

URBAN CHARACTERISTICS AND HOMELESSNESS IN BUCHAREST

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Abstract. Urban poverty continues to prove itself a concern in cities' territorial planning as it disrupts the quality of life and the development process in some cities. Homelessness emerges sometimes as extreme urban poverty even in developed European Union countries. The study assesses Bucharest urban space to differentiate characteristics that influence the homeless to locate in certain places. The analysis included a three-level urban space categorization. Functional types of space were correlated to homelessness presence according to three space characteristics: property type, physical structure and state of use. The main findings argue that homeless people localization in Bucharest depends on urban space capacity to meet homelessness housing and living needs. Analysis' conclusions evidence homeless location patterns to urban planners and authorities that may use the information to improve policies and actions to alleviate extreme poverty in Bucharest.

Key words: space features, urban poverty, homeless localization, Romania.

1. Introduction

Urban poverty represents a complex phenomenon that challenges the territorial systems (Ianoş, 2000). Multidimensional facets of urban poverty influence cities' dynamic (Ianoş, 2004) and alters the urban structure. Homelessness constitutes the extreme expression of urban poverty (Vranken, 2004). The homeless confront multiple deprivations (Dewilde, 2008; Weden *et al.*, 2008), because they lack a dwelling, but depend also on public and local community's services to provide living and socio-professional reintegration (Badea and Constantin, 2002).

European Union developed a complex homelessness typology based on the housing type. The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless includes as homeless the people who lack a dwelling, but live temporarily in institutions and shelters, and also people in insecure or inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2006).

Quality of Life Research Institute and CASPIS conducted a study in 2004 and estimated 14000 homeless people in Romania and around 5000 in Bucharest (Dima and Manu, 2006).

The present analysis refers to the homeless living on the streets, acknowledged as roughsleepers (Vranken, 2004), and investigates urban space characteristics that determine the homeless' decision to locate in a certain place in the city.

2. Methods

2.1. Study area

Post-socialist transformation processes (Ceccato and Lukyte, 2011) and the current economic crisis increased poverty and inequalities in Romania. Homelessness intensified and become visible after 1990 (Dima and Manu, 2006), especially in Bucharest - metropolitan city that attracts both investors for development actions and poor population seeking for solutions to get out of poverty. Previous studies (Badea and Constantin, 2002; Cărăboi, 2011; Paraschiv, 2012) found that the homeless in Bucharest are predominantly men, aged between 31 and 60 years old and at least with secondary education. Homeless people suffer from drug and alcohol addiction (Cheng and Yang, 2010) and accommodate in the interior of apartment buildings, inside the sewer canals of the city and in improvised shelters (Greenberg and Crossney, 2007). Former living in foster homes and familial conflicts constitute principal causal factors of homelessness (Cărăboi, 2011).

2.2. Homelessness and urban space

Characteristics that define urban space correlate with homelessness locations,

as they facilitate accommodation or provide sources of income. First, literature investigation provided the conceptual framework related to influences between space and homelessness. After that, Bucharest urban space was analyzed and interpreted based on direct field observations on homelessness locations. Following interpretation results structured into a typology that considers the functional types of space on three categories of characteristics: property type, physical structure and state of use (Table 1).

Residential, commercial, industrial, cultural, leisure and vacant spaces enter in a four-class typology - public spaces, semipublic spaces, semiprivate spaces and private spaces. Each class subdivides into another categorization - open space and closed space, which extend other two characteristics of an urban functional space - derelict or used space. Within this matrix of urban space characteristics, only certain combinations intervene in homelessness localization preferences.

Within the analysis, images constitute the representational instrument that depicts the urban characteristics that influence the homeless' locations and captures the urban landscape created as a result of homelessness - urban space interaction. The physical presence of homeless people in certain places within the city represented the main criterion to identify the space typology based on urban characteristics that intervene in homeless location options.

Table 1. Homelessness localization in Bucharest

Urban space characteristics		Homelessness locations	
Public space	open space	derelict space	green spaces
		used space	green spaces pedestrian space transport infrastructure space
	closed space	derelict space	-
		used space	-
Semipublic space	open space	derelict space	-
		used space	commercial space religious space
	closed space	derelict space	-
		used space	sewerage infrastructure space
Semiprivate space	open space	derelict space	vacant space brownfield space
		used space	garbage bin waste deposits space
	closed space	derelict space	-
		used space	-
Private space	open space	derelict space	-
		used space	-
	closed space	derelict space	residential space
		used space	residential space

3. Results

Bucharest space analysis in relation to homelessness places in the city evidence that the homeless use each type of functional space to shelter or to find food and money sources, but according to some space characteristics (Aiello *et al.*, 2010). The type of property, from public to private, ensures the accessibility degree of each space. Semipublic space corresponds to private spaces with public access. The semiprivate space represents the private property territory that can be used (abusively) by the others while temporarily unexploited by the owner. Differences between open and closed spaces influence homeless people safety, sheltering way, relations with the other inhabitants and opportunities to gain income. Derelict spaces encourage homelessness localization and offer them the freedom to appropriate the urban territory. In derelict spaces, the homeless develop

more easily sheltering according to their needs and avoid to be disturbed and to disturb the locals. Used spaces suppose population traffic, favorable to receive help and to find living sources.

Urban parks (Iojă *et al.*, 2011) represent public open spaces that concentrate a high share of homeless people (Fig. 1). Derelict green spaces – squares (Fig. 2) and green space that surrounds institutions, acquire also homeless presence.



October 2012

Fig. 1. Used green space – Gara de Nord Park

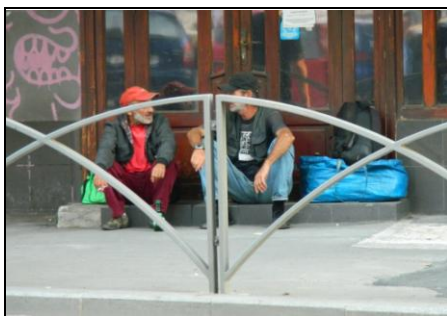


October 2012

Fig. 2. Derelict green space - Opera Square

Used open public spaces, like intersections, pedestrian space, exemplified by the sidewalks located in the city center (Fig. 3), and transport infrastructure space, as railway (Fig. 4) and metro stations, respond to certain needs of homelessness localization.

Commercial (Fig. 5) and religious spaces (cemeteries, except churches) correspond to used open semipublic spaces that restrict partially homeless people's access, but they locate nearby.



September 2012

Fig. 3. Pedestrian space - Sala Palatului area



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Fig. 4. Transport infrastructure space - Gara de Nord



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Fig. 5. Commercial space - Carrefour Orhideea

A used closed semipublic space - the sewerage infrastructure space, addresses itself as a less visible but representative location in homelessness preferences.

Peripheral vacant areas depicted by empty lots that continue the built urban space and Văcărești area gather improvised housing (Fig. 6). These derelict open semiprivate spaces include brownfield space as well (Fig. 7).



September 2012

Fig. 6. Vacant space - Industriilor area



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Fig. 7. Brownfield space - Lujerului area

Homeless people shelter or gather also in used open semiprivate spaces – near outside garbage bins in residential areas and around city's waste deposits (Fig. 8).



August 2011

Fig. 8. Waste deposits space – Pieptănari area

Within the private space category, the homeless inhabit closed derelict and used spaces, both represented by residential functionality. Abandoned buildings (Fig. 9) and the interior of apartment buildings develop different types of homeless housing.



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Fig. 9. Derelict residential space – Izvor area

4. Discussion

Homelessness diffuses on the entire Bucharest territory, but affected urban areas distinguish certain features that attract homeless people's localization.

Public space defines the generally accessible urban space (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2009). Homeless people lack a dwelling in property so that they use public space to satisfy their housing needs. Open public spaces offer facilities for homelessness localization. The homeless prefer green spaces to improvise shelters during the warm period. Local homeless and poor people, who come seasonally to Bucharest to beg, build shelters on the green space grass and near the trees or just use park benches to accommodate (Paraschiv, 2012). Urban parks possess public toilets and built areas to store the homeless' things, while derelict green spaces provide freedom to appropriate the urban territory.

Road intersections and sidewalks in the city centre of Bucharest (Unirii, Romană, Universitate areas) present high car and people traffic that facilitate begging or informal work (in parking lots, for example).

Gara de Nord (central Bucharest railway station) concentrates the highest number of homeless people in Bucharest (Cărăboi, 2011) and the phenomenon has great visibility among the city residents (Paraschiv, 2012). The railway station (and metro stations also) defines as an intensely circulated space that concentrates sheltering, food and money opportunities. The homeless sleep on the platform benches, group inside the underground sewage system, find leftovers from the passengers and gain some income by begging or by collecting waste bins cans. The area represents also a node of homeless

drug traffic and prostitution (Paraschiv, 2012).

Commercial and religious spaces represent semipublic spaces that claim the right to exclude the homeless group to participate inside the spaces and directly use the services. Except markets and churches, where the homeless receive interior access, they choose to be present near malls, shops and cemeteries (which are all gated and guarded in Bucharest) to profit from food and money gains through begging and exploring the waste bins nearby.

The sewerage infrastructure system constitutes the space that the homeless use without residents' claim and offers housing organization potential. Sewer canals create a parallel world where the homeless dominate as a society.

Urban periphery and interior vacant land correspond to urban space development resources. As the owners hold the land unused, the homeless appropriate and transform it into improvised housing locations. The vacant land provides enough space for homeless sheltering needs. Brownfield spaces provide the same advantages. The former industrial space situated in Lujerului area depicts the case. The derelict land (formerly occupied by a railroad) situated between two commercial spaces - Cora Lujerului hypermarket and Plaza mall - shelters three-four homeless families that improvised housing near a tree, near the former industrial fence, inside an abandoned building or directly on the land, protected by the ruderal vegetation.

This area's heterogeneous landscape (Iwata, 2010) reveals in a single place aspects of Romania's social-economic trajectory - deindustrialization (brownfield site), partial urban regeneration and market economy (commercial sites), urban poverty and social polarization (homelessness and corporate office building), in a context of punctual development actions instead of integrated urban growth policies.

Homeless localization near residential garbage bins and waste deposits spaces discloses opportunities to find leftovers, to collect and to capitalize paper, paperboard and metal materials. The homeless locate in the garbage bin area inside a residential space to receive residents help with food, money or occasional work while it is the place the other inhabitants indulge for homeless using. The homeless place themselves inside apartment buildings (at the basement, inside the roof or the staircase), tolerated or unaccepted by the residents, to acquire weather protection and shelter conditions.

Abandoned buildings in Bucharest (former nationalized houses located in the central area) attract homeless people for two reasons: their weak property expression offers appropriation potential; their physical characteristics provide protection and intimacy, and suggests adequate housing to maintain features of a normal life.

Results of the urban space characteristics analysis in relation to homelessness localization evidence a study limitation that equals the need to future investigate directly

(interviews with homeless people) the homeless location reasons.

5. Conclusion

Homelessness dynamic reflects extreme manifestations of urban poverty related to housing and social exclusion. Geographical research on homelessness challenges complex approach based on multidisciplinary methodology. Homeless geographical regard contributes to emphasize correlation between affected population and territory. Homelessness - space relation concerns particularly territorial systems as the phenomenon models in a complicated manner within the urban space. Homelessness concentrates in Bucharest so that magnitude in terms of homeless number, territorial distribution and impact on the other residents involve greater alleviating policy concerns. The study findings help urban planners and policy makers understand correlates between homelessness behaviour and territory to include urban space modelling in alleviating strategies.

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