This is a pre-copy-editing, author-produced PDF of an article accepted following peer review for publication in *Urban Studies*.

Antonin Margier, Université Rennes-2

Geoffrey DeVerteuil, Cardiff University

TITLE: GROWTH AND FLEXIBILITY AT THE MARGINS? THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-WELFARE PORTLAND

ABSTRACT:

In this article, we shed light on the growth and flexibility of the voluntary sector as it responds to the housing crisis in American cities. To do so, we adopt a perspective from the margins of the post-welfare city (using governmentality studies), focusing on obscure grassroots actors at the interface of the state, the voluntary sector and civil society. Based on fieldwork carried out in Portland, Oregon (USA), this paper analyzes city code changes and incentives as government technologies, to shed light on how civil society and voluntary organizations operating at the margins are made responsible for providing resources and participating in the response to homelessness, while simultaneously having their practices subjected to control. We argue that, far from being excluded, some organizations at the margins are selected by the state for inclusion in the voluntary sector, while others remain at the margins as a way to delegitimate their own interventions and the way they provide services.

Key words: homelessness, margins, voluntary sector, post-welfare city, governmentality, Portland

Introduction

In 2024, the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that more than 770,000 individuals were experiencing homelessness in the United States (HUD, 2024). While the extent of homelessness varies from city to city, this crisis is especially severe and visible in West Coast cities, where rents have dramatically skyrocketed, resulting in many households ending up on the streets and in many encampments materializing over public spaces in the main cities (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland). Due to the restructuring of the welfare state amid a context of austerity, public resources in response to the crisis have become decidedly limited. Many social services are therefore provided by voluntary organizations. The voluntary sector is “all” (DeVerteuil et al, 2020: 921). The voluntary sector has, for the past 30 years, increasingly partnered with the state (sometimes unwillingly) as part of the ‘shadow state’ (Wolch, 1990).

More recently, scholars describe the voluntary sector as a crucial if contradictory player in the so-called post-welfare city (DeVerteuil, 2017; Fairbanks, 2011). The post-welfare city is marked by a "period of intensely coordinated activity to dismantle the liberal welfare state in accordance with the new ideological and political imperatives of market liberalism" (Fairbanks, 2009: 17). However, several scholars have emphasized the perpetuation of previous welfare arrangements, even as they reconfigure and diversify (May & Cloke, 2014; DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Parallel to the rise of punitive policies whereby the voluntary sector does the state’s neoliberal “dirty work”, we can paradoxically observe an expansion of care and supportive services for the homeless (shelters, food banks, social work, etc.) and a diversification of the actors involved in their management (grassroots organizations, volunteers, etc.) (Cloke et al., 2007; Laurenson & Collins, 2007; DeVerteuil, 2019). This ambivalent and sometimes

contradictory patchwork characterizes the post-welfare city, featuring both neoliberal policies against, and supportive policies towards, under-served populations (Fairbanks, 2011).

In this paper, we are most interested in the process whereby the growth and flexibility of the voluntary sector in a purported post-welfare city is best understood *from the margins* and *at the margins*, especially its interface with civil society and especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. By margins, we mean the edges both spatially and conceptually (Lancione, 2016), focusing on the post-welfare city. As such, the margins can be approached as both a method to approach sites on the periphery, as well as a particular perspective on change that is otherwise difficult to perceive from the center. 'From' the margins implies a certain methodological perspective that could be highly productive in examining the emergence and even contradictions in the power dynamics of provisional political and social trends, in this case the (incomplete) patchwork that is the post-welfare city as it underwent the pandemic, including marginal civil society actors that tend to go unnoticed. 'At the margins' implies a certain subordination, exclusion and bordering of particular places and agents but also of potential innovation, liberation and improvisation that lie beyond the gaze of the state (DeVerteuil et al, 2022). This innovation and liberation are very much improvised and provisional, in the shadows of power. By civil society, we mean the intimate, un-coerced, informal mechanisms linked to family, neighbors, neighborhoods, and communities. Civil society is far less formal when compared to the voluntary sector, and far less coercive than the state in its power. It is also a site of improvisation during times of crisis, when communities can come together to fill the pressing gaps left by the state, market and voluntary sector. The combination of 'at' and 'from' the margins constitutes a key contribution of the paper, throwing in greater relief what is precarious and unsung but also potentially promising in terms of how

the voluntary sector, in concert with the state, grows at the interface with other societal agents, especially civil society.

To provide an effective perspective of the margins around power, subordination, exclusion and bordering, this paper draws on governmentality studies as a means to identify the ways in which the civil society and volunteer groups are "activated" by the local government in order to address crises in the post-welfare city, including homelessness. From this perspective, we shed light on how micro-practices emerging at the margins of the state are codified and institutionalized by public authorities. In particular, we emphasize how responsibilization is employed as a governmental technique to curb these practices and align them with the official public response to homelessness. Using the case study of Portland (Oregon), we analyze city code changes and incentives as government technologies in order to shed light on how civil society and voluntary organizations operating at the margins are made responsible for providing resources and participating in the response to homelessness, while simultaneously having their practices subjected to control.

In the first part of the article, we review the existing literature on the voluntary sector in the post-welfare city, and develop a framework based on governmentality studies to understand the changes in the relation between the state and civil society within the context of homelessness management. We then focus on Portland to examine the government technologies that are used by the local government in order to involve civil society groups from the margins in the deployment of public programs and policies aimed at addressing homelessness through the development of tiny home villages. In the last part, we discuss these examples with regards to our conceptual framework, arguing that the technologies implemented by public authorities aim at giving the responsibility of housing crisis management to civil society, while simultaneously controlling the way they respond to this

crisis. This paper then contributes to studies on the incomplete post-welfare city by focusing on the ways in which the state "activates" (or not) civil society and the voluntary sector through government technologies geared towards the margins as a site and interface, as well as the value of a perspective *from* the margins.

The post-welfare city, the voluntary sector and civil society

The post-welfare city has its conceptual antecedents in Wolch's (1990) work on the emergence of a "shadow state" [1], through which a new mode of state withdrawal transformed the delivery of resources to the poorest part of the population, especially in a context of austerity (Trudeau, 2008; DeVerteuil, 2017; Power et al., 2022; Power & Hall, 2018). The financial disengagement of the state resulted in a reconfiguration of poverty management, notably by promoting the development of the voluntary sector. In the American context, while the share of social welfare spendings transferred directly from the state to citizens living in poverty has largely decreased since the 1980s (Allard, 2009), state funding of the voluntary sector has become widespread (Marwell and Gullickson, 2013). This "non-profitization" of poverty management (Bonnet, 2019) thus reflects a privatization of social assistance (Marwell, 2004; Hasenfeld and Garrow, 2012) as the state contracts social intervention with private actors. This ensured that the state retained control over the shadow state.

[1] Wolch (1990) analyzed the economic restructuring and the transformation of the welfare state in the United States and in the UK between 1960 et 1990. According to Wolch, these transformations resulted in the rise of civil society and volunteers, which gave rise to the emergence of a shadow state. The shadow state is described as: "a para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, yet remaining within the purview of state control" (Wolch, 1990: xvi).

But beyond these voluntary sector organizations (often composed of social work professionals), many other civil society actors now informally provide resources and services to marginalized people, in the form of grassroots organizations and community groups (Fairbanks, 2011), volunteers (Cloke et al., 2007) or faith-based organizations (Johnsen, 2014). This scholarship highlights the diversification of actors in charge of providing social resources (Bonnet, 2019; Hasenfeld and Garrow, 2012) and the ways in which certain arrangements, whether institutional or informal (Fairbanks, 2011), are implemented to compensate for the decline of the welfare state and "maintain" a set of social services for the poor (Power et al., 2022).

Scholars have debated the relationship between these service providers and the state. Some authors argue that these organizations are mobilized by the state to do its “dirty work” in the service of neoliberal policies (Peck &Tickell, 2002; DeVerteuil, 2017). To wit, the voluntary sector has relatively little scope for challenging state policies. This is particularly obvious for voluntary organizations who receive government fundings for providing services: “while nonprofits take responsibility for service provision, the state maintains control over who can receive services, how much they can receive and for how long they can receive the services” (Trudeau, 2008: 671). Trudeau also emphasizes how voluntary organizations negotiate the state authority over their practices and the ways in which they “buffer themselves from state influence” (2008: 674). Trudeau further “invite[s] scholars to examine the evolving arrangements of power between state institutions and voluntary sector organizations that constitute the shadow state” (2008: 687). Other scholars focus on civil society and grassroots organizations, perceived as more independent from the state, providing services in a way that is supposed to overcome the abandonment of the state, to subvert austerity policies and punitive policies (Fairbanks, 2011), and influence public policies

managing poverty (Margier, 2024). But for most of these authors, these organizations remain in the "shadows of the shadow state" (Benson, 2022).

We argue in this paper that these organizations, located at the margins of the post-welfare city, are *potentially* (1) beyond the subordination, exclusion and bordering that usually characterize agents at the margins, and that they (2) are especially revealing of the emerging trends in the incomplete patchwork of the post-welfare city, particularly during and in the wake of the pandemic. Following on from this second point, and as a means to understand the ways in which non-state actors are enrolled in the public response to homelessness, we deploy a governmentality approach. We argue that this approach can be decidedly useful in terms of understanding the growth and flexibility of the voluntary sector as it interfaces with civil society agents.

Governmentality and the conduct of conducts

A Foucauldian governmentality approach can frame the transformation in the techniques of government as they unfold in the post-welfare city (Raco & Imrie, 2000; Rosol, 2015). This scholarship is particularly relevant to grasp the ways in which relationships of power evolve within the restructuring of the state in advanced economies. From his genealogical study of power over centuries, Foucault develops the concept of governmentality as a way to understand the modern state and refine his own theory of power.

According to Foucault, governmentality aims at orienting individual behaviors toward a unified goal; it thus refers not only to political structures but primarily to the "art of government". In that perspective, governmentality is not reduced to the state but includes a wide range of techniques and mechanisms to control populations. As it aims at managing populations, governmentality is referred to as the "conduct of conducts", which ranges from

governing others to governing the self. In Foucault's perspective, a relation of power is a mode of action that does not intervene directly upon others but rather on their own actions: "to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1982:790). In this perspective, governmentality requires the freedom of the individuals who are conducted by others, and power, according to Foucault is "exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault, 1982: 790). Thus, "personal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise, the more so because most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations" (Rose and Miller, 1992:174). Unlike violence, the relation of power implies the recognition of the other as an acting subject, and it is always "a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects *by virtue of their acting or being capable of action*" (Foucault, 1982:789). As argued by Rose and Miller (1992: 174), power "is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom". That is the reason why, in order "to understand power in its materiality, its day-to-day operation, we must go to the level of micro-practices, the political technologies in which our practices are formed" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 185).

Governmentality scholarship can be usefully applied to current modes of poverty management, as a way to understand the patchwork post-welfare city via its margins, in particular the interface between the voluntary sector and civil society. The contemporary retraction of the welfare state, which is often associated with less state intervention, does not necessarily mean less government (Raco and Imrie, 2000). Rather, it is part of a transformation of rationalities and techniques of government that are aimed at using "citizens, individually and collectively, as ideally and potentially 'active' in their own government" (Osborne and Rose, 1999: 751). The mobilization and the instrumentalization of

techniques and agents other than those of the State have become a means to "govern at a distance" (Rose and Miller, 1992, p. 181). In this perspective, technologies of government "refer to the mechanisms through which specific authorities attempt to shape, normalize, and instrumentalize the conducts, thoughts, decisions, and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objects and objective they consider politically desirable" (Barretta and Busco, 2011: 212). They "address the challenge of shaping individual behavior not only through legal frameworks but also through strategies and tactics of guidance and control" in order to align governmental and individual objectives-an alignment that "is essential for achieving governmental legitimacy, as it demonstrates the possession of vital knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of the citizenry" (Rodríguez, 2025, p.206). Public policies and programs are thus deployed through these technologies and the instrumentalization of self-governing properties of individual citizens. In the post-welfare city, it is all the more important to analyze government technologies, as they are implemented, to understand the ways in which the state "activates" the voluntary sector and governs the conducts of individuals and community groups, with the aim of steering their practices toward the objectives defined by public authorities. In the contemporary context of multiple crises and austerity, the governmentality framework seems relevant to analyze the evolution of the voluntary sector and the ways in which civil society is enrolled in the response to poverty.

This governmentality approach is especially relevant as a means to frame and understand the growth and flexibility of the voluntary sector *from the margins* but also *at the margins*. Unlike Marxist thinkers who view the state as central, Foucault argues that the institutional nature of the state derives from governing practices rather than the other way around, making his perspective particularly relevant for examining how practices located at the margins are codified and incorporated in institutional responses to homelessness. To

reiterate from the introduction, 'from the margins' is a methodological perspective that can incorporate governmentality, as well as notions of the incomplete nature of the post-welfare city. 'At the margins' is a peripheral position within this post-welfare patchwork, at the potentially consequential interface of the voluntary sector and a more amorphous civil society. To us, this interface is usually ignored, but became increasingly prominent – yet also blurred - during the pandemic. We believe that this perspective from the margins, at the margins, fills an important gap into how the voluntary sector interacts with civil society - in terms of growth but also in capturing a certain flexibility.

Study context and methods: From the margins in Portland

Renowned for its livability[2], Portland became a model for many policymakers and planners (Hagerman, 2007). While the implementation of quality-of-life policies brought back middle class and capital towards the center of the city, it further reinforced spatial inequalities and contributed to Portland's 'uneven development' (Goodling *et al.*, 2015). The city indeed had the highest rent increases in the United States between 2006 and 2015, with the average rent climbing 63% while tenants' incomes rose only 39%. This rise has continued throughout the years as Portland rental rates rose more than anywhere else in the country during the height of the pandemic - the median rent was up to 39.7% in 2021 alone (Hendrickson, 2022). Consequently, over half of the tenants spend more than 30% of their incomes on rent and one quarter of them more than 50% (Portland Housing Bureau, 2021). Alongside this, the city is experiencing a shortage of 25,000 affordable housing units within Multnomah County,

[2] In 2020, Portland has been ranked the 9th best place to live in the U.S. News and World Report.

hence the average waiting time for a city's affordable housing unit is five years (Peel, 2022). This has led to many households ending up on the street. The latest Point-In-Time count in Multnomah County revealed that more than 12, 000 individuals were counted as experiencing homelessness in 2025 (Mongeau Hugues, 2025). However, a report based on a broader definition of homelessness – aimed at including hidden homeless populations which are usually not captured in the city's Point-In-Time count - found that 38,000 individuals experienced homelessness in 2017 in the Portland tri-county region (Zapata *et al*., 2019).

As a result of the lack of available shelter beds, encampments have sprung up in public spaces throughout the city. In order to address these glaring deficiencies, the previous mayor declared a *State of Emergency on Housing and Homelessness*, as a means to expand financial capacities and to remove existing barriers to the experiments and the development of alternative models for addressing homelessness. This State of Emergency gave the opportunity to public authorities to suspend some rules, to introduce more flexibility in the application of the code and then to develop innovative responses to meet the needs of the growing homeless population.

This paper draws from a fieldwork conducted by the lead author over the last few years in Portland (2019-2024). Qualitative research methods were used to collect data, the main one being interviews. About 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a wide range of actors (e.g. voluntary sector and civil society), from those in charge of the design and implementation of public policies to end homelessness (policy makers (8), outreach workers (6), homeless advocates (5), shelter managers (4), police officers (3)), through individuals and private organizations (neighborhood associations and volunteers (8), grassroots organizations (5), business improvement districts (1)) providing resources to the homeless individuals themselves. The sampling was expressly designed to capture a perspective 'from the margins',

including peripheral civil society organizations that are usually missed because of their size or stance, or their flexible nature. Yet during the pandemic, these usually unsung actors became more prominent at the margins of the post-welfare city. The interviews averaged one hour and consisted of questions designed to elicit perceptions of the City's solutions to end homelessness. The interviewees were asked to give their own viewpoints on public policies for ending homelessness and providing resources to homeless individuals in the city. Voluntary sector stakeholders were invited to express their positions about their relation with the State actors, and vice-versa. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded for thematic content. Specifically, these interviews focused on three main themes: (1) the local context for the emergence of voluntary sector organizations in the governance of homelessness; (2) the means of their interventions and the conditions under which they provide resources; (3) the relationships between public authorities and voluntary/civil society organizations that are involved in the delivery of resources to unhoused people. The combined perspective afforded by these themes aimed at understanding the rationalities and the techniques that drove the voluntary sector to involve itself in the public response to homelessness at the interface with civil society. More specifically, as the aim was to follow the power in a Foucauldian perspective, the data was coded for themes related to the 'conduct of conducts' whether through incentives, encouragements, or control and coercion. These themes were then analyzed in relation to the interviewees' specific roles. This approach was designed to understand how power circulates through society and how macro-level strategies and micro-level practices become intertwined in shaping the public response to homelessness.

To provide a more detailed picture of the interconnections between public policies, local government strategies and the delivery of resources to unhoused individuals, an analysis of complementary sources of data (urban planning policies, articles in the local media,

reports, etc.) was carried out. Public meetings at the city hall were observed and volunteers were followed on the ground in order to understand how they meet the needs of the most underserved individuals in public spaces. While we acknowledge the importance of the intertwinement of state scales in policy development (Brenner, 2004), our research focuses on local state actors—including elected officials and municipal employees as well as public institutions. Our aim is to observe what occurs at the boundaries of what is conventionally referred to as the state and highlight the porosity between local state institutions and non-state actors operating at the margins.

City code changes as a means to involve and control voluntary and civil society organizations in the management of homelessness

During the COVID-19 lockdown, libraries and cafés were closed, and the capacities of the shelter system were reduced to ensure social distancing. Homeless people were thus deprived of their means of subsistence and safe places to rest. In response to this situation, a coalition of local grassroots organizations and voluntary sector organizations (C3PO) was set up to address the crisis. They convinced public authorities to support them in order to find solutions and to develop tiny home villages which appeared as the most easy-to-build and cost-effective solution for sheltering the unhoused individuals left behind in public spaces during the pandemic. With the support of public authorities, these grassroots organizations managed to develop and build (in just a few weeks) three villages composed of 40 to 60 tiny-homes. Given their position at the margins, these organizations operate in a more informal way than the voluntary sector (Darby, 2016) and, as such, usually have more flexibility to provide resources. Interestingly, it is precisely these characteristics that public authorities were looking for during the pandemic for coping with these exceptional circumstances

(Margier, 2023). Led by a homeless advocacy group (*Right To Dream Too*[3]), the coalition started to operate these villages, supported self-management and provided social services and meals to the unhoused. Although the relationship between local grassroots organizations (especially those promoting self-managed homeless villages) and public authorities have been marked by suspicion over the last decade, this example emphasized the ability of civil society to provide services that meet efficiently the needs of the homeless population. However, it is worth noting that these villages were originally intended as temporary solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, public authorities ultimately decided to sustain these micro-villages. This continuation, along with the ongoing public funding directed towards them, consequently required management by a professional social work organization. Thus, an organization with which public authorities were accustomed to collaborating was awarded the contract, and their social workers arrived on site, imposing a different style of management—more top-down and disciplinary than the self-management previously promoted by the grassroots civil society organizations. As a result, the latter abandoned the villages, no longer recognizing their own approach.

The margins became more attractive to the state and the voluntary sector during the pandemic, for a variety of reasons. Bottom-up and citizen-led initiatives were perceived by public authorities as a resource that could be "activated" and could help to implement public strategies for addressing homelessness. After the lockdown, the Housing Bureau of the City of Portland announced the development of six Safe Rest Villages which were to be built at the end of 2021, highlighting the shift of public stakeholders towards the promotion of the village model. But beyond this policy, the Housing Bureau of the City of Portland also decided to

[3] Right To Dream Too is a self-governed tiny-home village in Eastside Portland. They built a first village downtown on a vacant lot before being relocated in the east side. They promote and support the development of self-managed tiny home villages for addressing the housing crisis.

make changes in the City code to make it easier to build tiny home villages for civil society. As mentioned by a manager in charge of making these changes, they “allow for shelters to be set up in more zones and it created outdoor shelter as a community service [...] So the outdoor shelter is now entered in the city code” (Housing Bureau, manager). The Shelter to Housing Continuum package (2021) contained code changes that make it easier to site homeless shelters and associated services in various zones. From that perspective, it:

> allows public agencies and community-based nonprofits to open more shelters like the Kenton Women's Village or St Johns Village. Until the S2HC [Shelter to housing continuum] amendments were adopted, outdoor shelters required code exemptions from City Council one at a time. The adopted code provides a *more routine path to permit these kinds of facilities*, based on emerging alternative shelter models around the city (City of Portland, undated).

In order to promote the development of “outdoor shelters” by civil society groups located at the interface with the voluntary sector, some guidelines were published by the Housing Bureau to structure the different steps to follow to build a tiny home village. From this perspective, villages can now be developed by community groups, neighborhood associations or citizens, whereas before then tiny-home villages had to be approved by the city council to be legal. But, as in the case of the COVID-19 tiny home villages, the condition is to follow the required criteria and to be managed by a professional service provider. These changes arose from the awareness of public authorities that many local organizations willing to take their part in homelessness management lacked the financial and technical abilities to do so. These amendments clarify the development standards that outdoor shelters must meet. The City code changes and the publication of guidelines for developing outdoor shelters have been thought of as a means to encourage civil society and the voluntary sector to propose

solutions for addressing this housing crisis. It was conceived by public authorities as an incentive for residents, faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations to commit in the development of micro-villages, but also a means to increase the scope of volunteer actions and thereby extend the (indirect) reach of the state in the post-welfare city.

In that case, these changes aimed at enlarging the voluntary sector to absorb organizations located at its interface. Once the city issued these guidelines for temporary outdoor shelters in 2022, some residents saw an opportunity for helping their unhoused neighbors. A retired social worker developed WeShine, a civil society organization aimed at developing a tiny home village. Although the founder of this organization had no experience with homeless services, she used this new zoning code and the opportunities provided by public authorities for doing her part and responding to the housing crisis: “There was a change in the code. And so, it was in February of ‘22 when the city issued what they call guidelines for temporary outdoor shelter. And that's what allowed us to build these pods with the first permit that we have”. Using private land leased by a church and focusing on small scale gave the opportunity to WeShine to develop a 10-tiny home village in less than a year. As it fits with the criteria mentioned by the Housing Bureau, WeShine is funded by the Joint Office of Homeless Services for operating the village but it “does not fund 100% of the cost. And it also is… it's pretty generous about the money to build and to operate but where it's kind of stingy is it does not pay for WeShine to exist as an organization and have the infrastructure it needs to be able to build and manage multiple villages”.

This explains why the voluntary sector sought other funding so they could continue to develop and operate villages in the future. By focusing on small villages which are easier to develop, the aim of WeShine is indeed to build several villages throughout the city in the coming years. From this perspective, this organization is looking for commercial under-used

parking lots or properties owned by a religious facility: “we decided to go after privately owned land, that's part of businesses and neighborhoods being part of the solution”. This also gives the opportunity to build villages faster than public authorities[4]. As mentioned by a manager at the housing bureau (who is in charge of the code changes), “it would be ideal” if civil society could use these outdoor temporary shelter guidelines to build more villages.

Using the governmentality approach, these changes can be thought of as government technologies, defined by Rose and Miller (1992: 175) as specific practices, programs and procedures “through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions” and to align practices operating at the margins with the objectives of the local state. Even though these changes rely on the freedom and willingness of citizens and community groups to respond to the crisis, the conditions imposed by public authorities—such as the requirement for professional management—are intended to guide how care and resources are provided to homeless individuals, thereby reproducing the top-down management style of congregate shelters. As this approach is often criticized by grassroots organizations—who advocate for more compassionate, self-managed models of tiny home villages—their inclusion in the response to homelessness also serves as a means to control and shape the care practices they develop at the margins, aligning them with the dominant, macro-level conception of that public response.

Responsibilizing civil society

Our view from and at the margins afforded an important perspective on the growth and flexibility of the state and the voluntary sector at the interface with Portland’s civil

[4] The City was supposed to build 6 Safe Rest Villages composed of 10 tiny homes in 2021. In 2023, only 3 had been set up because of the difficulties to find publicly-owned pieces of land that fit with these projects, but also due to the opposition met in many neighborhoods.

society. What were some of the lessons, empirically but also conceptually and methodologically? The governmentality approach provided an understanding of how public authorities activate organizations and individuals who are often in the margins of the post-welfare city but who are willing to help homeless individuals. This activation highlights the *flexibilization* of the state in the post-welfare city, and the ways in which public authorities make the voluntary sector grow at its interfaces with civil society. This flexibilization especially rests on making civil society more responsible, and this has spread as a rationality within neoliberal societies.

Given that neoliberalism is underpinned by the conceptualization of individuals as rational and self-interested, it was not surprising that the state advanced discourses of *responsibilization* leading them to become enterprising selves (Teghtsoonian, 2009; Lemke, 2001). Such discourses urge "individuals, organizations and communities to take responsibility for enhancing their capacities, for responding to needs and challenges as these arise, and for monitoring and managing various different type of risks to which they may be susceptible" (Teghtsoonian, 2009: 29). But beyond self-management, "self-governed citizens are also made responsible for the welfare of family members and community members and even for participating in sustainable policymaking at a wider societal level (Houdt and Shinkel, 2014). The slogan "everybody has a responsibility" is part of this community responsibilization "that comprises expectations to deal with difficult health and social issues – such as mental health problems, criminality and violence – at the local level; that is to say, among 'ordinary' community members" (Juhila *et* al., 2017: 10). This is especially true in Portland where government technologies lead citizens to govern themselves (taking care of their neighborhood and unhoused neighbors), echoing the increase of responsibilities allocated to the local civil society in what Ilcan and Basok (2004) call "community government".

This responsibility of civil society to address the homelessness crisis is also perceived as such by voluntary-sector stakeholders. The manager of WeShine argues that one of the reasons why she developed this voluntary organization was that she was unsatisfied with public policies for ending homelessness. But she also thinks that civil society must be part of the solution:

> I think we felt that it it's not up to government to solve alone that. Faith communities, neighborhoods, businesses, all should be part of the solution and all need to join within. And that it's both unfair and ...it's never going to work to just hold government's feet to the fire and let them to solve it alone. It's too big, it's too much (WeShine, manager).

Similarly, the leader of the church that leases a piece of land to a grassroots organization for developing a tiny home village advocates for a necessary partnership between civil society and public authorities: “The problem is only gonna be solved when we all do it together” (Multnomah County, 2022). The Alternative Shelters Network (2022) that gathers local community groups working on the development of tiny home villages also refers to the role of civil society: “There is a place for government action and there is a place for community action. Both are required for a complete set of solutions. There is an immediate and ongoing need to act responsively and intentionally”. As a member of the Downtown neighborhood association also notes: “We don't want to be just complainers, we want to be a partner. We don't want to be nimbys, we don't want to be complaining that the city isn't doing enough. We want to give the city a chance to be successful”. The development of government technologies for making it easier for civil society to provide services to homeless people meets (and shapes) the self-perception by individual citizens as subjects of responsibility. Although the incentives allow individuals and community groups the autonomy to design

solutions for their homeless neighbors, the framework within which they can operate is limited, and several rules-including location criteria, visibility standards, and the obligation to be managed by a professional organization-constrain the range of solutions that grassroots and community organizations might develop. This regulated freedom highlights the tension between encouraging civil society initiative and maintaining centralized control on the solutions developed for responding to homelessness. This explains why certain organizations from the margins are favored over others in this process, ultimately shaping who gets to participate and what kinds of interventions are deemed legitimate.

A selective expansion of the voluntary sector at the margins

Despite the activation of civil society to expand the voluntary sector, this development is not without its limits, and is marked by improvisations and retractions. As mentioned above, power depends on the autonomy of individuals who have to make (good) choices. But the freedom of individuals must be used responsibly and in support of public strategies. In Portland, the government technologies implemented by public authorities are aimed at encouraging citizens and community groups to take action and to deliver resources to the unhoused people. That does not mean that all bottom-up initiatives are tolerated by public authorities, such as the meals delivered by Free Hot Soups Volunteers in Director Park, in Downtown Portland. Their visibility stirred up the anger of nearby businesses and led to rule changes (Mesh, 2019). In 2019, city officials indeed decided to require volunteer groups to obtain a permit from Portland Parks and Recreation and to hold events in public spaces no more than once a week. Many volunteer organizations as Free Hot Soups Volunteers that used to provide social services in the city's public spaces were then prevented to continue their work. As it operates without hierarchical leadership, these grassroots organization

volunteers say that these new regulations put an end to the services that has been in operation for six years (Harnish, 2019). The government thus uses the law to prevent some alternative ways to provide services, especially those that are visible in the center of the city. In response, several volunteers have sued the City of Portland over this rule restricting meal service to one day a week. This confirms how public authorities encourage actors to take part in the response to the housing crisis but in a specific way that supports public policies and strategies. Similarly, regarding the COVID-19 villages co-built by grassroots organizations and public authorities, once the initially valuable flexibility of grassroots actors was no longer deemed necessary, public authorities re-asserted the need to align with state objectives. As one official state: "There is part of that that is antithetical to a more grassroots mode, which is how [it] began. So, there's a disconnect there and a transition that needs to be made. Transitions are generally difficult […] These villages came together as a response to an emergency. To see what they built as a community and what they pulled together in such a brief amount of time, we want to honor that as much as possible. That said, these are no longer villages by way of residents. This is an alternative shelter run by a nonprofit" (quoted by Zielinski, 2021).

As argued by Juhila *et* al (2017:4): "responsibilization is thus not a total freedom of choice, but there are certain rules and boundaries based, for instance, on legislation or on expert knowledge". The same perspective is noticeable for tiny home villages: self-managed villages that popped up informally are always threatened to be dismantled (Margier, 2023) while the villages that comply with the criteria enacted by the Housing Bureau's guidelines are encouraged and supported. As Tonkens argues (2011: 61), one might notice the "co-occurrence of responsibilization and de-responsibilization" that restricts irresponsible citizens' autonomy, through other political technologies that include sanctions for a re-

responsabilization (Rose, 2000). Local activists who provide resources in a way that does not fit with the public strategies are deemed irresponsible, shedding light on the different visions of what should be done to provide assistance to the unhoused individuals. Any initiative to provide care and resources to homeless individuals from a different perspective than that promoted by public authorities is then deliberately marginalized.

Conclusions and contributions

The Portland example shed light on the ways – from the margins – in which the voluntary sector expands at its margins, interfacing with various civil society organizations within the context of the pandemic and post-pandemic and the uneven patchwork of the post-welfare city. Depending on the urgency of the situation, grassroots organizations, community groups or neighbors are absorbed in the public response to homelessness. These groups, whose point of view on the way to respond to the housing crisis might differ from public authorities, are often discarded (or their practices prohibited) as soon as they are no longer needed. This invites us to think about the situational dimension of the post-welfare city - that is never a static patchwork but always expanding or shrinking based on the ways it can sustain the implementation of public policies. Far from being out of reach, some organizations are plucked at the margins by the state to be included in the voluntary sector, while others are maintained at the margins as a way to delegitimize their own interventions and the way they provide services.

The governmentality approach enriched understandings of the transformation of the welfare state. Although much has been said on the ways in which volunteers and civil society have increasingly become providers of services for the poorest part of urban populations, this paper shed light on the pathways through which the state oversees (e.g governs) the

voluntary sector but also allows some leeway. As described by many scholars, the state's role as a provider of services has decreased and its role as "an allocator of resources" (Juhila et al, 2017) has increased as service provision is outsourced to the voluntary sector (Marwell, 2004). Thus, the state has "'rolled back' but it has not ceased to govern or 'steer'" (Juhila *et al*., 2017: 6), always keeping room for flexibility.

In Portland, the state governs at a distance through a set of political technologies that aim at compelling civil society to provide welfare assistance to the unhoused population. These technologies – including code changes – foster an incentive framework aimed at giving the opportunity to voluntary organizations, community groups and citizen individuals to promote initiatives for ending homelessness. In addition to the development of contracts by public authorities with professional voluntary sector organizations for operating public shelters or providing resources (Bonnet, 2019), this evolution highlights the willingness of public authorities to involve community groups and volunteers in the provision of services for unhoused people and to enlarge (the actors and) the responses to homelessness. The programs and technologies developed by the local government can be thought of as a "conduct of conducts" as they are aimed at being grasped by the civil society for enforcing the local homelessness policies. The development of these political technologies highlights how the increasing allocation of responsibilities to the local and society level (Ilcan and Basok, 2004) might proceed.

Through an assemblage of legal, financial and political apparatuses, public authorities manage to produce mechanisms of enrolment of civil society in the pursuit of its own goals. These technologies of government seek "to administer […] 'private' realms, and to programme and shape them in desired directions" (Rose and Miller, 1992: 180) that sustain public policies. Public authorities "activate" the civil society and community organizations to

be part of the solution for addressing homelessness in the post-welfare city. Based on the responsibilization of self-governing individual citizens, these technologies tend to transfer to civil society the responsibility to address the housing crisis, although not without limits or retractions.

Analyzing the growth of the voluntary sector *from the margins* and *at the margins* emerges as a fruitful perspective to better understand the patchwork nature of the post-welfare city, and constitutes a key contribution of the paper itself. Failing to examine the interface with civil society at the margins of the post-welfare city effectively obscures the various innovations and improvisations that can occur, however provisional, during times of crisis and immediately thereafter. Only a perspective from the margins can record the subtle interfacing when the state, the voluntary sector and civil society gingerly overlap and improvise 'at the margins' in provisional, unpredictable and surprising ways. This Foucauldian perspective is convenient for understanding how micro-relations and micro-practices unfolding at the margins are codified and institutionalized by public authorities. Such a theoretical path is also a way to analyze how micro resistances from the margins are deactivated or scaled up, and the relations of power through which the post-welfare city is maintained or transformed across the state, the voluntary sector and civil society. As the new Trump administration announced significant cuts to federal funding for nonprofits and social programs during its first months—forcing local governments to operate with diminished resources—this governmentality, centered on organizations operating at the margins, will likely expand in the coming years as a response to homelessness.

References:

A Home For Everyone (2020) First COVID-19 and now dangerous smoke: Gratitude for the community's support through yet another crisis in 2020. Available at: https://ahomeforeveryone.net/news (accessed 16 March 2023).

Alternative Shelter Network (2022) *Shared beliefs*. Available at https://www.shelternow.org/asn (accessed 19 march 2023).

Barretta A and Busco C (2011) Technologies of government in public sector's networks: In search of cooperation through management control innovations. *Management Accounting Research*, 22(2011): 211-219

Benson O (2022) Shadows of the shadow state: Grassroots, refugee-led organizations within a multi-scalar and contested resettlement institutional domain. *EPC: Politics and Space*, 40(8): 1745-1752.

Bonnet F (2019) The Upper Limit. How low-wage work defines punishment and welfare. Oakland: University of California Press.

Brenner N (2004) New State Spaces. Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood. Oxford: Oxford University Press

City of Portland (undated) *About the S2HC Project – Part 1 and Part 2*. Available at: https://www.portland.gov/bps/planning/s2hc/about-s2hc-project#toc-goals-of-part-2-of-the-project (accessed 20 march 2023).

Cloke P, Johnsen S and May J (2007) The periphery of care: emergency services for homeless people in rural areas. *Journal of Rural Studies* (23): 387-401.

Desmond M (2016) *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown Publishers.

DeVerteuil G (2017) Post-welfare city at the margins: immigrant precarity and the mediating third sector in London. *Urban Geography* 38(10): 1517-1533

DeVerteuil, G. (2019) Post-revanchist cities? *Urban Geography* 40(7): 1055-1061.

DeVerteuil G May J and Von Mahs J (2009) Complexity not collapse: recasting the geographies of homelessness in a 'punitive' age. *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (5): 646-666.

DeVerteuil G., Marr M. and Kiener J (2022) More than bare-bones survival? From the urban margins to the urban commons. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 112(7), 2080-2095

Dreyfus L & Rabinow P (1982) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fairbanks, R (2009) *How it works: Recovering citizens in post-welfare Philadelphia.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Fairbanks R (2011) The Politics of Urban Informality in Philadelphia's Recovery House Movement. *Urban Studies* 48(12): 2555-2570

Foucault M (1976) Histoire de la sexualité I, La volonté de savoir. Paris: Gallimard

Foucault M (1982) The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8(4): 777-795

Goodling E, Green J & McClintock N (2015) Uneven development of the sustainable city: shifting capital in Portland, Oregon. *Urban Geography* 36(4): 504-527

Hagerman C (2007) Shaping neighborhoods and nature: Urban political ecologies of urban waterfront transformations in Portland, Oregon. *Cities* 24(4): 285-297.

Harnish K (2019) New Portland Rules Could Abolish Free Hot Soup for Homeless People in Director Park. *Willamette Week*, October 25.

Hasenfeld Y & Garrow E (2012) Nonprofit Human-service organizations, social rights, and advocacy in a neoliberal welfare state. *Social Service Review* 86(2): 295-322.

Hendrickson V.L (2022) Rents are climbing fastest in Portland, Oregon; Austin, Texas; and New York City. *Mansion Global*. Available at: https://www.mansionglobal.com/articles/rents-are-climbing-fastest-in-portland-oregon-austin-texas-and-new-york-city-01650482005 (accessed 20 march 2023).

Houdt F & Schinkel W (2014) Crime, citizenship and community: neoliberal communitarian images of governmentality. *Sociological Review* 62(1): 47–67

HUD. 2024. *Annual Homelessness Assessment Report*, Part 1 – PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the US. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/ahar/2024-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us.html

Ilcan S & Basok T (2004) Community government: voluntary agencies, social justice, and the responsibilisation of citizens. *Citizenship Studies*, 8(2): 129–144

Johnsen S (2014) Where's the 'Faith' in 'Faith-Based' Organisations? The Evolution and Practice of Faith-Based Homelessness Services in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy, 43*(2): 413-430

Juhila K, Raitakari S and Hansen Löfstrand C (2017) Responsabilization in governmentality literature. In: Juhila K, Raitakari S & Hall C (eds.) *Responsibilisation at the Margins of Welfare Services*. London: Routledge, pp.11-34.

Lancione, M. (2016) The assemblage of life at the margins. In *Rethinking life at the margins*, ed. M. Lancione, 3–25. London and New York: Routledge.

Laurenson P and Collins D (2007) Beyond punitive regulation? New Zealand local governements' responses to homelessness. *Antipode* 39(4): 649-667.

Lancione M (2016) The assemblage of life at the margins. In Rethinking life at the margins, ed. M. Lancione, London and New York: Routledge, pp.3-25.

Lemke T (2001) The birth of bio-politics: Michel Foucault's lecture at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society* 30(2): 190–207.

Margier, A (2023) The institutionalization of 'tiny home' villages in Portland: Innovative solution to address homelessness or preclusion of radical housing practices? *Cities* 137 [DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104333]

Margier A (2024) Challenging the 'reticent state'? Grassroots organizations, COVID-19 and the local government. *Cities* 149 [DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2024.104997]

Marwell N (2004) Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors. *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 265-291.

Marwell N & Gullickson A (2013) Inequality in the spatial allocation of social services: Government contracts to nonprofit in New York City. *Social Service Review* 87(2): 319-353.

May J and Cloke P (2014) Modes of attentiveness: reading for difference in geographies of homelessness. *Antipode* 46(4): 894-920.

Mesh A (2019) Volunteers Sue Portland City Hall Over Requiring Permits to Serve Free Hot Soup. *Willamette Week*, November 27, 2019.

Mongeau Hugues L (2025) Homelessness continues to rise in Portland area even as increased services help thousands. *The Oregonian*, May 20, 2025.

Multnomah County (2022) *Beacon Village Alternative Shelter Program*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIuXGx2kWUE (accessed 19 march 2023)

Osborne T & Rose N (1999) Governing cities: notes on the spatialization of virtue. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 17: 737-760.

Peck J & Tickell A (2002) Neoliberalizing space. In Brenner N & Theodore N (eds) *Spaces of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Blakwell Press, pp.33-57.

Peel S (2022) Wait time for City of Portland's affordable apartments is five years. *Willamette Week*, 19 October.

Portland Housing Bureau (2021) State of housing in Portland: https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2022/phb-soh-2021-web.pdf

Power E & Hall E (2018) Placing care in times of austerity. *Social and cultural geography* 19(3): 303-313

Power E, Wiesel I, Mitchell E & Mee K (2022) Shadow care infrastructures: Sustaining life in post-welfare cities. *Progress in Human Geography* 46(5): 1165-1184

Raco M & Imrie R (2000) Governmentality and rights and responsabilities in urban policy. *Environment and Planning A* 32: 2187-2204

Rodríguez C (2025) Governmentality: The Core Tendencies in Contemporary Regulation. *Interciencia* 50(4): 205-210

Rose N & Miller P (1992) Political power beyond the state: problematics of government. *British Journal of Sociology* 43(2): 173-205

Rosol M (2015) Governing cities through participation – a Foucauldian analysis of CityPlan Vancouver. *Urban Geography*, 36(2): 256-276

Teghtsoonian K (2009) Depression and mental health in neoliberal times: A critical analysis of policy and discourse. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(2009): 28-35

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2022. *The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf

Tonkens E (2011) The embrace of responsibility. In: Newman J and Tonkens E (eds) *Participation, Responsibility and Choice: Summoning the active citizen in Western European welfare states.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 45–65.

Trudeau D (2008) Towards a relational view of the shadow state. *Political Geography* 27(2008): 669-690.

Wolch J (1990) *The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition. Foundation Center.*

Zapata M, Liu J, Everett L, Morrow E, Hulseman P, Potiowsky T & Willingham E (2019) Governance, costs, and revenue raising to address and prevent homelessness in the Portland tri-county region. Report, Portland State University.