

GEOGRAPHIES INTO INCLUSIVE CITIES

DESIGNING FOR THE URBAN HOMELESS

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Abstract

Within the inclusive urban design debate, mainstream research steps away from traditional urban design ideals of placemaking and deals predominantly with the physical accessibility and free use of the built environment.

This research challenges commonly accepted notions of city-making, particularly urban inclusivity by design and the actual extent of this inclusion in the case of marginalized groups. The study builds on sociological theories of socio-cultural production of space/place and of the body in space in order to explore an alternative to traditional approaches to inclusive urban design. The proposed conceptual framework assumes the knowledge sprang from in place lived-in experiences of individuals to be invaluable to an inclusive urban design process. The intent is to introduce 'imaginary geographies', personal embedded constructions of the urban reality and one's place in it, as potential disciplinary working concepts.

To probe this, the research uses the case of the urban homeless, namely rough sleepers as an example of urban marginalized groups. The underlining aim is to introduce the adopted sociological toolset into the urban design discipline. The research starts from field collected urban narratives surrounding those sleeping rough which are subsequently translated into a specific visual urban design language characterized by tracing and mapping uses, significations and appropriations of (public) space. Homeless rough sleepers' narratives constitute, as a result, the prime matter to inform inclusive urban design theory towards practices that are more empowering and involving of nowadays excluded social groups at all stages of the urban design process.

The aimed result is a conceptual framework aware of a diversity of urban users, a framework that supports and facilitates for self-expressions of marginalized individuals at different times in different places in the city.

Keywords: Imaginary geographies, homeless, inclusive urban design.