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Urban Traces Report



First steps ...

Initially, my research was supposed to concern young people's perception of the role of 'housing environment' in the process of creating a urban policy in Warsaw and Brussels. For several years this topic has been an interesting challenge for me. I have conducted a part of qualitative research in Warsaw. I have executed a literature review. I have collected mental maps of Warsaw, including university students and high school students associations regarding housing issues. I started to build a research team. I wanted to add quantitative methods to the research procedure. However, due to the difficulties in conducting research on the group of young people during my stay in Brussels (the stay fell on summer months), I changed the subject of my research.

Modification of the research topic ...

I chose the subject-matter of barriers to the involvement of NGOs acting for the benefit of homeless people with regard to the housing policy process. Many factors influenced the choice of the topic. For many years I was a volunteer in a non-governmental organization helping homeless people. This subject-matter was related to the research project I have been carrying out ("D-Housing. Democracy of housing policy", financed by the Polish National Science Center). I got to know this topic in connection with the search I conducted as a participant in a research project entitled "Social Rental Agencies as an instrument of housing policy in Poland", financed by the Polish National Center for Research and Development.

Housing activism in Belgium and Poland as a context of the research...

In March 2018 I prepared a preliminary research project and a research plan. I viewed the subject of research that I was interested in as an element of housing activism. It's worth noting that there is a long history behind housing activism in Belgium. One of its first manifestations were the strikes of factory

workers (e.g. in 1886). They demanded - among other things – an improvement in housing conditions. Next, in the 20th century, housing activism was undertaken by trade unions and political parties as well as urban movements. Brussels was known as the city of one hundred neighborhood committees (Delasi 1980, p. 67). In the 90s of the 20th century, social movements gained much importance. There were organizations acting for the benefit of: homeless people ('sans-abri'), illegal immigrants ('sans-papiers') and squatting movements. Afterwards, the housing issues were included in the postulates of tenants' movements and of organizations working to reduce the problem of the high number of evictions (Degryse 2013). It should be stressed that in Poland the first social organizations defending the right to decent housing conditions operated in the first half of the 20th century. In the next years, housing demands were included in the 'Solidarity' program. Since 1989 tenants' movements have gained in importance in housing activism. It was within the context of reprivatization, related to the - often illegitimate - return of houses from the social housing stock to the descendants of former owners of the properties nationalized by the Communists after the Second World War (Audycka-Zandberg 2014, Kostka & Czarnota 2017). Another area of housing activism is squatting movements (Polanska & Piotrowski 2015). Housing issues form a subject of concern for urban movement activists (Vargas-Tetmajer 2016). An important part of housing activism - less frequently studied by housing policy researchers - is activities undertaken by homelessness activists and the organizations acting for the benefit of the homeless.

Findings ...

In April 2018 I conducted research on Warsaw housing (including in-depth interviews with Polish NGOs and representatives of the City of Warsaw). In May 2018 I established contacts with some Brussels-based non-governmental organizations working in the field of homelessness. Thanks to this, after arriving in Brussels in June 2018, I started researching very quickly. I did some interviews in the first week of my stay in Brussels. I carried out all interviews in June 2018. In July 2018 I prepared a research report.

The subject of my research was the activity of two institutionalized deliberation forums: *La Strada* in Brussels and the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness in Warsaw. The study focused on the point of view of non-governmental organizations. For the purpose of the study, the following research question was formulated: what are the barriers to the involvement of organizations working for the benefit of homeless people in the housing policy process in Brussels and Warsaw? The search for the answer to that question was conducted through the development of the research thesis: the involvement in the housing policy process is one of the main forms of the non-governmental organizations' activities in the field of housing. In both Warsaw and Brussels, organizations working for the benefit of the homeless participate in the housing policy process. There are institutionalized forms of participation in both cities. However, some barriers also appear and can be identified with regard to both cities. Those barriers -

despite similar manifestations - have different grounds, related to different traditions of deliberative democracy in Warsaw and Brussels.

In the study, data on barriers to the involvement of Belgian and Polish NGOs (operating in the field of homelessness) in policy making were compared with the concept of the 'Deliberative Democracy of Housing Policy Process' (Zubrzycka-Czarnecka 2019). In the process of comparison, particular attention was paid to the features of the concept of deliberative democracy adopted in each of the countries. Due to the comparative nature of the study, reference was made to 'Most Different Systems Design' (MDSD). This allowed me to capture the similarities between the units of analysis coming from different socio-economic and political contexts.

Based on the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews conducted in Brussels and Warsaw, three types of barriers (hindering the involvement of NGOs in housing policy process in the field of homelessness) were distinguished. They were: 1) financial barriers, 2) formal and legal barriers, and 3) 'relational' barriers.

In August 2018 I started working on a paper discussing the conclusions of the study. During my stay in Brussels, cooperation with Michael Ryckewaert and Nele Aernouts was very helpful to me. While conducting research, I was using the materials of the University Library of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.