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Homeless people in public spaces: from urban conflict to exclusion

Urban studies have shown that urban spaces, and especially public spaces, are contested. Hence, conflicts "can provide clues about power relations" (Sibley, 1995: xiii), such as in *La Goutte d'Or*. In this neighborhood in the north of Paris, the contested occupancy of public spaces makes tensions appear between residents and homeless. Through this case, this paper aims to reveal the combination of physical, symbolic and political dynamics in the denial of the legitimacy of homeless to dwell in the neighbourhood. By the creation of an association, a part of the residents manages to monopolize the public sphere, especially through the conquest of the neighborhood council. From this position, they are able to use discourses (Foucault, 1975; Bourdieu, 1982) in order to disqualify symbolically the presence of homeless in public spaces and to impose their own conception of the legitimate practices. Consequently, even if several homeless individuals estimate that they have something to say, they face many resistances to access to the public speech and to get a political representation. Finally, all these discourses tend to be articulated to public policies, through which a "residential" representation of public space is imposed in urban planning and social policies. Then, the resolution of the conflict tends to the reproduction of mechanisms of domination, revealing the non-recognition of the right of the homeless to occupy these public spaces.

References:

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