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SHAPING IMAGINARY 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.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban Design, as a relatively young discipline, is constantly re-evaluating its working paradigm. An indicator of this is the diverse number of approaches that professionals, theoreticians as well as practitioners in the field, have on understanding the process of designing the urban (Carmona, 2014). It could not be otherwise for a discipline which draws its theoretical framework from the social studies as much as those of design, and which builds its practice by incorporating notions of architecture, planning and urban management to name only a few.

A major characteristic of Urban Design, a unique trademark, so to speak, is its constant engagement with notions of placemaking, thus rendering Urban Design '*ultimately about place*' (Borden in Carmona, 2014, p.1). However, while at a theoretical level placemaking as a process of shaping the urban is much circulated (Carmona, 2010; Norberg-Schulz, 1991; Shaftoe, 2008; Urban Design Group, 2013), urban design practices are subject to debate when it comes to actually *creating* places in the materiality of our built environment. An outcome of this debate is the discussion on inclusive urban design (CABE, 2006), a discussion that is problematic in its current form due to the complexity that the concept of inclusivity poses.

Mainstream research in this section of the field (Dong et al., 2004; Erkilic, 2012; Heylighen & Bianchin, 2013)

engages only marginally with broader notions of inclusivity, focusing predominantly on physical accessibility to/within the urban context. Such an approach leaves unanswered questions on those users of public space who are, in fact, to benefit from such an inclusion and to what extent. Furthermore, it opens up to a wide range of challenging issues as to whether physical accessibility is sufficient in the context of the placemaking debate. This is all the more so given the commonly loosely accepted definition of inclusive urban design as '*Good design should reflect the diversity of people who use it and not impose barriers of any kind. […] We all benefit from an environment designed in line with inclusive principles*' (CABE, 2006, p. 9).

The present study argues that in order to build a case for effectively more inclusive throughout practices, the discipline's focus must be not only on the outcomes, but also on the very urban design process. However, a higher level of inclusivity can only be reached by re-considering and re-phrasing the very concept of *inclusive urban design* (InUD).

Therefore, with the aim to explore more inclusive urban design practices, it is proposed here an alternative conceptual framework under the generic name of *imaginary geographies*, the major premise of which is that in-place knowledge of different space users is invaluable for a more inclusive urban design process to be achieved. Since inclusionary debates within the urban realm implicitly bring up discussions on a diversity of types of exclusion from the built environment, this research will take up a particular example.

Consequently, in order to probe the proposed conceptual framework of *imaginary geographies*, to explore its specificities and adaptability to (inclusive) urban design practices, the present research chooses to focus on the case of the urban homeless rough sleepers whose situation is ultimately one of urgency, requiring immediate solutions just as much as long term structural changes. This extreme case of urban exclusion (Giddens, 2009) is concomitantly an example of underachieved inclusive urban design, which makes it an interesting case study.

2. RETHINKING INCLUSIVE URBAN DESIGN

The present paper challenges in-place notions of InUD within the reference system that constitutes the urban, which often regards the city as container for everyday activities. In a city perceived in this way, the representative characteristic of the urban dweller is that of *space user*. As such, he/she fundamentally is understood as engaging with the city at a level where physical access and ability to unfold daily activities prime. This type of approach to urban environments and their users accounts limitedly for the verso of use of space: *being in place*. Consequently, it can be argued that due to a fragmented accepted working definition of the concept of 'inclusivity', inclusive urban design theory and practice approach the design of the built environment from a one sided angle, that of its materiality of form. In doing so, the InUD debate reproduces exclusionary practices which overlook a fundamental inherent component of placemaking: being in place (Relph, 2008; Tuan, 1977; Rodaway, 1994) with the complexity of two-folded human-space continuous (re)shaping processes (Gehl, 2010; Shaftoe, 2008) that *being* in the city attracts.

It can therefore be argued that in its current working framework, mainstream urban design practices as a whole indicate an insufficient understanding of the urban plurality and account only to a small extent for the specificities (cultural, social, political, individual and so on) of experiencing the city. Furthermore, contemporary urban design as a discipline lacks the tools and methods that could facilitate such a multi-layered understanding of *living* the urban. The inclusive urban design debate itself has so far engaged marginally with proposing alternative approaches to commonly accepted mechanisms of the urban design process.

The critique to InUD's existing paradigm on which this study builds upon is structured along two lines of inquiry: *the purpose* and *the function* of (inclusive) urban design. *The purpose*, the raison d'être of the discipline, is questioned against two larger intra-disciplinary debates: urban design as a catalyst for urban (social) change (Madanipour, 2006) and the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2003; Mayer, 2009). It is argued here that increased inclusivity in the urban designed realm should not be understood as solely physical, but also social. Moreover, InUD has the position and resources necessary to develop tools and methods in a way that could turn the discipline into an active agent of change (Boano in Carmona, 2014; Madanipour, 2006).

Similarly, the current *function* of urban design in general and InUD in particular is posed next to a co-existing set of intra-disciplinary debates which, on one hand, step away from traditional understanding of the urban of the city-container type (Jiron, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; Matos Wunderlich, 2008; May & Thrift, 2001) and, on the other hand, at a more structural level, leave behind the 'Argument for Design' approach to the discipline, a long established tradition which regard the designer/architect professional as sole expert in the field (Allmendinger, 2009; Carmona, 2014; Gehl, 2010; Healey, 1997). In so doing, the above set of ongoing discussions take established approaches to urban design to a different direction which brings human (lived-in) experiences and

their built-in/building mechanisms to the forefront of discussions on *making places*.

The present study proposes the conceptual framework of *imaginary geographies* as grounds for a more inclusive theory, methodology and practice of urban design. Aiming to explore an answer to the latter line of inquiry, that of (inclusive) urban design's function, imaginary geographies act as a conceptual platform where the individual lived-in urban has a substantial weight in the collective towards which it builds. Thus, individualized bodies performing in space, internalized senses of *self*/the *other*, *felt* experiences (whether sensuous or emotional) become filtered through the prism of affect and (memorable) time into constructions of the urban. All of this constitutes a continuum process of people-shaping-space-space-shaping-people that materializes in the very action of being in place while (co)creating it. It is this very continuum that *imaginary geographies* aim to capture and bring at the core of the InUD process in an attempt to include the complexity of individuals enacting the urban.

Subsequently, feeding back into inquiries on the purpose of (inclusive) urban design, the argument for imaginary geographies provides a support framework for working with/for the more excluded groups in city, exclusion often social in nature, but which nevertheless is adjoined by marginalizing spatial practices often reinforced by urban design processes.

Under the *imaginary geographies* framework, designing with the commonly overlooked city users in mind requires an increased pro-active engagement with the focus groups and working with them towards friendlier built environments. In the absence of such an engagement, the problems of the urban marginalized can only be partly understood and proposed solutions are therefore incomplete and untailored to meet the needs of the more vulnerable space users. *Imaginary geographies* recognize the significance of in-place knowledge of the urban dweller and account for lived-in constructions of the city in order to achieve more effective urban solutions and, overall, a higher quality of the built environment.

In the absence of a deeper understanding of urban users and the dynamics behind process of place-making, urban design practices will perpetuate urban exclusion given a pre-set perception of the general public. Consequently, following from considerations for the common good, such as safety, public hygiene or aesthetics, the city ultimately excludes an increasing number of its users. Illustrative examples of this are the public benches segmented by armrests, the scarcity of already highly regulated public services (such as toilets) or the bus shelters with uncomfortable seating. The question that the present research therefore aims to answer is: how can we, the professionals, rethink inclusive urban design by learning from the marginalized groups in the city?

3. PERSUING IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHIES OF THE HOMELESS

3.1. Contextualizing the urban homeless

Understanding contemporary concepts of 'citizenship' and 'right to the city' (Harvey 2003; Lefebvre, 1996) is essential for the purpose of this research in order to contextualize the concept of 'homeless' and to set up a complex background (politico-economic as much as socio-cultural) against contemporary approaches to homeless groups.

Current debates on how the urban should be performed and who has the right to what city affect broader discussions on urban inclusivity – who should be included? Why and how? Moreover, such debates have implications on general attitudes and approaches of exclusivity/inclusivity, as well as claims to the city, feelings of belonging and isolation. This research's theoretical framework assumes that different discourses on the city and the public, such as those above, feed into collective homeless imaginaries of 'the self' and of 'the other'. Understanding the context from which they stem and their fundamental principles may help develop more integrated approaches to homelessness and design towards more inclusive cities.

Moreover, current economic, demographic and ethical concerns come to support the need for re-assessing the situation of the urban homeless; the solutions provided so far and, most significantly, the overall approach to understanding this particular group.

Recent studies (EOH, 2013) have illustrated that attending to those who have already reached a state of commonly accepted 'homelessness' is, in fact, less financially effective in terms of public money than if net-solutions would be devised to prevent individuals becoming homeless in the first place. The amount spent by the state for a person sleeping rough could rise up to £24,350 a year (out of which £150 were hospital costs; £3,000 drug treatment; £400 medication; £1,800 day centre services; £19,000 accommodation and support), to which could be added extra expenditures for police intervention, overnight imprisonment and other crime prevention and public safety services (MEAM, 2009).

It is commonly accepted that *homelessness* is predominantly a structural issue, a socio-economic problem (Fitzpatrick et al.2000) which is advisably to be addressed at system level by proposing improved housing, employment and welfare solutions. Current demographic trends play a major role in pushing these concerns up in policy agendas.

With a number of 7 billion people in the world in 2011 and an estimated 9.3 billion people in the world by 2050, statistical data indicates that 52% of humanity was urban in 2011 and that the world population increase will be almost entirely absorbed by urban environments.

Due to market regulation and recent globalisation trends, already existing inequalities have accentuated. As a result of this, levels of poverty and unemployment have increased worldwide with 50% of world population living on less than $2.50 a day (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 2005).

While decision and policy makers strive to meet the needs and demands of a fast growing world population, there are clearly social minorities whose interests do not always reach to be listed in the long-term strategies and plans, thus ending by being overlooked by numerous policies and urban designs. Varying from one community to another and from one cultural context to another, such social groups may be those of the elderly, of children or of different socially excluded groups. Mainstream urban research includes a number of attempts to understand some of these marginalized groups in their individual complexity, outside dominant socio-economic discourses. Such were the cases of the elderly with dementia (Burton and Mitchell, 2006), of children (Haider, 2007), of the black community living in Chicago's Black Belt and the poor constituting the Parisian banlieues (Mustered, 2008; Wacquant, 2008).

A similarly urban contextualized study of homelessness is relatively poorly represented in the urban disciplines and available accounts of homelessness are scarce and incomplete. At the same time, attempts to quantify and categorize the homeless have turned out to further reinforce the *status quo* due to a number of simultaneously, at places contradictory, working definitions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). Ultimately, as Fitzpatrick et al. (2000) point out, what 'homelessness' *is* remains a political decision. Thus, systematizing homelessness has a multiple purpose: one is the need for it to be translated into statistical data so it can be accounted for and fit within politico-economic agendas and the second is the need to fragment and explain it for the public's understanding. As they are disassembled and discussed in different discourses, the different understandings of homelessness are self-validating and their reiterative value of 'truth' leads to approaches that continuously (re)produce the homeless in the eyes of both the public and the decision makers.

There are numerous empirical examples of what we can refer to as 'the homeless city', better understood as the city perceived, lived and (co)constructed by and around the urban homeless. However, there is little attempt to understand it in a more complex system of urban dynamics and its significance to city processes, form and lived-in experiences of the urban.Two examples of insufficiently explored predominantly homeless places are Skid Row, Los Angeles and Tent City, Toronto.

Los Angeles' Skid Row is a succession of tents, carts and boxes one after another, with individuals and entire families making the street their home. The population in the area is estimated somewhere in-between 3.000 – 6.000 people (Wikipedia, 2013). In its present state, Skid Row is a degraded space and perceived predominantly as a no-go by the general public.

The Tent City in Toronto has been repeatedly subject of academic research (Avramov, 1999; Gallant et al., 2004; Gilbert and Phillips, 2003). This case is a good indicator of an pre-existenting potential in organisation and courses of action among the homeless. Mayor J. Flaherty's call for cleaning the streets of Toronto of homeless people in 2002 by making it illegal to live in public spaces led to the withdrawal of the homeless population of the city to a mercury contaminated site where they laid the grounds for a Tent City. Threatened once again with consignment, the recently formed community found the resources to act, resulting in it being relocated and its basic needs provided for by the local authorities. The example of Tent City in Toronto is illustrative of homeless individuals coming together in order to act towards change, thus appealing to and exercising their right to the city. Placing the discussion on 'politics of encounter' and homelessness within the wider context of literature on marginalised communities, whether ethnic, racial or social a clear difference in mainstream theoretical approaches becomes noticeable.

Documenting 'the homeless city' is a first step towards developing tools and methods for mapping homeless imaginary geographies and subsequently translating them into more inclusive urban design practices.

With an estimated number of 100 million homeless people worldwide (Capdevila, 2005) *homelessness in the city* remains a subject insufficiently researched and accounted for in the urban context (Avramov, 1999). This

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particular socio-economic and cultural group requires thorough understanding if informed planning and urban design decisions are to be made and efficient and integrated solutions are to be achieved.

The homeless are often regarded as a largely homogenous public user group which needs to be dealt with at city level. D. Avramov (1999) identifies two major policy approaches in dealing with homelessness: '*system inadequacy*' and '*personal deficiency*' (idem, p. 2), both of which suggest a narrow understanding of the homeless as individuals lacking the will and/or the power to work as part of the system and, by extension, of society.

National social welfare systems, with their network of shelters, soups kitchens and drop-in centres form structures that are more likely to institutionalise homelessness (Gowan, 2010), by accepting it as a *de facto* social problem rather than fighting it. At the other end of the spectrum, a large number of in-place policies are dehumanizing in their approach on tackling homelessness by criminalizing and constantly displacing the urban homeless.

In both of the above cases – welfare and policy-making arenas, the majority of homeless related strategies have a top-down character, which contributes all the more in perpetuating social differentiation and stigma. Implicitly, in many cases tackling homelessness is not about finding solutions in the better interest of those living homeless, but about removing them from the public eye, thus further excluding them. In this context, social inequalities and group vulnerabilities are (re)produced continuously and enhanced.

Furthermore, from an InUD disciplinary perspective, in this wider understanding of the status of *being* homeless, urban design practices act themselves in an exclusionary manner by creating places which do not allow for unwanted individuals – paving spikes, built over under-bridges and so on. Thus, space itself can be looked upon as 'a tool to create, perpetuate and justify marginalization and inequality' (de Albuquerque, 2012).

3.2. (Re)producing the homeless body

Following the lines of Levebvre's (1991) theory which considers space to be a social product, it can be argued that the public realm is culturally constructed around collective social imaginaries on *who* the public is and *what* public space is. S. Kawash (1998) notes that: '*In public space, the homeless do not appear as individuals with distinctive identities*'. '*The homeless body figures in contemporary public discourse as the fundamental threat to the public use of public space—a threat simultaneously ideological (the presence of the homeless challenges the definition of the public) and physical (the homeless body, by occupying space, becomes itself the threat)*'. In other words, the public, at its raw base just another cultural product takes on material form in the same way that J. Butler's (1999) concpet of the *body* takes form in a performativity of constructs such as gender and racial identity.

This identity of *who* and *what* the public is, where *the* self-referential *public* is both concept and reality continuously reiterated through its very own discourse, exists only as far as and only if *the other*, concept and reality, is produced and defined. In this sense, S. Kawash herself, when discussing popular representations of the homeless-public opposition and the '*imagined*' (that is, constructed) nature of that public, notes that '*if the image of the public—however partial or illusory—is constituted by an imaginary act of exclusion, the exclusion itself is material, has material effects, and produces particular forms of materiality.*'

The physical reality of public shape is shaped through the eye of the public, regulator and regulated, controller and controlled, issuer of social normative aimed at both the *self* and the *other* in an almost instinctive attempt to a defined sense of identity. '*Exclusions are justified, naturalized, and hidden by representing social space as a substantial unity that must be protected from conflict, heterogeneity, and particularity*' (Deutsche, 1997, cited in Kawash, 1998). In its structure-like constitution, public space does not allow for difference.

Existing literature supports the general belief that a majority of homeless people, as an implication of their condition, are predisposed to mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety or nerves (Crisis, 2009; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). If not put on the base of laziness or an inability to integrate in society, homelessness is often associated with an unfortunate fait and regarded with compassion (Gowan, 2010). But homeless people also form networks, they cultivate relations with other people or places (Cloke et al., 2000; Koegel, 1992). If homelessness is not always a choice, although the bohemian wave in America's 1970s-1980s could be called to challenge this pre-conception, for sure homelessness implies a lifestyle (Borchard, 2009), a way of *being* in place and a way of being *in place*.

Recent studies (Borchard, 2009; Gowan, 2010; dos Santos, 2007) aim to place the homeless in a more complex socio-cultural context, where homelessness is more than a reflection of an economic or social status.

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The core idea of these approaches is homelessness as an alternative lifestyle, specific for a diverse group with insufficiently explored cultural and human resources.

There is an indication here of a shift in perceiving and addressing the homeless, where they are no longer seen as passive receivers of services, but rather active members of society. Such an approach to homelessness is empowering as the ethnographic character allows for voices from the group to make themselves heard. Furthermore, the approach supports socio-economic inclusion by challenging stigmas of the so perceived 'inadequate' homeless and placing them back into the systemic reality of the city. The homeless may not be yet close to be regarded as member of the general public, but it steps away from its traditional status as a non-citizen, a fact which contributes to a more inclusive approach to design practices for homelessness.

Stepping along the lines of the latter type of research, the present work takes discussions on the homeless outside the socio-economic arena and explores an alternative approach to answer the urgency required by the homeless status. What the present paper argues is that 'homelessness' as a state of *being in the city* and the 'homeless' identity itself are culturally produced by the general public as much as by homeless individuals themselves, an aspect which has unexplored implications and potential for the urban design discipline. As this study hypothesizes, an in-depth understanding of the 'homeless in public space' in general has high theoretical and practical value for the urban design discipline, with implications for other fields, such as social sciences and policy-making.

3.3. Operationalizing Imaginary Geographies

Imaginary geographies, as a concept, incorporates and accounts for in-place experiences of the lived-in everyday, an '*essential part of the way cities are produced, reproduced and especially lived*' (Jiron, 2008, p.51).

The concept of *imaginary geographies* is understood here as a quantum of mental constructions of the 'self', the 'other' and the city, of a socially performative self and the artifice that comes with it. In other words, imaginary geographies are reflecting of the way in which we think our world and bring it into being along with one's personal being in this world. These imaginaries are translated by means of narratives into discourses which lay the base for one's constructed world. 'Imaginaries geographies of the homeless', construction often used throughout the research in this form refers to homeless and public imaginaries alike the ultimate outcome of which is the cultural construction of the (im)material 'homeless'.

In order to capture understandings of the city as well as experiences of being in the city, the research takes a predominatly phenomenological stance, aiming to catch the subjective nature of the journey/narrative and *'cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom'* (Lester, 1999, p.1).

Alternative methods to capture the lived experience of the city are increasingly explored across the urban studies (Anderson, 2004; Matos Wunderlich, 2008) in support of bottom-up approaches to understanding urban processes. Walking *in place* is one of these methods, used for representations of time-space relations as well as space and people in motion (Matos Wunderlich, 2008). As a scene for conducting unstructured interviews, but also for a nonstatic observation of space, walking is an engaging method of talking about place while being in place (Anderson, 2004). Adopting walking as a method when documenting journey/narratives of the homeless can potentially uncover sequences of reading and exploring the urban different to mainstream knowledge of the city. Spaces otherwise used by the general public as transitient become for those living homeless, to a certain extent, places of permanence. By re-appropriating the underpasse, the niche, the park, the street itslf, the homeless individual engages in a particular manner with urban space which is thereby re-interpeted and re-created to meet specific imaginaries of what the city *is* and how it is lived.

Understanding space through the eyes of the urban user is core to tracing imaginary geographies. Seeing the city through the eyes of the *other* is essential when accounting for plurality and difference in making and experiencing places. Furthermore, it is fundamental when discussing social change within the inclusive urban design debate which implicitly assumes embracing *otherness* and exploring feelings of urban belonging. Photovoice is a recurrent empowering method (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2000) which allows for juxtapositions of the viewing self/other when re-mapping the city by spatialising experiences of the urban. Incorportaing photovoice within the urban design process adds to better understandings of the spaces subject to design and it is a tool likely to lead to stronger communities and more complexly dynamic urban places.

The richness of information conveyed by means of stories is an indicator that the latter could be valuable for an inclusive urban design process. Photographs resulted from applying photo-voice and the attained mental maps would only come to support stories of the being homeless. In addition to this, there may be another ways to illicit memory and discussions on constructions of urban reality. In his project entitled 'Memoryscapes', Toby

Butler makes use of oral history and in-place objects to unveil by means of sound walks the 'hidden history' (Living Maps, 2014) of different places. Similarly, Nela Milic (Living Maps, 2014) looks into remapping a changing Belgrade and she does so by organizing series of workshops which bridge over the city then-and-now. She started by collecting community donated artefacts, reminders of pre-revolutionary Belgrade. Consequently, the young researcher brought different generations together and had the teenagers interview their elders in order to re-trace their common city. One of the common features of the two projects is the place they give to physical objects as triggers of memory and signs/symbols in processes of placemaking. It is potentially this line of thinking that the 'Misguided' walk in Zurich took on when attempting to understand space based on the collection of traces left by a diversity users. Initiatives such as the ones above could successfully be employed in the case of the present research.

Drawing on good practices implies an extensive study of inclusive intended design examples, homeless related initiatives as well as more integrated pieces of research. Calling attention on the significant social role of collectors in an environmentally misbalanced Sao Paolo, M. C. Loschiavo dos Santos (2007) militates for the acceptance and societal inclusion of those she is working with. More than that, the educational project she embarks on, organising workshops of knowledge exchange between collectors and her design and architecture students, results in valuable design products. Thus, a bridge is raised between the collectors as a vulnerable social group and the students as representatives of both the greater public and the designers' guild. In M. C. Loschiavo dos Santos' study the habit of scavenging is represented as the base of the collectors' culture/identity. The success of the project lies in its two-sided target: the general and the particular. That there is a social win at the end of this research, is prehaps obvious. What may not stand out is the double gain as far as design practice is concerned: social inclusion, on one hand and newly generated knowledge for a potentially environmentally friendly design for contemporary Sao Paolo as the study group overcomes its 'object of research' status and becomes educator in a complex process of recycling knowledge exchange.

The methods discussed so far are tracing along the lines of social-empowerment through processes characteristic to urban design. By taking one step further, there is potential in having the homeless-storytellers tell their stories themselves, without the intermediary 'expert' interpretation of the professional designer. This is already happening within photo/art exhibitions such as those organized by Café Art, organized walks, such as that of the Unseen Tours in London with their ex-homeless guides or discussion groups, such as those facilitated by project of Human Libraries. If 'imaginary geographies' aim to constitute an alternative conceptual framework for InUD, it seems reasonable that the methodology drawing from here includes and plays on some of the already existing models of (marginalized) public engagement.

4. DISCUSSION

The present research builds on a critique of the commonly accepted purpose and function of urban design within the inclusive urban design debate. Mainstream related disciplinary practices indicate an apparent insufficient engagement with designing for places of plurality and co-shared experiences of the urban, places which could encourage and facilitate further urban inclusion of vulnerable groups as active members of public space. With a weak theoretical and methodological frameworks to support such types of inclusion, the question that poses itself is to what degree are what professionals call 'inclusive urban design practices' actually inclusive. More significantly perhaps, explorations of which urban users are to be included, in which conditions and how this inclusion is to be achieved lead the way to a debate on the limitations and opportunities of more inclusive urban design practices.

The urban design intradisciplinary problem which arises is that the inclusive city is yet far from being attained; this is particularly notable in the specific case of the urban homeless. The resources and facilities aimed to address needs of this group are more often than not inadequately tailored to meet the needs of a growing heterogenous social group.

The present research does not argue for inclusion of the homeless in the sense that public space should accommodate rough sleeping and other related everyday practices. What it does theorise is that *homelessness* as a perpetuated concept is itself socio-culturally produced and, as such, a potential alternative epistemological approach to the notion might lead to more effective and appropritare solutions. Furthermore, by means of the proposed conceptual framework, this research argues that urban users in their diveristy need to be accounted for by a more inclusive urban design process.

The hereby proposed approach is likely to provide a more thorough understanding and represenation of placemaking processes. Furthermore, it potentially opens a path to urban practices which result in an empowering physical environment and strengthened social networks that can in time lead to social change. The research question to be addressed is: *how can professionals rethink inclusive urban design by learning*

from marginalised groups in the city? In order to answer this question the present study draws from postructuralist social theory and starts from a grounded theory approach which allows for a constant re-evaluation and re-formulation of the research protocol.

Imaginary geographies are therefore proposed as a conceptual framework in the centre of two co-exisitng deisciplinary debates: urban design as placemaking practice and urban design as a cathalyst for urban change. Under the notion of imagianry geographies, a set of tools and methods is explored with the purpose to document and transpose into urban design practices theoretical notions of *space production/ identity construction,* notions at the basis of place-making processes (Butler, 1999; Lefebvre, 1991). By means of this conceptual framework, personal narratives of lived-in experiences and (self) representations within/of the city feed into discourses which construct the image of the city, in other words, the urban reality (Berger & Luckman, 1996; Butler, 1999; Gowan, 2010).

The absence of what is recurrently referred to in the present work as notions of imaginary geographies in most of mainstream urban design theory, reflects a gap in understanding city-making processes in which cultural constructs are inherent to all types of human-space relations. Moreover, in the case of vulnerable groups, accounts of everyday lived-in experiences constitute first-hand inside knowledge which holds insufficiently explored potential for inclusive (urban) design practices and for the urban disciplines in general.

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