Synthesis presentation – "Hidden homelessness: An indicator-based approach for examining the geographies of recent immigrants at-risk of homelessness in Greater Vancouver", Rob Fiedler, Nadine Schuurman and Jennifer Hyndman

I'm going to present a journal article titled "Hidden homelessness: An indicator-based approach for examining the geographies of recent immigrants at-risk of homelessness in Greater Vancouver". This paper was published by Rob Fiedler, Nadine Schuurman and Jennifer Hyndman from Simon Fraser University.

To start, this article observes that homelessness is a growing problem in Greater Vancouver: it doubled from 2002 to 2005. Most interestingly, a report has revealed that the profile of homelessness greatly differs from the racial profile of the region: only a small minority identifies itself as belonging to a visible minority while it represents more than two thirds of immigrants. In brief, immigrants are not a visible part of the region's homeless.

But, in the same time, it is known (from many researches) that immigrants comprise a high proportion of the region's at-risk population. This is due to many underlying issues that will not be discussed here, but we can cite among others low social assistant rates, lack of affordable housing, low income and that immigration policy in Canada has become a *de facto* population policy according to Ley and Hiebert (2001). The context of immigration has changed since the 1980s: less money is available and with the reduction of the welfare state, a "new poverty" has risen. Moreover, immigrant households are on average larger, so they need bigger apartments, which are less affordable.

Nonetheless, immigrants are over-represented among the at-risk population. The hypothesis in this paper is that immigrant homelessness remains hidden. To test this hypothesis, the authors use an indicator-based approach in order to identify spatial concentrations of immigrant homelessness.

The authors defines at-risk populations those living in unaffordable, overcrowded, substandard housing situations. Indeed, definitions of homelessness split this population into two groups:

- Absolute homelessness, also called "street" or "visible" homelessness (people living on the streets), which is an immediate problem, requires a rapid action but represents only a small part of homelessness.
- Relative homelessness (situation of bad housing conditions). This situation remains largely invisible and concerns much more people but in a less acute manner.

Let's talk about data and methods: to identify the population at-risk of homelessness, the authors use the CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the national housing agency) indicator in core housing need and spending at least half of household income on shelter costs (INALH). This indicator has been created by the national housing agency to identify households unable to obtain adequate, suitable or affordable housing. Thanks to this indicator they identified that immigrants, and particularly recent immigrants, are living in the worst housing conditions.

What we can finally observe from geographic indicators is that immigrant renters in core housing need are present in very specific locations. Indeed, the authors note that there is an

intersection of concentrations of low income and core housing need associated with recent immigrants: they tend to coincide in very specific areas of Greater Vancouver. More importantly, we can identify a few inner suburban areas (Metrotown, Edmonds, Burquitlam, and Richmond Centre) where immigrant homelessness is clustered. Those inner suburban areas are the places where immigrant homelessness is concentrated. Immigrants live in low-rise rental apartments clustered in localized spaces in the suburban areas, but not in inner-city areas, and are strongly associated with low income.

"*Contrary to what one might think walking on many downtown Vancouver streets, homelessness can be extremely difficult to find. All forms of homelessness are difficult to measure and remedy. Among immigrants and refugees, homelessness may be expressed in ways other than presence among the 'street' or 'sheltered' homeless population. For immigrants and refugees, homelessness more often takes the form of 'hidden' homelessness that is characterized by involuntary 'doubling-up' or sharing housing accommodation, while in other cases it is revealed by unsustainable rent burdens*"

"*The rental housing market in Greater Vancouver acts to both concentrate and disperse households with the most acute housing need. Renters at-risk of homelessness are generally found either concentrated in areas with low-rise rental apartments or dispersed in areas with low or moderate rates of housing need, possibly explained by the existence of basement suites.*".

The results are that spatial concentrations of recent immigrants are fund in inner suburban locations.

Recent immigrants are excluded from at-risk estimates because of a bias in the indicator

Immigrants and refugees avoid ending up on the streets thanks to coping strategies where they survive on social assistance.

"*One, recent immigrant renters are disproportionately located in the inner municipalities. Two, immigrant renters who arrived pre-199l- are more centralized than renters in general, with a notably higher proportion found in the City of Vancouver. In both cases, the distribution of core housing need and INALH closely echoes each group's overall distribution of renters by GVRD sub-region*".