

Seminar 4: Representations and Perceptions (Room: TBD) - Chair: Masa Filipovic Hrast, SI

Magdalena Mostowska and Ewelina Biczynska, PL: The Public Memorialization of Homeless Deaths

There's paucity of research about the memorialization of people who died homeless. Monk (et al. 2023) address the issue of bereavement but rather as an individual experience of people who experience homelessness. We draw therefore on other literature concerning public memorializations, such as on the concept of spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006) and digital spontaneous shrines. The advocacy element of commemorating homeless deaths is akin to – for instance – firearm killings or femicide, where a mix of statistics and a collection of individual stories provides a framework for the visual. These deaths are part of awareness campaigns and framed as forgotten, anonymous, where the social (not medical) has contributed to these deaths that were preventable, premature, and somehow wrongful and unfair.

We employ the methods of visual analysis (Rose 2003) to explore the various images, objects and events that commemorate people who died while experiencing homelessness. Our sample is not representative in any way, rather we draw on examples from Europe and the United States to show a variety of ways, channels, and forms. We take into consideration both physical and virtual, especially:

- Graves and other permanent or temporary tributes in public spaces
- Funerals, vigils and other ceremonies, marches and demonstrations
- Obituaries and announcements about deaths
- Press and internet articles
- Reports' covers and websites
- Media and social media coverage of memorials
- Virtual vigils and memorials

We analyse these examples both in content (and semiotics) and in form (composition) by answering question: Who is commemorating? For what purpose? What objects are depicted? How people are depicted? As individual or as groups (how are they described as a group)? What is the composition of the image (focus/distance, color/hue/saturation, lettering).



Magdalena Mostowska is a sociologist, lecturer, and researcher at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies at the University of Warsaw. She has completed several research projects on migrant and women's homelessness in Poland, the EU, and the US.



Ewelina Biczynska is a sociologist and a geographer, teaching at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies at the University of Warsaw. Her main scientific interests revolve around spatial justice, social and urban transformations, and social problems, especially in Latin America. She has been involved in several scientific projects about changes and development in Latin-American cities and regions. She also has over 12 years of experience in quantitative market research.

Simone Hellenen, UK: Stigma and the Front-line Worker: How Our Homelessness Systems Reproduce and Challenge Stigma

Whilst stigma is recognised as a major challenge, there is limited research which explores the system contexts in which stigma arises; without this knowledge there is little to guide systems-level responses to stigma. This study explores experiences of stigma and discrimination within homelessness systems in south London, seeking to understand how stigma is created and reproduced within care and support systems.

We present findings from an ethnographic study in south London ongoing since mid-2022. We draw upon data from interviews (n=67) and focus groups (n=4) with people using and delivering homelessness services, as well as participant observation (>100h) across a range of different settings. The study is framed by Bourdieu's social practice theory and concepts of habitus, capital and field. We analysed the qualitative data using thematic and grounded approaches.

Our analysis focuses on the actions taken by those who work in homelessness services to mitigate, manage and actively

work against stigma. The study explores how navigating stigmatisation can involve workers being an 'outlaw' (Hopper, 2006; Cloke et al., 2017; Scullion et al., 2015) finding loopholes in systems to bypass stigma 'traps' for their clients by vouching for clients, and over or underestimating needs. These well-meaning, often effective strategies, also have side effects that can curiously serve to strengthen stigma by labelling and inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes. We look at how the varying habitus of different groups of workers are shaping these outcomes.

Given the specific homelessness system context this study explores how front line workers, even 'good workers' are left managing multiple well meaning initiatives to respond to stigma but which also reproduce stigma. The study gives insight into why initiatives that aspire to address or counter stigma don't work as we hope in the homelessness sector.



Simone Helleren currently works on The Social Responses to Stigma (SRS) study with Andy Guise and River Újhadbor at King's College London. Following 25 years working in community development, the last 9 in homelessness with Groundswell UK, Simone did an MRes and PhD at the University of Birmingham. Her PhD thesis is about 'engagement with help', which she explored with 6 young people escaping homelessness. The SRS is a UKRI funded ethnographic study in south London seeking to understand how stigma is created and reproduced to the detriment of people experiencing homelessness and those working with them.