

Welcoming the unwelcome

Migration industries and border control for homeless job-seeking migrants in central Copenhagen

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Research Article

Welcoming the unwelcome: Migration industries and border control for homeless job-seeking migrants in central Copenhagen

Abstract

As modes of border control increasingly shift to cities, private charities that engage in caring for non-national homeless migrants risk, unintentionally and unwillingly, serving the so-called 'migration industries' as front agencies for the European border regime. Since the 2008 financial crisis, which hit migrant populations in southern Europe particularly hard, the number of homeless migrants sleeping rough in northern European cities has increased. In Copenhagen, these new homeless include jobless West African men who reside in Spain or Italy, but are transiently in the city to reboot their lives by collecting empty deposit-carrying bottles left on the streets. Political will to address this rising social problem at state and city levels has so far been limited, leaving the private non-profit charities of central Copenhagen as sole providers of care for homeless migrants. This article examines how these long-established institutions, which used to provide care primarily to locals with substance dependencies or mental health problems, have transformed into migrant industries shaped by the logic of the European border regime. For this purpose, prior research on urban borderlands and homeless migrants is reviewed, and documents issued by non-profit charities operating in the field of urban homelessness are analysed. The article focuses on the increasingly hostile elements of state and municipal policies on non-Western migrants, which work to divide 'our' homeless from the migrant 'others'. It also considers the various ways in which charities work to enable different survival strategies to emerge and be maintained among migrants without access to the formal labour market, and finally how charities' transformed role affects their relationships with local residents.

Keywords

migration industries, homeless migrants, bordering, gentrification, neighbourhood change

Introduction

Recent years have brought increased interest in cities as spaces of migration governance (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011; Persdotter, 2019). Borders and border control normally fall under the auspices of the nation state, with cities having no direct powers to control who enters or exits their jurisdictions. However, recent studies (Fauser, 2019; Lebuhn, 2013; Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013; Tervonen et al., 2018) point to the shifting role of cities, municipalities and other subnational levels of government in creating and enacting exclusionary mobility control policies. One example is the widespread use of new city ordinances and enforcement strategies that indirectly, but intentionally, work to exclude unwanted migrants by intervening in their daily lives. Often the intention of creating a 'hostile environment'¹ for so-called 'illegal' migrants is openly framed. Other cases involve reliance on what has been termed 'enforced precarity and organised abandonment' (Persdotter, 2019: 93). These new and complex bordering practices also involve those urban care institutions that have, consciously or unwittingly, become integral to international border regimes through their gradual transformations into so-called migration industries. Focusing on those private charities engaged in

caring for Copenhagen's growing non-national homeless population, this article explores the practical effects of these new bordering practices on the everyday activities of charity-run shelters and day centres. It aims to understand how these charities' unintentional transformation into migration industries has affected their abilities to service and assist destitute migrants in attempting to reboot their lives through various survival strategies.

Increased use of city ordinances for border control has been underway for many years, but pressure to limit the influx of impoverished migrants increased notably following the financial collapse of southern European economies in 2008. As migrant homelessness became gradually more visible in larger cities of northern Europe, shelters, soup runs and other types of low-threshold facilities could report growing numbers of impoverished migrants from EU and third countries among their clients (Djuve et al., 2015; Mostowska, 2014; Persdotter, 2019; Tervonen and Enache, 2017). In Copenhagen, the number of unregistered foreigners sleeping rough or in shelters has increased slowly but steadily since 2011, when the phenomenon was first included in national homeless statistics. Unregistered foreigners accounted for 107 of Denmark's 5,290 homeless individuals in 2011; by 2019, this number had risen to 519 (out of 6,400 homeless), of which 471 were localised in Copenhagen (Benjaminsen, 2011, 2019).² While these figures imply an increasing problem, it is noteworthy that the biennial counts take place in February, and so reflect neither the exponential increase in non-national homeless during summer months nor the temporal nature of these migrants' stays, which may range from a few days to several months. Although no reliable data are available, rough estimates by the involved organisations indicate that the population more than doubles during summer.

Despite being limited in number and geographical distribution, the homeless migrants have had considerable effects on the everyday functioning of Danish social infrastructure and the shelters set up to alleviate the effects of homelessness. In 2007 a dogma emerged that Denmark should not become the 'day centre for all of Europe's poor';³ on this basis, publicly funded homeless services were not permitted to assist anyone without a Danish health insurance card⁴ (Retsinformation 2010/1 BSF 106 (Legal information: Proposal for resolution 106); Kompasset, 2017:3). Although public support for homeless migrants has not entirely disappeared, financial and political attention has been limited while the burden of acting has been left to private organisations, which suddenly found themselves with sole responsibility for a growing social problem. As the most important front agencies that migrants face upon arrival, these organisations have also, unintentionally, become more closely engaged with Europe's border regimes and migration industries.

This article uses an urban border space perspective to analyse the charities providing shelter for homeless migrants in Copenhagen. It contributes to urban studies, particularly on urban marginality, by examining how the city is rooted in everyday practices of bordering and how private shelters and low-threshold day centres enable homeless migrants to shape the contours of their lived urban world. This investigation raises an often-overlooked aspect in migration: whether various urban agencies unwittingly contribute to shaping borders and migration regimes.

Using the case of Copenhagen, the article will address this gap by discussing the following questions:

- a) What have been the main instruments through which Nordic cities create and enact exclusionary mobility control, and what have been the effects among homeless migrants?

- b) What has characterised the public and policy reactions to the increased influx of unregistered homeless migrants?
- c) How have the more restrictive policies concerning international migrants affected the practices and routines of private shelters and day centres?
- d) How has this presumed transformation into migration industries affected such organisations' abilities to support homeless unregistered migrants in Nordic cities?

To develop the analytical framework, three different theoretical perspectives on cities and migration are combined. The first concerns urban borderlands and the role of cities in monitoring and enforcing migrants' legal status. The second focuses on the role of homelessness in cities. The third perspective deals with the role of migrant care industries and the abilities of local actors and institutions to carve out an enabling environment, i.e. place-specific spaces of rights and recognition for migrants. In combination, these perspectives reveal a research gap on (charity) organisations whose absorption into migration regimes can at best be characterised as incidental.

Methodology and context

The article forms part of a wider research project carried out since 2010 concerning the new, hypermobile lifestyles emerging among impoverished migrants of West African origin who oscillate permanently between their countries of origin, their homes in southern Europe and a precarious existence in Nordic capitals. While that research focuses on the aspirations, experiences and outcomes of individual movers and includes multi-sited ethnographical fieldwork in Senegal, Spain and Copenhagen, this study takes an institutional and urban perspective by examining how this increased mobility among Europe's poor has affected those private low-threshold day centres and shelters in Copenhagen that act as their prime caregivers. While users of these facilities include both Danish homeless and a more heterogeneous group of migrants, notably of Eastern or Central European origin, this article pays particular attention to the work of these organisations in relation to West African migrants, who are labelled as third-country nationals, i.e. Schengen residents without EU citizenship. It focuses specifically on DanChurchSocial (in Danish: Kirkens Korshær) and Blue Cross (in Danish: Blå Kors), which are two of the most profiled organisations addressing urban homelessness and renowned for their many African users. While these umbrella organisations engage in many social work activities, their caregiving activities for migrants is the article's focus. These services are, therefore, referred to as shelters, low-threshold day centres or caregiving private charities, while DanChurchSocial and Blue Cross refer to the wider organisations.

The West African users of low-threshold day centres and shelters are often experienced, resourceful labourers who have long migration careers in Spain, Italy or Portugal and engaged in onward migration following the 2008 financial crisis (Juul, 2020). With access to the Danish labour market more troublesome than expected, they soon resort to a hypermobile lifestyle, constantly alternating between homelessness in Copenhagen, their dwelling hubs in Spain or Italy and homes in their country of origin. They follow the formula of hard work, mainly in the summer season, and spending as little money as possible, in the hope of rebooting their lives. By investing their gains in income-generating activities in their country of residence, they hope to get by in the remaining months of the year (Juul, 2020). These self-organised recuperation strategies put limited strain on the Danish welfare system but depend highly on the services provided by private charities. Therefore, these migrants' conditional status and adaptive responses to their situation in Copenhagen provide a

thought-provoking lens through which to study the subtle adaptation of charities to new bordering regimes.

As changes in the attitudes of charities are often elusive and may pass unnoticed to the staff involved, data for this article derive mainly from literature review. To explore changes within the organisations and to the broader political structures, this article scrutinises secondary material in the form of brochures, webpages, newspapers and member magazines (*Korshærsbladet* and *Blå Kors Bladet*) published by the two central charities between 2013 and 2020, together with municipal and state documents published during the same period. These sources reveal changes in perceptions and priorities within the charities and in public discourse. Furthermore, four staff members (one from Blue Cross, three from DanChurchSocial) were formally interviewed regarding the above-mentioned changes. The author benefitted from her own position as a volunteer between 2011 and 2018; based in a shelter run by DanChurchSocial, she carried out participant observation of how routines, discourses and practices were changed and adapted to new conditions, and how staff–user interactions were impacted. Because of the power asymmetries and ethical concerns implicit in these multiple roles, the author does not refer in this article to confidential discussions, counselling sessions and staff-related information derived from volunteering, and instead refers to public statements by the focal organisations. It should be noted that the author did not conduct any fieldwork in Blue Cross. The article does not emphasise the migrants’ perspective but derives insights on their conditions and perceptions from previous research (Juul, 2017, 2020; Kastanje et al., 2012). Consent to use the material for research purposes was granted by all interviewees.

Cities, borders and migration industries

As shown in the introduction to this volume, the concept of migration industries has become a popular pathway for understanding the relationships and infrastructures forged between migrants and private actors. It highlights the ways that independent actors, so-called ‘migration industries’, work to shape mobility patterns and mobile identities through the services they offer. With the notable exceptions of Stenum (2002), Tervonen and Enache (2017) and Persdotter (2020), few attempts have been made to combine the literature on internal bordering with the (equally scarce) literature connecting migration and homelessness.

Moving borders to cities

Interestingly, the concept of migration industries emerges at a time of increasing attention to cities’ role in the governance of nation states and border control. Several scholars have exposed the progressive downscaling of external border control (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011; Lebuhn, 2013; Tervonen et al., 2018). Contrary to vernacular understandings of borders as linear or territorial demarcations between political entities, borders are increasingly extended into the hinterlands of EU Member States, where local agencies—private and semi-private—participate in the monitoring and enforcement of migrants’ legal status. This turns cities into the main arenas for expanding and diversifying modes of control and enforcement. New and ubiquitous border zones are formed that overlay the spaces of everyday life in ways that particularly influence migrant populations’ mobility and rights (Lebuhn, 2013: 38). As pinpointed by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 7), borders become ‘devices of inclusion that select and filter people and different forms of circulation in ways no less violent than those deployed in exclusionary measures’. This highlights the relevance of investigating how the increasingly selective and securitised European migration regimes deal with hypermobile

individuals who are nominally legitimate but clearly perceived as undesirable (Tervonen and Enache, 2017).

When bordering mechanisms increasingly operate at the city level, focus also moves towards those already in the country. In this process, state, private or semi-private organisations may become local agents of enforcement. According to Fauser (2019) and Lebuhn (2013), questions of how long someone is allowed to reside or whether a person is legally entitled to receive certain goods and services are now to be resolved at the city level. Consequently, even verification of identity papers and assisted returns—once core functions of the sovereign state—may now be carried out by NGOs and voluntary organisations (Lebuhn, 2013: 47). In some instances, however, this city-level enforcement may give local actors and institutions a more important role in carving out place-specific spaces of rights and recognition for migrants (Lebuhn, 2013).

Maneuvering the homeless city

The above-cited literature on everyday bordering shares common ground with urban marginality studies, which highlight how the rights of homeless people to occupy public spaces are increasingly being restricted and how charities' role in the city should be understood. Here, two approaches can be discerned.

The punitive approach, which draws largely on North American experiences (Mitchell, 1997; Mitchell and Hansson, 2018; Smith, 1986), focuses on the emergence of a 'culture of control' towards homelessness that has dominated neoliberal urban politics since the late 20th century. According to these scholars, countries responded to the growing visibility of homelessness by imposing restrictions and enacting specific laws that wilfully marginalised the urban poor to make cities stand out as safe and attractive to global investors and tourists. Through extensive use of new surveillance technologies and hostile architecture, together with 'legal regimes outlawing just those behaviours that poor people, and the homeless in particular, must do in the public spaces of the city', the only spaces the homeless have left are being annihilated (Mitchell, 1997: 305). A city is created where exclusion of the homeless is perceived as 'just' and 'good', and where homelessness is increasingly criminalised or rendered invisible through spatial restrictions (O'Sullivan, 2012: 69). In this vision, local (homeless) service providers are perceived as doing little more than legitimating attempts by city authorities, businesses and police to sweep homeless people from the streets and place them in shelters away from the view of ordinary people (for a detailed critique of such framings, see De Verteuil et al., 2009; O'Sullivan, 2012; Verteuil, 2006).

For scholars such as Cloke et al. (2019), this strong focus on the regulatory control of spaces where homeless people dwell and move is too narrow and offers little explanation of homeless people's attempts to negotiate and resist these regulations. Instead, the 'homeless city' concept is presented as a way to capture the assemblage of sleeping, eating and hanging out that characterises and co-constitutes the city, both in places of care and in the places that homeless people themselves create through various types of practices. In reality, homeless people differ widely in their reasons for becoming homeless and can, as Cloke et al. (2019) stress, also be expected to react differently to the obstacles encountered. By overlooking this, opportunities are missed to explore the processes through which migrants "massage" their relations with important actors in the field' (Schapendonk, 2018: 663), and to discuss the reactions among caregivers. Focusing on those supportive, non-punitive

responses that contribute to framing the everyday life of homeless people may, therefore, prove conducive to better understanding unregistered homeless migrants in Copenhagen.

Unintentional migration industries

The combination of border control and caregiving to homeless people evokes the notion of migration industries. When initially introduced, the concept of migration industries made visible the vast jumble of entrepreneurs and actors that emerged after migration control and detention activities were intensified and outsourced to private entrepreneurs (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen, 2013). As discussed in the introduction to this Special Issue, the concept has recently been taken up anew and broadened to loosely encompass those individuals and organisations involved in facilitating and enabling migration within nation states. Based on their ‘ensemble-creating’ activities (Cranston et al., 2018: 544), caregiving and rescue-oriented NGOs may, therefore, also be included: despite producing no direct profit, these actors and agencies’ activities contribute to providing infrastructures and interpretative frames that manage and sometimes even control migration flows. Particularly when considering altruistic networks engaged in caring for small and often almost invisible migrant groups, this duality of ‘servicing while managing’—inherent in the notion of migration industries—provides a useful lens to highlight these organisations’ role: they not only provide flexible and inclusive infrastructures of service provision but also communicate alternative discourses on the causes of migration and homelessness. The notion thus underscores how cities are made and re-made through not only migration flows and the derived transformations of urban care structures but also the communication approaches of charitable organisations, which impact whether local residents support or oppose migrants and homeless.

Another aspect underscored by the migration industries perspective is the ways in which these organisations, through knowledge accumulated on the ground, tend to become professionalised; as access to funding improves, they also become providers of jobs and careers. Although these organisations are perceived as altruistic stakeholders, researchers such as Cranston et al. (2018: 544) and Schapendonk (2018: 665) maintain that they can also be characterised by the term ‘industry’, which captures how these migration processes become an economy. This does not, however, imply that migration industries are necessarily products of intentional brokering.

The role of caretakers for homeless migrants was neither deliberately chosen by the Danish charities nor directly outsourced to them by the state. In general, Nordic politicians and governments have been either unwilling or unable to take an active stance or formulate explicit policies balancing ‘the fear of giving incentives for further migration and the fear of people freezing to death on the streets’ (Tervonen and Enache, 2017: 1127). Indeed, it is the absence of national or municipal interventions that provides the context for local charities becoming involved in caring for precarious migrants who are outside Nordic labour markets but partially within national welfare structures. This unwitting transformation from basic harm-alleviation among substance abusers to operating as front agencies for Europe’s hypermobile poor obviously frames the charities’ activities in particular ways. Without paying attention to these unintended dynamics, it may be difficult to fully understand these charities’ role as gatekeepers or agents of micro-scale everyday bordering mechanisms.

Before discussing the degree to which certain low-threshold day centres and shelters in Copenhagen have resisted or been swallowed up by the neoliberal state and transformed into migration industries, the functioning of everyday bordering in the Danish context needs to be introduced.

Responding to unwanted migration in Copenhagen

As many shelter users have obtained Schengen residency (and some EU citizenship) through their prolonged stay in southern Europe, their entrance to Denmark is legal. Crossing borders within the EU was, therefore, not perceived as a major problem by unregistered West African migrants encountered during the fieldwork. Indeed, they did this frequently throughout the year. Nonetheless, they remain targets of internal everyday bordering practices at the city level. If passports are not a problem, how does bordering play out on a daily basis? To answer the question on how cities create and enact exclusionary mobility control, the following paragraphs will consider the so-called ‘yellow card’, which has proved to be a key mechanism through which homeless shelters are absorbed into the logic of distinguishing legitimate/domestic and illegitimate/migrant clients. This surprising role of the yellow card is first discussed in the context of everyday bordering, before then looking particularly at its effects on shelters. These issues initiate discussion of public and policy reactions to new migration flows, which will be further elaborated below.

Everyday bordering through the yellow card

Surprisingly, Denmark’s chief instrument to separate wanted from unwanted migrants has turned out to be the yellow-coloured public health insurance card. Issued since 1968, the yellow card includes a personal civil registration number and was not originally designed with a selective purpose but has, relatively unnoticed, become a central device of everyday bordering since the 2007 EU enlargement.

For foreigners, the yellow card is normally issued based on work contracts. It gives rights to residence and health services and confers taxpayer status, which is key to other social and political rights. According to current legislation, job-seeking EU citizens can sojourn in Denmark for up to six months, whereas third-country residents may stay for up to three months provided they have a visa or a Schengen residence permit. Third-country residents are, with few exceptions, forbidden to work.⁵ As few West Africans have obtained EU citizenship, a yellow card is basically off-limits. Without the card, unregistered migrants (including EU citizens who have failed to enter documented work) can only access emergency allowances and must be able to document the ability to support themselves (Retsinformation LBK nr. 1513 [Legal information: Code no. 1513]; Mostowska, 2014: 2).

Linking the yellow card to labour contracts produces several other barriers. Without a job, access to housing becomes a challenge, and without a recognised address, one cannot open a bank account in Denmark, which is a prerequisite for receiving a salary (Nyidanmark, 2020). In this way, the yellow card, rather than EU citizenship, defines the rights and conditions of mobility, dividing those with access to the labour market from those without. Through this city-level mechanism, a situation of enforced precarity is created that enables the state and municipalities to signal that newcomers do not form part of the purportedly universal Scandinavian welfare model. The question is, however, how these restrictions are received among those targeted.

As shown by the homeless statistics cited above, being cut off from the formal labour market has not discouraged migrant arrivals, although it might have contributed to shortening their stay.⁶ Instead, migrants have engaged in various alternative strategies, including capitalising on Denmark’s long tradition of economic compensation for recycling cans and bottles. Bottle picking, ‘canning’, or ‘binning’ is a well-known survival strategy among (local) homeless people in North America and

Europe (e.g. see Tremblay et al. (2010) on binning in Vancouver, and Gowan (2010) for a San Francisco case). Compared to many other places, compensation is high, ranging from 15 cents for a small can or bottle to 40 cents for the largest, and the availability of recyclables is high.⁷ Therefore, bottle collection has always provided a means for homeless people, retirees, or others facing destitution to earn money.

Since being taken up by migrants, bottle collection in Denmark has undergone an interesting transformation. What emerged as a repulsive, filthy activity performed only out of desperation (see Smidt, 2010) has become a self-organised, highly flexible employment opportunity. In terms of both equipment (e.g. adjustments to bicycles, gloves and headlamps) and mutual collaboration, bottle collection has become professionalised, and is now a main reason for selecting Denmark as a destination (Juul, 2020). This situation highlights the manifest difficulty of enforcing the policy goal of keeping out unemployed EU migrants, and also reflects that it is now socially acceptable to leave refundable cans and bottles in public spaces for collection by those in need.

Unintentionally, limitations such as the yellow card have contributed to the emergence of a highly mobile livelihood, adjusted to the rules and conditions of free movement of labour in the EU. Although this livelihood is demanding in terms of flexibility and stamina, the precarious situation encountered upon arrival has transformed into conditions that are liveable while awaiting a change in circumstances. As explained by a 54-year-old Nigerian bottle picker with diplomas in education and electrical engineering:

Nobody is happy doing such a thing. But we have no alternatives. The only alternative is to engage in crime or sell drugs. The government tells us that it is not a job. Therefore, we cannot be penalised for this. That is why we are doing it. Pity is things of the mind. For some people this [work] is unimaginable. For others it's a way of living.

The central position of the yellow card in everyday bordering is only one example of how selective measures and control have moved from external borders to the city level. It shows how devices of control may change form, with internationally recognised passports replaced by mundane tools such as health insurance cards. As a result of such exclusionary policies, migrants have turned bottle picking into a professional occupation. This has contributed to making them much more visible in the city, thereby confronting the local population with Europe's poverty problems. Such exposure has produced both hostile and positive reactions. This leads us to the second question, focused on public and policy reactions to the increased influx of unregistered homeless migrants.

Organised abandonment or a policy of no policy?

Even here in 2017, the question remains politically contentious. There is no overall plan and no political commitment which offers alternatives in terms of shelter, toilets, etc. There is a great need to find common ground and a strategy vis-à-vis these marginalised groups. (Municipality of Copenhagen, 2017)

The frustrations vented above, attributed to a representative of one organisation taking care of unregistered homeless migrants, recapitulates the half-hearted attitude of local and national authorities to improving the living conditions of unregistered migrants. From the outset, politicians' overall message has been that homeless migrants have been misinformed about the possibility of getting a job and so should go home. Some politicians have stressed how any provision of welfare

services to unregistered migrants would entice their compatriots to join them, while others have argued that helping poor people return home would be more dignified than leaving them to sleep under bridges or in public parks.⁸

The consistent focus on repatriation essentially illustrates the problem of acting locally without compromising EU legislation. As shown by Djuve et al. (2015: 7), the free movement of poverty creates difficult political dilemmas for the affluent and egalitarian Scandinavian welfare states, which have traditionally combined strict regulation of entry and residence with relatively generous welfare arrangements for recognised residents. Free movement of labour within Schengen severely limits political manoeuvrability as EU legislation does not allow for selective tightening of migration policies or targeting of specific groups. In this way, European de-bordering and commitment to international law and multilateral arrangements protect migrants' rights, making it difficult to deport or turn back unregistered EU migrants (Tervonen et al., 2018: 139). Attempted solutions thus tend to fall short, both for those wanting to keep migrants out and those trying to alleviate their situation.

A case in point is the Transit Program established by the Municipality of Copenhagen in collaboration with seven caregiving organisations in 2016. As a migrant cannot be repatriated unless they consent (Municipality of Copenhagen, 2017), most repatriations have been of the most vulnerable alcohol and drug abusers, often from other Nordic countries. For the resourceful bottle collectors whose journey to Denmark is motivated by the hope of earning a substantial amount during a short but intensive work cycle, the Transit Program has had little appeal (Juul, 2020; Kompas, 2017: 3).

Dividing the urban landscapes of care

Following a rise in citizen complaints over migrants sleeping in public spaces or relieving themselves in parks and yards, the Municipality of Copenhagen increased policing and the state tightened legislation (Jensen, 2014; Nielsen, 2017). Under legislation passed in 2017 and 2018 (Folketinget [Danish Parliament]: Laws 131 of 27.02.2018 and 753 of 19.06.2017), activities such as begging and rough sleeping in groups can now be punished with up to 14 days in prison. Although this everyday bordering practice was intended to penalise foreign informal street workers, it also applies to Danish homeless, thereby further entrenching divisions between 'our' homeless and the 'others', both in public opinion and among the homeless themselves. Such divisions are also felt in the shelters where a tangible but disregarded effect of the bordering processes described above has been to separate publicly funded shelters from private charities. Being open-door or low-threshold centres, the private shelters have neither the means nor intention to distinguish between their users. As their guiding rule is to welcome everyone in need, users are in principle anonymous. However, since holding a yellow card became a requirement to access public centres, those funded through private charities increasingly receive only unregistered migrants. While volunteering in the day centre, the author observed frequent grumbles among Danish about foreigners taking over the facility. Likewise, Danish homeless often stressed that they avoided private centres as they did not want to interact with migrants. This viewpoint is also apparent within homeless organisations. To illustrate, SAND (the Danish national organisation for homeless people) published the following on their homepage:

We distinguish between poverty refugees and homeless [...] The Danish care system for homeless is established to assist the homeless with their complex problems (substance abuse, psychological problems and lack of a home)[...]. The last few years we have experienced day centres and, to some degree, night shelters being taken over by foreigners

who are more resourceful. Danish homeless have been squeezed out [...]. There is a need to find solutions for each group. (Christina Strauss, spokesperson, SAND, 2017)

As shown by Fahnøe (2018: 26), these emotional experiences among users result in day centres becoming symbolically tainted as places of disgust, shaped by policies that restrict access to services to a few places that are then very crowded, with very restricted space for privacy and limited funding. This accentuates the separation between ‘our’ homeless and ‘the others’, which is further reproduced between the homeless themselves. It illustrates how policies, discourses and practices of bordering through subtle forms of socio-spatial exclusion may lead to ethnic hierarchies and reinforce division, not only within the migration and homeless infrastructures but also between domestic and foreign homeless.

From philanthropic societies to migration industries?

Being tainted as places of disgust is, however, not a novel experience for private shelters and charities, which have long histories of confrontation and collaboration with the state and municipalities. This applies particularly to organisations such as DanChurchSocial, Blue Cross and the Salvation Army, all rooted in the late-19th-century philanthropic, Evangelist slum missions that supported the poorest people in growing industrial cities.

At the outset, these charities had limited interactions with the public social support system. By relying solely on private donations, organisations could help the neediest without compromising their rights as citizens (Slumstrup, 2012). In the 1930s, when social reforms based on universalist principles paved the way for assistance based on civil rights, not alms, new opportunities emerged for establishing operating agreements and funding. The benefits of this partnership with the state were a matter of dispute within the organisations, but DanChurchSocial, in particular, managed to utilise the potentials of collaborating with the state while remaining sharp and critical observers of public social policies (Slumstrup, 2012).

As the welfare state expanded in the 1960s, these organisations became important players in the Danish social sector, often as subcontractors to the state and municipalities. This has provided them with large budgets and numerous professionals. For DanChurchSocial, a significant proportion of total income (63% of EUR 34 million in 2019) still derives from private contributions and from their many successful thrift shops staffed by 9,000 volunteers (Kirkens Korshær, 2019). In this way, some autonomy has been retained. It was, therefore, perfectly in line with the organisation’s dictum of being ‘where no one else is present’ to open their doors to destitute and unemployed migrants. The private shelters and day centres have been innovative in adapting to the new circumstances and have responded through various strategies. Using Mostowska’s terminology (2014: 7–8), these strategies can be either submissive, covering gaps in the existing care system, or subversive/innovative, intended to improve the conditions of new poverty migrants.

Volunteering allowed the author to follow how one shelter modified and attuned daily routines to new groups of poverty migrants who value material assistance over social and emotional support. New activities were added to the traditional offering of hot meals, rest, showers and laundry facilities. In 2012, Blue Cross opened Grace, a morning café to ‘provide shelter, support and love for people living in the streets of Copenhagen’ (*Blå Kors Bladet*, 2020). Meanwhile, DanChurchSocial developed a special service, Kompasset, to assist unregistered migrants with registration, job

applications and legal counselling, in addition to their existing shelter facilities (Kompasset, 2017). Small but important infrastructure, such as lockers, were established to alleviate the burden of carrying personal belongings around during the day. Without access to places to rest, showers, storage for personal items and valuables/documents, bicycle repair and other facilities, the burdens of surviving through bottle picking would be insurmountable and this self-organised form of income generation unviable. These charity services can, therefore, be characterised as subversive strategies designed to create an enabling environment that supports migrants in their quest for economic and social recovery.

Subversive strategies also emerged on an interpersonal level through individual relationships between migrants and the volunteers dedicated to resolving problems regarding their semi-legal status. These interactions, portrayed by Schapendonk (2018: 663) as active ‘massaging’ of important relationships, reveal how the impacts of shelters and day centres reach much wider than caregiving. This happens, for example, when migrants without a credit card ask volunteers or staff to buy flight or festival tickets for them online. Another example is the transformation of shelter amenities by their users into spaces for sharing information on upcoming events regarding bottle picking, and for providing informal welcome services advising newcomers how to get by as bottle collectors in Copenhagen. Finally, innovative strategies have surfaced to resolve some of the more structural barriers. In 2013, Kompasset was merged with one shelter into a new unit combining shelter activities with advocacy, campaigning and documentation of the living conditions of homeless migrants. This unit collects and publishes basic data on the living conditions of unregistered migrants and organises conferences at the municipal and national levels to contest the current ‘policy of no policy’ and force politicians to take responsibility for this inter-European social problem.

Despite the charities’ tremendous efforts towards improving the precarious conditions of unregistered homeless, these activities have received limited financial support from the Municipality of Copenhagen or the state. This reflects the workings of the new internal bordering regimes: instead of being a public issue for politicians to resolve, the migrant problem has been relegated to certain specialised fields of care. By primarily funding these activities through private channels, the charities have moved closer towards becoming enrolled in European border regimes. Furthermore, political pressure has gradually forced the organisations into a constant balancing act between self-financing and public support, leading to shrinking scope for migrant advocacy. Increasingly, activities must be financed through insecure, short-term EU funding, supplemented by internal funding and grants from national foundations to finance specific and temporary projects. Consequently, charities’ outspoken and critical approaches to urban marginalisation processes, having been particularly prominent in the 1970s to 1990s (Slumstrup, 2012: 331), are increasingly constrained.

Neighbours and neighbourhoods

In recent decades, urban regeneration and rising rents have impacted on the inner-city areas where day centres and shelters are located. Whereas these facilities and their users were previously accepted as a circumstance of life in a low-rent working-class neighbourhood, the influx of middle-class families with children has changed the demographics, putting conviviality between housed neighbours and homeless people under strain. Reflecting on this new, more ambiguous position, a Blue Cross staff member commented that:

Generally, the neighbours are very encouraging. We get backup from the baker, the supermarket and others who donate food and other items. But there may be neighbours that find it tiresome. Most users are calm. The environment in Grace is very conducive to relaxation. (Staff interview, Blue Cross, 2021)

Attitudes are nonetheless ambiguous. In 2017 Kompasset decided to relocate to Nordvest, an area once known as a raw, semi-industrial melting pot, but where flashy new apartments are mushrooming on hitherto empty lots. One group of local inhabitants applauded the initiative, hoping that giving shelter to homeless migrants could contribute to limiting the rapid gentrification otherwise threatening this part of town (*The Murmur*, 2017). Mutual understanding was further entrenched when Kompasset and a local neighbourhood association were granted funding to create an urban oasis on what was earlier a dull yard in front of the day centre. Through communal events, open to both residents and shelter users, the neighbourhood's social diversity was maintained. For the staff, who were used to conflictive neighbour relations, this constructive collaboration enabled a more dialogue-oriented relationship with local residents to emerge. Interviews revealed how staff assumed wider responsibility for users' potentially unsocial behaviours in the public space outside the shelter, for example by cleaning up when neighbours complained that gardens were being used as toilets.

This case illustrates how the new role of cities in border control and enforcement can activate new constellations of public and private actors, and thereby play an important role in carving out spaces of rights and recognition for migrants, as suggested above (Lebuhn, 2013: 47). It also shows how the day centres are forced to take on more of the burdens of hospitality related to caring for the city's 'unwelcome' residents.

Fears over funding

In the overall picture, caring for unregistered migrants represents only a small part of the large and complex activities carried out by the charities. Of DanChurchSocial's 450 professionals and 9,000 volunteers (Kirkens Korshær 2020), only 10 staff and approximately 25 volunteers run Kompasset, which currently encompasses a shelter, a day centre, advocacy and documentation activities (Kompasset, 2022). Nonetheless, the increasing difficulties encountered by Kompasset's staff when seeking support for migrant-related activities create anxieties within the organisation, which depends heavily on public funding for their other activities. A growing divide is apparent between the staff and volunteers engaged with homeless migrants in Copenhagen and the many volunteers nationwide who contribute significantly to the organisation's budgets through running thrift shops but (according to the Copenhagen staff) are more inclined towards helping Danish homeless, vulnerable families and children. A similar situation is detectable in Blue Cross, which admits downplaying migration-related activities in communications to members:

How to use the profits from the thrift shops is a latent conflict. Many support the activities, but others believe we should concentrate on Danish homeless. So the work we do in Grace is not something we boast of. (Staff interview, 2021)

In this way, the separation of activities targeting ‘our’ homeless from those directed towards the migrant ‘others’ is reproduced within the organisations, undermining the initial principles of hospitality for all. This causes frustration among the staff in charge of documentation at Kompasset:

The headquarters is not very interested in our work. When we hand in reports, they are regarded as a nuisance. Priority is on children and families in Jutland. This is where the money is earned. (Staff interview, Kompasset, 2020)

The author’s evaluation of the two charities’ publications from 2013 to 2020⁹ reveals that they often mention homeless migrants. Of the 32 reviewed issues of the Blue Cross magazine, 17 included articles on homeless migrants, with two such articles featured on the frontpage. Regarding DanChurchSocial’s magazine, 36 of the 41 reviewed issues included articles on migrants and homelessness, although some did not mention their non-EU status. Although coverage slightly decreased from 2018, activities related to migrants have not become hidden. The charities’ organisational profiles may have changed less than is perceived among shelter staff.

Dealing with public authorities and the media may represent a balancing act for the charitable organisations. An incident in 2017 illustrates how fears over funding, legality discourses and bordering policies interact to challenge the legitimacy of caring for unregistered migrants. A broadcasting crew secretly recorded an employee explaining to a migrant that, without a yellow card, the only jobs available would be in the informal sector.¹⁰ When the footage was televised, the employee was accused of having encouraged and even helped the migrant to find employment within the black economy (Godtfredsen, 2017). Consequently, Kompasset was forced to return funding totalling EUR 23,000 to the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Ministry subsequently underlined that help should be offered to people with established legal status in Denmark (Ritzau, 2017)

The charity faced a dilemma between conforming to these stricter interpretations and jeopardising anonymity as a core principle of the organisation. Should they no longer accept the many users known only by their nicknames? Was it even possible to verify all users’ legal status, let alone separate those allowed to work from those allowed to stay? So far, the organisation has firmly rejected taking any responsibility regarding users’ legal status. As expressed by the head of DanChurchSocial, ‘*People’s identity and legal status can only be regulated by the police and the public administration. This is not a matter for private persons or organisations to judge*’ (Godtfredsen, 2017).

As these comments show, the incident spotlighted an existing ambivalence within the organisation. Fearing that additional public exposure could endanger their financial foundation, the charity’s leader refrained from questioning the legitimacy of the accusations. Instead, they underscored the importance of respecting the law: ‘*Law is law and people are people. We do not turn away people in need [...] but if it is unlikely that their stay is legal, then we will help, for example, by assisting persons to get repatriated through the municipal programmes*’ (Korshærsbladet, 2018: 2 ; see also Godtfredsen, 2017). As it is impossible to conduct repatriation and legality checks without checking people’s papers, doing so would mark a retreat from the charity’s principles of anonymity and unconditional care for all and a further step into the field of border control and monitoring. To date, such monitoring of users has not been carried out.

Conclusion

To the overall question of whether private, non-profit, low-threshold shelters unwittingly contribute to shaping borders and migration regimes when caring for homeless non-nationals, the answer remains ambiguous. This study's analysis confirms that cities such as Copenhagen increasingly act as gatekeepers for internal border regimes, as proposed by Fauser (2019), Lebuhn (2013) and others, and that caregiving shelters and day centres do play a role therein.

As the study reveals, bordering occurs not only at national borders but also in shelters, where divisions are created between 'our' homeless and the migrant 'others'. This happens through the key mechanism for selective policies at the city level: the social security card, which has also become especially difficult for third-country residents to acquire. The selective workings of the card have been largely intentional (regulated through national legislation) and reinforced by a number of punitive measures, such as the banning of begging and rough sleeping. Less deliberately, the yellow card has contributed to certain shelters being considered as places of disgust, thereby furthering divisions between homeless of different nationalities. Understanding how such selective processes work at the city level may indeed be key to grasping how the city is rooted in everyday practices of urban bordering and how this contributes to urban marginality.

According to some scholars, this 'culture of control' may be seen as part of larger urban policies aiming to exclude the homeless and make the city safer and more attractive to tourists and investors. Yet this representation of the homeless city as a landscape of despair is challenged not only by the agency of the homeless and their abilities to resist regulations but also by the activities of private charities. This resonates with the thinking of Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011). It contributes to urban studies by regarding migrants not as victims of neoliberal urban governance (as proposed by Hansson and Mitchell, 2018), but as agents who negotiate and resist the enforced precarity they encounter in Copenhagen. This is manifested through active use of the opportunities offered in the city, including the support provided by citizens willing to share their bottles and even their credit cards, as well as the services provided by private charities, which homeless migrants have 'massaged' to work in their favour. By thus forging of new relations with local residents and creating infrastructures to support their alternative income-generating strategies, homeless migrants are contributing to reshaping the city. Apart from showing that there is more to homeless life than bare survival, these strategies underline the vital role of private shelters and day centres in supporting homeless migrants in their economic and social activities. This joint resistance furthermore exemplifies Lebuhn's (2013) idea that when bordering mechanisms move to the cities, local actors and institutions may have more scope to carve out space-specific places of rights and recognition.

The notion of migration industries, which has received little attention from urban scholars so far, can help us better understand the role of NGOs and care organisations in producing urban migrant marginality. Finding themselves as the primary caregivers to migrant homeless, the private charities also involuntarily assume an important role in structuring service infrastructure. In response to the concurrent rise in homeless migrant numbers and denial of access to public shelters, private charities widen their scope and enlarge their activities to include advocacy and documentation. The state and municipalities engage little in providing solutions to this increasing social problem, leaving space for the charities to gain influence over interpretative frameworks for developing and enacting assistance. Although this position has further bolstered the charities' role within the migrant care sector, it has also unintentionally heightened their risk of further entrenchment in international border regimes.

Finally, hat as this research shows, the changing role of private charities with regards to homeless migrants and their gradual absorption into the migration industry has been unintentional. A better understanding of this dynamic also improves our grasp of neoliberal outsourcing, through which migration-related functions are being transferred from public to private entities. However, to fully understand the processes that modify the function and performance of urban agents as well as migrants' access to and exclusion from rights and resources in the city, the migration industries concept needs to be combined with insights from the literature on urban borderlands as well as with the e work on urban marginality.

Notes

1. Persdotter (2019: 93) quotes Theresa May announcing such a policy during her time as UK Home Secretary in 2012. Several Danish politicians have made similar statements (e.g. Karen Jespersen, Minister of Social Affairs, quoted in Claudi and Dahlgaard, 2007:1; Marcus Knuth, integration spokesperson (Venstre), in Søndergaard, 2018; Karsten Lauritzen, integration spokesperson (Venstre), in Agger, 2009; Mai Mercado, Minister of Social Affairs (Conservative People's Party), Dan Jørgensen (Socialdemocrat), in Møller, 2017).
2. The 2021 registration of homeless people has been postponed due to COVID-19.
3. Minister of Social Affairs, Karen Jespersen, quoted in Claudi and Dahlgaard (2007, p.1).
4. This practice was later modified when a complaint was filed in 2013 by DanChurchSocial. Nonetheless, the exclusion of unregistered homeless is still widely practised. Additionally, migrants using such public services risk being expelled if they become what is termed 'an unreasonable burden on the social assistance system of the host country' (Kompasset, 2017: 4).
5. For third-country nationals, work permits are issued only if the applicant has specialised skills for a role that cannot be filled by EU citizens (<https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Applying/Work>).
6. According to Kompasset (2017: 8), the large majority of their clients stayed in Denmark for less than six months.
7. Tremblay et al. (2010: 424) reported incomes among Canadian bidders of EUR 15–35 a day (2010, 424). In Copenhagen, migrants interviewed by the author reported incomes during winter of EUR 3–4 on weekdays and EUR 40–50 a day at weekends, but considerably more in the summer period. However, Copenhagen bottle pickers refer to summer festivals as the 'big jackpot'. Here a full week's hard work can earn them EUR 1,500–4,000 (Juul, 2017: 143).
8. Such statements were made by Mai Mercado, former Minister of Social Affairs (Conservative) in Godtfredsen, 2017); Frank Jensen (Lord Mayor of Copenhagen, Socialdemocrat); Inger Støjberg (Former Minister of Integration, Venstre; TV2, 2014); and Trine Bramsen (Socialdemocrat; Folketingstidende, 2018), but also voiced by many others.
9. *Blå Kors Bladet* (Blue Cross) is published four times per year, while *Korshærsbladet* (DanChurchSocial) is published between four and six times per year.
10. Grace was also subjected to secret recording, but no 'irregularities' were found (Staff interview, Blue Cross, 2021; see also Møller, 2017).

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