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Précarité énergétique et aide sociale en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale

Energiearmoede en sociale bijstand in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Introduction and issues

- 1 Until 2005, energy poverty was an under-researched subject in Belgium, unlike the United Kingdom and Ireland, where the pioneering study by B. Boardman [1991] inspired many others (for a synthesis, see [Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015; Day *et al.*, 2016]). In keeping with the international literature [Tompson and Snell, 2013; Thomson *et al.*, 2016], energy poverty is defined here as problematic access to daily household energy. In concrete terms, people who are affected by energy poverty are faced with physical discomfort due to the temperature or humidity in their dwelling, or financial discomfort leading to a self-limitation of energy consumption or debts. A delay in paying an energy bill and insufficient financial means are often used to determine a right to social assistance in Belgium [Huybrechts *et al.*, 2011], or as criteria for defining households affected by energy poverty in international research [Thomson and Snell, 2013; Bartiaux *et al.*, 2019].
- 2 We use the term “energy poverty” [Bouzarovski *et al.*, 2015] in reference to the various situations encountered in the field in terms of access to domestic energy, which

range from vulnerability to extreme poverty. The aim is to reflect as closely as possible the diversity of those affected.¹

- 3 In Belgium, various estimates of the prevalence of energy poverty have been published: depending on the criteria used, in 2013 it varied between 0,2 % (electricity disconnection) and 18,1 % (inadequate housing²) according to Delbeke *et al.* [2019: 26]. For the Brussels Region in 2017, J. Coene and S. Meyer [2019] estimate that 9,9 % of households under-consumed energy in relation to the budget and size of the household as well as the number of rooms (without taking into account the insulation of the dwelling), while 12,1 % over-consumed energy with respect to their budget. The proportion of households unable to heat their home adequately for financial reasons amounted to 10,9 %. The corresponding figures for Belgium are 14 %, 4,5 % and 6,2 % according to these authors.
- 4 The study by Huybrechts *et al.* [2011] provides a very good summary of the extent of the phenomenon, its causes and consequences, and the related social policies in Belgium. But neither this study nor any other was based on the experiences of people affected by energy poverty: a “bottom-up” approach has been used here. This type of research has been carried out in several European countries using qualitative methods, and its complementarity with technical and economic studies has become evident.³
- 5 The objective of this research⁴ was therefore to meet these people and to analyse the accounts of their daily lives within the context of social factors specific to the Brussels Region in order to answer the following research question: “What are the practices of people affected by energy poverty in the Brussels Region and how do they perceive their daily lives?”
- 6 The structure of this article is as follows: The ethnographic method and the data collected are presented first. Then the results are presented, showing how energy poverty in Brussels is exacerbated by the tensions on the housing market, as well as by the difficulties involved in accessing assistance. The conclusion reviews the main results by including the notion of “home” while insisting on the necessity to go beyond the individualising perspective of the home or of the people affected by energy poverty.

1. Data and methods

1.1. Ethnographic approach

- 7 The ethnographic description aims at providing an account of a “field, i.e. a part of social life constituted as a defined subject of research” [Demeulenaere, 2006: 764]. This description should make it possible to “produce a new understanding of known subjects” [Olivier de Sardan, 2008: 157]. To increase its empirical validity, frequent use is made of comparisons and/or interpretations by other authors. A rather inductive approach is therefore used [Olivier de Sardan, 2008: 23].

1.2. Data production methods: interviews and observations

- 8 The field observations and interview excerpts used here come from a qualitative survey carried out in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). Between 2014 and 2017, 20 in-depth interviews [Kaufmann, 2007] of an average of one hour were conducted by the first

author with people affected by energy poverty as defined above, in their homes in ten municipalities in Brussels. 12 women and 8 men between the ages of 26 and 66 were interviewed; 9 of them were homeowners, 8 were social housing tenants and 3 were tenants on the private market. These people were found thanks to 10 or so intermediaries from different Public Centres for Social Welfare (Centres Publics d'Action Sociale, CPAS), a social housing company, the associative sector, and from our networks. Some people were contacted during ethnographic observations.

- 9 These observations were made during “energy awareness” workshops, in the waiting room of a CPAS, during visits to beneficiaries or during meetings with social workers or conferences organised by or for these workers. These observations were recorded each time in a field notebook. In total, between March 2014 and April 2017, contacts were made with 8 CPASs and 11 non-profit associations (ASBLs) dealing with the issue of access to domestic energy, covering 13 municipalities in Brussels.
- 10 All first names used in this article are assumed names chosen with reference to the respondents' mother tongues.

2. Energy poverty and the housing market

2.1. Living in energy poverty in Brussels

- 11 Heating water in a kettle to wash themselves, as Annie and Madeleine had to do, cleaning the traces of humidity every day, as Christine, Alice and Jasmine had to do, deciding not to have a washing machine as Iman, Paul and Micheline had to do, living with a power limiter, as Saïd and Meryem had to do, heating with a kerosene lamp, as Mireille had to do, caulking or even condemning part of one's home, as Patricia, Nadia and Nur had to do, and “insulating” a window with cardboard and adhesive tape, as Rose had to do: these are all situations experienced by the people we met. According to Mireille, she lives “like a refugee” given the condition of the flat she bought and her lack of means to renovate it. In fact, there are cardboard boxes everywhere, the enamel of the bathtub is eaten away and blackened, the walls are bare and dirty, and the kitchen fittings are no more than rudimentary.
- 12 Yet, as Annie says:
“Housing is a whole. It's wellness, it's safety, it's rest. It's the place where the family can bond. And when you don't have that anymore, where is your dignity?” (Annie, social housing tenant, aged 60)
- 13 To live in energy poverty is also to be confronted with the ill will or bad faith of certain owners, neighbours or even professionals. In a context where there is a high demand for renovations, some people charge “outrageous amounts of money” according to Lucie. Saïd and Meryem paid for a neighbour who “stole electricity” from them and who “threatened and intimidated” Meryem. As for Serge, his owner tampered with his electricity meter which was in his own cellar. Serge noticed the fraud only when he received a bill for € 3 000:
“At first I said [to the supplier] that I did not agree, that I had never tampered with the electricity meter, that I didn't even know how to do it. Firstly, I don't have access to the basement, and secondly, I lost my right hand [because of a car accident]” (Serge, social housing tenant, aged 65).

- 14 For the people we interviewed, living in energy poverty is therefore synonymous with practices and interactions which are sometimes very unpleasant, but many are well aware that “it could be worse” and tend to lower their expectations:
- “To me, a nice house is a place with decent living conditions [...] I just need some basic comfort. [...] The homeless... that's worse than me, there is always something worse, so I don't ask for more than that” (Mireille, flat owner, aged 49).
- 15 The street as “the next step”, “and with it, true exclusion” was also mentioned apprehensively by the French people affected by energy poverty, who were interviewed by Maresca and Lacombe [2015: 54].
- 16 “If you don't like it, go somewhere else”: a statement heard by several of the people we interviewed. But where is somewhere else? They know what they lose, but they don't know what they gain. And even when the Regional Housing Inspectorate reports unsanitary living conditions, the relocation of the household is negotiated, as there is not always a rehousing solution. After all, unsanitary housing is better than no housing at all.⁵ For some, the choice between unsanitary housing and the street becomes a reality: Henri, aged 47, is officially homeless, but sublets a room at a friend's place. However, the state of the housing prompts him to spend most of his time on the street, although by his own admission “it's quite hot, there are thugs and alcohol, and you have to be able to stay healthy. We used to give each other two or three punches, but now the teeth have to fall out.”⁶
- 17 These situations also show that in BCR, energy poverty is exacerbated by the shortage of modest housing, which is the subject of the next section.

2.2. Energy poverty and tension on the Brussels housing market

- 18 There is a high amount of tension on the Brussels housing market. In 2016, 92 % of rented accommodation was not accessible to the first six income deciles, if we consider that the cost of rent should not exceed 25 % of a household's disposable income – an ideal situation which is rarely achieved. This situation is not improving [Observatoire des loyers, 2016: 62]. With respect to emergency housing, the president of a Brussels CPAS admitted to social workers in March 2014 that there were only three emergency housing units available for a maximum of one month for their municipality of more than 133 000 inhabitants. And according to the Brussels planning office, the demand for public housing in BCR at the *Fonds du Logement* on 1 January 2018 involved 3650 households, while the supply on 1 January 2017 amounted to 1 673 units.⁷ According to several sources, the waiting period for social housing is ten years on average in Brussels.
- 19 This shortage of modest housing reinforces energy poverty in BCR, as it forces people to accept housing despite any defects: “We took what we could take” (Paul, tenant of a flat on the private market, aged 50). “I can't eat [the] walls!” exclaims Nur, recalling the order of priorities: she is unemployed, and without CPAS assistance, she would be “in the street” (Nur, house owner, aged 55).
- 20 This material competition between individuals, which characterises modernity according to Kaufmann [1988: 74], is further reinforced by the discrimination of certain owners regarding the origin of tenants or the source of their income, confirmed by the

study by Verhaeghe *et al.* [2017] and experienced by several of the people we interviewed. Mireille and Saïd, from sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa respectively:

“I called [...] and was told that it was already rented. [...] People recognise my accent, and refuse to rent to me. [...] And because of this difficulty, we took what we could get.” (Mireille, flat owner, aged 49).

“We looked for a flat, anything and everything – exorbitant prices [...], tiny storerooms for € 1000, hovels with water leaks [...] I found this apartment [...] The owner [...] said, ‘Sorry, but I don’t take people who receive CPAS assistance.’ And I explained my situation to him, I almost cried [...] [he finally accepted]. The flat is not very good, but we had no choice.” (Saïd, tenant of a flat on the private market, aged 39).

- 21 In summary, the state of the built environment and the housing market, the waiting lists for social housing, strong competition between potential buyers or tenants, and discrimination on the rental market greatly restrict the possibilities of modest households and do not contribute to decreasing the prevalence of energy poverty in the Region.

2.3. Energy renovations of the housing stock and rehousing

- 22 During the field study, a social housing company was gradually evacuating its buildings in order to equip them with central heating systems. The consequences of this policy once again illustrate that housing represents much more than “just a material shell” [Kaufmann, 1988: 78].
- 23 Micheline will therefore have to leave the flat where she raised her children and deplores not being able to move in again after the works, as the inhabitants will be re-housed elsewhere according to the composition of their household. However, Micheline lives alone now. This rationalisation can be understood given the lack of modest housing, but is nevertheless a shock for her.
- 24 For her part, Madeleine refused to leave her house which was threatening to collapse: “I have spent 40 years of my life here!” Given the state of deterioration of the facade and Madeleine's debts, all of the aid professionals she met recommended that she should sell her house, which made her feel totally misunderstood.
- 25 However, making a place one's own constitutes a person, according to psychiatrist J. Furtos [2009: 1]:

“Living somewhere means investing yourself in a place, which is very different from being housed. If a person cannot live somewhere, he or she cannot settle in, and today this is referred to as exclusion. Helping people to live somewhere means fighting against exclusion.”
- 26 What worries Micheline and Madeleine is being housed in a place which is too small for all of their possessions, not to mention the moving expenses: having to hire a van? The housing company will not intervene. They would have to get rid of furniture, yet it is all that they have. Most importantly, they have accumulated social capital: supportive neighbours and a sense of balance based on their social network. Micheline will not be re-housed in the same building as her neighbours, with whom she watches television, has discussions and goes to the launderette. “Everybody gets on well. That's the problem, because we have to move, we're all going to be separated. [...] The woman next door came to my place and was crying.” (Micheline, tenant in a social housing flat, aged 62). Madeleine also expresses her concern:

“If I have to move, [...] I'm going to have to sell all of my things. [...] I might as well take a rope and hang myself! But my daughter also has to find a flat. [...] She is alone with the little one. We have no family left.” (Madeleine, owner of a house, aged 60)

- 27 The energy renovation of buildings therefore not only compromises people's habits and their feeling of security, but also their social support: emotional support, mutual aid between neighbours, intergenerational households, etc.

3. Requesting assistance

3.1. Being a beneficiary

- 28 “Inhabiting” one's home is also about living there, making choices there and having habits there. It is where people restore their strength [Schwartz, 1990]. There are many possibilities for assistance in BCR in order to combat energy poverty (e.g. renovation incentives, requests for payment deferrals, changing energy suppliers, etc.). These measures are listed by Bartiaux *et al.* [2015]. Sometimes the advice received is appreciated, as is the case with Jeanne who called upon an energy centre:⁸

“I was using too much energy [...] I changed my bulbs to LEDs. [...] I had a thermostat which I didn't understand [...] and didn't use properly. [...] [The energy advisor] will install a more recent one which is easier to use.” (Jeanne, flat owner, aged 67)

- 29 Home is the place for “privacy” and where a person develops a sense of control over daily life. But this is no longer the case when a person must ask for help in order to pay the electricity bills for example. Madeleine tells us:

“I was brought up by my grandparents, and CPAS was taboo. [...] The people who went to CPAS were [...] the people who had nothing, who hung about on the street like the homeless [...] But one day, when you're there with your daughter and a newborn baby, and you don't even have enough money to buy a bottle of milk, you have to put your pride in your pocket.” (Madeleine, owner of a house, aged 60.)

- 30 At the CPAS, the expenses of the applicant household are examined closely. In debt mediation, “it's the judge who decides, you see – he pays everything and then he gives us the rest” explains Meryem, whose family of six only live on one person's unemployment benefit and family allowances.
- 31 Most social services refer to the “rational use of energy”, implying from the outset that the person affected by energy poverty should have done or not done something in order to avoid being in his or her situation. As Jeanne indicates above, the people interviewed generally recognised the usefulness of the advice given in order to reduce energy expenditure. But what do these savings represent in relation to the cost of housing and the costs due to its state of deterioration? The efforts, however, seem to be focused on the responsibility of the person seeking social assistance.
- 32 Several social workers and energy advisors in the field have also reported during the study that they made a distinction between the beneficiary “who makes efforts” and the one who “takes advantage”. People who seek assistance are supposed to be active, willing and even somewhat submissive [Mechelynck, 2013; Méhauden *et al.* 2015]. Each “user” (as social workers call them) therefore undergoes a supervision of his or her daily life, as the conditions for assistance often involve having to prove that a person

deserves it. However, this idea of assistance “gives the individual control over his or her fate, which he or she obviously does not have” [Glady, 2016: 18].

- 33 The steps involved may morally break a person in difficulty who would struggle to recover his or her strength in a home compromised by uncertainty and a lack of heat. “Sometimes you lose your footing” explains Henri when talking about the support services and the steps he was caught up in at the time of the interview.
- 34 The lack of awareness of the humiliating nature of these assistance procedures is an integral part of the suffering experienced by “users” who feel misunderstood and that the difficulties they are going through are not recognised [Baudaux, 2019]. Thus, “the majority of administrations do not understand the suffering which their way of operating imposes on their users, especially those who are less culturally endowed” [de Gaujelac, 1996: 114]. More generally, Thompson [2019] analyses these social pathologies generated by non-recognition as being both caused and reinforced by the hierarchical social structures which characterise our “administrative/capitalist” societies, in his words.
- 35 However, “users” can show resistance, for example in the way they make their homes their own, even if it is social housing. Annie explains that she used her own money to repaint her “dirty grey” facade, which, according to her, is characteristic of social housing, because she was fed up with this “label”. Bruno asked to change houses after his divorce, but his social housing company refused. He then took the liberty to make “some changes” in the layout of the rooms and the colour of the walls, without asking permission.
- 36 These small examples of resistance can be beneficial for people who have lost control over many aspects of their daily lives, as is the case for those in inadequate housing. It helps them to restore their capacity for action also with respect to bureaucracy, which is discussed below.

3.2. The bureaucratic burden

- 37 The burden of procedures was the obstacle mentioned most often after the stigmatisation of social assistance recipients. For Rose and Nadia, it was very difficult to contact the Region to obtain authorisations for insulation works in their flats: they had to go there in person during their working hours and dealt with a different person each time, therefore having to explain everything over again, and there was always a document or a stamp missing. Without the administrative assistance from their municipality, they would have abandoned these procedures, described as causing anxiety and as being unbelievably complicated by women who were not among the most disadvantaged in our sample.
- 38 Annie explains that the social workers at her CPAS often lose parts of the files and ask the “users” to produce the required documents once again. Madeleine had to start all over with a new social worker who asked her to gather and photocopy all of the documents again – although she sometimes could not afford a tram ticket. She saw this new person only three times in two years and remained without hot water during the entire period. Finally, the threat from a bailiff prompted her to return to the CPAS; she was seen by a third person and everything finally got moving.

- 39 Following an unfortunate bankruptcy and divorce, Irma went to the CPAS for the first time. A social worker told her that the municipality was at that point beyond her means, implying that she was benefiting from unduly earned money; “I cried – I was so humiliated!” she confided during the interview. She then moved to another commune and described the social workers she met there as being “angels”. However, this difficult period has affected her deeply:

“Now, I don't have the courage to do it again [...] I have completely lost my self-confidence. I have to look for a job, but what, and how? I can't see myself anywhere...” (Irma, tenant of a social housing flat, aged 45).

- 40 It is therefore not surprising that people frequently do not make use of support services. However, as we have observed, this phenomenon seems to be misunderstood in the social assistance sector.⁹ The political analyst P. Warin [2010] explains that this lack of use has three main forms: the lack of knowledge, the lack of requests and the disagreement with the conditions of assistance, for various reasons:

“People may not make a request especially when the offer imposes conditions of behaviour which appear to be impossible or unacceptable. [...] In particular, the principle of activation, with all that it implies in terms of commitments to be respected, can prevent a person from making a request due to a lack of confidence in his or her own capacities, a feeling of discouragement with respect to the complexity of the procedure, or non-adherence to the principles of the offer.”

- 41 Discouragement was the most common issue which emerged from the interviews, explaining the lack of use of support services, whereas several social workers whom we met seemed to think that if there is a lack of use, it is because there is no need.

3.3. Between distancing and adherence

- 42 Finally, the recipient may feel unable to reciprocate the assistance received and overwhelmed by the donation (in this case social assistance), “thus reduced to his/her powerlessness” [Caillé, 2014: 45]. “What we want above all is not so much to satisfy our needs as to be recognised [...] as contributors and generous generators” by other people and by the institutions [Caillé, 2014: 54-55]. In short, to be recognised as citizens who participate fully in society and thus in consumer society, and not only as “users” of social security who will be judged for any “superfluous” expenses. It is therefore understandable that receiving comes at a price which is sometimes unbearable for the recipient.

- 43 The choice for the individual who is financially dependent is therefore between distancing (“I am not taking advantage”, “it's a temporary situation”, “in my case it's different”) or an adherence which can even go as far as boasting or at least giving the impression of doing more than just putting up with the situation, according to the self-image to be preserved. Because in the end, choosing how to experience one's situation, or at least the way in which it will be related, is perhaps the only room for manoeuvre for a “user” who depends on social assistance. Indeed, what freedom is left for someone whose debt mediator provides pocket money, when each expense is judged, when it is necessary to make a good impression in order to continue to benefit from quality support? Perhaps it is precisely the freedom to talk about oneself as someone who has mastered all of the inner workings of social assistance, as someone who has slipped through the cracks or who has got round the control process, or on the contrary as the

victim of circumstances who has nothing in common with those who are waiting in the same queue.

Conclusion: staying warm, living somewhere, understanding each other

- 44 This ethnographic study in the Brussels Region shows the daily difficulties posed by energy poverty while underlining the importance of the context which shapes the characteristics of energy poverty. In French, the notion of “foyer” at the very least sums up several aspects brought to light by our study. The term is also the name of the social housing company in several municipalities in BCR. It means the hearth (to stay warm), the home (somewhere to live) and the household, an object of social assistance (understanding each other) – three dimensions undermined by energy poverty and detailed below.
- 45 Staying warm and trying to fight humidity requires people in energy poverty to do things often on a daily basis, sometimes in vain, such as cleaning damp spots. Professionals put the emphasis on individual behaviour (and even give it full responsibility), and not on architectural techniques. It appears, however, that the actions recommended during the workshops on energy savings or the use of technical “solutions” such as the power limiter or the budget meter (not used in BCR, but could very well be [Grevisse and van der Planke, 2017]) are largely insufficient. Energy poverty is in fact a result of social and structural aspects which go far beyond individual behaviour.
- 46 Our study shows that the practices and negative emotions of people affected by energy poverty cannot be understood without putting them in the context of the shortage of modest housing in BCR. A market under pressure, an old and poorly insulated housing stock, long waiting lists for social housing, and competition and discrimination between prospective tenants all contribute to reinforcing energy poverty in the Brussels Region. Heating and maintaining poor quality housing also confronts the often vulnerable occupants with the booming but poorly regulated energy renovation market.
- 47 Living in a dwelling and making it one's home is compromised by humidity, drafts, outdated fixtures and financial difficulties which make it difficult to maintain a warm, welcoming, reassuring place to live where one feels at home and comfortable enough to invite guests from outside the family. The legitimately expected privacy of a “private” space is compromised as soon as the help of a public authority is requested. But this emotional dimension of housing is often neglected from the angle of an expert in social assistance or housing.
- 48 Furthermore, in order for people affected by energy poverty and social workers to understand each other, the pressure experienced by the former should be recognised: between the dignity of housing and the dignity of independence, between the security of a somewhat comfortable home and the freedom not to have to report everything, and between playing the “game” of being active and providing proof in order to not to be in need and managing alone to protect one's privacy. These pressures are difficult to bear with a precariously balanced budget. A better consideration (or awareness) of

these different issues would probably help to improve aid relations and to fight against the lack of a mobilisation of rights in the area of housing and access to energy.¹⁰

- 49 For people affected by energy poverty, this pressure goes hand in hand with a strong feeling of non-recognition and even anxiety, shame and guilt following their responses to these dilemmas – some might say their “choices”, although, as we have shown, the options are very limited. These negative and disabling emotions are also socially constructed by stigmatising or condescending practices, illustrated by interview excerpts and field observations.
- 50 All in all, for public policies which combat energy poverty, this research has shown the importance of taking into account the emotional aspects of the quest to preserve a home, as well as the fact that individual assistance and calls for changes in behaviour are not enough if these policies do not regulate a housing market which is under great pressure, particularly for modest housing.

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NOTES

1. In French, “précarité énergétique” is used, and in Dutch, “energie armoede”.
2. Leaky roof, damp walls, rotten frames.
3. In the United Kingdom, Harrington *et al.* [2005], Middlemiss and Gillard [2015], in Austria, Brunner *et al.* [2012], in France, Maresca and Lacombe [2015].
4. The study presented here is part of more large-scale multidisciplinary research on energy poverty in Belgium published and funded by BELSPO [Bartiaux, 2019].
5. Meeting with DIRL, BCR offices, 2014.
6. Field notebook, Ixelles, 18/04/2016.
7. Presentation by Y. Van de Castele, Brussels, 24/04/2018.
8. These centres run by non-profit associations and financed by BCR provided several municipalities with energy advice between 2012 and 2017, before becoming Homegrade, "the centre for housing advice and support in the Brussels-Capital Region". Information available online at: <https://environnement.brussels/thematiques/batiment-et-energie/guidance-et-soutien-techniques/homegrade>
9. During the presentation of this research in February 2018 at a Réseau de Vigilance meeting (a voluntary and official gathering of social workers on the issue of access to energy, held once a month in Brussels, outside school holidays), the lack of use was mentioned as being surprising and unexplained (despite the abundance of literature on the subject since the 1960s).
10. Among other recommendations proposed at the end of the field study: see in this respect Delbeke *et al.* [2019].

ABSTRACTS

This ethnographic contribution focuses on energy poverty and aid policies in the Brussels-Capital Region. The data produced between 2014 and 2017 consist of field observations and in-depth interviews with people affected by energy poverty. Our study shows that the practices and negative emotions of these people must be understood in the context of the shortage of modest housing in the Brussels Region and the poor state of the housing stock. This context is hardly taken into account by public aid, which insists instead on the technical equipment to be installed in homes and on changes in the individual behaviour of occupants. These differences in perspective and the sometimes stigmatising or condescending bureaucratic aid practices help explain the limited use of aid intended to fight energy poverty.

Cette contribution ethnographique porte sur la précarité énergétique et les politiques d'aide dans la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Les données produites entre 2014 et 2017 consistent en observations de terrain et entretiens approfondis avec des personnes en précarité énergétique. Notre enquête montre que les pratiques et les émotions négatives de ces personnes doivent se comprendre en les contextualisant par la pénurie de logements modestes en Région bruxelloise et l'état médiocre du parc immobilier. Ce contexte est peu pris en compte par les aides publiques qui insistent au contraire sur les dispositifs techniques à installer dans le logement et sur les changements de comportements individuels des occupants. Ces différences de perspective et ces pratiques d'aide bureaucratiques parfois stigmatisantes ou infantilisantes contribuent à expliquer un recours limité aux aides destinées à combattre la précarité énergétique.

Deze etnografische bijdrage heeft betrekking op de energiearmoede en het steunbeleid in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest. De gegevens werden verkregen tussen 2014 en 2017 en bestaan uit waarnemingen op het terrein en diepte-interviews met mensen in energiearmoede. Ons onderzoek toont aan dat de praktijken en negatieve emoties van deze mensen moeten worden begrepen in de context van het tekort aan bescheiden woningen in het Brussels Gewest en de slechte staat van het woningpark. Met die context wordt amper rekening gehouden in de steunmaatregelen van de overheid, die daarentegen de nadruk leggen op de installatie van technische voorzieningen in woningen en op individuele gedragsveranderingen bij de bewoners. De verschillen qua perspectief en de soms stigmatiserende of betuttelende bureaucratische steunpraktijken verklaren deels waarom er zo weinig gebruik wordt gemaakt van de steunmaatregelen in de strijd tegen energiearmoede.

INDEX

Keywords: poverty, energy, housing, real estate market, social aid

Subjects: 4. santé – qualité de vie – inégalités sociales

Trefwoorden: armoede, energie, huisvesting, vastgoedmarkt, sociale bijstand

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