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## (Finding) Pathways out of homelessness: An engaged, trans-disciplinary collaborative in the City of Tshwane

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### ABSTRACT

Street homelessness in the City of Tshwane was brought to public attention in the winter of 2014. This led to a composite research project involving different constituencies, including homeless people, to reflect on ways of addressing street homelessness in the city. This article serves as a conceptual and epistemological introduction to this collaborative research project entitled Pathways Out of Homelessness. The article argues for the use of a broad working definition of street homelessness that allows for complexities of homelessness to emerge, in order to discern diverse and appropriate alternatives.

### KEYWORDS

Homelessness; politics of generosity, compassion and justice; engaged communities; shared knowledge; trans-disciplinary research

## 1. Introduction

The notion of home conjures up meanings and feelings of rootedness, of shelter, of warmth and security and of being useful and responsible. A home or a roof is more than just a financial asset. It is a place where one lives permanently and where one belongs. A home provides an address and a location that confers rights on its inhabitants: they can vote, send their children to a local school, collect pensions and grants as well as access local health care and financial services.

Homelessness by comparison can mean the lack of shelter, rootlessness, alienation, instability and vulnerability. The sense of powerlessness of homeless people compared with those living in a home cannot be ignored. To be homeless is to be socio-politically and economically vulnerable. Homelessness means not having a fixed address. Homeless people are doomed to live in a world of non-recognition and become the invisible and voiceless victims of national and local socio-political structures.

During the winter of 2014, homelessness was brought to public attention in the City of Tshwane. This provided an opportunity to review the official approach to homelessness. The paucity of national guidelines and policies on homelessness influenced different constituents in the city to develop a combined approach. The City of Tshwane as responsible to ratepayers and taxpayers now needed to expand its responsibilities to include those whose circumstances do not allow for formal participation in the life of the city. The

Executive Mayor at that point requested the Tshwane Homelessness Forum and higher education institutions to work with the city in reviewing policy and drafting strategies to address homelessness, based on research and dialogued in the city's first Homeless Summit.

The thrust of this article is to frame the collaborative research project that emerged, conceptually and epistemologically, to give an overview of the methodology used and to provide a broad definition of homelessness that permits the complexities of trajectories into homelessness to emerge. In the absence of a coherent national and local policy on homelessness, this article – and the project it reflects upon – argues for a multidimensional approach to homelessness grounded in a politics of generosity, compassion and social justice. Other articles in this collection will explore specific strategic interventions in greater detail.

## 2. Homelessness in South Africa today

Homelessness is generally accepted as not having a permanent address and can include people without shelter, who were provisionally accommodated, who live in emergency shelters or on the streets, or who are at risk of losing their home. Although this project focused on street homelessness, it recognises that despite definitions of street homelessness being multiple and fluid they share the common concern of finding ways to reduce the number of homeless people.

Homelessness is not desired. Political and economic conditions and policies, inter-cine violence in a country, war and sexual or physical violence are examples of contributors to homelessness. During apartheid, policies were enacted to control the social mobility of black South Africans. The notorious influx control laws were designed to restrict black South Africans from entering urban areas legally. Blacks were not counted as homeless but as undesired persons to be removed and relocated to their designated areas as determined by the Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 and the Group Areas Act No 41 of 1950. It was only in 1986 that the apartheid state abolished the Influx Control Act No 68, which no longer criminalised black migration into urban areas.

The abolition of this Act changed migratory patterns into urban areas. An increasing number of previously barred people of all ages, races and sexes entered urban spaces in search of a better life. The increased number of migrants could not all benefit from existing social and kinship networks and swelled the number of homeless people.

The Mental Health Care Act of 2002 initially sought to provide for the care, treatment and rehabilitation of mentally ill persons as part of primary, secondary and tertiary health services. However, the de-institutionalisation of people with mental health problems added to the growing number of homeless people as their kith and kin were often unable to accommodate them.

In the last decade or more, foreign nationals who are refugees or asylum-seekers in South Africa also count among street homeless people. The flow of foreign and South African migrants into South African cities and towns added to the number of street homeless people. Over time they have moved from concentrating in the city centres to other regions in the city. It is not uncommon to find homeless people living next to streams, in city parks, in bushes and on vacant land. Street homelessness has spread across the city and includes formerly white suburbs and black townships.

A submission by the Tshwane Homelessness Forum (2012) into the City's policy development processes attempted to highlight the need for a holistic and integrated approach to address homelessness. A basic assumption of this research was that neither homelessness nor solutions to homelessness could be considered or addressed in isolation, without an appreciation for the many different faces and causes of homelessness, requiring diverse interventions. Any policy or strategy development process must give consideration to the varied psycho-social, economic, spatial, physical, political and spiritual contexts that define people and life in general.

### 3. Homelessness in the City of Tshwane: Finding collaboration

For many years the City of Tshwane sought to address homelessness through policy and strategy development. The first attempt dates back to 1998 and to the time of the Pretoria Inner City Partnership. Different policies drafted by consultants were not adopted. It was only in May 2013 that different consultants were engaged to draft the Tshwane Homelessness Policy, which was adopted. Challenges in implementing its recommendations, however, were experienced. From a structural perspective, the Policy lacked adequate budgetary support and strategies for implementation and can best be regarded as a stillborn policy that could not be translated into action.

The urgency of addressing homelessness and finding acceptable solutions was a reason for this collaborative approach. A major consideration for a collaborative project that combined academia, public sector and community, was the knowledge and experience that policies made independently of those affected by them are bound to encounter resistance. The tardiness of the state in producing coherent sets of guidelines or policies to address issues of homelessness was an added motivation for a shared effort. The levels of mistrust and uncertainties that prevailed around the intentions of public service agencies regarding service delivery also applied to the City of Tshwane.

The immediacy of addressing homelessness and the importance of durable and acceptable solutions demanded an innovative approach. This saw the emergence of cooperation between the City of Tshwane, higher education institutions in its midst and civil society as represented in this case by the Tshwane Homelessness Forum. This collaborative was conceptualised in September 2014 and formally launched on 5 December 2014 at the University of South Africa. The date of the formal launch was specifically chosen to commemorate the social justice legacy of Nelson Mandela who died on this day a year before.

The project followed a trans-disciplinary approach, as described by Klein et al. (2001), bringing together different sets of expertise to find real-world solutions for real-world problems. In the context of this project, a shared understanding of homelessness in the City of Tshwane and a shared working definition were required. The process was designed very deliberately in a way that enabled different knowledges to be retrieved, shared and contributed to the collective process of strategy development.

### 4. Understanding homelessness in the City of Tshwane

Gauteng, where the City of Tshwane is located, is the economic hub of South Africa, and Pretoria/Tshwane, as the administrative capital of South Africa, attracts people from all

over the country and even the world. Some enter Gauteng through the airport and therefore legally, whilst a substantial number of people do so using alternative points of entry and quite often in illegal ways.

Migration to urban centres is a worldwide phenomenon now regarded as one of the most influential factors of the twenty-first century. Saunders (2011) describes human population movement as redefining the cityscape. According to him, cities that create opportunity stand to benefit socially and economically but cities that marginalise and ignore migrants may experience increased social unrest as well as make poverty an inevitable consequence.

As the administrative capital, the City of Tshwane attracts migrants not only from rural South Africa but also from across Africa. Migrants enter the City with high hopes of finding a better life, but on failing to secure a sustainable income they become destitute and vulnerable, unable to rely on social and economic networks considered key to surviving in the city. The presence and increase of migrants into the city requires acknowledgement and attention. The current statistics show that 32.1% of street homeless people in the City of Tshwane come from within Gauteng Province, while 52.1% come from the other eight provinces and 15.8% are foreign migrants. Regardless of their origins, they share economic and social depravity and, by the sheer gradual increase in numbers, they are unwittingly reshaping the urban contours and redefining the rural–urban configuration. According to the 2011 Statistics South Africa figures there were 6244 street homeless people in the City of Tshwane, of which 3747 people were concentrated in Region 3. It is important to note the marked shift in the spread of street homeless people across the city. Twenty years ago, street homeless people were only found in areas that today constitute Region 3, or Central Pretoria. Today the remaining 2497 street homeless people are found in other regions of the city, mostly nodes of economic activity with a high concentration of shopping malls, construction sites and household job opportunities. This indicates an increasing suburbanisation of street homelessness, but also demonstrates the urgency for the City to address homelessness as part of integrated urban planning policies. It is interesting to note that less than 400 street homeless people were identified in predominantly black townships.

## 5. Towards establishing a working definition

This study acknowledges the relationship between different forms of vulnerability but considers street homelessness as the most extreme form of exclusion or marginalisation. This is well captured by Cross et al. (2010:18) in the following citation:

For the developmental state, the street homeless are the proverbial skeletons at the feast, the excluded poorest who enter unobserved and stand by gaunt and starved, terrifying to the invited guests but deprived of any capacity to join the party.

Cross & Seager (2010a) confirm that little is known about street homelessness, which substantiates the importance not only of a working definition but also of deepening insight through engaged research.

To establish a broad working definition for street homelessness, we consulted key texts. We noted the common ideas of rooflessness and rootlessness in the different approaches and supported a definition that includes a distinction between people living in shelters,

informal settlements and other forms of sub-standard housing and those who are on the streets and therefore ‘roofless’. The intersections between different forms of homelessness are acknowledged.

Our focus is on people who cannot claim to access a roof for the night. They are not living in informal settlements of sub-standard housing although the uncertainties and precariousness of life are similar (see De Beer et al., 2015:11).

This research benefited from the study on homelessness conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) between 2005 and 2008. Prompted by a homeless community using the HSRC building as their shelter, the research team produced a special edition on homelessness published in 2010 in *Development Southern Africa*. The principal aim of their study was to perform an ethnography of homelessness and the social services they have access to.

We especially considered the contribution of Sanchez (2010), who emphasised the importance of collaborative and constructive engagement between civil society and faith-based organisations and government, drawing on research she has done in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Street homelessness in this study referred to all individuals physically living without any form of shelter, on the street, on pavements, in bushes, in city parks or in other vacant urban spaces. We advocate a broader definition of homelessness compared to that of the HSRC that excludes ‘temporary overnight sleepers’, or as referred to by Cross et al. (2010) as ‘truly homeless’.

In contrast, we consider all people living on the streets, whether temporary or chronic, as homeless. We would argue that the slippage into chronic homelessness often starts with temporary overnight sleeping on the streets. Furthermore, it is also the inability of finding pathways out of homelessness early enough that turns the temporary into chronic homeless dwellers.

We acknowledge that meanings and analyses of home and homelessness can generate disagreement among social scientists (Duncan, 1981; Saunders, 1989). The different definitions assisted us in understanding the importance of creating a working definition applicable to understanding the local conditions of street homelessness. In this respect, we followed the approach of Hartshorn (1992) who tried to capture the variegated facets of homelessness by referring to economic homelessness, situational homelessness, chronic homelessness and what some would call ‘near’ homelessness.

In fact, the categories identified by Hartshorn (1992) provided us with a helpful entry into researching and understanding homelessness. They also provided us with a base from which to deepen our understanding of homelessness as well as contribute to the complexities thereof.

## 6. Research and curricula activities focusing on homelessness

This project accepts that researching homelessness in the City of Tshwane means building on existing bodies of knowledge. In addition to scholarly and academic knowledge, local knowledge of homelessness, residing in grassroots practices or interventions or in the lived experiences of (former) homeless people, equally forms the bedrock of this research.

Homelessness as part of its research agenda has not prominently featured at the three higher education institutions in Tshwane. The sporadic attention it receives is evident in

postgraduate research occasionally focusing on homelessness, or a recent publication edited by Mashau & Kritzinger (2014) reflecting on the narratives of homeless people in the inner city of Pretoria through a series of contextual Bible readings.

Our collective experience in trying to locate research on homelessness showed that such research often goes unnoticed, is hardly known or is often inaccessible. Recognising the value of such research requires a concerted effort on the part of those researching and reflecting on homelessness.

This research project hopes to give greater visibility to homelessness, both in public policy discourse but also in higher education institutions. Methodologically, the project has a threefold focus on documenting existing practices, narrating lived experiences and appraising current and related policy documents. It initially focused on Region 3 of the City of Tshwane and then extended its focus to include Regions 2 and 7. Phase two of this research will focus on extending homelessness research across the city and contribute documented evidence to inform policy decisions and strengthen academic knowledge on homelessness.

### **6.1. Documenting existing practices**

This research documented health, spatial and psycho-social practices in the City of Tshwane, aimed at facilitating pathways out of homelessness.

De Beer (2013) emphasised the importance of retrieving and documenting existing practices in discerning pathways out of homelessness. Such practices, he argued, had the potential to represent the ‘diverse voices, people and needs, often marginality and vulnerability, but, importantly, also “other ways of knowing”’. It invited the knowledge – actions, experiences, struggles, solutions – of community organisations and vulnerable or marginal populations, often excluded from main stream knowledge production’ (De Beer, 2013:7).

To gain insights into street homelessness, a total of 76 interviews were completed with practitioners working for 19 different civil society organisations involved with different issues of homelessness. The Department of Social Work at the University of Pretoria facilitated these interviews. The Department of Family Medicine conducted health assessments with homeless people in the inner city, including 1152 commercial sex workers working at 30 informal sites in the city, and about 300 drug users living on the streets (see De Beer & Vally, 2015:11–35).

In addition, the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria engaged in mapping and spatial analysis to help determine ‘where to locate shelters and other interventions spatially, if they are to be effective’ (De Beer & Vally, 2015:11). De Klerk (2015) asserts that mapping and spatial analysis of the existing topography and soft infrastructure in the inner city should be further developed as a design and planning tool to complement and support policy initiatives to create pathways out of homelessness.

### **6.2. Lived experiences**

Foth et al. (2007:7) convincingly reason that to address the plights and needs of society’s vulnerable persons, ‘we need to be sensitive to the needs and voices of the marginalized’ as well as ‘cultivate and recognise ‘an epistemology of difference’. This project thus considers

homeless individuals as essential contributors to constructing effective policies addressing this aspect of social vulnerability. Policies aimed at improving the living conditions of people must place their holistic freedoms at the centre of policy reflections.

It is about working with homeless people rather than for them. Homeless and former homeless individuals are invaluable in sharing experiences of drifting in and out of homelessness, or of finding sustainable pathways out of homelessness. Hence, a central component of this collaborative research project is to make spaces for the diverse voices of homeless and former homeless people to be heard and included in finding durable solutions. Using the ethnographic method to collect data on homeless experience helps avoid armchair-type assumptions.

This occurred through ethnographic interviews and documentation of narratives with homeless women, homeless refugees and asylum-seekers and homeless men at a drop-in centre in the inner city. It was complemented through the method of contextual Bible readings conducted by researchers from the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology at the University of South Africa, using this method to also trace and document the personal narratives of homeless women and men.

A very important space where the narratives, knowledge and contributions of homeless and former homeless people were clearly invited and documented was during the Tshwane Homeless Summit on 25 and 26 May 2015. Through the use of open space technology, participants were contributing in equal measure to the construction of a vision and strategic pillars for implementing such a vision out of homelessness (see De Beer & Vally, 2015:44).

Listening to people who were forced to live in the shadows of the city is also to stand existing paradigms on their heads, and creates spaces and processes where shared experiences and learning contribute to finding pathways out of homelessness.

### 6.3. Writing policy

Koopman (2009), in seeking to outline a prophetic public theological praxis, argues that engagement in policy-making and technical analysis of policy should be fundamental components in seeking to find sustainable pathways out of social vulnerability.

A key question underpinning this project relates to the sluggish conception and implementation of an appropriate policy on homelessness. According to documentary evidence, the City of Tshwane had commissioned different consultants between 1998 and 2009 to develop and propose policy on homelessness. The proposed policies were found inadequate and were thus neither approved nor implemented. Finally, in 2013, the City of Tshwane adopted the Tshwane Homelessness Policy, but this was never implemented due to reasons cited earlier. Civil society, city officials and eventually the former Executive Mayor of the city agreed that a collaborative research project was important for reviewing the existing policy but also to propose a strategy for implementation.

The Tshwane Homelessness Policy does not exist in isolation. In critically appraising the City's Policy and approach to dealing with homelessness, other local and national policy and strategy documents are also considered, amongst others the City of Tshwane Informal Traders Policy (2011), the City of Tshwane Integrated Poverty Reduction and Community Development Strategy (2008), the National Development Plan (2012), the Integrated Urban Development Framework (2014), the Social

Housing Policy (2008), the National Mental Health Policy Framework (2013–20) and the Street People Policy of Cape Town (reviewed in 2013). The project also engaged in comparative reflections on policy documents from the United Kingdom, Ireland, the USA and India.

All of these policies, as well as focus groups with policy-makers, city officials, homeless individuals, non-profit organisations, business and the police, helped to provide a context within which to consider social vulnerability. In their reflections on homelessness, Cross & Seager (2010b) offer important recommendations on policy, strategy and practices which this project also considers: the reduction or alleviation of homelessness; the prevention of homelessness; targeted interventions focusing on access to housing and shelter; as well as services and livelihoods.

## 7. Towards a new kind of politics

The initiative to collectively address homelessness is a conscious decision placing socio-economic justice and human dignity at the centre of deliberations, asking for political solutions permeated by compassion, generosity and social justice. Hankela (2012) looks at meanings of humanity in inner-city Johannesburg through the radical vision of Bishop Paul Verryn. For Verryn, radical solutions are needed to address the deprivation and vulnerability of homeless people. We subscribe to Verryn's idea of radical solutions and consider it a first step towards embracing the concept of radical humanity. Radical in this context refers to its original meaning and as such points to the core element that binds us and which is a basic response to the daily death-dealing, demeaning and debilitating realities faced by street homeless people.

### 7.1. A politics of compassion

Social justice theories asking for an eradication of human vulnerability and socio-economic precariousness put a politics of compassion at the core of their reflection and advocate that public policies and strategies cease from addressing homelessness as bureaucratic functions designed to find administrative solutions (cf. Fassin, 2011; Ure & Frost, 2014; Waite et al., 2014).

In creating spaces of reinsertion for homeless persons, compassion can be regarded as the element to counteract the cold and bureaucratic features of administrative policy-making. It is through such politics of compassion that the process of othering, where names and labels used to refer to homelessness persons as tramps, vagrants, hobos and more can be tackled. Through affirming the dignity of all as a basic human rights concept, the first steps are taken to assert that all inhabitants of the city, regardless of their social status, have a right to the City. Compassion, literally understood, is indeed about suffering with the other, creating deep bonds and common journeys of solidarity, exchange and mutuality, in which there is no longer 'us' and 'them' but an assertion of our common humanity. Compassion in this sense is not to be equated with charity, in a narrow, condescending sense of the word, or alms-giving, but rather with the fostering of new kinds of communities of solidarity. Human compassion can infuse political virtues and emotions.

The centrality of homeless people being present and heard during the whole process sought to embody a politics of compassion. It deliberately reframed the discourse and,

instead of othering people, the very people who are often the objects of our othering became subjects and companions in crafting a possible way ahead.

### **7.2. A politics of generosity**

For this project, we locate generosity within an ethical context that has raised questions around giving and receiving as ways of improving the human condition. Such questions have inspired philosophers like Kant, Adorno and Habermas, as well theologians like Coles (1997), to engage with the politics of generosity. Mauss (2002) speaks of the gift as part of a social system of reciprocity, and as essential in promoting and maintaining human solidarity. The precariousness of homeless persons does call for acts of generosity that embody human solidarity.

La Caze (2013) takes up the concept of wonder and asks that it be attached to generosity, race, class and sexuality to construct a philosophy and politics where human relations are built in a mutually respectful and non-appropriative way. Such generosity goes way beyond oppressive giving that violates the receiver (see Brontë, 1847), and acts from a position of radical hospitality. It will approach policy and strategy from a place of mutual respect for self and others, working collaboratively towards the common good, and replacing a culture of violent charity – hand outs and crumbs – with a culture of generous investment and reciprocity. What is required, therefore, are strategic interventions that are investing in sustainable alternatives to homelessness in the form of appropriate and tailor-made housing solutions, economic access and psycho-social infrastructure meeting people where they are at.

Van Marle (2014:52), in reflecting on the work of Justice Albie Sachs, regards his approach ‘as one of generosity, in all senses of the word’. For Van Marle (2014:52), at the heart of the concept of generosity, in the context of jurisprudence and the law at least, ‘is the idea of unexpectedness that breaks with the formality and predictability of law’. This could, however, apply to generosity in more general terms too, or the way we understand a politics of generosity in considering policy and strategy that will include and affirm homeless people, instead of criminalising and excluding them. In South African cities where homelessness is still criminalised and treated through law enforcement agencies, an urgent alternative politics needs to be asserted.

Van Marle (2014:52) continues to define her understanding of generosity as ‘a willingness to look widely, to stretch and push, to include many angles, to be unpredictable, but also to become human’. It ‘encompasses ... a certain kind of humanism’.

In this regard, the concept of wonder is broadened to address twenty-first-century concerns raised around refugees, reconciliation and homelessness beyond just ways of othering.

### **7.3. A politics of justice**

A decade after the demise of apartheid, Nelson Mandela in 2005 in London reminded the world that the eradication of poverty is about justice. He understood that political equality was only a first step towards liberation and that social security was an essential milestone in making freedom real:

Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings ... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice ... Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom. (Mandela, 2005)

Inspired by Nelson Mandela's wisdom, this collaborative project argues that policies designed to address poverty and social injustices must be premised on principles of social justice, equal rights and access to the City of Tshwane. Thus, the city and its politics of justice will not deal with homelessness in ways that patronise the socially vulnerable, make poverty more bearable or deal with homelessness as pathology, but will instead seek to address the structural causes of homelessness. Its politics of justice will go beyond welfare-based approaches to approaches that affirm the right of people to be in the city, to access city resources and to participate in city-making processes as participating citizens (see Gørgens & Van Donk, 2012:12–3).

This collaborative project is an attempt towards building a society on principles of social justice. The proposed strategy, with its emphasis on access to psycho-social, housing and economic opportunity, tailor-made according to the diverse faces of homelessness, and its insistence on appropriate budgets to ensure such access to just alternatives, is to practise a politics of justice.

## **8. From community engagement to engaged communities: Exploring collaborative action**

### **8.1. Beyond community engagement**

Community engagement as practised by higher education institutions, as pointed out by Botman (2012), often resembles acts of charity instead of fostering the kind of shared learning environments where mutuality and reciprocity can facilitate the education/liberation of both the academy (students and scholars) and community members alike.

Singh (2001), in writing about the social purposes of higher education, framed her arguments of transformation of higher education within a social justice and capabilities perspective as advocated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. A little more than a decade later, Bozalek & Leibowitz (2012) also emphasised the importance of the capabilities and social justice approaches and added the normative framework of a political ethics of care. They include an approach to community engagement that seeks institutional involvement beyond that which they describe as 'the privileged and wealthy administering charity to the marginalized' (Leibowitz, 2012:xxii). Modise & Mosweunyane (2012:56) echo this when they envision engagement 'as a mutual, reciprocal and collaborative relationship between a university and external partner'. Wallis (2006:2) describes it as a 'two-way relationship leading to productive partnerships that yield mutually beneficial outcomes'.

The gist of such arguments is that higher education institutions should be looking for meaningful community engagement that will not be mistaken as token 'charity' gestures. In searching for ways to incorporate community engagement as part of critical curricular development and in developing well-rounded critical thinking and compassionate citizens, higher education institutions are required to create intersections between them and the broader environment. This project is an attempt to address community engagement as

a multi-directional commitment that brings together the different social partners. An engaged community around the common theme of homelessness in the City of Tshwane recognises the salience of a collaborative effort and collective sharing of resources, experiences and knowledge to improve the social well-being of homeless people as well as to demonstrate the relevance of research in society and with society.

## ***8.2. Collaborating to overcome homelessness***

The different partners involved in collaboratively addressing issues of homelessness in the City of Tshwane agreed in September 2014 that the sheer magnitude of the challenge requires a concerted and collaborative approach based on knowledge sharing. This collaboration is a novel approach in Gauteng and is an attempt to use a research-based methodology to inform public policy.

The size of the challenge cannot be underestimated. An analogy of the challenge is the currently constructed social housing project in the City of Tshwane that will accommodate 750 families or 3000 people. The cost of this project, which will include 25 shop fronts and community facilities, is estimated at R 300 million. This represents a modest investment because a more rigorous approach to reducing homelessness needs substantial financial investment to match a moral commitment based on human rights and the restoration of human dignity.

A major advantage of this project is its intention to bridge the gap between academia and the policy environment. This approach provided scope for integration and collective thinking. It also created space for diverse sources and forms of knowledge to work towards a common goal. Each partner has something to offer and it is this diversity that such a project can benefit from.

The non-profit and faith-based sectors have relentlessly and unconditionally committed themselves for years to develop innovative responses and solutions to homelessness without which the City of Tshwane would be a much worse place. The Tshwane Homelessness Forum brings together individual homeless people and several organisations, committed to make change in relation to homelessness. Policy and strategy recommendations flowing from the collaborative research project built on some of the sustainable alternatives offered by some of these organisations.

Local government adopted the Tshwane Homelessness Policy in May 2013 but asked for it to be reviewed. The Executive Mayor showed political will and pledged his commitment to the process of the Homeless Summit. Strategic Executive Directors and politicians from relevant departments in local government participated and/or supported the process wholeheartedly since inception.

Universities are institutions of critical reflection, doing research and supporting societal change through engagement with communities. Botman (2012:xiv) argued that universities should also be measured by their contribution to the public good, their social impact and their contribution to social justice and overcoming the legacies of the past. In this project both the University of Pretoria, as the largest residential university in the country, and the University of South Africa, as the largest distance education institution, contribute significantly. Although this project is hosted in the Urban Studio of the Centre for Contextual Ministry at the University of Pretoria, it spreads across the disciplinary expertise offered at the university. At the University of South Africa this project is an

extension of their Meal of Peace Project (see Mashau & Kritzinger, 2014:10–6) with homeless communities in the inner city, and the Department of Health Sciences has also been engaged in homelessness research for some time already.

The real experts, however, are those who live on the streets or who used to live there. How they became homeless and how they found pathways out of homelessness are important criteria for this project. Collecting their narratives produces knowledge that would assist in strengthening the basis on which the different partners can interact.

In addition, the following international partners also collaborated as part of the interaction and shared their experiences and knowledge of homelessness: the Institute for Global Homelessness, DePaul University; Community Solutions in New York City; and the Centre for Equity in Delhi, India.

### **8.3. Co-producing knowledge to address homelessness**

We agree with the urban research perspective of Pieterse (2014:19–20) focusing on the Global South. Like Klein et al. (2001), Pieterse supports a trans-disciplinary approach and envisages the local city level as ‘laboratories’ or ‘studios’, where practitioners from government and civil society ‘work with academic researchers to jointly decipher the most urgent questions that require sustained attention’ (Pieterse, 2014:20).

Trans-disciplinarity must be considered within the context of twenty-first-century knowledge production that demands collaborative efforts to address social concerns in a well-rounded way. The production of knowledge is no longer confined to university spaces but is increasingly seen as social production where the different partners involved agree to work together in the interest of finding durable solutions. Knowledge production, as asserted by Preece et al. (2012:14), should be seen as a multifaceted process that brings together the different partners as equal members in producing the required knowledge.

The Tshwane Homeless Summit, as the culmination of the research project entitled Pathways Out of Homelessness, was an innovative contribution, not only to policy and strategy formation for the City of Tshwane but also in the way in which it set forth collaboration, trans-disciplinary inquiry and the collective sharing/generation/transformation of knowledge.

Each partner, we argue, has a fundamental role to fulfil and universities as bastions of knowledge production retain their role of social conscience. It is only through recognising the singular and collective commitment in establishing shared responsibilities that viable alternatives to find pathways out of homelessness can be discerned and implemented.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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