

17h30 – 18h00

Focus session (Room: Auditorium): “Talk with us, not about us” - Participation of people with lived experience of homelessness in housing activism and homeless services in 21th century Hungary

Presentation by Gyula Balog (HU), Katalin Gyöngyösi (HU), and discussion with colleagues with lived experience of the Hungarian “City is for All” housing advocacy group

HU-ENG interpretation will be available

Since homelessness services were established in Hungary in the 1990s, many changes took place in the society, politics, economy and social policy of the country. A growing number of people have been affected by housing poverty, while there has been a lack of effective long-term, state-level intervention to prevent housing poverty and homelessness. The criminalization of homelessness has further increased the exclusion and everyday difficulties of people experiencing homelessness.

The general structure and quality of homeless services remained the same over decades, but the system has grown and started to take over tasks from other sectors (e.g. health and mental health services, legal counselling). Policy experts, practitioners, researchers and most importantly, clients claim that the current system of homeless services cannot effectively address the complex needs of its clients.

The representation of homeless clients is a legal requirement in Hungarian homeless services. Yet, it is rarely implemented in practice. This is the starting point for our interest in, and research into the participation of homeless people in influencing housing policy, homeless services and social awareness of homelessness.

We give an overview of the participation of people with a lived experience of homelessness in housing activism and homeless services in 21th-century Hungary. We present, from a founder/activist perspective, the operation and results of “The City is for All” group, Hungary’s most important housing advocacy initiative to date involving people with lived experience of homelessness and their allies. This reflective historical approach will be complemented with results from our recent empirical study which, relying on the thematic analysis of a series of qualitative interviews, provides insight into the interpretations of participation of Hungarian experts by experience in the field of homelessness.



Gyula Balog is a senior expert by experience, activist, and trainer in the field of homelessness and housing poverty, based in Budapest. He works as a peer mentor for tenants at “From Streets to Home” Association (ULE), Hungary and as board member at School of Public Life Foundation. Gyula was involved in the Hungarian “The City is for All” housing advocacy group from its beginnings. He founded and has been coordinating the “First-Hand Information on Homelessness” awareness-raising programme on homelessness and housing poverty for 20 years, bringing interactive lessons and living library events led by a group of

people with lived experience to schools and other audiences for 20 years. He also took part in research projects, theatre plays as an actor, wrote short stories and journalistic pieces, and has extensive experience in community work and organization.



Katalin Gyöngyösi is a PhD student in the Special Needs Education programme of the Doctoral School of Education of ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, after an initial training in French language & francophone culture, Nationalism Studies, and special needs education and rehabilitation. She is interested, and has professional experience in working with young and older people facing various disadvantages. Her current research focuses on the intersections of disability and homelessness, and on peer support for recovery and Independent Living. She’s volunteered in homeless

services for a decade, and joined the working group coordinating the Hungarian “3rd February” annual homeless survey in 2023.