

14th European Research Conference Helsingborg, 20th September 2019

VENUE: Helsingborg Campus of the University of Lund, Sweden
Bios and Abstracts

Seminar 11: : Room C164 - Theories of Home and Space

Chair: Nóra Teller, HU

Laura Helene Hojring, DK: From Homelessness to Homeliness



Laura Hojring has worked in the field between homelessness and architecture since she graduated from The Aarhus School of Architecture in 2006. Through the research field of architectural anthropology, she explores and communicates about the social aspects and consequences of the built environment in relation to social exclusion and homelessness, most recently with the PhD-thesis: "Homeless and homeliness - stories about architecture and people".

An essential goal, when offering a homeless person a housing solution, is for them to achieve a feeling of being at home. But what is a home? And how can a house affect the feeling of homeliness? Through the PhD-thesis "Homeless and homeliness - stories about architecture and people" I have investigated how four different types of housing influence the residents (homeless and former homeless) feelings of being at home. The case studies are set in a Danish context and consists of four housing types: A night shelter for women, a hostel for men, permanent housing with support and apartments in social housing. Based on qualitative interviews and architectural analysis the research shows that the notion of home can be used as a measurement for the way a housing solution works. The difference between feeling at home or not, is the same as defining whether a dwelling fits or doesn't fit the residents needs and preferences. In this article I define six categories that influence the feeling of homeliness and make it possible to operationalize the notion of home. A notion, which is otherwise often understood as something fluffy and imperceptible. The six categories are: Safety and territorial control, privacy, community and social interaction, identity, everyday life, and time. These six categories can be used to understand the connection between residents personal and individual housing needs, in relation to the framework a housing solution offers, based on its architecture, and its geographical, social and organisational context.

Roberta Bova, IT: Homelessness: the Importance of Network and the Expectations in the Future



Roberta Bova has gained her PhD in International Cooperation and Human Rights at the University of Bergamo, Italy, with the thesis "Vulnerability and Recognition" (February 2014). Nowadays her research interests mostly concern the micro-level analysis of migrants and homeless people' decision-making, in relation with the institutional and civil society's policies.

This paper exposes the conclusions of an anthropological research I realize in collaboration with the University of Bergamo (North of Italy); it started in September 2012 and is still going on. The research pointed to investigate the role of the social network in homeless people life, how they feel like at the homeless shelter and their expectations in the future.

The research methodology was based on ethnography and the analyses of the narrative interviews.

The ethnography shows different trends: the number of Italians is growing and the homeless female population as well; a lot of people came from a parental background of poverty, low education and drugs abuse. Many of the non EU homeless rarely made experience of the street life when they were just arrived in Italy. Instead, they became homeless after, when they have exhausted their social network or they have lost their job.

I also caught a great number of narrative interviews; from their analysis I understand that many people postponed the entering in a homeless shelter because they were suffering for the stigmatization. In the everyday life instead, the most significant problems were

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related to cohabitation. Many people interviewed were looking for reaching more autonomy and were conscious that this implied to earn a living, but also to find a new context of friendship, actually many people had broken their previous relationships and were afraid to spend the next years in solitude.

In conclusion, I understand that nowadays most of the social services are devoted to emergency and primary support, and scarce resources are addressed to projects of social integration and autonomy reinforcement. Furthermore, the entire society is not in touch with this phenomenon and sometimes homeless are excluded also from their relatives and friendship networks. These are main the causes of homeless chronic vulnerability.

Johannes Lenhard, FR: The Economy of Hot Air Vents – Homeless People’s Struggle for Surface-space at Paris’ Gare du Nord



Dr. Johannes Lenhard is centre coordinator and post-doctoral research associate at the Max Planck Cambridge Centre for the Study of Ethics, the Economy and Social Change. While he spent between 2012 and 2018 focused on research with homeless people in London and Paris, his new project is turning to elites. With fieldwork in Munich, Berlin, London, San Francisco and New York, he is currently examining the behaviour of venture capital investors.

A very particular kind of space was contested at Paris’ Gare du Nord among the group of homeless people I worked with for two years during my doctoral fieldwork. Many of them were struggling for surface-space on the hot air vents emanating heat around the train station. During the winter months, warm spaces were a scarce commodity which fuelled competition among my rough-sleeping informants. The hot air vents were particularly sought after: they were part of the free, public space and they were secure due to the continuous presence of police at the train station.

The advantages of public, well-policed space often turned into the opposite, however: conflicts arose not only among the homeless people but also between the homeless population trying to profit from the warm spaces and the train station staff and police. These conflicts – violent as they could be on the outside – were indicative of deep fault lines in the make-up of the city space: between public and private space, between what home is for one person and a transit space for another, between defending the property rights of the train station and home-making practices carving out emergency shelter.

In this paper, I want to present strategies I observed: from rendering oneself invisible, claiming space using objects to ‘cleaning’ people away with water in the morning and announcing spatial orders. Who at what point manages to claim ownership to the surface-space of the hot air vents using which strategy? I want to present a view at housing exclusion from the very margins.