



SOCIAL WORK & THE CITY

IMPROVING THE PUBLIC DOMAIN AND BUILDING COMMUNITY?

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MEELDIV TUTVUDA !

- Who lives in a city today?
- Who still wants to live in a city in 10 years?
- Who wants to work as a social worker in a city?



WHAT IS TYPICALLY URBAN? WHAT DO YOU ONLY SEE IN CITIES?



DEFINING THE CITY

- **Number of inhabitants, density**
 - More than 10.000, 50(0).000 or 1M?
 - Europe: network of smaller cities and few 'capitals'
 - Asia, Africa, South-America: mega cities vs. the rest
- **Center function (economically, culturally, political ...)**
 - Sometimes a tension between 'the city of flows' and the city of people: ex. Transport vs. clean air / Tourism vs we live here / laborers who work in cities but can only afford houses outside the center etc.
- **Social heterogeneity / Diversity**
 - How to build community in diversity? How to build community if nobody stays for long?



CITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

- **Cities consist of different parts that have different historical identities and functions**
 - Urban ecology: city as an organism
 - How does a neighborhood fit in the larger city?
 - How is it connected? Does it contain useful services? What is its reputation?
 - This identity can change over time: How? Why? Who wins?
- **A city and neighborhoods are not entirely 'local'**
 - Policies, money and people from outside influence what happens inside
 - Many people in cities have lifeworld experiences i.e. cultural practices and networks that span across the world

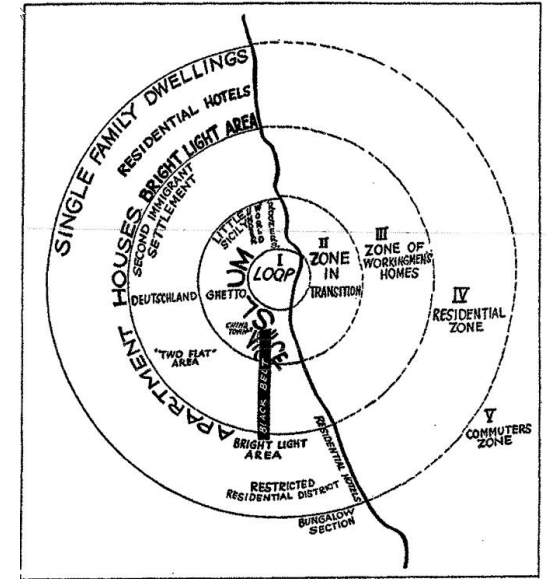
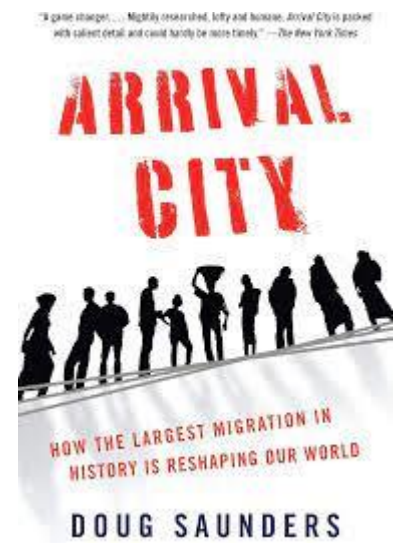
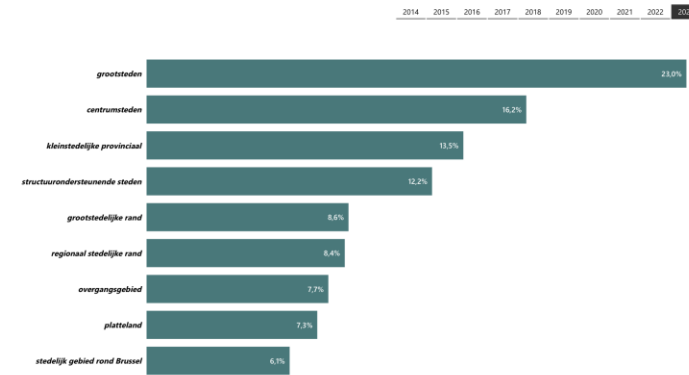


CHART II. Urban Areas



TYPICAL URBAN CHALLENGES FOR SW?

- Neighborhoods with higher concentration of poverty and unemployment
- Large areas with a lot of people + rapidly changing and diverse population
- Need to collaborate with a complex network of organizations
- Lack of social cohesion... a problem?
- (Predominantly) Urban social problems: homelessness, undocumented migrants, illegal seks work, drug related issues, street criminality,....



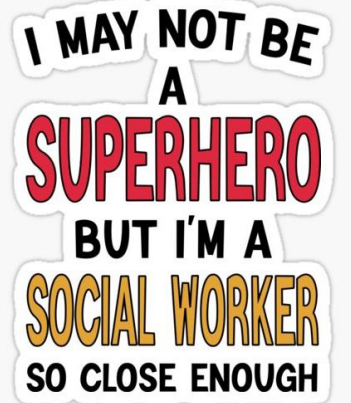
You could look for statistics:

- average (taxable) income
 - Unemployment / NEET
 - Crime and nuisance stats
 - Average size/price of housing
 - #receiving benefits
 - Child poverty rates
 - Age pyramid
- Compare to Tallinn as a city

DEFINING SOCIAL WORK

You are studying social work: what is it about? (in your own words)

- Realizing rights and responding to social needs
- Improving quality of life and opportunities for all
- Relations and trust – not only for them also with them
- Lifeworld perspectives: trying to understand how people live and what they value
 - In cities, people sometimes only share the space they live in

A meme featuring a speech bubble with the text: "I MAY NOT BE A SUPERHERO BUT I'M A SOCIAL WORKER SO CLOSE ENOUGH". The words "SUPERHERO" and "SOCIAL WORKER" are in large, bold, red and yellow fonts respectively, while the rest of the text is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

International definition

“Social work is a **practice-based profession and an academic discipline** that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.” (IFSW, 2014)

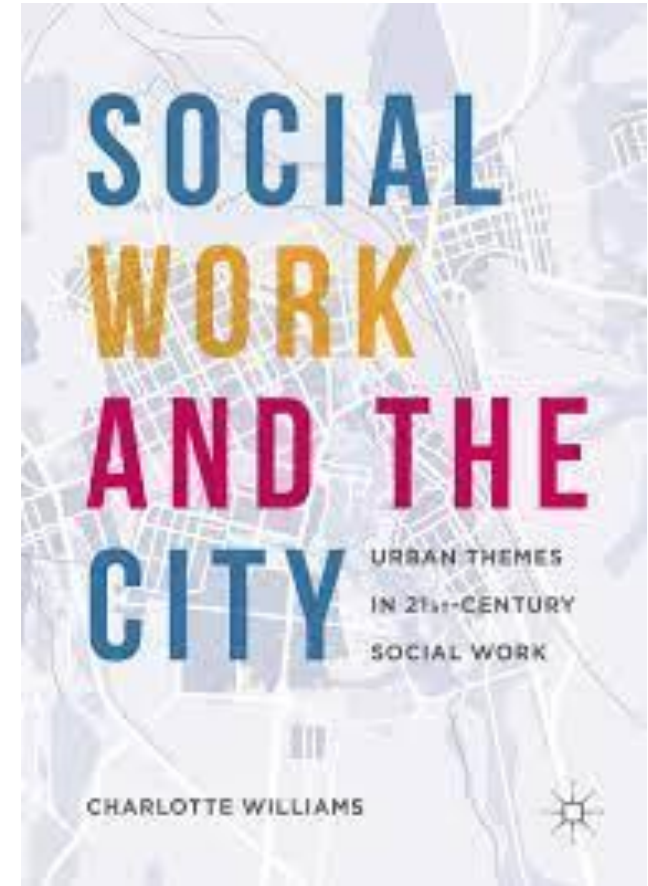
WHY FOCUS ON 'URBAN SOCIAL WORK'?

1. The world is getting more urbanized, we entered the 'age of cities'

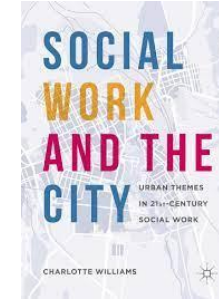
- *"In the year 2007, more than 50%, of the global population, over 3 billion people, live in urban areas. We estimate that this will grow up to 75% in 2050" (UNESCO)*

2. If there are typical urban challenges, social workers will need specific skills and knowledge to address these challenges.

- Being able to understand and bring together different perspectives (Williams, 2016)
- Trying to understand people's lives in the cities is about thinking about how the spatial and the social interact: contextualising SW



URBAN SOCIAL WORK (WILLIAMS, 2016)



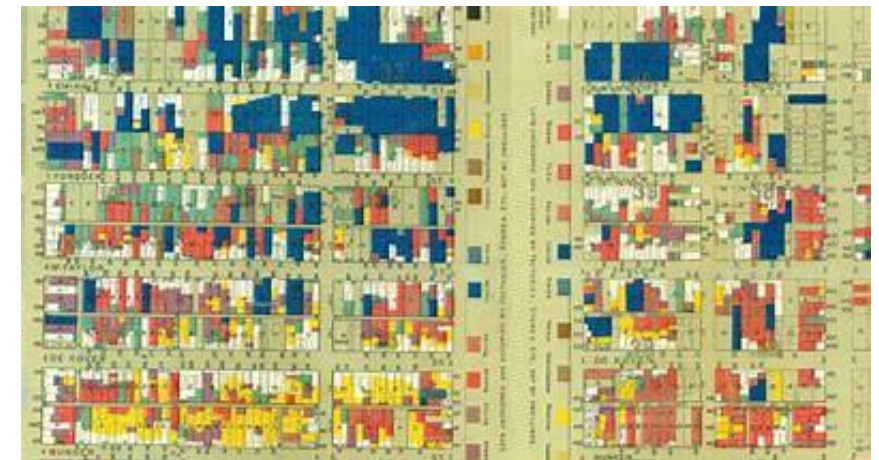
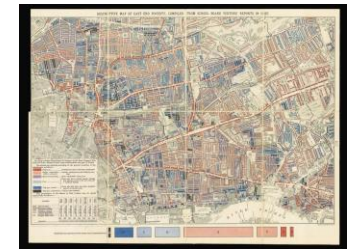
“social work seeks to engage with causes of social distress whilst, at the same time, working on its manifestations in everyday life”(p3)

“The physical and material world is not irrelevant to doing social work. How people live, how people can live, the sense they make of their everyday lived experiences and their power over place is crucial to welfare delivery and welfare receipt” (p 11)

“ We often don’t think about the spatial, because we think from our own professionals expertise, target groups and specialities, but we should look at people in their environment before we decide what they need. How are they living, what already exists etc.”

PRACTICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

- Study how people live in an area and see what we can learn from that to fulfill our mission as social worker
- **Historical examples: early 1900's**
- 'Social Surveys' in Chicago, London etc.: different methods
 - Getting data about who lives here (money, nationality,...)
 - Experiencing it yourself and talking to people and key figures
 - Try to understand how they think: ambitions, role models, informal networks, pride



PUBLIC SPACE AS PUBLIC DOMAIN



Who has the right to the city? For whom or what is the space meant?



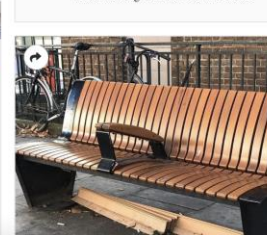
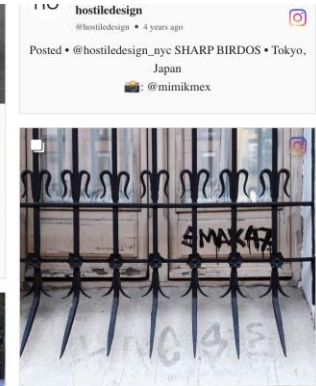
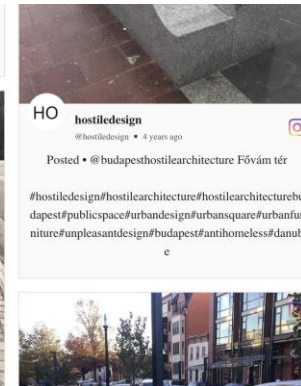
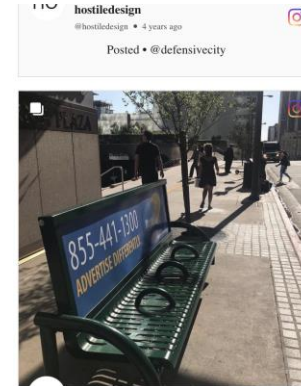
Who do you see? Who uses space, who claims it? What is possible for different groups



Who don't you see? Who can't or won't use the spaces and why?

Social work (and other disciplines) can actively be present and intervene in public space: to find citizens and share information, to make a statement, trying to connect people,...

ETNOGRAPHY & SIGNS, LANGUAGE



SOME EXAMPLES FROM ANTWERP



Health kiosk: get info, free tests and fruit to promote healthy lifestyle and gather data (university and local organizations)



Street therapists (and other types of street outreach SW)



From empty space to collective garden



“Issue walks” with older residents



‘together on the streets’ volunteers from the community preventing conflicts



Women-friendly public spaces? From research to safe haven



Poetry on poverty

**I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S THANK YOU FOR
YOUR ATTENTION**

**OR THANK YOU FOR NOT FALLING
ASLEEP**