

## Seminar 12: Structural Barriers to Tackling Homelessness (Room: AULA)

Chair: Masa Filipovic-Hrast, SI

### Miroslava Hlinčíková, SK: Who Deserves What? The Struggles between the Rhetoric of Housing as a Right and Housing as a Merit in the Context of Housing Policy in Slovakia



Miroslava Hlinčíková, PhD. works as a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the SAS. She has been a member of various research teams and has cooperated as an analyst with NGOs. Currently, she works for Amnesty International on the research Right to Housing in Slovakia. She is the author and co-author of several monographs and studies on minority issues in urban environments. In addition to her work as a researcher, she has been a member of the municipal Housing Committee in Trnava, Slovakia and is active in initiating the discussion about the Housing First model.

In Slovakia, housing is becoming less affordable for more people with diverse incomes and socio-economic statuses. The rental sector is underdeveloped and the state housing stock with reduced rent comprises only 1.6% of the leases. In this context, rental public housing is considered to be something temporary, unstable, and uncertain. My presentation is based on the analysis of the municipal housing policies and policies for ending homelessness in all of the major regional cities in Slovakia and the results of my ethnographic research in one of them. I will look at how constraints and barriers in the public housing policies of selected Slovak cities affect the affordability and stability of public housing for residents in the context of the right to housing. The research project looks at vulnerable groups (homeless people, low-income families and individuals) and their possible access to rental housing. I assume, in Slovakia, the housing policies diminish the state's role in housing, do not consider housing as their responsibility towards the residents and don't recognise housing as a right. To better understand the mindset, context and reasoning behind the local housing policies, I will look at how the rhetoric about rental housing is framed. In this system, anyone (fulfilling the basic conditions) can apply for municipal housing, as long as he/she works "hard enough" and proves responsibility and deservingness. I would like to deconstruct the category of deservingness present in the discourse about housing, and look closely at its content and how it is understood by different actors (politicians, officers, social workers). This idea is based on the moral premise that it would be unfair to support someone "who doesn't try hard enough" and reflects the background behind the implemented staircase system of ending homelessness in Slovakia.

### Timo Weishaupt, Christian Hinrichs and Jan Weckwerth, DE: Theorising homelessness: An urban sociological perspective on the interplay of individual, institutional and structural contexts



Professor Timo Weishaupt holds a Chair in Sociology with a focus on Social Policy at the University of Göttingen, Germany. He received his award-winning Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2008. Since his doctoral studies, he has conducted research at the work-welfare nexus. In the fall 2020, he started working on a project, funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG) which seeks to illuminate individual, structural and institutional factors that cause (or prolong) homelessness and housing exclusion in three German cities.



**Christian Hinrichs, Germany, is a sociologist and research assistant at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. He is doing his doctorate on the dynamics of biographical trajectories of homeless EU citizens from Eastern European countries in the context of simultaneously closing national welfare regimes. His research interests include the field of urban, migration and racism studies.**



**Jan Weckwerth is a postdoctoral scholar at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany. His research interests include social inequality, in particular class and lifestyle analyses, as well as urban sociology, the sociology of professions, and the sociology of culture and film.**

Rough sleeping and homelessness are amongst the most severe manifestations of poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion, which could, in principle, be prevented in well-developed welfare states such as Germany. Nevertheless, the number of people sleeping rough or experiencing homeless has increased in recent years, which has further aggravated the situation across most of Europe. While there are several explanations for why and when homelessness occurs, these approaches typically prioritize individual factors (e.g., “sin or sick talks”) or structural causes (“system talks”) or both (“new orthodoxy” or “pathways”). What’s missing though is a comprehensive attempt that theorizes the interplay of individual and structural factors, while also taking account how and when the welfare state (un)successfully intervenes.

We thus apply a distinctly praxeological approach with a critical focus on and systematic theorizing of the agency of homeless persons as well as the patterns of actions “on the ground”. Based on evidence collected in three medium-sized university towns in Germany, we reveal not only the intended as well as unintended mechanisms of (partial) exclusion from welfare-state services at the municipal level. We also systematically take into account individual resources, habitual dispositions and biographical experiences, and the role of the local (public and private) housing market – as well as the interactions between all of these factors.

Our theoretical model is solidly empirically grounded: We conducted more than four dozen narrative and semi-structured interviews with local experts as well as persons experiencing homelessness in three cities. These data were supplemented with media reports, official documents and participant observations. The interviews were evaluated systematically by conducting a qualitative content analysis, which informed our theoretical approach.