,000 individuals were counted as homeless within Multnomah County, Oregon, including 2,000 who were sleeping on the streets each night. The visibility of encampments in public space has given rise to many concerns and complaints from residents. To address this issue, the previous mayor declared a *State of Emergency on Housing and Homelessness* and there has been a roll-out of care and supportive initiatives and the proclamation of a policy of compassionate management of homelessness by the city. To gain an understanding of how policies are implemented on the ground, I focus on the management of homeless encampments in public spaces. This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in Portland in 2019-2020 and outlines how the rise in homelessness outreach practices is closely related to encampment cleanups and the invisibilization of homeless people through “compassionate eviction” from public space. I argue that, despite the compassionate discourse which officially underlies the rise of supportive policies in the management of homelessness, outreach work is used in a way to invisibilize homeless people. In that sense, I interpret this rise of outreach work in the management of homelessness as an adjustment of policing to the compassionate turn more than an end to punitive practices.

Charalampos Tsavdaroglou, GR: "Our house" Commoning Practices in Omonia Square. Renewal Plan vs. the Homeless Refugees' Right to the Central Square of Athens



Charalampos Tsavdaroglou is a Postdoctoral researcher in University of Thessaly's, Department of Planning and Regional Development. Charalampos holds a PhD in Urban and Regional Planning, from School of Architecture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and he was a Marie Curie Fellow in University of Amsterdam. His research interests include critical urban theory, autonomy of migration, intersectional, decolonial and affective geographies, the right to the city, common spaces versus spatial enclosures and urban social movements.

During the current refugee crisis, Athens became a major hub for thousands refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Most of the refugees are accommodated in state-run camps on the outskirts of the city. However, several newcomers are being excluded from refugee status, evicted from accommodation facilities and become homeless. It is estimated that in Athens more than 10.000 newcomers face homelessness without access to social services. The majority live in the streets, parks and abandoned buildings at the city center. Responding to the needs of homeless people, a refugee group called “Our House ” self-organized for two years a collective kitchen in the city’s central square of Omonia. The group served almost 200 meals per day, provided clothes, blankets and sleeping bags to homeless refugees and organized music concerts and set up a little street library. These activities describe commoning practices amongst refugees that express their claims for visibility and the right to the city center.



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At the same time and in the context of a controversial renewal project of Omonia square planned by the municipality of Athens, “Our House” activities have been prohibited. The opening of the new Omonia square in May 2020, revealed its new iconic fountain and the lack of urban furniture for rest. The redesign project did not follow public participation processes and several civil society organizations criticized the project for non-transparency and enforcement of gentrification in the wider area. Yet, refugees continue to claim their presence in the square while police operations implement a cleaning up agenda.

The paper draws on the Lefebvrian right to the city, literature on homeless’ and refugees’ commoning practices and critical approaches on urban renewal plans. Based on participatory research it shows that the conflict around the Omonia renovation project is an ongoing process of claiming the right to the city center.