



UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

Conflicting Rationalities and the Governance of Homelessness in Ward 64

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**The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project between
the City of Cape Town, Ward 64 and UCT**

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The Problem

Before I start let me set the scene, one I am sure you are aware of but let's step into this story together. In South Africa there is no national mandate or coherent policy framework around the issue of homelessness. Therefore there is no national budget, laws or policies that can be used to mobilize and unify the actors involved in the governance of homelessness. Municipalities must each individually revise the various by-laws that affect street-based people these revisions are scrutinised by opposing political parties and often leveraged to influence public perception.

In 2017 the City of Cape Town adopted an unfunded mandate and took on the responsibility of providing services to street-based people without financial support from national government. However it was acknowledged that this was a mistake as the City realised that its Departments did not have the capacity to follow through with this responsibility. This, accompanied by an out of date City of Cape Town Street People Policy, has left the question of "who is responsible for service provision to street-based people" both ambiguous and politically inflammatory.

Add to this thousands of complaints to the City of Cape Town and the South African Human Rights Commission. These complaints range from annoyed rate payers who report street people "scratching in bins" to horrified citizens reporting the abuse of street people by law enforcement officers. Government officials are forced to act while civil society shuns their responses as essentially criminalising poverty. These tensions are only the surface of the complex relationships that govern Cape Town's homeless sector.

The Research

I have 10 minutes (of which I have already used 3) to share with you what I found out in two years and so I am going to avoid going into the nuts and bolts of policy or detailed outlines of the programmes run by the committed organisations that work with street-based individuals every day. What I am going to do is:

- Tell you briefly about the scaffolding of this research,
- Highlight the potential this ward and sub-council holds to approach the problem of homelessness
- Pull out some of the main challenges I see to achieving this potential and then some ways to overcome these challenges.
- I will then end with some larger lessons learnt.

My research arose in collaboration with Councillor Aimee Kuhl and the University of Cape Town's Knowledge Co-Op. Cllr Kuhl presented the Co-Op with a request for research to assist elected officials struggling to operate between various levels, spheres and entities of governance. The governance of homelessness in the Ward presented a microcosm for this larger context.

I used Vanessa Watson's concept of "conflicting rationalities" to investigate the ways in which various stakeholders interact within what she calls "zones of contestation and encounter" (2009). These zones are where the rationalities of government administration and service provision confront a the rationality of survival shaped by its own logics and imperatives.

To investigate the governance of homelessness in the Ward 64 I used a "nodal governance" framework. Nodes range from legislatures to government departments to civil society and even gangs. And all nodes are examined through four essential characteristics.

1. **Mentalities**, which embodies the different ways of understanding the problem the node has emerged to govern
2. **Technologies**, the methods available for exerting influence over a course of events
3. **Resources**, drawn on to support the operations of the node
4. **Institutions**, direct the mentalities, technologies and resources of the node over time

The Potential of Ward 64 and The Deep South

Ward 64 is situated in what used to be the deep South Municipality, it is boarded by nature reserves and PRASA land and a stone's throw away from both Masi and Ocean View. Street-based participants of this study communicate that they chose to move from the City Centre, where they had stayed for economic opportunities, to the Ward for the slower pace, less crime and for the views. While cries of outrage rise at the punitive response to homelessness in the City, the minimized presence of national and City Law Enforcement and the presence of more than seven organisations who work with street-based people has resulted in limited by-law enforcement and an approach to homelessness in the area that is far more developmental than punitive. (Focus Group, 2021).

The ward within a very small area has all the building blocks of a coordinated developmental approach to the governance of homelessness.

- Shelters (Haven and Happy Valley- Simons town)
- Service centres (U-turn and was net)
- Food programmes (from churches and Our Fathers House- also Simons town)
- A rehabilitation programme (living hope)
- Committed Social Development Portfolio Chair Anna Else with decades of experience
- Community members like Carolyn Axman from the Net who have poured their lives into this issue
- There is communication between Wards (limited but definitely better than other areas)
- Private Security with years of experience and relationships with street-based people
- Proximity to the Street-People Unit
- Willing Ward Councillors

Everything needed is right here. This Ward but also this sub-council has the potential to become an island in effectiveness the deep and turbulent waters of homelessness not only in Cape Town but also in the country.

The Challenges

1. Working in Silos

- Organisations, often with the same mentalities and technologies, are working in Silos and although there is a common recognition that partnerships are needed to take care of individuals that enter their organisations there is, and I quote “an unwillingness to feed into one machine”
 - Competition for Funding
 - Organisational Pride
 - Challenge of coordination- it takes time and effort
- Organisations with established programmes and years of experience are attractive to community members and local government funders, therefore the expansion of their operations often quickly gain community buy-in leaving smaller local organisations with less support and funding
- The end of last year the promising seeds of a sub-council wide homeless network were beginning to sprout but the growth has since halted due to the issues just mentioned.

2. Crime as a barrier

- Over the past 15 years there has been an increase in both gang and drug related behaviour within Ward 64 and the surrounds.
- The increase in crime has affected both the homed community and the street-based people in the area. For example during the time of research, a hotel owner in Simon’s Town, just outside of Ward 64, was attacked and badly beaten. In the same month a street-based individual living in Muizenberg was murdered.
- **The entrenched stigma that all street-based people are criminals has**
 - created a barrier to care for street-based individuals who are themselves affected by crime as they are turned away by both police and even hospitals
 - provided an open door for gangs to infiltrate homeless communities as because of the assumed criminal nature of all street-based people, gang members are able to hide in plain sight.
 - has increased the risk for those individuals and organisations working with this population as their interventions interrupt and constrain the gang-related activities that occur in parallel to the daily activities of street-based people.

3. The Public

This same narrative and the fear it produces results in the public applying pressure to the City and Ward Councillors, which leads to a reactive and punitive response and disrupts developmental interventions.

4. Street-Based People

Must choose to participate this takes time, patience and commitment to change

Ways to overcome these Challenges

Recommendations for a Local Networked Approach to the Governance of Homelessness

- First, guidelines for participation in a network engaging in the problem of homelessness should be decided amongst all actors.
- Second, at a minimum, to maintain positive relations, those involved should be required to inform the network of new programmes they are running and when their operations are expanding into new geographies.
- Third, my further recommendation is for the inclusion of HOMAC representatives in these networks. The potential HOMAC has to interface between those in the homeless sector in Ward 64 and the City of Cape Town is underutilised and its value questioned. However, provisions for issues such as extended EPWP contracts for street-based people and legal requirements for a shared data-base of street based people in the area can only be made at a political level.
- Fourth, there needs to be an administrative coordinator between all actors in the network, this position should ideally be jointly funded by all those in the network or alternatively the Street-People Unit should be used in this role, however I do not believe that the SPU has the capacity to do this on a consistent basis. They are skilled at facilitating meetings but continued correspondence and coordination has not been possible up to this point.

Recommendations for Managing the effects of crime

- Mach 1 Security suggested the implementation of a WhatsApp group through which threats and violence against street-based individuals can be reported and responded to.
- Channels through which Street-based people can report crime (happening to them or around them) should be established and taken seriously as throughout my research I heard stories of how street-based people positively affected the outcome of law-enforcement operations by providing accurate information.
- Sisters at the Muizenberg clinic should be given particular sensitivity training to learn how to treat street-based people with respect and care.

Recommendations for public participation in the problem of homelessness

- Public education campaigns about how to approach the problem of homelessness must include how supporting an organisation which helps street-based people will reduce the negative impacts of homelessness for both street-based people **and homed residents**

- Direct interaction, through volunteering and simply greeting street-based people, is needed and should be encouraged in churches, local newspapers, on official Facebook pages and the like
- Churches need to have an open-door policy to street-based people
 - The Reverend Linscott emphasizes that collaboration with organisations like The Net has helped him and his congregation navigate challenging aspects of engaging with and providing support to street-based people in and outside of the church.

Larger Lessons Learnt

- The Street People Policy has been under review for more than 3 years, pressure needs to be applied to The City by both civil society and local government for its release
- As mentioned HOMAC is underutilised largely because it plays an advisory role but has no teeth, representatives should be elected by the organisations they will serve and given a vote on matters pertaining to homelessness within the council
- Smaller NGOS run by local people are extremely valuable as they provide context specific understanding to homelessness in their area and should be protected and supported – short-term “probationary funding” should be made available particularly for new and local NGOS this will invite the potential of innovative pilot projects such as forms of transitional housing as well as harm-reduction interventions
- The implications of this research is that a local context-specific approach to the governance of homelessness is more appropriate than a broad (and rigid) one-size-fits all national policy.

In the context of no guiding principles, mandate, and outdated city level policy, a multiplicity of government and non-state actors have stepped in to fill the gap in Ward 64. The minimal presence of law enforcement and the commitment of organisations and ward level government has resulted in the dominance of a developmental approach to homelessness in the Ward.

Homelessness is not an unsolvable malfunction of an otherwise working society. Whether we face or displace the problem of homelessness speaks of who we are as people Emmanuel Levinas states that "facing 'the other' is an ethical imperative" (ibid). This research invites us not to see the survivalist activities of street-based people as separate from society but rather as how individuals fulfil the needs commonly shared by all members of society.

Acknowledging that those experiencing homelessness are individuals and not a homogenous group invites us to see the problem for the potential it holds to unify multiple stakeholders, from all spheres of governance. Due to the ambiguity of who is responsible for taking care of street-based people, the problem of homelessness extends an invitation to each one of us to not only examine what we believe it means to be human but also to take responsibility for what it means to be human together.