

SELF-ORGANIZATION AS A RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS: NEGOTIATING  
AUTONOMY AND TRANSITIONAL LIVING IN A “VILLAGE” COMMUNITY

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Self-Organization as a Response to Homelessness: Negotiating Autonomy and Transitional Living in a “Village” Community

Tent cities date back to the 1930s; however, the past decade has seen a rise in formalized camps, many attempting to function as democratic communities. Here, democratic communities refer to temporary spaces in which people without homes (PWH) live together with the goal of governing their own affairs (horizontal rather than top-down). Findings of the first “village” for the homeless indicate mixed results with self-governance among PWH in terms of the autonomy of individuals or as a method to mitigate homelessness. Given decline of social welfare budgets, as well as criticisms that shelterization and criminalization try to control the poor, government-sanctioned camps have provided safe, legal, dignified spaces for PWH.

Studies of tent cities are growing, yet few follow their attempt to implement self-governance within the first few years of existence. This ethnography of a transitional “village” in the Pacific Northwest fills a gap by uncovering socio-cultural and organizational processes that facilitate and impede self-organization. The village is collaborative; a nonprofit provides oversight to residents dwelling in tiny houses. The village is neither run exclusively by the homeless nor directly managed by housed “outsiders.” Using participant-observation, interviews, and documents, I

study the development of the village's vision, rooted in Occupy yet influenced by neoliberal principles. Some view this village as a safe, stable place in which to secure future housing while providing dignity and autonomy; residents themselves were divided in how they experienced autonomy. For some, living there can be difficult since they have the authority to enforce community rule violations on fellow residents but often do not feel threatened or uneasy about putting a fellow resident in check. Some residents perceive a lack of power in regulating others. The authority of the nonprofit board is inadvertently reproduced even as it seeks to relinquish that authority. My work also has implications for research on relations between "housed" and "homeless", and for decoupling processes that focus on divergence between stated organizational policies and actual practices.

Materials related to this work (Appendices A-E) are included as supplemental files with this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: HOMELESSNESS, THE RISE OF TENT CITIES, AND THE CONTEXT OF SELF-REGULATION

During a Support Committee (SC) meeting less than two months after the opening of Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE), the first city-approved outdoor-type encampment for the homeless in Eugene, the major agenda item revolved around what process should be used to help people transition out of the village. A major goal of the village was to allow formerly undomiciled residents to have a safe, secure place in a community setting in order to get their bearings and transition into more sustainable living situations. My field notes from the SC meeting (all participants' names except political figures have been changed) briefly depict a negotiation of how much autonomy and informality should go into transition plans for residents. Our meeting takes place at a local community justice center<sup>1</sup> about two miles from OVE. At the time approximately 25 people resided at the new village, mostly single adults with a sprinkle of couples:

Starting with Marge and Bonnie, two members of the Support Committee (SC)...[i]t sounds like generally, SC participants advocate some degree of villager-centered transition (e.g. villagers plan out their own transitions, and communicate necessary resources with Board members). Some people seemed to emphasize a more informal approach to village transition, with developing one-to-one relationships with villagers and seeing what they need/want. Patty (SC member) and Louise's (resident) relationship was given as an example of what can be done to help people develop self-directed transition plans. Both of them brainstormed what Louise has done, what she can do, and obstacles she could face. Others brought up the idea of creating a committee or having a more formal plan to transition people out of the village. Todd, a Board member, mentioned that we have quarterly reports to give to the city, suggesting that something more organized would be helpful.

*Some more detailed suggestions and ideas about transition:*

Someone reports that at a recent Sunday villager meeting, Luke (a resident) thought villagers should individually present their ideas for transition to the village council. Bonnie asks if Luke's comment was a [Village] council perspective. Louise (resident) says no. When Marge mentioned to Luke about villagers putting their transition plans in writing, Luke said that people have the ideas in their minds. Todd said the city is going to want us to have some structure and that most of us probably want that too. To write or not to write down plans? That is [one part of] the question. Bonnie said it seems like we don't want to create a structure and then tell people "this is how it is." Patty adds that some people become anxious when they think they have to write down something that may be used later to hold over their heads [e.g. why didn't you accomplish so and so?].

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<sup>1</sup> A short while after the 30-foot yurt was purchased as a community space for the village by OVE, weekly Support Committee meetings moved there.

OVE is an interesting site in which to study the experiment of structured autonomy for the homeless precisely because it is formally sanctioned by the city and overseen by a nonprofit board of directors. Thus, OVE is a site where the planning and carrying out of autonomy must be negotiated, with housed community leaders and municipal authorities. The above excerpt illustrates various considerations that organizational participants have when thinking through the formality of transition plans, and whose interests those plans serve. Will statistics that reflect transition plans affect the city's view of the village, so the plans must be as organized as possible, as Todd implied? Should homeless people decide how they want to think about and articulate their plans after getting into OVE, as Luke asserted, or a Patty and Louise's relationship indicated? The actors involved in negotiating autonomy are in different social locations, creating possibilities for collaboration between housed and homeless individuals, while creating challenges for the empowerment and autonomy of homeless people.

For example, Luke, a white man in his fifties, had previously been involved with Dignity Village in Portland, where unhoused people were at the forefront of creating their own community. Immediately prior to moving into OVE, Luke was secure in his own tiny dwelling located on church property, one of three such occupied dwellings on that lot. At Dignity, he followed community rules in which he said he was heavily invested, and at the church he was quite independent, volunteering there on a regular basis as well. He had experienced some autonomy and felt that he and other residents should direct their own transition plans. Patty, a white SC member/volunteer around her forties or fifties who owned a home but had relatively low income, was trying to develop a supportive peer relationship with Louise, also white and in her fifties. Patty occasionally gave Louise rides to appointments or to the bus and stored Louise's trailer on her property for a while. Important for eventual transition, Patty offered to help Louise brainstorm her type of preferred work, which included baking. If Louise could access a community kitchen and get a food handler's permit, Patty would help facilitate as much as possible. Todd, a white Board member<sup>2</sup> in his late sixties, and Marge, a retired white SC volunteer in her seventies, had business backgrounds and favored written transition plans for purposes of documentation and accountability. To Luke, but not necessarily Louise, documentation was "in [his] mind." Overall, volunteers and residents held

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<sup>2</sup> Board members of OVE are also volunteers. When OVE received grants to start paying a couple of people to manage the non-profit, the paid workers were technically "staff." Any paid staff were not allowed to serve on the board.

various perspectives about written documentation of transition plans, revealing that degree of formality and residents' autonomy would be a process. Possessing autonomy is key to people that are in unhoused situations, since acts of survival are often subject to various forms of control.

### **Homelessness Criminalized, Contained, and Controlled**

According to the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the first national legislation to define the term, an individual or family is “homeless” if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” To be homeless includes people or families that live in shelters or other institutional settings meant for people without stable homes, and the definition covers some types of “transitional” housing as well (McKinney-Vento Act Amended 2009). People that live in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, tent cities, or other encampments comprise the “unsheltered” portion of the homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless, NCH 2009). According to a report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimated that in 2013, 40% of the homeless were living in unsheltered conditions that were “not intended for human habitation” (2014: 9). In the same year within the county where my work takes place, approximately 63% of the numbered homeless fit the “unsheltered” label (Bryant 2014).

Regarding scope, the question of “how many” homeless there are is misleading, since for most people homelessness is a temporary condition (NCH website 2014). For this reason, I use the term People Without Homes or Housing (PWH), although I often write “the homeless” or “homeless people” due to still-popular discourse (on the changing cultural meanings of “homelessness” over time see Webb 2014). Enumerating the homeless is nevertheless ubiquitous. Most measures of homelessness count episodes, either at one “point-in-time” (PIT counts; e.g. on the last day of January) or by using “point-prevalence counts,” which look at how many people experience homelessness in a certain time period. Using two different data sources from the last decade, NCH reports that the number of episodes of homelessness could range between 1.6 and 3.5 million per year across the United States (2009). Whatever the number, the consequences of being homeless are associated with more health problems, shorter life span, distress in meeting everyday physical and emotional needs, as well as having less formal education, less money, and generally, the experience of poverty (Eitzen and Eitzen Smith 2009). In addition, PWH are some of the most stigmatized and criminalized members of society (Baum and Burnes 1993; Smith 2014).

A widespread U.S. belief locates causes of homelessness in the behaviors of the people that experience it (Mosher 2010: 2). This belief entails an individualistic, moral explanation for poverty and homelessness, which Teresa Gowan describes as “sin-talk,” one of three major discourses on homelessness. The second discourse, “sick-talk,” focuses on poor or homeless individuals in terms of mental illness, drug addiction, and the like, where the proper response lies in treatment. Finally, “system-talk” highlights structural explanations of homelessness. Gowan contends that all three perspectives operate in society in varying combinations (2010). The most common perspective, sick-talk, is encouraged by a neoliberal philosophy of individual responsibility, and views people experiencing homelessness as a “problem” that needs to be controlled. Control comes in many forms, including institutionalization, criminalization, and seclusion.

These various forms of control involve the transformation of homeless people into outsiders through the action of multiple institutional sites simultaneously: the state (city and police); and mental health and shelter facilities. In terms of the latter, homelessness is often medicalized (Lyon-Callo 2008) or “shelterized” (Hoch 2000). Medicalization supports the discourse of “sick-talk” (Gowan 2010), where people in homeless situations must be treated or rehabilitated in order to be considered well, or to be “housing-ready” (Padgett et al. 2016). Any real or interpreted sickness becomes a sort of “master status” (Becker 1963) that limits explanations and solutions for homelessness to an individual’s mental state. Alternatively, although people who live in shelters have defined them as a “home” rather than an institution (Nunez 2004), ample research points to shelters as institutionalizing influences with top-down management (Timmer et al. 1994; Hoch 2000; Gowan 2010), even to the point of mirroring a “total institution” (DeWard and Moe 2010). In these situations, people experiencing homelessness are treated as patients or clients/guests who must adhere to program requirements.

Moreover, practices associated with visible homelessness have been punished as criminal acts for decades, including through police sweeps, anti-loitering or anti-panhandling laws, camping bans, and exclusion zones. Recently (2014), the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty reported increases in these policies that criminalize the poor and homeless throughout the U.S. compared to three years prior. The criminalization of homelessness is complemented by practices and policies that ultimately contest the right of homeless persons to live and be in urban space (Davis 1990; Wright 1997). Laws and policies enforced by local authorities often restrict the availability of public space for homeless persons and can even challenge a homeless person’s right to basic subsistence (e.g. sleep, eating, companionship, movement, shelter) within these spaces.

Outsider status is further consolidated when homeless people are concentrated around local businesses, highlighting their inability to consume and thus their illegitimate presence (Waterston 1999; Borchard 2010). Indeed, many U.S. cities have exclusion zones in their downtown “core” areas or where municipal revenue is otherwise heavily generated.

At the local level, city planners, politicians, and influential others produce what Talmadge Wright calls “social imaginaries” through which the status of homeless individuals is made low by their association with the dichotomies of “deserving/undeserving, clean/dirty, moral/immoral”, including in physical space (1997: 300). Cities often attempt to divide core urban areas and define their legitimated uses. Wright contends that in urban areas, authorities distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate spaces as “pleasure” or “refuse”. Respectively, these are either hassle-free spaces where people with money can consume in the visible absence of poverty, or areas that authorities neglect, often impoverished parts of town that generate less profit and are marginal in the eyes of the powerful. Given this distinction, city officials routinely attempt to define homeless people as “out of place,” especially those that challenge local policies as Wright (1997) has shown in the cases of San Jose and Chicago. In mid-sized and large U.S. cities, the use of public infrastructure and public and private architecture to keep the poor and homeless contained further supports and accentuates ostracization. Mike Davis names this type of containment as the “architectural policing of boundaries” (1990: 223). Architectural policing is evident in an example from Duneier’s *Sidewalk* (1999), where the panopticon-like design of Penn Station in New York forced the homeless out of nooks and crannies and eventually into the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue area that he studied. In another example of this spatial realization of the outsider status of the homeless, cities often relegate the unhoused, as well as homeless services, to outlying areas, such as industrial zones (i.e. “seclusion”, Herring 2014), buoyed by common NIMBY (Not In My Back-Yard) attitudes of neighborhoods.

### **Resisting Control, Reconstituting Autonomy**

In the most general sense, then, this apparatus of control deployed against homeless people aims at their constant objectification as unwanted outsiders and outcasts; it involves, that is to say, a fundamental assault against the autonomy of the unhoused as human persons capable of agency and action in their own right and imagines them as suitable only for being governed from the outside.

Overall, economic marginalization coupled with lack of resources, entrenched negative beliefs about the poor, and criminalization and exclusion form the backdrop against which the unhoused seek dignity and autonomy (NLCHP 2014). Autonomy can be defined in the more

“negative” sense, as freedom “from” criminalization, or in the “positive” sense, as freedom “to” exist independently. Even in places where the poor and unhoused can access services, such as at shelters and social service agencies, they often experience these places as too bureaucratic, demeaning, and limiting to their autonomy or quest for self-sufficiency (Hays 2003; Heben 2013; Timmer et al. 1994).

People Without Housing (PWH) have therefore challenged these constraints by mobilizing in various ways, ranging from protests and demonstrations (Casanova 1996; Wright 1997), to direct action strategies like housing and parking lot takeovers (Dolgon et al., in Smith 1995), to the formation of tent cities and other homeless encampments<sup>3</sup> (Wagner 1993; Wright 1997.) In these mobilizations, many participants have cited a sense of empowerment. Those involved in forming tent cities have also expressed a stronger sense of community, dignity, and autonomy (Finley 2003; Mosher 2010). At Dignity Village in Portland, for instance, creating a community meant creating empathy, safety, security, and a sense of connection with similar villages or camps as part of a broader network (Mosher 2010: 454-55). It is important to note that many tent cities or encampments are political, particularly at the beginning, but this is not a necessary condition. These communities often emerge out of material and/or psychological necessity as well, partly in response to the “administrative spatial strategies” of local authorities (Herring 2014).

Media outlets such as Freedom Outpost state that “for many” municipalities, tent cities have grown quickly and these communities “have become America’s new norm”<sup>4</sup> (2013). Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_tent\\_cities\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tent_cities_in_the_United_States)) lists about 25 “tent cities” across the nation (2018). In a more exhaustive report called “Welcome Home: the Rise of Tent Cities in the United States,” the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) estimates approximately 100 “tent communities” in 46 of 50 states plus Washington, D.C., and the numbers are growing (2014: 3; cf. NCH 2010). The growth occurs mostly in cities where the unsheltered portion of PWH is larger (Ellis 2014). The number of tent cities is undoubtedly an undercount, as is the overall population of people considered homeless (NCH 2009). Numbers by both the NLCHP and NCH illustrate that tent cities “house” roughly between one-fifth and one-

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<sup>3</sup> According to Wikipedia, tent cities are “encampment[s] or housing facility[ies] made using [tents](#) or other temporary structures” (2018). This straightforward definition is useful because, although similar, it is one that people can relate to more than definitions found in academic journals.

<sup>4</sup> The novelty that the Outpost points to is a more accurate statement for legal, durable tent cities rather than more informal and temporary manifestations.

half of 1 percent of the estimated homeless population. As small as the percentage seems, tent cities have recently garnered a fair amount of media attention, serving as broader representations of the attempts of PWH to establish autonomy and democratic self-organization.

### **The Growth of Tent Cities**

The NLCHP has connected the rise of tent cities to the lack of affordable housing and life in dangerous or isolated conditions: "Encampments and tent cities have emerged as a means of self-help for homeless individuals to survive and find shelter, safety and a sense of community" (quoted from Ellis 2014). The rise in temporary housing accompanies the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression (NCH 2010: 66). According to Neil Donovan, former Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), "[t]ent Cities are American's [sic] de facto waiting room for affordable and accessible housing. The idea of someone living in a tent (or other encampment) in this country says little about the decisions made by those who dwell within and so much more about our nation's inability to adequately respond to our fellow residents in need" (2010: 6).

Growth of these communities further reflects limited public resources, and a partial transfer of responsibility for addressing homelessness from the government to the non-profit sector. Influenced by neoliberal principles, local governments might provide land and support through zoning laws, conditional use permits, or consent decrees (NCH 2010; Heben 2013); however, non-profits, including religious organizations and residents themselves, have increasingly provided oversight and most of the fiscal responsibility for authorized tent cities or village communities. Historically, tent cities have served as symbols of poverty and the lack of accessible housing. Andrew Heben suggests that a more productive conception of tent cities is that they are viable communities that offer safety, stability, increased autonomy, and an increased sense of community (2013). Whether encampments—whatever their degree of formality—are criticized because they are seen as concerns for health, business, property, or safety reasons, or because they should not be seen as "good enough" solutions for the poor (Loftus-Farren 2011), a key point of departure when considering autonomy for PWH is to view encampments as a "viable" way of life (Smith 2014).

The tent city or encampment has been a feature of American life since at least the Great Depression, but today more formal "villages" are sprouting up in different regions, with the Pacific Coast leading the way in terms of "the movement to formalize and regulate encampments" (NCH 2010: 9). As noted below, villages differ from other camps mostly in terms of degree of formalization and durability of housing structures. Also, their development includes self-

management as a core tenet. Susan Finley asserts that the structure of “Dignity Village” in Portland, the first of its kind (Heben 2013), presents a “new way of life to formerly unhoused persons” and that the village presents “a model for new ways to address poverty and homelessness” (2003: 510). Rather than a charity model whereby PWH are recipients of resources from wealthier people in return for showing comportment (Stern 1984), the village is designed as a formal community where people in transitional housing have a space of their own and can establish community rules themselves, albeit in the context of local regulations and stipulations. And unlike more temporary camps, villages may offer increased stability and security to their residents. For example, several villages have security or monitoring during the day, often carried out by residents or in fewer cases, by community volunteers (NCH 2010).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focuses on a transitional “village” for the homeless at the more formal end of the tent city continuum. It asks: *How do villages (or the organizations that work on their behalf) negotiate autonomy for the unhoused within these transitional communities? What role do local government authorities play in this negotiation of autonomy?* More recent studies document the success that tent cities have in terms of providing a sense of dignity, empowerment, and autonomy for PWH. However, it is vital to understand how these individuals actually experience autonomy, and to analyze both collaborative efforts and tensions in how autonomy is negotiated between unhoused and housed advocates, especially when local government is involved. A key to this negotiation is interrogating how self-governance works, since this is part and parcel of trying to achieve autonomy (Rocha 2011).

The primary questions above lend themselves to further inquiry. For one, *who* negotiates autonomy within these communities? What is the importance or value of autonomy (and self-governance) to participants? As autonomy and dignity for PWH are major outcomes that participants want to have, how well have these outcomes been met? What features of these communities (e.g. structure, degree of formality, strategies for fostering self-organization and empowerment) contribute to or detract from the development of autonomous homeless individuals and communities? Given the temporary status of many villages, what does “transition” mean to various actors in these settings and how does the transitional character of these communities shape their efforts to create more autonomous social spaces?

A deep, textured, qualitative examination of these inquiries can shed further light on questions relevant to poor and homeless peoples’ movements, organizational decision-making

processes, and to discourses and potential solutions related to homelessness in general. For example, must tent city or village communities like the one featured here become incorporated as part of the “homeless services industry” (Gowan 2010), making it operate like an agent of the state? And in what ways do village-sponsoring organizations reinforce or challenge conventional wisdom about the abilities of people experiencing homelessness to organize themselves (Piven & Cloward 1977; Yeich 1994), or about beliefs surrounding causes of—or solutions to—homelessness? Overall, how do villages for the homeless represent a new model in mitigating homelessness?

### **Self-Governance, Autonomy, and Characteristics of Self-Organized Tent Cities**

These questions speak directly to major themes in the literature on living arrangements for PWH and their efforts to construct forms of self-organization that maximally preserve autonomy in the face of the constant efforts to undermine it described above.

Self-organized communities developed by PWH carry important benefits to those involved. These communities provide spaces to sleep as well as a level of comfort and stability. They further may allow opportunities for securing better livelihood. In a study of such communities on the Pacific Coast, residents favored having a stable place so that people could search for work, go to school, or build skills (NCH 2010). These communities can experience a greater sense of dignity and autonomy because the authoritative presence of shelters, social services, or police is absent. For example, residents tend to develop more self-reliance since they do not have to follow rigid rules such as curfews for bedtime or having to meet weekly with a caseworker in order to keep a roof over their heads. Where these communities are self-governing, residents often create—or participate in—community rules. Mosher notes with Dignity Village, “[a]s residents participate equally in the process of creating rules and policies that govern their community, they begin to develop a collective identity based on shared values and needs that are often centered on issues of social justice for other homeless people and collective action in helping each other acquire housing and needed services” (2010: 438).

Living in tent city communities also “gives [residents] a staging point and bargaining power to organize for real gains, such as changing the way homelessness is perceived and managed by social service industries, local governments, and communities” (Mosher 2010: 4). In this way, villages can be political communities of public education (Finley 2003). Although Nickelsville, in the state of Washington, was not a permanent encampment, residents had a stable place from which to advocate for a more permanent facility by writing letters to city and state officials (Loftus-Farren

2011: 1051). Surrounding communities often provide increased advocacy, attention, and assistance for villages, especially at the beginning when it is assumed that the community should be around for a while (Ibid: 2011).

What have scholars asserted about some basic characteristics of tent cities, which subsume the category of “village”? First, tent cities and other such communities are not monolithic. They differ in terms of physical structure, organizational structure (including non-profit status), community structure (e.g., Community Rules and how rules are applied; vetting process / decision-making processes about who to accept as a resident), and official recognition or sanctioning by the city. Overall, we might consider self-managed communities along axes of formal to informal, loosely to highly structured, and horizontal or vertical in decision-making (Heben 2013).

A tent city can be defined in physical terms as a temporary housing facility ranging from actual tents to more permanent tiny buildings. These “tent” cities may consist of more durable wooden dwellings with insulation. They might also have infrastructure, such as bathrooms with running water rather than porta potties. Mosher (2010: 4) describes Portland’s Dignity Village (DV) as the first stable “village” for the unhoused, organized in late 2000 and early 2001. Durable structures took a few years to materialize (Heben 2014).

Tent cities can also develop formally or informally (the more predominate form). Formally operated communities tend to have more durable structures. Because of NIMBY attitudes and municipal codes and ordinances that limit physical and social space for the visible poor, advocates and the unhoused have tried to create distance from the traditional notion of a homeless “camp.” Camps have the connotation of being disorganized eyesores that cause problems for neighbors and businesses; “villages” are increasingly associated with a more formal, and often locally-approved, type of self-organized community of the homeless.

Generally, “villages” are more organized than “camps,” with rules, for instance, that specify how residents contribute to the community (e.g. doing security hours), and that publicly prohibit drug use on the premises. For example, Dignity Village operates with community rules and a manual created and revised by residents. Camp Runamuck, a village in Providence, RI, was one of the first to consist of “an official charter and firm leadership structure” (NLCHP 2014: 4). For communities in which drug or alcohol rules would be continuously violated, or in which people suffer more from mental illnesses, “institutions [e.g. shelters] or unorganized tent cities that remain informal may continue to be the best option in these situations” (Heben 2013: 69). In comparison to more traditional shelters, decision-making in villages is more horizontal (Heben 2013); villages

elect their own councils to make decisions on important community matters. Villages also allow for more leeway in things like preparing food or entering and leaving with fewer time restrictions. These communities are less concerned about specifying time limits on residency, and more concerned that residents respect community rules (Mosher 2010).

Different types of governance or leadership structures exist amongst these villages. One model uses a “chief” plus a five-member leadership council (Camp Runamuck, RI). A second type of self-governance includes deciding matters by majority vote with rotating moderators or councilors (Camp Quixote, WA). Dignity Village in Portland, OR offers a variation of the second type, where a Council, Chair, and Vice-Chair with other councilors form an administrative branch, in which the entire body of villagers forms the legislature that approves all new rules (Loftus-Farren 2011). While Heben characterizes Dignity Village as an “autonomous village” since fewer compromises existed with city officials, he calls OVE a “collaborative village,” somewhere between formal and informal, or semi-formal (2014). In this sense, the “collaboration” is between the organization and city government, which sanctions the village and cheaply leases the land. However, two other collaborations exist within the majority of encampments that attempt self-management: one is between mostly “housed” advocates and transitionally housed residents; the other is among residents themselves. These collaborations are elaborated below.

### **Theorizing Autonomy, Negotiating Autonomy**

The question Heben poses for the collaborative village is: how does a tent city community have some degree of formality while keeping its positive informalities (2014)? This requires a balance between building / keeping community and abiding by the city contract, while also sticking to the rules outlined in its village manual, which are themselves influenced by city and neighborhood interests. Below I will discuss how autonomy has been negotiated in village communities. First I will explore autonomy as a concept, including its application to PWH.

In literature on homelessness, autonomy is a key factor in promoting self-worth and emotional well-being among the unhoused. Rooted in moral and political philosophy, Gerald Dworkin’s conceptualization of autonomy pertains to individuals’ ability to make a choice freely “in accordance with their own standards and preferences” (1988: ix). Autonomy, and the associated concept of dignity (Finley 2003), is connected with respect and having voice in decisions that affect one’s life. Autonomy has also been cited as important in successful mobilizations that include the poor and homeless (Mosher 2010).

Theorizing autonomy among subservient workers, Rocha (2011) asserts that the concept can be interpreted through at least three different approaches: moral, pure action, and welfare. A moral approach interprets autonomy as acting with free will so that individuals can understand their moral obligations “in a world governed by the laws of physics” (Ibid: 314). A pure action approach examines autonomy for its theoretical implications, without connecting it to an extrinsic goal, such as morality or happiness. Rocha favors a welfare approach, which I utilize. A welfare approach focuses on autonomy in terms of satisfying some goal particular to the individual, especially happiness. Because I sought to understand what residents and others “get” out of autonomy, or the importance that autonomy holds for various actors, the welfare approach makes the most sense for this study. Lastly, although the concept of autonomy allows for the development of one’s individuality regardless of social influence (Rocha 2011), both Rocha and Dworkin (1988) argue that autonomous individuals must recognize others’ needs or higher ideals. For example, someone that chooses to respect or follow authority can still remain autonomous, as long as their right to choose is not removed.

Moreover, as with the concept of freedom (Wright and Rogers 2011), autonomy can be viewed as both “positive” and “negative.” Positive autonomy includes autonomy “to” do something, such as make independent choices or develop a “true” sense of self; negative autonomy—or autonomy “from”—includes things to avoid in order to maintain autonomy, such as coercion, deception, or brainwashing (Rocha 2011).

What has autonomy meant in particular to people without housing? One such meaning cited by Mosher is having some privacy, control, and decisions over “home.” “Particularly within the area of homelessness, recovering ‘home’ means recovering the privacy and freedom of self-expression, a sense of security, improved social status, a sense of having a stakehold in the community, and a renewed sense of competence” (2010: 188). Similarly, in his study of a tent city in Seattle, Sparks cites the ability to create their own living structures in line with their values and priorities (2012). Indeed, a key difference between shelters and Dignity Village in Portland is that “participating in a community based on expressed and shared values as opposed to one dictated by *externally* imposed rules for conduct” signals empowerment, of which autonomy is a part (Mosher 2010: 3). Nevertheless, just as shelters must take into account a variety of constituents, such as clients, donors, employees, volunteers, and community partners, horizontally-governed villages must do the same. There are at least three major “collaborations” that locally-sanctioned, nonprofit-driven communities that include the homeless always consider.

Using Heben's (2014) language in initiating the "collaborative" village, the first collaboration is between organizations that support the homeless and local government. Formally structured villages (e.g. with written community rules) backed by advocates respected in the community may be more likely than informal camps to obtain city approval for housing the homeless on public or private land. Municipalities are more likely to sanction this type of "tent city" if overseen by a non-profit organization, rather than by looser groups of advocates and/or the homeless (Herring 2014). Yet while cooperative relations with city officials can be useful in order for a village or tent city model to work<sup>5</sup> (Heben 2013), government officials, advocates, and the unhoused themselves, have different or at least overlapping interests. One example is of differences that arise regarding the role of villages as transition spaces. In a 2010 evaluation of Dignity Village prepared for the Portland Housing Bureau, "[t]he majority of the residents and stakeholders interviewed...described the Village as transitional or temporary. But for a small number of residents, the very notion of the Village as 'transitional housing' is offensive. From their perspective, the Village is about having a home and a community. Dignity residents viewed their home as an autonomous, semi-permanent 'village', similar to co-housing" (2010: 8).

In his four-type framework regarding the logics of homeless seclusion, Chris Herring argues that variations in longer-term tent cities are influenced by the negotiation between "administrative spatial strategies" used by local authorities as representatives of the state, and "adaptive strategies" used by PWH. For Herring, cities can choose to "tolerate" or "legalize" encampments, the two logics where autonomy remains with the homeless (the other two logics entail local *control* rather than autonomy). The difference is that toleration occurs through "lack of enforcement" of laws that could be levied against homeless campers, whereas legalization is a strategy used by the local state to accommodate encampments when political barriers to legalization are overcome (e.g. when a church or other non-profit organization comes forth to assume "provision and management of the camp", 2014: 298). Normally, cities must respond to, or at least appear to respond to, business or neighborhood concerns / interests regarding a community of the homeless in their neighborhood, regardless of whether concerns are supported by evidence. With the idea of collaboration, a city can

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<sup>5</sup> Communities of the homeless that are more politicized and include homeless "subpopulations" that are considered undeserving, like those who frequent the street, often push the issue of homelessness in ways that sometimes garner more resources for those deemed more deserving (Rosenthal 1994). Examples of the deserving include people that live in shelters, and homeless families. Rosenthal refers to successes of movements for the homeless in this way as a "good cop / bad cop" dichotomy.

essentially shift responsibility for problems that arise in the direction of the non-profit. Perhaps in the neoliberal state, the non-profit inadvertently takes over key functions of the state to manage or enforce rules in order that camps or villages may legally continue (e.g., the village in this study re-structured its Board of Directors to allow for part-time paid staffing, and more recently, had a proposal for a paid quarter-time administrator position to handle paperwork).

The second collaboration in which negotiating autonomy takes place is between transitionally housed residents and the [housed] persons that support them. Degree of hierarchy influences how autonomy is negotiated. Utilizing DeWard and Moe's (2010) analysis of a women's shelter to illustrate hierarchy in temporary housing provision, residents negotiated autonomy in three ways: by submitting and taking responsibility for their circumstances; by adapting through appealing to higher authorities; and by resisting the authority of shelter staff and claiming their own competence. Although class tensions exist in organizations or communities between those who are better or worse off in terms of housing status (Rosenthal 1994; cf. Rivera and Erlich 1998), one might expect a relaxing of that tension when dealing with democratic principles of self-governance and dignity. But the degree to which actors operate from their class positions can produce tensions in self-governing communities as well (Mosher 2010).

One tension surrounds prioritizing the immediacy of housing compared with building a strong community culture. Building a community culture includes setting up rules and other aspects of communal living, such as sharing meals together. While housed activists might play a role in trying to build community by bringing in meals for residents to share, residents themselves may want to get into a housing structure as quickly as possible. Those with a system-talk analysis of homelessness and most low-income housing advocates support immediate housing as they criticize stair-step approaches to housing "readiness" (See Padgett et al. 2016 for one example). Conflicts may also arise when housed non-profit actors must take ultimate responsibility for any potential failure of the tent city or village, lest it be shut down or receive "bad press." Some villages are set up more like shelters for this reason, such as Pinella's Hope, which is run by a religious non-profit and requires more stringent monitoring of drugs than in less stringent communities (NLCHP 2014, "Welcome Home"). Moreover, housed advocates have greater access to resources that can place them at the front end of a "giver-recipient" status relationship. Lastly, who ultimately makes and enforces the community rules directly shapes the ability to choose for PWH (Mosher 2010).

The last collaboration involved in negotiating autonomy is at the community level, among residents of the tent city or village. Dignity Village is unique in that mostly unhoused Board

members negotiate autonomy by interpreting, enforcing, and altering its rules and bylaws. Different groupings (some might say “cliques”) developed at Dignity organized around ideas regarding the purpose of the community. Some residents wanted to stay true to Dignity’s original political mission and push for broader rights for the homeless. Others sought to focus inward by becoming self-sufficient in order to transition to more stable living situations. The former group believed that a focus on rights for the unhoused translated into increased dignity and respect (Mosher 2010).

Class differences also matter among tent city dwellers or villagers. Some had been impoverished or homeless for a much longer period or more consistently, and had taken on what sometimes is called the “street mentality” (Duneier 1999). Other residents came from middle-class backgrounds and embodied middle-class expectations of being treated well by social institutions and organizations, working for change within the status quo, and yet still questioning authority (Lareau 2003). Varying expectations can provide opportunities to work across class differences in achieving autonomy or can work at cross-purposes. Before delving into the community of OVE, I step back to touch upon the contradictory relationship between autonomy and neoliberalism.

### **A Note on Neoliberalism’s Relationship to Autonomy**

People commonly relate autonomy to a positive sense of individual freedom, where being under control is seen as the opposite. In a neoliberal era, the shift in responsibility from government to unhoused persons and their advocacy organizations has, perhaps ironically, afforded the homeless some degree of autonomy and ability to self-govern (Finley 2003; cf. Herring 2014; Sparks 2012). In other words, as one example, the federal government has asserted control by providing fewer resources, such as public housing over the past few decades, rendering lower income people with fewer housing options. One result is that the poor and homeless lack economic stability and empowerment. This seeming contradiction between autonomy on one hand and disempowerment on the other is evident in the Final Report and Recommendations from the Opportunity Eugene Task Force before OVE began: “Certain Homeless Task Force members stressed that in addition to shelter, food and medical care, most homeless individuals had an intense need and the desire to have dignity through being self-sufficient. *This matched nicely with the current lack of funding...*” (2012, emphasis added).

In *The Disciplinary Revolution*, Philip Gorski concludes that state power and capacity to control is manifest in “*local government and non-state governance*” (2003: 166, author’s emphasis). Rather than control solely through centralization of government or having to coerce citizens, the dispersion of

state authority allows “not only regulatory and normalizing capacity but coercive and extractive capacity as well” (Ibid: 166). During early modern (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century) Europe, self-discipline or self-regulation reflected individual agency rather than repression (Gorski 2003). Today, the perception of whether or not self-discipline allows for agency or repression is more conflated.

### **The Case of Opportunity Village, Eugene**

Eugene is Oregon’s second largest city and contains most of Lane County’s unhoused population. The latest county enumeration in January 2017 revealed 1,529 people unhoused, 1,003 of those unsheltered; the number of unhoused and the portion unsheltered are considered an undercount (Lane County Human Services Report 2017). Despite some day services and nighttime shelters for people without homes, compared with NLCHP’s national finding that approximately 40% of homeless people are unsheltered (2014), Eugene’s *unsheltered* homeless rate of 65.5% is staggering. In 2013, Eugene’s unsheltered rate ranked third highest among 15 similar-sized cities in all regions of the country (Bryant 2014).

Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE), now considered the first project under the non-profit organization SquareOne Villages (SOV)<sup>6</sup>, began in August of 2013, emerging out of Occupy Wall Street protests beginning in late 2011. In the aftermath of the eviction of homeless campers, who later “incorporated into the OCCUPY Eugene encampment”, an Opportunity Eugene Task Force was created by the mayor to address local homelessness (NLCHP 2014: Appendix 1).

OVE is located in an industrial area amidst some residences on approximately one acre of city-owned land. OVE was organized as a “transitional” village that has had to receive city permission to renew its lease. The most current lease runs until June 2018. Residents are not limited to staying a certain number of days or months, but are expected to transition to more stable living environments given the relative stability as well as opportunities provided at the village.

Driving by the village one might notice colorful little houses situated on the property. When entering the village from the main street there is a wide driveway that leads up to the sliding gate on wheels. The gate is usually open a few to several feet during the day unless there is a large meeting, such as weekly villager meetings. It is closed and locked at night, with a resident usually sleeping several feet away on a cot inside the front / welcome hut. The welcome hut is to the right after one

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<sup>6</sup> OVE changed its name to SquareOne in mid-2015. Its mission is “to create self-managed communities of low-cost tiny houses for people in need of housing” (SOV Website 2015).

goes through the gate, and visitors must check in there. Most of the time, a visitor is given a name badge sticker or a laminated badge that clips onto clothes. Visitors are escorted by residents, or occasionally by volunteers who are well-known around OVE, such as many on the Board or Support Committee. As I became better known around the village, I would still receive a badge much of the time, although ample times residents would tell me “you’re okay” or “we know you” and I would go without one. Receiving or not receiving a badge for me depended quite a bit, although not entirely, on which resident was covering the gate.

At full capacity OVE is equipped with 29 “tiny houses” comprised of 6’ W x 14’ L, dome-shaped structures called “conestoga” huts (designed by local group Community Supported Shelters), and similar-sized bungalows (roughly 60-100 SqFt), designed and built locally for singles and couples<sup>7</sup>. The welcome hut has a cot, front desk and computer, with a loft up top for storage. The village also boasts a 30-foot round heated yurt as a community space, one shower, two small bathrooms with clean running water, a food pantry, small kitchen with a refrigerator, cookware, a donations structure, a mobile tool-shed (for village improvement and potential micro-business opportunity), a trailer with a bed, and internet access with 4-5 community computers on site (See Appendix E for some pictures of OVE’s layout).

Approximately 30-35 people live at OVE at any given time. Residents, or “villagers”, are expected to contribute approximately 8-10 hours per week to the village, especially by staffing the gate. The village is self-managing through: 1) a rotating Village Council of five or seven resident members; and 2) weekly meetings in which all villagers can vote and are expected to attend, barring excused absences (e.g. work). Self-governance is a “core value” of OVE. Residents are men and women age 18 or older, but most are between ages 30 and 60. Most are white, with several people of color (African American, Latina/o, or American Indian) during my research. Consistent oversight of the village is provided by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Board of Directors, which comprises 3) the third governing group of the village.

The three major players in OVE’s governing structure, to be discussed at length in Chapter 3, are distinct yet overlap with the three main “parts” that comprise OVE: The residents, the board, and the Steering/Support Committee. The board consists mainly of leaders from faith organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and two rotating village residents. A “Support Committee” forms the last formal body of OVE, a group situated in-between residents and the Board that has

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix E to see pictures of what the dwellings look like.

taken on a listening and resident advocacy role; members of this committee can give input but do not vote in village matters.

Each resident at the village signs a Community Agreement that consists of five major rules for the “acceptable behavior for residents”: 1) No violence to yourself or others; 2) No theft; 3) No alcohol, illegal drugs, or drug paraphernalia; 4) No persistent, disruptive behavior; and 5) Everyone must contribute to the operation and maintenance of the Village. A Village Manual (see Appendix D) is the major document to which residents and others refer when governing their affairs. The manual lays out policy regarding village governance, security and safety, and how to handle rule violations, as well as policies dealing with food storage, pets, abandonment, alcohol and drugs, couples who have a falling out, probationary status, medical and family leave, and bathroom cleaning. The village manual, 13 pages as of late January 2015, is updated on an as-needed basis; updates must be approved by the village council and in some cases by an entire village vote. The Board also can review and approve amendments made by villagers to both the Village Manual and Community Agreement. Continued sanctioning of OVE is determined by its adherence to the non-profit’s contract with the city, the “Operational Agreement” (which also forbids drug use on the property, as an example. See Appendix B.). Although residents have the power to change community rules outlined in the manual, housed advocates in OVE had proposed rules in place, that the city agreed to, before the original residents were selected. Overall, OpportUNITY Village Eugene is situated between progressive activism and city-sanctioned politics, which is reflected in discourses that emphasize both self-sufficiency (focus on individual responsibility) and human rights (focus on societal responsibility). In this context, practical tradeoffs are often necessary to create enough official buy-in to give experiments of this sort the opportunity to start in the first place.

## **Methods**

In order to learn about meanings of autonomy and self-governance in OVE, and how these concepts are negotiated in practice, I employ a qualitative, ethnographic approach. I borrow from both Kathy Charmaz (2006) and Michael Burawoy et al. (1991) in analyzing the data, which come from field observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Charmaz details the production of grounded theory through the process of induction, whereby the researcher generates themes from constantly comparing data to other instances of data, and then comparing the data to emerging theoretical insights. Rather than in the “pure” grounded sense of creating theory from the data upward, Burawoy et al.’s approach seeks theoretical extension and clarification, often through

applying a social mechanism to an extant theory and specifying where it fits and does not fit the theory. My approach is a more modified grounded theory, while specifying insights from the inhabited institutionalism approach (Hallett and Ventresca 2006a; 2006b) within organizational sociology.

Between April 2013 and the spring of 2016, I conducted participant observation in organizational meetings (e.g. Support Committee, Board, and village-led meetings), OVE-sponsored or attended events and activities, through volunteering at the village, and to a lesser degree in broader community meetings or events that addressed homelessness. I sought to answer how the (formerly) unhoused negotiate autonomy and transition within the organization, as well as how self-governance works in practice. In order to corroborate—and challenge—observations, I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with residents, Support Committee members, Board members, advocates outside of the village, and one local official. In addition, I analyzed documents that include: OVE’s listserv, policies, meeting minutes, quarterly reports, and website; and proposals and public communications from homeless advocates outside of OVE. In order to situate OVE’s development more broadly, I kept abreast of local government materials and policies (e.g. city council meetings, special sessions, 10-year plans to end homelessness) pertaining specifically to homelessness. The bulk of data for this specific work comes from interviews, analysis of various meeting minutes, and field observations<sup>8</sup>.

In order to begin participant-observation and to conduct interviews, I built upon—at that time—my two-year role in OVE’s Support Committee as a participant and notetaker, as well as an occasional volunteer at the village and participant in community events. I presented myself as a student desiring to do meaningful research who is inspired by and supportive of OVE, while also being a critical observer. My role is somewhat like the “buddy-researcher” described by Williams (2005, citing Cress and Snow 1996 and Snow and Anderson 1993), a researcher role where one presents him or herself as supportive of the advocacy organization one studies, and somewhat knowledgeable of—in this case—homelessness. My original motive for this work could be described more as a “researcher-as-participant,” than a “participant-as-researcher” (Burawoy et al. 1991: 2). In other words, I was a researcher first, but also a participant.

The remainder of this research addresses the development of OVE’s vision (Chapter 2) in order to highlight the imagined type and scope of community, as well as provide a foundation of expectations in order to compare with actual implementation of OVE. The running themes deal

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<sup>8</sup> I often do not cite examples from field observations *as* observation.

with how PWH and others experience OVE's attempt at creating autonomy. Chapter 3 focuses mostly on village self-governance to provide a concrete example of how organizational vision is (or is not) translated into practice, and how various members experience it. This chapter on implementation also introduces the concept within sociology of organizational "decoupling" as it relates to my data. Chapter 4 involves a deeper explanation of how and where OVE represents instances of decoupling and loose coupling. These instances are explained through how expectations of transition out of the village are navigated, and to a lesser degree, how micro-business opportunities illustrate a different notion of self-sufficiency than transition expectations. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of findings as well as implications for working with PWH, self-organization in transitional spaces created for PWH, and organizational decision-making.

**CHAPTER II**

**DEVELOPING THE VISION:**

**FROM OCCUPY TO THE MAYOR'S HOMELESSNESS TASK FORCE**

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO A TINY HOUSE VILLAGE FOR THE UNHOUSED**

**Setting the Context**

In order to understand how this experimental project might diverge in practice from its stated goals and core principles, OVE's organizational vision and expectations should be specified. I ask: What does the development of OVE's vision tell us about the "players" and broader environment that a budding organization must navigate? This question also relates to an organization's political strategies. More specifically, how is self-governance to be enacted in a transitional community of PWH? Whether vision is considered essentially separate from practice, or is open to intervention by organizational actors who rationally decide to diverge from stated goals, I aim to understand how organizations and their actors negotiate this divergence. In the process of creating OVE's vision, I also attend to how people without homes are represented and included. How part of the vision, particularly self-governance, is implemented is the subject of Chapter 3.

This chapter relies mostly on organizational documents, and to a lesser degree, on private listserv commentary, in order to tell one story about how the vision of OVE proceeded. The time spans from late 2011, when people experiencing homeless join Eugene's Occupy movement camp, to immediately before the village's informal opening in late August 2013. I was uninvolved during most of this period, joining OVE in April 2013. Although vision does not necessarily stop once a project is underway, the official opening of the village and its implementation of self-governance is a reasonable starting point in order to compare with its planning stages.

I initially conceptualize "vision" in a way that attempts to approach participants' understandings. Thus, vision is treated in OVE as a set of ideas or goals, something never completely realized, yet an ideal toward which to move. The process of "realizing" a vision is messy; hence this conceptualization takes for granted a divergence between goals and practice. Unlike Weberian methodology, I do not set up ideal characteristics of a village organization to compare with OVE's reality. However, qualitatively comparing OVE's vision with its implementation as

actors see it, is significant when analyzing differences between organizational intentions and outcomes.

The divergence of strategies and outcomes has been conceptualized in the literature on organizations as “decoupling” (Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Hallett and Ventresca 2006a). Decoupling, explored further in Chapter 4, has predominately been analyzed as a set of decisions made by organizations that serve them in positive ways (Harrison et al. 2015). Research on racial inequality provides similar insights when differentiating the ideal from the real, or white racial attitudes from the consequences of behavior (e.g. Bonilla-Silva 2010). The fact that OVE was the first project of its kind in the area has implications for the development of future villages or similar projects.

As noted above, the need for a project like OVE emanates from a number of factors related to the spike of visible poverty since the early 1980s, and the development of homelessness as a “public problem” (Stern 1984). The “new” homelessness has often come to be perceived as a separate problem warranting its own assessment of causes and solutions. For instance, homelessness has become practically and analytically distinguished from poverty, unemployment, and lack of affordable housing, although it is connected to all these issues. The Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, with its slogan of the “99 percent”, emerged in a way that related Wall Street speculation to various social ills, including unequal distribution of resources in general, as well as poverty and not too long after, homelessness. OVE’s development is part of this national attempt in relating homelessness back to myriad social problems, while calling for increased dignity and autonomy for homeless people in the process. Attempting to bring multiple problems into focus, and relate them together, the 99 percent implied inclusion of all social classes outside of the very rich, including the middle-class, working class, and the very poor and homeless. Jamil Jonna (2013) notes that across the country, various subpopulations of the “unhoused” joined Occupy soon after its camps began running all day, every day. Indeed in Eugene, publicizing the lives and rights of the unhoused became an issue pushed by many in the Occupy movement.

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<sup>9</sup> The newer homelessness, especially since the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, is defined against and associated with stable, material housing and home as a place. Particularly, today’s conceptualization of homelessness evokes lack of affordable housing. “Older” manifestations of what is now called homelessness, whether vagrancy, disaffiliation, or the “forgotten man”, bore a greater connection to lack of family and community rootedness, rather than to lack of a house. This was especially the case when “homelessness” was seen mostly as a rural phenomenon (DePastino 2003; Webb 2014).

Specifically, the idea for Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE) grew after a January 2012 eviction of homeless campers, who subsequently “incorporated into the OCCUPY Eugene encampment.” [When] “OCCUPY’ [itself was faced with]...eviction, [activists] worked with the city and local service providers to launch the Opportunity Eugene Task Force to address the situation of homelessness in Eugene” (NLCHP 2014: Appendix 1). The first of six recommendations from this task force was to “[d]irect city staff to work with community members to identify potential sites in order to establish a safe and secure place to be...independently financed with oversight by a not-for-profit organization or agency” (Task Force Final Report 2012). The nonprofit itself, and the “village” as its project, became OVE. Before OVE drafted any vision statement, however, having a safe place for the unhoused became a goal that all concerned Occupy participants, other advocates, and the city could (partly) rally around. Once these various stakeholders agreed that creating “a safe place” for PWH was the major method to address local homelessness, they could mobilize resources to address the problem.

From sociologist Herbert Blumer’s five stages of the construction of social problems in 1969, the process of vying for ownership in how a problem is defined, coming to a definition, and then gathering resources to address that problem, represents the two stages “legitimacy” and “mobilization”. In order to explain how homelessness was constructed as a national problem, Mark Stern (1984) utilized Blumer’s five stages while focusing on New York. Although Stern mentions all five of Blumer’s stages regarding the homeless—including the first stage (“emergence” of the problem)—I focus on the legitimacy and mobilization stages locally, especially since homelessness has already “emerged.” My reasoning is that in the ensuing three decades since Stern’s work, the issue of homelessness has undergone a process of redefinition or reconstruction. The growth of more formalized tent cities and “villages” indicates a new negotiation of the problem of homelessness.

In the 1980s, Stern’s focus was on New York City and New York State, who were at odds over whether homelessness was a problem of housing foreclosures or mental illness, a battle that transcended one U.S. state. The outcome would determine who should take ownership and responsibility over the issue. The city would be responsible for funding and programming regarding mental health, while the state would address foreclosures. The outcome was that both levels of government agreed on a minimum compromise: provide food and shelter. Therefore, government resources were mobilized toward addressing food availability and (at that time, warehouse-type) shelter for the visible poor (1984). Activists for the homeless led a national critique that affordable

housing rather than temporary shelter was the ultimate answer to homelessness, yet they also worked to alleviate hunger and lack of safe places to stay (Ibid). According to Gowan (2010), between the 1980s and the beginning of the early 2000s, activist arguments—even with a consistent presence—have taken a backseat to more professionally-defined discourses that explain causes and solutions regarding homelessness (i.e. homeless people need treatment and rehabilitation for mental/physical health, and/or addiction). In part, Occupy rejuvenated systemic critiques long held by advocates of PWH.

OVE's initial vision could be considered an extension of Occupy's goals, reiterated specifically in regard to PWH. For example, Occupy Eugene lacked a formal authority structure and sought horizontal rather than hierarchical leadership. Community rules governed the original Occupy camp in Zuccotti Square (New York), where participants were encouraged to listen to each other and aim for consensus decision-making (Al-Jazeera documentary 2011). OVE, in its earliest version of a vision statement, was called an "urban village" whose focus on "self-government" provided "autonomy, responsibility, and respect" for the unhoused. Moreover, the statement from 2012 begins that OVE will be "an alternative living site for those experiencing homelessness and the community members who have joined with them to address a new mode of living that embraces a future of fewer traditional jobs and a need to live in a more sustainable manner."

On the other hand, OVE's development follows more strands than just Occupy given the variety of stakeholders involved, including activists, long-respected and newer leaders in non-profits and churches, local government staff, members who were unhoused, and others. Several people who ended up taking influential positions at OVE (volunteer and paid) were previously part of hierarchically-arranged organizations, such as churches, other non-profits, and the military. Moreover, some Homeless Task Force members were city staff or other government officials who had non-activist, more social service or mainstream political backgrounds in dealing with poverty and homelessness.

Overall, material from the Task Force's Final Report (See Appendix A) to the city in Mid-2012 reflected a visionary path. A lengthier quote from the report below illustrates not only the major recommendation that resulted in OVE, but also its connections with Occupy, its goals to offer certain correctives to the usual treatment of the unhoused, and its potential for becoming a model project.

“[Recommendation] 1. Direct city staff to work with community members to identify potential sites in order to establish a safe and secure place to be, opened by October 1, 2012, independently financed with oversight by a not-for-profit organization or agency.

There was no consensus among group members regarding a long-term plan or vision for the site(s). However, one vision that emerged by some members of the Task Force is as follows:”

Certain Homeless Task Force members stressed that in addition to shelter, food and medical care, most homeless individuals had an intense need and the desire to have dignity through being self-sufficient. This matched nicely with the current lack of funding. They want to contribute to constructing these shelters. Materials needed. Labor and guidance are plentiful.

The shelter discussion also included establishing a community with adequate land on which food could be grown, artisan work accomplished and, as above, where residents help with the construction and maintenance of their homes. One of the most important concepts to arise from the Occupy camp, echoing what has been found in other successful homeless shelter models, is the idea of “family” or “community” and the importance of regulating the camp from within through strong “community agreements” signed and enforced by community members before they enter the community.

The Opportunity Eugene community shelter will serve as a national model of a self-sustaining, self-managed, low-capitalization, eco-friendly community. A 501c3 agency will have oversight of the community. Community members and the 501c3 agency will work together to produce food and other needs and to seek needed resources from the compassionate and generous larger Eugene community. The City’s only obligation would be to provide land; land use, zoning and code variances that allow the community to operate cost-effectively under reasonable safety standards; and offer the same level of safety and security services provided to other Eugene neighborhoods. The first year the city would contribute a fixed amount for start-up costs and operation expenses. The community will be self-sustaining in future years.” Opportunity Eugene Task Force on Homelessness Final Report (2012)

At least two aspects of OVE’s vision are clear in this report. One, this “safe and secure place” would meet base material needs in addition to providing dignity and autonomy through a self-regulating community. Two, city support would be available, yet limited, “match[ing] nicely with the current lack of funding.” The city’s “only obligation” would be to provide land and alter zoning/planning laws to allow the village to run, and provide the common “safety and security

services” present in other neighborhoods. The task force report illustrates reliance on Eugene’s broader, generous community for donations, as well as oversight [and fundraising] provided through its nonprofit. I view the city’s limited funding role in terms of rollbacks in social service spending and government provisions, to be discussed later in this work.

OVE’s second draft of the vision statement in Nov. 2012 illustrates that all major vision components were kept through the opening of the village in August/Sept. 2013. The second draft contained ten bullet points, each beginning with the promise that the village will create “[t]he opportunity for” or “[t]he opportunity to”. Among these was the opportunity to dwell in a community free from drugs, alcohol, or violence, the opportunity to live in a self-governed community; and to live in a nondiscriminatory environment. According to Wanda, one of my interviewees, former Occupy activists took the Mayor’s suggestion to use the name “Opportunity Village” rather than “Occupy Village.”

These opportunities were not rights or guarantees as activists would have desired, but the opportunities that were envisioned took into account barriers that unhoused people experience. For example, the opportunities to both “renew life goals and aspirations”, and to “work toward personal and community sustainability” point to relaxing the usual hurrying of PWH to simply be productive. Productivity includes having to find fundamental resources, such as income and affordable or stable housing, as soon as possible. However, the opportunity to have a safe space with privacy and time to regroup held promise as something helpful rather than punitive to PWH.

### **What’s in a Name? Relations with and Distinctions from Occupy and Its [Radical] Message**

As stated above, the original name for Opportunity Village was Occupy Village. “Occupy,” a word that implies taking up or inhabiting a space or time, implies a right for the 99% – and then, the unhoused – to be heard and own a more equal share of the nation’s wealth and income. It conjures up the idea of a right to space from which the most marginalized are often excluded. Based upon group discussion of how the village could be accepted by the city and a suggestion from then-Mayor Kitty Piercy, activists chose to go with the name “Opportunity Village” instead. Language associated with “rights” and particularly with the Occupy movement was seen as too radical, decreasing the likelihood of the village ever opening. The death of a middle-aged unhoused man surrounding the Occupy Eugene camp further brought negative public attitudes toward the movement, from which OVE needed some distance.

To be sure, negative attitudes about PWH existed within Occupy as well as outside of the movement. The presence of the unhoused created a contradiction between the stated goals of earlier Occupiers and these newcomers. Some Occupy activists illustrated prejudice against the homeless, including a proposal to close off the encampment to people who were deemed “non-activists” (Jonna 2013: 4). The proposal was overturned, although according to Jonna Occupy Eugene never mended this rift. Upon disbanding of the Occupy Eugene camp, advocates separated into different and sometimes overlapping groups. Some focused on environmental justice such as the effects of the proposed Keystone oil pipeline on indigenous U.S. communities. Others continued to write about and criticize aspects of U.S. foreign policy and militarism. Still others saw homelessness as a relevant, timely, and close-up issue on which to focus. The latter participants became involved in planning for what became OVE or more radical projects (Jonna 2013); one of Occupy Eugene’s many subcommittees dealt with housing.

Nearly twenty percent (7 of 37) of my interviewees were connected with Occupy and morphed into participating in OVE, including one eventual long-term resident.<sup>10</sup> At least five others that were rarely or not involved in Occupy still held favorable opinions of Occupy in general. The establishment of the Mayor’s Task Force indirectly facilitated a minority of participants’ transition from concern with the unhoused in Occupy to developing what became the village. Not only were some Occupiers initially appointed to the 58-member task force. According to Sheila whom I interviewed, when the city decided it lacked the funds to implement the task force’s recommendations, a smaller “shadow” group starting with 5-6 people took initiative to help implement and fund the first recommendation for a “safe place.”

Although this research cannot clarify specific characteristics of Occupiers that influenced their dedication to the issue of homelessness, some of the most dedicated had had little experience working with the unhoused. Still, they felt it was an important issue to pursue. Two such members of the Steering Committee (which became the “Support” Committee), both retired white women, explained that they were confronted with the issue as Occupy proponents. They did not originally join Occupy to address homelessness. Marge notes, “that wasn’t what got me *in*, in the *first* place. But then I kind of stayed, and became involved with the issues involving homelessness.” Marge became involved due to concern over economic disparity and increasing poverty, referring to homelessness as “a topic within Occupy.” More specifically, Marge got involved in what became

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<sup>10</sup> One member (Bonnie) who did a lot in OVE became part of an Occupy-related group at her church but was not part of Occupy itself; Bonnie did witness the extent of homelessness at the Occupy camp.

OVE because she thought she might offer business knowledge to unhoused folks who would get involved in micro-enterprise. Similar to Bonnie and Marge, Todd—also past retirement age—supported the general goals of Occupy, and ended up thinking that homelessness “might be a good thing to put some energy into” when the Task Force was created. Todd also cited Rory, a task force member, as a possible connection for why he became involved. Overall, these volunteers felt they had something to offer. I got the impression that when Todd spoke about leaving a local business legacy (what he helped start was still going), he would extend that to leaving an imprint on the village community if he could.

From Occupy Eugene on, the process of creating a vision for OVE was one that moved from political marginality to increasing legitimacy within the city. Occupy activists stood face to face with the unhoused and were pushed to respond to the latter’s needs. Activists were mostly responsible for laying the political groundwork and original vision to bring about OVE. At least by the time the village site was confirmed, in late 2012, many activists were no longer steering the project. Instead, a Board of directors had volunteered or was recruited to develop a viable project the city could approve. Development relied upon a working relationship with the government or those in local power. “*Then* the city council would listen,” Marge asserted. “So it wasn’t people like me and Sheila, and the activists who, once it *switched* [to more respected community members] it became *credible* to, the powers that be so to speak.” Still, activists were necessary at the beginning, to both decide on a village model as their way of addressing homelessness and housing, and to put the issue in front of government bodies like the city council. The board continued the original vision of self-governance by the homeless but had to become somewhat more conservative; city officials were more likely to listen to established members of the community who were less radical.

A posting on the organization’s private listserv in mid-November 2012 illustrates a tactic used to appear less radical in order to gain the city’s approval. The post, sent out to all listserv participants, was by Landon, an eventual Board member. Landon altered (changes in *italics*) a vision statement drafted by Marge: “OK, pondering that a bit more and here is what I am putting in as hopefully a little clearer so I don't have to explain what it means: ‘Our vision is *to establish a transitional, environmentally sustainable village* that will provide opportunities to those who are currently without housing *to build community* and to work with other community members to *develop relationships and skills that will enable them* to transition away from the streets into a lifestyle that is more sustainable and self-fulfilling.’”

Explaining why he made those changes, Landon writes on the listserv, “I left out the phrase about creating a more humane and sustainable Eugene just because I think that is part of what people mean when they criticize us for a ‘utopian’ vision and I want to limit that kind of debate as much as possible so that we can focus on creating the village. Granted, we are trying to make our city more human and sustainable but I’d rather not get into an argument over those kind of claims and whether we are over reaching. Comments? Rebuttals?”

Landon’s explanation, in which he asks for constructive criticism, clearly exemplifies how OVE as a project could gradually move from political marginality to increasing legitimacy. Appearing non-“utopian”, at least publicly, was crucial in gaining legitimacy with local government authorities, who could too easily write the project off as lacking a concrete plan. If project planners favored a utopian edge it was better to do so privately. The project needed to have a less activist and more mainstream image. On one hand, a mainstream image could better secure donations and funding. On the other hand, that image was helpful in eventually swaying two city councilmembers to support the project. The councilmembers were known by advocates to be against communities of homeless people. Furthermore, radical discourses or systemic critiques about homelessness could further marginalize any attempt to start a village for PWH.

As OVE developed its vision of a village, it became clear that the nonprofit group would work within city parameters. For example, OVE and the city agreed to a contract specifying (among other things) the type and amount of units and dwellers, handling of security, and policies regarding drugs, pets, and dismissal. The city expected a quarterly report complete with demographic and transition information; transition meant tracking where a resident went after the village and whether their departure was voluntary or involuntary. These documents and the organization taking responsibility for overseeing village residents (and governance) were required actions to gain increasing support from the city council and other local officials. Working within legal parameters differed from another group that also emerged out of Occupy.

Whoville, which got its name from author Dr. Seuss and cites its historical roots in “Hooverilles” erected in protest during the Great Depression, had more contentious relations with Eugene officials like the City Manager and City Council. Unlike OVE, to whom the City of Eugene gave one acre of land to temporarily lease, Whoville was negatively sanctioned by the city and was considered an “illegal camp.” In Rosenthal’s language Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE) became the good cop to Whoville’s bad cop status.

Based on his research in Santa Barbara, CA in the 1980s, Rob Rosenthal argued that an activist-type group combined with a more moderate-appearing group (or characteristics of group members that are accepted as moderate / “safe” in the eyes of authority) has been effective for gaining concessions at the level of local government (1994). Rosenthal described this combination as a “good cop, bad cop” phenomenon. “In-your-face” activists, representing the bad cops, are positioned to directly confront city policies regarding homelessness, pushing local power brokers to answer to uncomfortable city practices. Good cops are more moderate, willing to compromise with local officials to establish a plan / project that creates benefits to the city while obtaining some concessions for people who are homeless. Rosenthal’s work helps to contextualize the effects of the pragmatic maneuvers to make OVE more palatable. In other words, Whoville’s presence and tactics made OVE the preferable alternative to address Eugene’s homelessness in the early teens decade.

Whoville has since formalized as well—under a different name—and received County approval for a safe space. However, at the time it emerged more spontaneously, contrasted with OVE’s city-community planning process. After Occupy ended, protest was never a strategy of OVE like it was for Whoville. Whoville’s predecessor or perhaps co-organization at one time was SLEEPS, Safe Legally Entitled Emergency Places to Sleep, which used the tactics of protests and demonstrations in addition to lobbying local officials in advocating the right to sleep. Whereas according to Wanda, SLEEPS prided itself on “unhoused people helping each other” in a broad sense, co-homeless support in OVE was largely limited to people getting along at the village.

### **Working out the Vision: Type and Scope of Community**

The actors involved in planning OVE and their interactions were vital to how the project of OVE was envisioned. Working out the vision for community happened in informal actions, over the organization’s listserv, in formal meetings that included both homeless and housed, and was circumscribed some by meetings with the city. To “work out” the vision entailed a process. The vision’s content was what emerged from the planning process, including how self-governance would be set up, and what the community of residents would look like.

Figuring out the practicalities of the type of community OVE would be meant negotiating how much resident autonomy was ideal while helping to foster resident self-sufficiency, as well as deciding the kind of community and culture OVE would have. It also required dealing with dissension. Although sometimes connected with an intentional community, OVE was a created community with an application process. A vetting committee composed of usually a few future

residents and at least one board member reviewed applications and interviewed prospective residents to determine if they were a fit for the village. Several interviewees portrayed OVE's "type" of community as different from an intentional one. OVE is comprised of most people who do not know each other beforehand, although some do. Interviewees often stated that residents both choose yet are, beyond their control, forced to live together, holding varying beliefs in OVE's emerging model or attachments to its vision. In contrast Whoville's outdoor tent camps—without micro-housing like OVE—informally screened and accepted people. From the beginning, OVE arranged for an intermediate security agency to provide watch in order to free up city / police resources; Whoville was subject to greater police scrutiny, and the police were called for this "camp" much more often. Overall, creating a community at OVE was a process influenced initially by Occupy activists' pushing the city to respond, and later included local community members who had already established some respect with city officials.

At least four of my interviewees, consisting of three eventual SC members and one Board member (Sheila, Bonnie, Marge, and Wanda), were part of creating OVE's vision after the task force's recommendations failed to make headway. A fifth member (Peter) joined afterwards. Not quite a "village" at that point, in general this OVE "shadow group" or "design team" favored a larger community of unhoused people in one area with two distinct, adjacent camps. Eventual residents would govern themselves and contribute to building their own tiny houses with community support, thereby instilling a sense of dignity and ownership. Rudy was the sole member of the planning group who envisioned more highly populated encampments where people lived in longhouse-type structures. "His" community would have been larger and closer to the structure of the Occupy camp. The rest of the group felt that this vision would essentially "warehouse" or corral the homeless and that larger numbers of the unhoused together would lead to greater tension and chaos. Group members gradually became irritated with Rudy for continuing to push the issue, despite their lack of interest. A few people left the group due to feelings that ideas weren't going anywhere; people who stayed mentioned a similar sense of stalling due to Rudy's forcefulness. As Marge, a Steering Committee member, states,

[T]hat was pretty much the consensus, was to go for a village model with the exception of Rudy. And Rudy just wasn't giving up. [W]e ended up taking up so much time, debating these things when Rudy was basically the only one, who was really for that mass [encampment]...And then Rudy I remember one night, Rudy was threatening to go to all the city council members, and *tell* them that they would be wasting their political capital, if they supported this [village]. And he was *so* opposed

to it, and we kicked him out. I don't understand how Rudy could *think* that he could *do* that, and still be privy to what was going on in the group. So once Rudy, was asked to leave, then there was, uh, we weren't *wasting*, a lot of our time (Interview 2015)

The strategy of removing a member initially came with complications, as the group went on hiatus, reconvening later "by invitation only" from a lead organizer. After Rudy was gone, the group felt it could move in a more positive direction. Unfortunately I could not find Rudy to ask for an interview.

Second, meetings with city government also influenced the vision. Originally thinking of a roughly 100-person community divided into two camps, soon after planning group members advocated for 30-person camps (and around the same time, some thought four 30-resident camps totaling 120 people would be viable if they could get land). The city council wanted to limit any camp to 15 people in order to avoid increased community tensions and promote safety. Advocates kept pushing the city to let them have 30 people, and the city ended up agreeing on that number as long as there was *one* camp. Thirty people living in one village was a number that not only appealed to the city because the smaller population could be more easily managed (against tensions, including violence), but advocates were also proponents of that size as suitable for building community. Advocates hoped that 30 members would be small enough to maintain intimacy and safety, yet large enough to take on community tasks (e.g. doing shifts at the "gate").

Third, the vision was for the creation of a strong community, where villagers governed themselves through community rules and decided many matters collectively. In reality collective decision making among residents would serve alongside the notion that the board was often a hierarchal authority with the final say. In other words, true self-governance was an ideal that came with mistakes and lessons, along with highlights. By having community rules and being able to vote democratically at the village, residents would be able to exercise autonomy while building community. In OVE autonomy came with responsibility. Residents would be required to attend regular village meetings, and were encouraged to get involved with village council, the elected, all-resident governing body.

In addition to autonomy with responsibility, originally a major goal was to give residents a sense of ownership by having them build their own dwellings with volunteer support. Residents with building skills might be especially positioned to craft a home to their liking, even with the decision on basic design already made. Some residents did participate in the creation of their own

dwellings, but overall the process was limited. Discussing who served on the original board prior to the village opening, Wanda, a former board member, pointed to what she felt was a “fatal error” made regarding a sense of ownership as OVE developed,

Bonnie and Marge didn’t want to serve. Peter, Rory, me, and the three ministers, I think [were the original six board members]. And we did not have I don’t think any homeless people which I strongly objected to but, [it was] hard to get anybody, who would show up, who *could* show up. So we started, and, I think, between the presence, of Peter who was very much into the small houses, and then three ministers, a really *fatal* error, in terms of true self-government, and, sense of ownership and whatnot, developed...[T]here was a lot of dissension. Rory, I think, understood and agreed with the things that I was talking about but probably he *was* the only one. The ministers...I said, “they don’t understand.” I called them “the boys that build.”...Because they were all *so* intrigued with going about, figuring out how many square feet and what the design should be and who was gonna build what and everything that—one of the things that had come out when we were working with the folks who were homeless, was that they needed to be the ones to figure things out. Part of the whole thing that made so many homeless projects bad was *other* people were figuring out what was good for homeless people, as *if* homeless people couldn’t think for themselves (Interview 2016).

Wanda’s assessment brings up the question about the type of community OVE was developing and who was represented. In another part of the interview, Wanda associated churches to which the ministers belonged as one of the most patriarchal institutions, “So, there’s a lot of really smart people out there and the first thing that happens to them,” adds Wanda, “is they get *patronized*, every time they try to get any kind of assistance. And they *all* spoke about it just being the worst part almost of being homeless.” In an organization that was developing with autonomy as a major goal, Wanda saw this goal failing to the degree that “the boys that build” ended up doing or deciding things “for” the homeless. Research has argued that unintentionally, doing “for” the homeless reinforces their lower status (Rosenthal 1994).

In addition, doing things “for” residents held implications for fostering self-sufficiency. The concept of “self-sufficiency” often accompanied the language of self-governance and autonomy. When I first heard it used by Wanda, “self-sufficiency” applied to the houseless took on an aura of empowerment, perhaps even living partly outside “the system” (such as a farmer living off the grid, or specifically, the unhoused generating their own income in a community). However, when used by the powers-that-be, I had associated the language of self-sufficiency with neoliberal’s philosophy of individuals fending for themselves rather than relying on government assistance. Nowhere was the

latter clearer than in debates surrounding welfare reform during the 1990s Clinton Administration. In the push for welfare reform, poor or lower-income people needed to take responsibility for themselves, while the government provided a reasonable step up (opportunities) rather than handouts (Hays 2003). Both Hays and Mariko Lin Chang found when studying welfare [reform] recipients that the level of promised opportunities were not fulfilled to their intended degree (Ibid 2003; Chang 2010).

The name “Opportunity Village” conjures up the idea that individuals need support, but ultimately hold responsibility for getting out of their circumstances, mirroring an “opportunity” notion of equality. In this notion, equality is assumed to be available for everyone as long as they are given the same opportunities, of which they can take advantage. The notion of *equality of opportunity* downplays an assumption of power imbalance in society, and can reproduce inequality through assuming that if everyone has access to the same standards, outcomes are only a matter of personal motivation (Hays 2003). One example would be every student taking the same exam, no matter their learning style or access to course materials. On the other hand, an approach known as *equality of condition* presumes that power imbalances and historical inequalities exist; therefore, one necessary way to address inequality is through some type of affirmative action policies (Wright and Rogers 2011). Self-sufficiency, in the latter approach, is placed in the context of community and public support and responsibility. Articulations of OVE’s vision reflected both approaches.

Before illustrating one such articulation, in the OVE community I identified two major goals that fit under the umbrella of self-sufficiency: 1) transition and 2) micro-enterprise. Simply put, transition meant moving out of the village. When a resident moved to an apartment, a house, or moved in with family or as part of a longer-term living situation, the transition was deemed successful. Usually that transition was voluntary; sometimes finding steady paid work preceded transition. An unsuccessful transition meant a villager exiting—voluntarily or involuntarily—without having viable housing options. In the fall before the village began, a board member had edited a draft proposal for the village in preparation for the city council meeting. Marge, a Steering Committee member, responded on OVE’s listserv to several points made in the draft, beginning with potential challenges to self-sufficiency related to transition:

I think we have been using the term "transition" very broadly and, appropriately, to mean almost any outcome other than jail or institutionalization that does not involve returning to the streets. For example, independent living, patching things up with family or friends that includes housing, supportive or subsidized housing, living in a tiny structure in someone's back yard, moving to an eco-community etc. I think we figure that while some people will be able to become partially or totally self-supporting others may need long-term supportive

housing. I hope that any time limits imposed could be extended for those in the process of acquiring housing (Nov. 2012).

The discussion surrounding time limits for residents is nothing new when it comes to PWH. In the context of poverty and lack of affordable housing (Timmer et al. 1994; Gowan 2010), there are simply not enough resources for all people in need of stable, affordable housing. Therefore, government and other resource providers must adjudicate between who gets or does not get a scarce resource like low-income housing. Imposing time limits is one method of adjudication. The idea is to discourage complacency by setting a limit, but make it lengthy enough so that most people have a reasonable chance at success (Lyon-Callo 2008). In the excerpt above, Marge implies rewarding people who are in the process of looking for other housing by extending any potential time limits. Making special adjustments for people that are actively searching for housing is more characteristic of the equality of opportunity approach, which Sharon Hays asserts is the dominant approach toward inequality in the U.S. (2003). Yet Marge also seems to recognize that acquiring housing could be a longer process, acknowledging the dearth of affordable and/or supportive housing, and therefore, an uneven playing field. This recognition reflects an equality of condition orientation.

Micro-enterprise, the second goal that I connect with self-sufficiency, had the potential to be more empowering for residents, or provide them with self-determination. Micro-enterprise, or micro-business, was discussed as a way for residents to make money to pay modest monthly utilities and to provide some with a bit of disposable income. A successful micro-enterprise could sustain incomes for some individuals or a group of entrepreneurs during their OVE tenure. During the process of the village's community development, myriad ideas were introduced at meetings to develop micro-business opportunities. Among the ideas were community gardens using hydroponics so residents could grow and sell their own produce, and baked goods or art to sell at local open markets. Eventually institutionalizing business opportunities would mean an ongoing income source for some new villagers to tap, independent of whoever began the project.

### **Distinguishing a Village for the Homeless: Unique Selling Points and Local Challenges**

OVE was likely, yet not guaranteed, to open once the city first gave its unofficial approval (i.e., before all the city's requirements ended up being met). Four major factors were important or contributed to the successful opening of the village. The first was that in the process of promoting the village concept and OVE's goals, the organization was developing an identity. Second, controlling its image was key in terms of gaining support from local government and the public /

neighborhood, specifically by establishing credibility as a nonprofit organization. Third, with perceptions (and hopes) of OVE as a model project, OVE planners continued to highlight the village's unique features (e.g. dignity and autonomy, with nonprofit oversight). The fourth important factor was creating communication lines and relationships with neighbors in order to counter potential negative attitudes.

Making distinctions from other groups or projects is important in developing organizational identity. In terms of identity, there are at least several instances in SC meeting notes where a member mentions the importance of distinguishing OVE from other organizations or projects. For example, when OVE uses another organization as an umbrella for their nonprofit status, a member brings up needing to state clearly what OVE does (i.e., distinguishing for practical reasons so that donations go to the right place). Another example pertains to a project idea that never happened. As the city of Eugene made it clear that the new village could not be opened up in time for winter 2013, SC members felt pressure to create a temporary village for the meantime. Any "winter village" had to be separated from OVE's name and mission as well. The distinction was that the winter village was even more temporary and makeshift; OVE would be longer-term, although still temporary, with more durable structures. Merely invoking these distinctions at a meeting strengthened the group's focus and intentions. From the latter example, OVE is situated as a nicer place to settle in, where eventual residents can take advantage of resources and opportunities.

Simultaneous to differentiating themselves from other organizations or projects, OVE linked with some of these same groups (e.g. St. Vincent de Paul Society), partly in order to establish credibility. In minutes from November 2012, OVE considered "getting organized" key in order to ask a long-term local nonprofit to agree to be its first fiscal agent. Getting organized meant having proper budget figures and a cohesive mission / vision on paper, among other things. This entailed waiting for more information, such as estimated cost (e.g. of huts) before making organizational information public. Similarly it included withholding information that might show disorganization while emphasizing information that could garner further credibility. The withholding or emphasis of information was a tactic used in preparing for city reports or meetings especially. The city council and other government entities (like the Planning Department) were the biggest hurdles to clear besides neighborhood and public image.

Several people inside of OVE—and one outside of OVE—told me that the organization was concerned with its public image, where control of information was important. Organizations often have a vested interest in controlling information and presenting themselves in the best light

possible, a type of organizational “impression management” (Goffman 1959). In the case of this particular organization, information control seems connected to increasing professionalism and formalization of the organization, at least when outsiders indicate that OVE is a viable project.

A related and vital part of gaining credibility with local authorities was making a good first impression. The first of anything had to be impressive enough, including the dwelling structures. OVE connected with the organization Community Supported Shelters, who first developed the “Conestoga hut”. The Conestoga was new enough to garner public attention; its structure was a focus of publicity. One OVE member’s church sponsored Conestogas for people to live in on church property, and called upon other churches to house the poor using tiny homes. Conestoga huts were placed in other visible areas around the city. City officials and neighborhood leaders were invited to view these huts in order to educate them about the benefits of these dwellings for the homeless. OVE was highly invested in these visits after deciding it wanted to build several huts for future residents.

The hope for many SC members was that positive community reactions to the huts would make these structures more desirable at the village too. The appeal of the huts was part of what one member emphasized as the “3 S’s”: sanitary, safe, and “sightly”. Having a clean, safe, and aesthetically pleasing village made OVE different from a camp. The committee and organization hoped to essentially market the physical village as new, responsible, and integrated into the community. After all, an eyesore in the neighborhood was too susceptible to stereotypes about poor and homeless people. Moreover, SC members knew that the “type” of person living in the huts should be responsible. Again, a successful first impression was deemed necessary to gain support. Having the right person/people strongly relates to the public image of “the homeless” that OVE wanted, calling into play various discourses about homelessness and where responsibility for the issue lies.

The notion of equality of opportunity supports providing chances to individuals who are responsible for turning those chances into productive outcomes. Individual responsibility and essentially, competition, is required when a shortage of resources (e.g. affordable housing, space for the unsheltered) exists. Organizations as well as cities dealt with shortages by creating priorities for who would be let in. Not only were priority categories important for seeing who was a good fit in the community, but OVE’s emerging vetting process was vital for distinguishing the “type” of resident that could make the best impression for allowing the village to succeed, i.e. to get fully off

the ground and establish a generally positive image in the community and of its [formerly] homeless residents.

In this chapter we saw that vision is a process that involves multiple constituents, both inside and outside the organization (OVE) or project (the village). In developing both its identity and credibility, OVE planners sought agreement in creating an appealing village while also dealing with resistance of an insider. In addition, building local credibility entailed appearing less politically radical and more organized, while negotiating the “type” of community and residents that could: 1) garner enough empathy or support from the broader community; and 2) allow the village to function well on a daily basis. Organizational sociologists might refer to the broader community in which OVE strategized politically as an “external field environment” (Harrison et al. 2015). The second point about village functioning deals more with the village as an insular organization.

OVE developed its vision within the context of the Occupy movement, but also within stretched municipal budgets and a three-decades long discursive environment influenced by principles of neoliberalism (cf. Sparks 2012). This context is evident in OVE’s discussions of time limits regarding transition, which were not imposed, as well as in the validity given among key planners to both the equality of opportunity and equality of condition approaches. Overall, OVE’s planners drew on notions of both self-sufficiency and community responsibility, a discursive middle ground in terms of how culpable the homeless might be considered in their situation.

Still with an eye toward external field influences, in the next chapter I zoom into the organization itself to uncover ideas about perhaps the most meaningful principle behind OVE: self-governance by PWH. I use self-governance as a means to examine how a stated goal is implemented and interpreted by various actors *in practice*, especially regarding the value of autonomy to residents. Indeed, making the project and community desirable requires credibility from residents themselves. Encouraging villager buy-in in order to live in a self-governed community, or having residents be part of the planning process, is a complex process.

## CHAPTER III

### ENACTING SELF-GOVERNANCE

#### **The Purpose and Intent of Self-Governance**

Heben (2014) argues that because the homeless, particularly the unsheltered, have no right to space, they must fight for places to be. In *Out of Place: Homeless Mobilizations, Subcities and Contested Landscapes* (1997), Wright contends that people without homes (PWH) do not fit into the imagination of city planners and officials. And as one of my interviewees, Lita, explains, villages for the homeless are designed to keep PWH away from the usual rousting that occurs by police and others when they are out of place. Furthermore, to the degree that shelters often manage the homeless even as they provide necessary emergency and supportive services, the hierarchical relationship between provider and receiver does not allow for much autonomy (DeWard and Moe 2010). It is the practice of criminalizing poverty and homelessness, as well as the indignities present through shelterization (Hoch 2000), that lies at the heart of a need for rights to space and dignity through self-governance (also see Finley 2003; Mosher 2010). Sloan, a long-term board member who has helped oversee the project, speaks to the difference between standing alongside the transitionally housed and “managing” homelessness (Gowan 2010). His belief both challenges and reflects Wanda’s criticism from Chapter 2 about board members doing “for” the homeless:

Sloan: we’ve tried to be very protective of the self-governance. And, it’s meant a lot of work for some board members, to spend a lotta time talking with villagers and helping to convince them, that, the village manual, is the right way to handle this. Ya know, having conversation about these issues is the right way to handle this. And...I think it’s paid off I mean, I don’t think self-governance would have lasted all the way through if we had not had a deep respect for the idea of, self-governance and the dignity of the villagers.

Rob: Right.

Sloan: Um, it could have gone the other way and I know that in some places it *has*. The experiment you know, people just didn’t have, the time or the patience to stand alongside, some of the antics. And um, just took over. And...while it’s effective—the Mission, for example, you know is an effective way of *managing*, a homeless shelter. Um, *but*, that’s not what we were trying to develop...so, it’s been worth the extra work, you know to stand alongside them as they, work their way through the issues (Interview 2015).

As a longer-term, invested board member, Sloan's belief is that the board has stood alongside villagers to let them work out issues themselves rather than first rushing to their aid. As Mosher suggests, autonomy includes a sense of ownership that is reflected in people making decisions for themselves. Autonomy, the dignity that's assumed to accompany it, and the rights of "individuals" are intertwined with the concept of self-governance. Self-governance, a core belief of OVE, is also a foundational tenet and practice of democracy. Heben states that the term democracy was purposefully removed from the U.S. Constitution because it was not practical for the writers, and suggests that PWH can teach others a lesson about how democracy can work through self-governance (2014: 26-27). PWH, however, also face important limitations when it comes to their ability to enact self-governance. Residents, as well as Support Committee (SC) and board members, often noted these limitations. But while some residents and SC members indicated unrealistic expectations from the board about self-governance at the village, Sloan seems to read the board's expectations as cautious, or more tempered, suggesting the collision between the ideal and the real in discussions of self-governance by the homeless.

Where my study enters the conversation pertains to the practicalities of self-governance by the homeless, or transitionally housed. In this chapter, I explore two main questions: *What are the requirements for resident autonomy and self-governance?* And more generally, *what are the ways in which self-governance is facilitated, and in what ways is it constrained, both locally and also by larger external environments?*

First, and briefly, in terms of "how much" self-governance exists in OVE, the modal response given by my interviewees is that OVE experiences "limited self-governance"<sup>11</sup>. Instead of achieving democratic organization, OVE has its own successes, challenges and contradictions. Villagers point to the *idea* of self-governance as noble, inspiring, or just "good," but the reality is that it is difficult to implement.

### **Self-Governance in Practice**

In what follows I describe how self-governance is carried out. In practice, oversight by the non-profit Board of Directors alter any "pure" form of "self"-governance by homeless residents. Nevertheless, board members believe in the principle that residents of this transitional village should govern themselves, given opportunities and resources, which provides dignity, autonomy, and community instead of dependence and submission expected of the homeless, such as is often the

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<sup>11</sup> The word "limited" was first used by Greg, a longer-term resident, in his assessment of self-governance at the village (2015).

case in shelters (Hoch 2000; Timmer et al. 1994). Since governance is more collaborative at OVE, I ask how it is negotiated among residents within the village, as well as between residents and the board of SquareOne Villages (SOV, changed from the nonprofit's former name, OVE, in mid-2015). Initial inquiries brought me to ask another question: Did, and if so how, housing status or position within the organization shape community definitions of—or experiences with—self-governance? This question is important since OVE consists of both housed and homeless members, and PWH are not often trusted to manage their own affairs. In addition, most of the consistent members who are housed participate in either the board or Support Committee, which play different roles and carry different status. The Support Committee used to have more power in the beginning when it steered the organization and called itself the “Steering Committee.” Once a full board formed, the authoritative role of the SC gradually faded into a support or advocacy role.

### **Governance Structure of OVE**

Opportunity Village Eugene, now considered the first project under the non-profit organization SOV, is temporarily located in an industrial area amidst some residences on approximately one acre of city-owned land. SquareOne's<sup>12</sup> mission is “to create self-managed communities of low-cost tiny houses for people in need of housing.” The 30-40 people who live at OVE at any time govern village affairs through the five major rules of the Community Agreement and the Village Manual. Three major players, or groups, are involved in governance, which refers to upholding and/or changing the Community Agreement and Village Manual stipulations: 1) a rotating Village Council of five or seven *residents* who are elected by the village proper; 2) weekly villager meetings in which all full<sup>13</sup> members can vote and are expected to attend, barring excused absences (e.g. work); and 3) the board, which represents a third body with governing power, since it is charged with overseeing the entire operation of the village and can, if needed, make decisions about how village matters are run.

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<sup>12</sup> I use OVE and SOV variously to indicate where the organization is in its historical trajectory. For instance, before mid-2015, “OVE” may refer to the village *or* the nonprofit organization. In places where “SOV” appears, the organization is assumed to have changed its name. In cases where these acronyms might get confusing, I clarify their distinction or their relationship.

<sup>13</sup> Full members were those who had passed their probationary period, which was usually between two and three months. Newer villagers had to have a majority vote by the entire village in order to move from probationary to full villager.

Overlapping but distinct from the three groups with governing power, three formal bodies comprise SOV as an organization: Residents/villagers; the SOV Board of Directors; and the Support Committee, the latter which focuses solely on OVE and has no formal governing authority. Since around the time when the village began to operate, this Committee has taken on a listening and resident advocacy role; it lacks its former power or authority, something that SC members like Marge and Bonnie sometimes lamented. The residents are men and women age 18 or older, but most are between ages 30 and 60. Most identify as White or European American. Several villagers, or a small minority, identified as Native American (at least with some ancestry), African American, Mexican, racially mixed, or as from Hawaii. Men and women are fairly mixed at the village, and a few identified as non-binary or transgender throughout my observations. Social class varies but most of my resident interviewees are poor to lower-middle-class. Moreover, several residents experienced downward mobility as their older relatives had come from middle-class backgrounds or they had previously owned their own homes. Before briefly describing the other two formal organizational bodies, I will introduce some key functions of the first two major players in terms of village governance: the Village Council and villagers at their weekly meetings. The third major player, the Board of Directors, is described in a couple of instances that appear later in this work.

### *The Village Council*

Quite a few villagers served on the Village Council (or simply “council”), which usually met twice per week and rotated members every few months. Many residents never served. Councilors were recruited formally during weekly, full-villager meetings, and informally by fellow residents or non-residents during various interactions. Informally, active villagers often approached specific residents to get on council if others recognized the resident’s desire to volunteer for tasks, especially happily. For instance, Edgar, a villager who came from a nearby “Rest Stop” community with his partner, volunteered to cook for village meetings. Someone suggested that Edgar would make a good (responsible and active) council member. The Village Council was tasked with bringing up agenda items to the larger weekly meetings, even though any villager could potentially do so. During most of my research, particularly when the council was comprised of seven (rather than five) members, OVE instituted the “council of the day”. This councilor was responsible for being physically present at the village in order to address a variety of issues that could arise, or usually, address concerns of a resident or group of residents. Other current villagers on council might also be present on their “off” day, but if approached by someone wanting to speak with a councilor, they

could defer to the council of the day if they wanted. At times, people complained that the council of the day was nowhere to be seen.

Concerns could also include having access to electric power for a particular medical need (e.g. running an extension cord for an oxygen machine into their dwelling), or wanting to write up another villager for something s/he felt was not right. Village council members often handled “write-ups”, otherwise known as incident reports. Councilors could write up people themselves for community rule violations or accept write-ups from any villager. It was policy for any councilor to hand-deliver any written incident report to the accused villager, who could accept responsibility or challenge the claim. If a villager wanted to contest a report, they could provide an explanation to at a village council meeting. From there council made a determination (as long as a quorum was present), which could be brought up for vote at the weekly meeting.

### *Weekly Village Meetings*

The community yurt where meetings took place seemed simultaneously spacious and crowded. With picnic-length tables around the inside periphery, most holding 4 or so computers, an oblong pattern mostly resembling a circle formed with people seated on folding chairs or couches. Sometimes the meeting facilitator, often a council member but not always, sat closer to the middle, by or at the tables set up with food and drink. The middle appeared fairly “open” if the meeting was in session and there was little to no foot traffic. When one or more villagers did not volunteer to prepare a meal, residents could rely on water, juice, coffee, and snack-type foods that could be found at the “food tables” or close-by. During the first year that OVE ran, mostly volunteers or residents contributed food for the community. After nearly one year, the village applied for and began receiving food from Food For Lane County on a weekly basis.

The vast majority of villagers, even if many never were nominated or accepted a council position, voted at some point on village matters at weekly meetings. Following some form of Roberts Rules, villagers would vote on matters such as whether or not someone could have a visitor as an overnight guest, whether to take on a specific fundraiser, whether an interested individual or media representative could film or interview residents, and importantly, whether a resident should be given a warning, up to and including permanent expulsion from the village. Residents could raise their hand and bring up an agenda item that they wanted to cover, or could follow what was already set by the council. Villagers had varying degrees of participation at their meetings, both in terms of physical attendance as well as focus. Legitimate excuses for being absent at a weekly village meeting

could be work, a previously cleared travel arrangement, and occasionally for mental / physical health or waking up late, as long as the latter did not occur too often. During most meetings I attended, I could find one or more villagers nodding off or otherwise catching up on sleep, depending upon the liveliness of the meeting.

### *SC and Board Members: A Snapshot*

Steering / Support Committee members generally came with more resources and middle to upper-middle class backgrounds; the vast majority of us identified as white. They/we joined the organization voluntarily. Only one longer-term SC member had quite a low-income and at one point, had temporary difficulty finding housing. My take on that member is that she was the most vocal out of anyone on the SC—including me—in bringing up barriers faced by residents, whether that barrier was transportation, an ID, or money to buy essentials or desirable goods. At one point she also volunteered to spend the night once per week at the village in order to get closer to residents and their experiences. For the three years I conducted research and served on this committee, its meetings were most often facilitated by a board member. In that board member's absence, a longer-term member would agree to facilitate a particular meeting, which would feel more relaxed but often less organized. The board member, and often three or four other SC members, would attend (open) board meetings, held bimonthly and then once every month, and make suggestions for policy or nuance some of the board's understanding of what was happening at the village. No SC members were part of the OVE/SOV Board, although two rotating spots were reserved for residents.

Fewer social class differences existed between SC and Board members, than between these two bodies and residents on the whole. Board members were usually middle- or upper-middle class, mostly white, and were leaders in their respective organizations or were retired. Some Steering Committee members were originally asked to be on the board, but they declined, saying that they would rather not commit to such a potentially big task. The Board was ultimately responsible for the maintenance of the village and the legal and fiscal responsibilities such as abiding by IRS tax codes and the Operational Agreement with the City of Eugene, keeping quarterly reports, fundraising, and accounting. The SC and residents could share in some of these tasks. For example, resident board members offered ideas regarding fundraisers or agreed to head up a fundraiser from time to time. SC members were involved in helping to write grants.

Each resident at the village signs a Community Agreement (Appendix C) that consists of the five major rules: 1) No violence to yourself or others; 2) No theft; 3) No alcohol, illegal drugs, or drug paraphernalia; 4) No persistent, disruptive behavior; and 5) Everyone must contribute to the operation and maintenance of the Village. Throughout my period in the field these rules were nearly always attached to the front gate. A Village Manual (See Appendix D) is the major document to which residents and others are supposed to refer when governing their affairs. Board/Steering Committee members drafted this document with input from original or early residents. Since OVE's existence, alterations to the Village Manual can be (and have been) made by a vote of council members and/or the village as a whole. In other words, the 13-page manual is updated on an as-needed basis. As of January 2015, the last time it was updated, the manual laid out policy regarding the process of village governance, security and safety, and how to handle rule violations, as well as policies dealing with food storage, pets, abandonment, alcohol and drugs, couples who have a fallout, probationary status, medical and family leave, and bathroom cleaning. The Board also can review and approve amendments made by villagers to both the Village Manual and Community Agreement. Continued sanctioning of OVE is determined by its adherence to the non-profit's contract with the city, the "Operational Agreement" (see Appendix B), which also forbids drug use on the property.

### **Community Definitions, Perceptions, and Expectations of Self-Governance.**

In order to understand perceptions of self-governance at the village, it is key to examine more in depth community members' characterizations of the type of community that is OVE (or is not). Importantly, OVE is not an intentional community. The unintentional aspect of community is echoed in observations and interviews with residents, Board members, and an advocate for the homeless outside of OVE. Rather, people are "vetted" in by peers with Board oversight. Peer vetting is important for at least two reasons. First, current residents have to live with future prospects. Second, current residents are often deemed authorities that might have prior knowledge of someone's history and ability to get along with others, or can detect signals of drug use, violence, and other practices that could be harmful to the community. Regarding this second point, Patricia, a resident who served on the vetting committee for nine months, states:

It was Tanya and Tina [on vetting as well]. Both [were] hard drug users. Both on methadone programs. And, they knew, they *know* that community. So it would look like this. Gavin [board member], me, and *those* two. So we'd look at these applications. [Using a different voice] Oh no!

That's a drug user. I mean and they would *know*. I mean you would not believe, some of the curbing that happened between those two women (Interview 2015).

The difference between an intentional community and OVE is a distinction between people who want to be there versus those who have to be. The notion that villagers “have to be” there does not necessarily connote a forced community. Indeed, villagers are “free” to leave. Rather, most villagers live at OVE due to their need for housing and/or safety. But members speak about lack of a common goal among villagers. Diana, a former resident, suggests that what the villagers actually have in common is being “pissed off,” and being displaced; these two ingredients are not typically ideal for enacting self-governance. Even when comparing the sense of “we-ness” at OVE to that of the Eugene Mission, where guests apparently develop common feelings by opposing stricter rules, Lita, a current villager, arrives at a similar conclusion to Diana:

Okay so, camaradity [camaraderie] that [OVE does] have is, people who do council [T]hat's always a big issue. And the other thing is, you know the board is so wishy-washy. So people come together about *that* [sighs]. Um, they don't what the heck the Support Committee is...So they're like “well why do we even have these people? Who are they? They don't even,” you know—all of those, those three things are like their common, denominator. (Interview 2015).

The difference between Lita and Diana's sentiments—besides perhaps Lita's secure villager status at the time of interview as opposed to Diana having been recently voted out of the village—is a difference between anger/marginalization and village status / confusion. For Lita, villagers unite due to confusion or disbelief over board decision-making or the uncertain role of the middle body of the organization. Nevertheless, despite OVE being a somewhat “forced” community of strangers, Lita felt strongly about getting involved and about homeless people working together towards a common end. She recalls,

I really wanted to be involved. I mean I was willing to be, a councilmember, in the *village*, and got to all the *council* meetings. And um, [anonymous name] over there at the SafeSpot and I were talking about, starting up a homeless, association, neighborhood association. Just for the Safe Spot and for, *Whoville*. And for OVE, and SLEEPS. So that we could have our *own* kind of—you know so we could like help each other *out*...And learn about each other. And maybe if one of us had a problem child, then the problem child got kicked out and was going to the *other* place maybe we could [say] “*hey* this person's, kinda like this or kinda like that.” Or maybe they're not a great *fit* here. [Anonymous name says], “they'd be a better fit *there*” (Interview 2015).

Lita's identification with and dedication to developing a network of and for PWH was not too common at OVE. In fact, board member Gavin pointed to the lack of identification with the "homeless" as a status group or with fellow residents who were very poor. He characterized villagers as lacking a real shared sense that they are poor and marginalized; namely, they did not have Marxian "class consciousness". Quite the opposite, several villagers and a couple of board members pointed to the village having "cliques", or groups of people who shared similar attitudes that had a clear definition of in-group and out-group boundaries. These perceptions of OVE's community as non-intentional and unified, at times, by issues it is up against, raise the question of how residents examined self-governance.

Perceptions of self-governance at the village can be roughly divided into three categories: Self-governance works, it does not work, or it is "limited." These categories, however, do not fully capture the complexity of perceptions. Another way to differentiate between these views is between those who think about self-governance in a complex way and those who think about it in more black and white terms. In any case, there is a continuum of perceptions ranging from self-governance generally working to not working. For example, Sloan sees barriers to a self-governing system that he holds high and says ultimately works. But Sloan expects more concrete factors to make self-governance function. When these factors appear, self-governance is working. Peter also concludes that self-governance works at OVE, yet his assertion is more nuanced. In OVE and in similar camps, Peter posits, self-governance ultimately works (as measured by the continuance of the community; Peter says what hasn't failed with this model are the communities), in part because it *doesn't* always work. Rather, these communities have a built-in equilibrium allowing for degrees of success and pitfalls. When self-governance is threatened, or when the community is near a tipping point, someone steps up to correct the situation. Members in the community focus on villager relations and governing their affairs effectively for a time, until certain members that hold things together leave, or until another incident occurs that again threatens the self-governing process. A recent self-correction might be happening now with the election of Greta once again to council. Seen as a conservative villager, Greta helped revive the writing of incident reports when for a while, no council members were writing people up, and residents got away with too much. Self-governance was not working because people were not being held accountable or respecting the rules.

Sloan, on the other hand as noted above, sees the board as "standing alongside" the village, or working "with" them. In his estimation, the board has never had to override a village or council meeting, even as it has provided training, or set rules and parameters in place, especially more

toward the beginning. Sloan cites a deep respect for the dignity that self-governance provides, and notes how the board steps back even against its better judgment when it thinks it knows what villagers need, or when doing something “for” villagers would be more efficient. Sloan implies that efficiency would be short-term, but spending extra time “convincing” villagers that sticking to the manual works for governing community affairs has paid off in the long run. His distinction of working alongside versus doing “for” residents entails patience and time working through issues as they emerge, a mindset focused on what he sees as creating self-sufficient villagers.

Gavin, another Board member, distinguishes between self-management and self-governance. Although he doesn’t define self-governance outright, he associates it with strong elements of community and self-understanding (e.g. awareness of social location). “Self-management” refers to the ability to stay open and keep things going day-to-day. Management does not imply that things are going well. To Gavin at the time of our interview, villager morale was low and disempowerment was high. In addition, Gavin mentioned hierarchy within the village; power is concentrated and certain voices get heard above others, admittedly, even by the Board. Although the most “heard” voices are sometimes held with skepticism (e.g. Shauna, who was accused by many for trying to “take over” the village), board members can often relate to those people, which makes it easier for those voices to be listened and responded to for at least a while.

Believing that self-governance is not working very well, Gavin instead favors a model that provides structure and some regimentation. A marine background informs Gavin’s thinking, as well as a liberal Protestant background, and he uses these communities to buoy a belief that a strong culture can be created even in a transitional community. What is needed is a foundation, a common language and understanding, and a process, he states. The village manual may be an important part of that process, but is “not sufficient” for providing a foundation for governing one’s peers. According to Gavin, similar to Patricia, a former resident, villagers are given responsibility but lack support or perhaps know-how to carry out their authority. There is no written mechanism in place to tell when the board can and cannot intervene (e.g. with a drug incident). Intervention—or lack thereof—is complicated by favoritism, whether intended or unintended.

One instance of perceived favoritism related to Niles, an original resident. Niles was widely believed to be using and selling drugs at the village, but he partly helped to physically build the village. Niles had “patronage” / longevity and was connected / networked in with Peter and James, two vital people to the organization in terms of planning or implementing OVE’s physical infrastructure. In a different example where a resident was not breaking any rules, Gavin mentions

Louise as a villager who was not very able to advocate for herself, so the board has tried to give her a voice. But some people are easier to “hear” and relate to, as Gavin says. Is Niles one of those people, or does he “just” know how to build? Selective enforcement brings up issues of fairness, of enforcing rules against one person but not another. This is just one of at least several examples of selective enforcement. For Sloan, self-governance works, yet has challenges. Some challenges are trying to get villagers to understand that they have authority. Also, villagers have needed training on implied aspects of self-governance, such as running meetings and facilitating them effectively. Although Sloan cited improvement over time, more is always needed. Generally, however, Sloan believes self-governance works better than Gavin does. Sloan also appears less invested in how the community of OVE functions than Gavin. The ways that these two board members invest in the organization point to a difference I will elaborate upon in Chapter 4, which I refer to as being focused on “provision” or “promotion”. In the most basic sense, these two ways pertain to board members’ orientation toward OVE itself, whether they are focused more on meeting the material, psychological and other needs of OVE residents, or whether their focus is broader, like promoting OVE as a model village.

As a brief example, Gavin showed concern with “we,” the board, trying to “sell” this model of a self-governing village for the homeless before working out the kinks. His criticism deals with a promotion mindset that months later, I read on SOV’s website:

The tiny house movement is gaining traction everyday as a cost-effective response to the dire need for more affordable housing. Over the past few years, SquareOne Villages (SOV) has emerged as a state and national leader in this effort. We’ve helped generate significant interest and excitement around the tiny village concept, and have witnessed a growing list of new and existing organizations currently working towards building villages of their own...It’s clear that simply developing an innovative housing project is insufficient to achieving the goal of developing a replicable, widely dispersed model. After all, if a project is truly innovative in a significant way, others will need technical assistance and training—to varying degrees—in order to put these new ideas into action. Hence, SOV’s “Toolbox” and training curriculum for other cities to navigate roadblocks and the process toward creating tiny house communities that fits the local needs and climate. (SOV website Accessed 3/23/16)

Despite the desire to promote the OVE model, some residents also think, to use Gavin’s phrase, that the “nut” on OVE and self-governance has yet to be “cracked.” Although Gavin understands a focus on the broader picture, he seems to think it is irresponsible, and his main

allegiance lies with the “human technology” aspect of OVE, which is his interest and where his skill-set lies.

When I think of SOV as promoting future villages (or the model of OVE, and therefore it has to deal at least some with OVE), I think of two aspects. The first speaks more to a balance between looking ahead and “perfecting” what it began. The second speaks more to looking forward and potentially neglecting OVE. Regarding the first, the board’s idea of establishing a Working Group was to formally divide itself [relatively evenly] into interest areas so that some would focus on OVE and others would focus on developing Emerald Village Eugene (EVE) or other future projects. EVE was set to be—and is now operating as of this writing—a permanent village for low-income people that can earn equity in their tiny houses and eventually buy out their property from the organization. Dividing focus between OVE and future projects also functioned to keep board members satisfied because they could serve mostly where they want. I started thinking about the second aspect after transcribing Gavin’s interview and asking why the board as a whole is focusing so much on future projects, despite Gavin’s criticism (including in board meetings) that OVE’s model needs work. My tentative answer is that Peter and Landon are the two primary “movers and shakers” on the board, in different areas, and that their focus leads the charge in terms of building more tiny houses and villages and supplying greater affordable housing stock. Unlike Gavin’s expertise, Peter’s does lie in building the physical structures. Landon, as far as I know, is well-respected and has many community connections in relation to serving the poor and homeless.

When it comes to *provision* and *promotion*, again, Gavin sees the board almost rushing into promoting OVE in order to expand its scope. His concern is that provision is lacking. What lack of provision looks like pertains to education about residents’ social location, training in how to self-govern and be good stewards, case management in order to obtain needed entitlements for people (which was making some progress). Provision is also lacking in having a structure to facilitate / support the authority that the board wants residents to have. In other words, holding peers accountable has not been working, and there needs to be a mechanism for allowing residents the authority to enforce policies with their peers, or clear guidelines on when the board can step in to enforce community rules when needed. Although Gavin might use a different term, he is sympathetic to resident concern that OVE has become an unwanted stepchild.

Sloan described the emerging Board—including himself—liking the “idea” of self-governance” and the dignity it provided the people. Throughout the interview, Sloan was confident that Board members were in agreement about not overruling or overtaking resident decisions. A

process was put in place (e.g. the village manual), and Board members seem to value S-G among villagers to a high degree.

A key part in Sloan's interview about *promotion* deals with a "plus" in having OVE structured in terms of *self-governance with support*. Unlike Dignity Village, in which self-governance is truer to the word (rooted with community residents), support by a Board allows a body that keeps the community's eyes focused on the positive aspects of the village. The flip side of this, I assume, is board oversight that won't let the community get out of hand with drug problems. Left to residents, when things got bad (like at DV), they had "no voice" to highlight the truly positive aspects of their community. In Sloan's eyes, OVE has this voice through the board.

### **Barriers to Self-Governance**

Board members view OVE as a potential model (see above quote) of self-management for the precariously housed. The planning for OVE drew from previous camps and villages (e.g. Dignity Village in Portland), and is also seen as a work in progress. Therefore, expectations of successful self-governance are tempered by the realities of thirty or more people living together under strenuous conditions.

In practice, residents experience barriers in governing village affairs. These barriers may be considered *immediate* and *internal* to the organization, or those that are influenced or imposed from *outside of the village*. Although extra-organizational barriers are discussed later, one brief example is of the city contract, which indirectly contributes to unclear limits to authority. Because the Board is responsible for the village's image and its compliance with this contract, it can act to potentially override village decisions if it deems that the village is in violation of the Agreement). *Internally*, barriers can be grouped in terms of: 1) differing interpretations and applications of village rules; 2) lack of clarity about limits to authority from the Board; 3) power dynamics or personal agendas; and lastly; 4) an individual versus collective/community focus (including "expectations for individual autonomy"). Another barrier specific to board members is lack of knowledge of resident experiences (e.g., argues Sloan). However, this barrier is tempered by board members deferring to villager perspectives, including during board meetings. Sloan sees a difference in how much a board member's opinion is respected, depending upon whether they are offering an opinion about policy—more respected—or articulating a reality about the village—less respected.

The first internal difficulty in governing village affairs surrounds differential interpretation of the village rules. Greg, a resident, believes these differences might be due to the way that OVE is

currently structured. For example, although a village manual exists, it does not define clear guidelines for how to handle a variety of situations. Because of this, too much room is left for interpretation:

...my big thing is systems and routines in place...everyone hates McDonalds but, one thing they *do* well is, if someone spilled a soda pop in the hall of the bathroom, the employee, even if it's just their first *day* there's a manual, they could *turn* on exactly what to do, *any* little situation that arises. Um now we can't have that thick [of a manual] but there's some aspects that are good to have repeatable systems...[W]hen I left my department, [it was helpful to] have systems in place so it didn't matter who stepped *in*. They were gonna succeed. And, I *don't* see that with council right now...[T]he village and the council, their *effectiveness*, is kind of based on, who's living here *at that time*. And that's where it's kind of scary like I said, it coulda been a random few other different people in here—that's *all* it woulda took for this place ta not succeed (Interview 2015).

According to the last part of Greg's assessment, governing effectiveness is attributed to having the right or wrong villagers, including those on council. Later Greg refers to "luck", where a certain combination of people could mean the difference between the place staying open or shutting down. In Weber's terminology, Greg's expectation is that the most predominant form of authority—bureaucratic authority—is the most effective structure in which to realize successful governance. Bureaucratic authority relies on rules that structure peoples' lives. It is the positions people hold that grant them authority, rather than having authority given automatically to individuals themselves.

Less than two years old at the time of Greg's interview, the manual was not fully formed and still was not by the time I left the field. The manual was created to be continually expanded, especially by residents, and can always be considered a work-in-progress. Time will tell if, and how, OVE will become more formalized with the "systems and routines" to which Greg refers.

A little over one year into the village's history, I began hearing *in vivo* distinctions (i.e. ones particular to the village) between belief in a closer interpretation—as objective as possible—of the village manual (mostly by the original or longer-time residents), and belief in interpreting the manual on a "case-by-case" basis (a belief more prominent among newer residents, especially emergent leaders). I heard the merits and pitfalls of each. Longer-term residents or some shorter-term residents that participated on council indicated that, "the process works." Some original or earlier villagers helped develop the manual as groundwork for building village democracy. Newer residents wanted a less strict interpretation of the manual to make room for exceptions and individual circumstances. Patricia, who began at the village less than two months after it opened, highlights the

importance of following the written manual. “Everyone follows the same rules,” and interpreting situations on a “case-by-case” basis is dangerous because it encourages uneven application of rules and consequences.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, residents warn about potential outcomes from having loose interpretations of rules. Diana, a former longer-term resident, believes that lack of documentation and having fairly fluid rules leads to cronyism (the appointment of friends or associates to positions of authority, without proper regard to their qualifications) or nepotism. Recounting that she (and others) “got in” from a villager she knew prior more than through her qualifications, she saw holes in the process for “vetting” village applicants. In addition to getting friends into the village, nepotism entails reporting rule violations of some people but definitely not those that one likes or to whom one feels loyal. (Villagers report rule infractions most often through submitting “incident reports” to the Village Council.) Diana felt marginalized by specific residents who reported her for rule violations, and wanted her expelled. At her appeal to stay, several people mentioned that they or others felt intimidated around Diana because she treated them rudely or gave them a cold/unwelcoming shoulder when approached in village community spaces (e.g. the yurt). Her violation was ostensibly of a core village rule, “persistent disruptive behavior.” However, according to Diana, what got her *officially* thrown out of the village were missed gate shifts. Missing shifts is considered not contributing to the overall well-being of the village (Community Agreement #5), but unless these are repeatedly violated, are not grounds for dismissal. Diana’s “disruptive behavior” could not be proved through documentation, according to her and also to several residents who believed her expulsion was unwarranted according to manual rules.

Since OVE’s nascence, incident report files have gone missing at different times. The lack of documentation caused problems, and most importantly here, it undermined the work that longer-term villagers put into defining and redefining the rules and procedures from the manual. Moreover, sometimes the very villagers who call somebody out for breaking a rule are themselves accused of being rule-breakers, either of a similar or different violation, such as illicit drug use. This latter point speaks not only to applying rules unevenly, but also to the difficulty in governing one’s self and peers.

Putting peers in check is one part of a second barrier to self-governance at the village, which is a lack of clarity that exists among residents about their capacity to make decisions. The Board

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<sup>14</sup> Peter’s contention is that Patricia represents more of a “constitutionalist” rather than someone following the spirit of the law, the latter which he agrees with more (Interview 2016)

tells villagers that they have a responsibility to self-manage, with the village manual as a major tool. However, villagers experience a conflict between the *responsibility* they are supposed to have and the *authority* they sense they actually have to make decisions. In her interview Patricia (a longer-term villager) speaks to the conflict between responsibility and authority by implying that the Board empowers villagers to decide upon some rules and their enforcement, but the authority to enforce rules is sometimes disrespected by fellow residents. She recounted a time when an intoxicated male, an original villager, was on gate duty and locked the main gate (for a reason not revealed) so that no one could enter or exit the village. The man refused to give up the key and return to his own dwelling, saying that his sleeping bag and belongings were already set up there. Many residents wanted access to the gate key, but feared his potential anger from earlier outbursts, illustrating how difficult it can be to have peers comply with community rules. Villagers had to call a Board member to deal with the situation, as residents were afraid of approaching him (Interview 2015). At first the Board representative told villagers to handle the matter themselves. Patricia's story boils down to something like this: The Board tells us we have all this responsibility to report when we see a rule violation, but they don't live here. They don't see the repercussions of doing this (e.g. peer resistance). When it appears that responsibility is "handed down" to residents from the Board, but they lack a Board member's authority, their enforcement of rules is not respected.

Lacking authority also increases dependence on the Board. In fact, I heard several residents (e.g., Patricia, Diana, Vivian) refer to the Board in a parental (paternalistic) fashion, that residents had to rely on "daddy." When an unknown resident stole some items from the makeshift donations tent, the responsibility for coordinating donations was pulled from Greta, a trusted original resident. According to Vivian, daddy said, "no you can't do [coordinate] that" (Interview 2015).

For the most part, however, my observations illustrate that members of the Board are often hesitant to take a strong stance regarding specific decisions made by villagers; the vast majority of village decisions are not overturned. When Diana was voted out, for instance, some members of the Board—and Support Committee—were not happy about it, but they did not intervene. That said, the perception by many residents is that the Board has provided unclear boundaries for resident decision-making.

A critical exception to non-intervention by the Board is when a village rule (e.g. drug use/possession or theft) is broken—or potentially broken—especially on a scale where there is concern that the city could shut down the village. For example, one Board member who believed in a zero-tolerance policy for drugs called for immediate dismissal of a villager, Nadia, whose visitors

were caught with drug paraphernalia. This happened before Nadia could have a full village hearing, something to which all residents who are threatened with eviction are entitled. Even though the attempt to expel Nadia was in part a reaction to fear of the village's demise and was overturned by her testimony and subsequent village vote, the Board member's concern was strong enough to cause a broader conversation and force a community decision.

According to former residents Wes and Shirley (Shirley was a village board member and also transitioned to being a full Board member after exiting the village), the Board has the right to "step in" if it is in the best interest of the village, or to ensure village survival. After all, the Board created the village, a sentiment echoed in several interviews. Without them, this project would not exist. However, individual rights must be respected (Interview 2015). The majority believed that Nadia was NOT using drugs, even if she inadvertently let them in. To complicate the matter, another resident (then on council) entered the dwelling that had just been transferred to Nadia that evening and rifled through a backpack, finding the drugs. Some villagers were angry, not at Nadia, but at this violation of an individual's privacy. Therefore, negotiating self-governance entails the Board adjudicating how much the village as a whole is threatened by any particular incident, while considering the rights of individual villagers. The Board eventually determined that the degree of violation by Nadia failed to warrant her expulsion. All said, villagers were pleased that their near-unanimous vote to keep Nadia brought back some faith in the *process* of villager decision-making. Rules were discussed and enforced (e.g. the relative and friend with drugs were no longer allowed to visit the village), but the individual case was considered. Still, some residents (e.g. Patricia) believe that incidences like this would not have occurred if the Board took more responsibility and intervened before allowing the drug situation to worsen.

The Board's neglect of OVE issues can thus be seen in two lights. In one it reflects a desire by board members to move on to promote future projects entailing a more deliberate or proactive disengagement with OVE proper. It fits the definition of neglect as disregard. From this vantage point, failure to do something about the drug situation comes from not being around as often, or to put responsibility on residents (as Peter does), only being called upon during a perceived crisis. In another light, however, neglect entails a more hands-off stance taken in order to let the village govern itself. This type of neglect can be supported through the stated core value of self-governance.

When the village's existence or community life is not immediately or seriously threatened, some residents feel that the Board neglects them. Neglect occurs when the Board's focus is on

matters that don't include the OVE community or its culture, such as building structures (at or near the beginning of the village's history) or fundraising. Villagers also point to Board neglect when it comes to a focus on its second project, the affordable housing village community (or EVE). While at times OVE villagers (e.g. Patricia) portray the board as well-intentioned or dealing with burnout, they used terms such as feeling "abandoned" or being treated like a "step-child." Whether or not the Board is focused enough on OVE as a community or its relationships is not my purpose here; rather, it is important to communicate resident interpretations of barriers to self-governance. Todd, an original Board member who still devotes the majority of his time in the organization to OVE, echoed resident concerns. He lamented the degree to which he saw the Board shift energy and resources to its more recent project. He felt that OVE still had things to sort out before beginning a new village (Interview 2015). One implication of Todd's emphasis is that negotiating self-governance at OVE happens at the level of organization. Before and during the transition from the name OVE to SOV, the organization must decide if and when to expand its scope while still running its "pilot" project.

Lastly, lack of clarity with rules stems partly from differences in expectations between Board and Support Committee members on one hand, and homeless members of the community on the other. Although expectations for self-governance overlap between these subgroups within the organization, those among "the housed" seemed to lead to fewer rules and less regulation than what "unhoused" members may have wanted. Some middle-class members of the original Occupy Movement responded to Occupy's philosophy as it applied to houselessness, and sought to build cross-class alliances or in some cases, relationships, with the homeless contingent in their midst.<sup>15</sup> But during the actual planning of what became OVE, middle-class expectations of self-governance with the homeless needed to be adjusted. Two retired women on the Support Committee (Bonnie and Marge) expressed their disappointment with how difficult it was for residents to self-regulate. Bonnie thought that many Occupy members' ideas of self-governance, including her own, were "pie-in-the-sky," that it would "just happen." Bonnie reflects on the fact that most of her relationships had been with members of her own socioeconomic status; this was the first time she interacted with members who were currently homeless (this was the case for Marge as well). Bonnie was used to interacting with people who participated in meetings with agendas, clear rules for

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<sup>15</sup> Other Occupiers did not desire cross-class relationships. See Jamil Jonna's (2013) summary of anti-homeless sentiment and actions within Eugene's Occupy camp.

communication, and clear facilitation. At first she interpreted village meetings as very disorganized. Bonnie admits that Occupiers were assuming the model of an intentional community rather than one like OVE. While residents saw intentional communities as having more unified goals, in OVE people are accepted through a vetting process<sup>16</sup> and individuals' goals vary. Many residents simply apply to OVE out of necessity. On the other hand, in terms of expectations for self-governance, residents like Jeremy were more realistic about its difficulties. He criticizes one Board member's application of a "political *can-do*, nothing-will-stop-me attitude" to the homeless, pointing out a great "power imbalance" between the homeless and a respected, well-networked community member. Sometimes, this Board member's call for residents getting along or making decisions together was met with sarcasm or feigned deference, even if the *idea* was respected. This imbalance can be interpreted as differences in authority and status between residents and the Board, as alluded to in Barrier #2 as well. Here I think of Diana's suggestion that what the villagers have in common is being "pissed off," and being displaced – not typically two useful ingredients for group self-governance and autonomy. Even original villagers did not plan the original rules and may experience alienation from the rule-making process, even if they helped to reformulate the rules as village life progressed. Notwithstanding the inclusion of residents sought by Board members, had the homeless come together more organically and tried to establish rules, their community would likely have been disbanded by authorities (a fate similar to Whoville).

A third barrier to self-governance pertains to uneven power dynamics *within* the village or, village "hierarchy." Although Patricia notes that all villagers need to follow the same rules, not all peers are believed to be equal. Some villagers, for example, are considered better equipped to be on council than others. In the eyes of longer-term residents, newer villagers do not understand the original vision or mission of OVE; newer villagers might do better to gain wisdom about what has and hasn't worked in the past. Other villagers are believed to only read or emphasize the parts of the manual that support their individual cases, rather than read the entire manual, a point that Greg and Shirley separately argued. Still others are apathetic according to Edgar, and are waiting for someone else to take the lead, or do not have adequate experience with governance. The implication of this lacuna in rule-making and enforcement is that some villagers are needed to pick up the slack, those whom have experience with rules for running and facilitating meetings and

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<sup>16</sup> People are "vetted" in by peers with Board oversight. The difference is between people who want to be there versus those who have to be. As Louise (original longer-term resident) commented, the difference between OVE and an intentional community is that here, "we were just kinda thrown together."

keeping documentation. This sentiment is more in line with the middle-class expectations explained by Bonnie.

People often applaud villagers who “step up,” but one specific hindrance is that stronger voices on council can drown out the voices of others. Patricia comments that for a well-managed village, you can’t have “queens” or dictators like Shauna who try to control things. Several residents and non-residents felt that until Shauna was getting ready to depart from the village, she got involved in matters that were not her business [e.g. gossiping about others or spreading rumors]. This implies that good village leaders get people to work together and make collective decisions for the common good. Sometimes quieter residents are considered more “level-headed” contributors, as Wes discussed. However, these residents may feel their vote does not count, or they fail to understand group processes. Most often, the people least involved in community decisions or who kept most to themselves were simply viewed as being from the “street” or having a mental illness and could not easily engage in community-building processes. Here, a key element of “apathy” correlates with federally-defined subpopulations of the homeless.

In her own defense, Shauna embraces the “dictator” label, illustrating her concern for and active involvement in the village. She says that people can call her a dictator or say she’s “taking over” the village. However, when she asks questions or tries to promote meeting participation and is met with deaf ears, Shauna sees no alternative but to pick up the slack by making a suggestion or offering a comment to start conversation. Embracing the label allows Shauna to interpret others’ comments in a way that gives her dignity. Indeed in SC meetings it is common to hear requests for resident participation in projects or to implement an idea (e.g. for fundraising) by “stepping up” and following through with it. Board and SC members alike have applauded when residents take advantage of opportunities to benefit individuals or the village community.

One final point is a connection that Patricia alludes to regarding the first and third barriers. The village manual lends clarity regarding village rules (specific to barrier #1), but to Patricia, village councilors are not qualified to make decisions apart from the manual. Again, authority is conferred on the document and those occupying positions in line with it. By this logic those who have the proper authority are residents that stick to the manual. But who to trust more with interpreting and applying rules in the manual is a matter of community decision and power dynamics. Ironically, villagers like Patricia who advocate for following rules on paper tended to help make (or at least be more invested in) the rules; hence, they often claimed to be fair adjudicators of this key document.

A fourth barrier to self-governance is an individual versus collective/community focus. Individualists care about themselves more than the community as a whole; collectivists care about the community, including its image to outsiders, and have more invested in community life. Sloan, a long-term board member, sums up the difference, acknowledging that villagers both have different capabilities as well as different orientations to “community.”

[W]e have people who live in the village, who are *very* community, oriented, and are always thinking about the good of somebody else. And then we have other villagers, who find that, a very foreign concept. So, they’ve been out on the streets and struggling, for a good part of their lives. And survival and self-interest, is their primary way of processing things so it’s a real[laugh] learning curve for them to be engaged in conversations where they need to listen to somebody else and understand somebody else’s perspective. And then think about what’s, good for *everybody* even if it’s not the best thing for me. Um, so self-governance—and that, obviously happens in *any* democracy. So I think our *role* has been to try to help them continue to, keep the community, as the highest value, and not, just their own interests. Um, and self-governance, works when, people hold the community in a higher regard than their own personal interests. Um, but when there’re competing self-interests, then it gets to be, more of a challenge when people, won’t waver on that.

Self-governance is perceived as working when the community is preferred above the individual. In Sloan’s estimation, the residents most likely to be self-interested are those who have experience in the street or who have struggled the most. This perspective is interesting, since some villagers relate increased struggle to empathy and community-mindedness.

Community-minded villagers consider OVE more a part of themselves, including feelings of being in the same boat, even if they plan to leave sooner or later. Mara (a coupled villager) recounts one incident that speaks to this distinction. A weekend incident occurred with Reese and Phil, two villagers who had been living in the same dwelling. The village ended up expelling Phil from the village for domestic violence. The rule decided by village council and then backed by the Board was to keep the gate locked to ensure that Phil did not enter back in. But some residents voiced that their individual lives (rights) were violated because they could not come and go as easily, such as to work, as they pleased. However divided, the village majority voted in favor of the proposal to lock the gate. According to Mara and her partner Edgar, locking the gate was the right thing to do because it protected villagers as a whole, and symbolized the seriousness of the offense. Even with such a community focus, Phil’s individual circumstance is taken into consideration; villagers voted that he could return in six months if he receives necessary help / program support.

## Conclusion

Villagers such as Greg and Edgar likened the problems with participating in self-governance to United States democracy in general. Just as the U.S. Constitution is open to interpretation bias, so is the village manual. Greg likens village rules to interpretations of the Bible; both illustrate that interpretation often serves the purposes of the account-giver. In another example, Edgar (a coupled resident over four months at the time of interview who was also on council) discusses no one wanting to take notes at village meetings, stating that it's no different here than in the U.S. more generally; some feel their vote does not count, manifesting apathy. Furthermore, when the focus of self-governance is on the overall decision-making capacity of the village, the importance of hearing each individual's voice might be pushed into the background. Barriers to self-governance at OVE might inform us about attempts to govern U.S. society more generally, albeit with a specific population deemed "homeless" that is semi-in-charge.

On SOV's website under the mission statement are three areas highlighted: 1) Bridging the Gap; 2) Community Building; and 3) Small Footprint. The second, most pertinent for this chapter, emphasizes a core value of autonomy. SOV indicates: "Our village model provides a hand up rather than a hand out. We respect the autonomy of our residents while also providing opportunities for engagement and empowerment within self-managed, peer supported communities—creating a foundational sense of ownership on which the village thrives." (SOV Website, accessed 3/31/16). First, SOV makes a distinction that separates contributing to laziness from an emphasis on empowerment and self-sufficiency. Empowerment comes from giving residents autonomy over their lives and allowing them to manage their affairs. There is a balance implied between respecting autonomy and allowing self-management to become an excuse for apathy or laziness. Another aspect of this statement includes "peer support" rather than staff support, leaving something to the imagination about what peers can do for each other (perhaps contribute to a sense of empowerment or self-esteem). A respect for autonomy with the expectation of community and life engagement is supposed to create ownership in the community, rather than something imposed.

## CHAPTER IV

### TENSIONS IN TRANSITION EXPECTATIONS AND THE BOARD'S ORIENTATION TO OVE

In this chapter I focus on other key tensions within the village; namely, I explore tensions related to: 1) transitioning out of the village; and 2) promoting the village outwardly yet responding to resident / village needs in ways that sometimes contradicts the public presentation. I use the terms *provision* and *promotion* to highlight the second tension and interrelationship. The first tension exemplifies the concept of decoupling, which refers to organizational divergence between its “formal procedures and actual organizational activities” (Harrison et al. 2015: 342), and is rooted in neoinstitutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Neoinstitutional theory has traditionally assumed that organizations act rationally in pursuit of clear goals and operate as independent entities (Hallett and Ventresca 2006b). Analytically this theory has centered on organizations through a more macro lens, studying cultural “logics” and external pressures that affect organizational legitimacy and survival (Harrison et al. 2015). More recently the neoinstitutionalist tradition has decentered organizations and moved toward explaining the larger environmental context in which these organizations are found (Harrison et al. 2015, citing Scott 2008).

Given their concern with legitimacy and survival, new institutionalists study institutional-level “field” pressures that bear upon organizational stability and change. Decoupling can signify one way in which organizations strategically *respond* to external pressures to change or stabilize (Harrison et al. 2015). As such, the concept has often been treated as a response to pressures, although some researchers analyze decoupling as a process that can grow out of relational conflict. For an example of the latter, external pressures occurred to affect change in the United Steelworkers (USW) organizing strategy toward Social Movement Unionism (SMU). However, at the interactional level in many local USWs, the new push to organize along SMU lines largely failed to be adopted. Decoupling emerged as tensions between leaders steeped in older methods of organizing met up against the new strategy. Examining this case of attempted organizational reform in the USW, Harrison and others found that individuals’ varied positions and interests within the organization help determine the extent of decoupling (2015: 356).

As a *strategic* response, decoupling is often assumed within neoinstitutionalism to be functional (i.e. positive) for organizations, and involve choice (Harrison et al. 2015; Hallett and Ventresca 2006b). In other words, separating adopted policies from actual tasks allows organizations to proactively achieve goals when policies imposed by outside forces are—or are defined as—constricting<sup>17</sup>.

Critique of the neoinstitutionalist treatment of decoupling emphasizes that its traditional focus on formal structure largely ignores personal agency and internal actions within organizations that affect decoupling (Harrison et al. 2015)<sup>18</sup>. Proponents of “inhabited institutionalism” (Hallett & Ventresca 2006a) seek to theoretically and practically bring actors back into organizations rather than treat organizations solely as entities unto themselves. Inhabited institutionalism attempts to bridge traditional neoinstitutionalism’s focus on macro environmental fields with symbolic interactionism’s emphasis on change produced through actors constantly producing meaning in interaction (Blumer 1969; Hallett & Ventresca 2006a). For this bridge to be made, H&V argue, we must understand *how* decoupling occurs at a micro level, requiring qualitative research. Much organizational research on decoupling has been quantitative, where decoupling is understood in terms of technical measurements of some organizational output (e.g. membership growth in x amount of time). Yet, rather than sidestep a focus on features external to organizations, recent scholars aligned with the inhabited institutionalist approach have treated power struggles among organizational actors as reflective of broader tensions at the institutional field level (Harrison et al. 2015). For example, Harrison et al. note that tensions on the ground between the old guard USW and organizers under SMU reflected broader tensions within union organizing. Lastly, Harrison et al. contribute the idea that decoupling is not always functional for organizations, and can lead to negative outcomes. They introduce the term *dysfunctional decoupling*, which occurs when the gap between vision and implementation leads to organizational decline or even failure. In their case of the USW, maintaining the old guard style of organizing led to membership decline, while recently hired leaders tried to build a mass, diverse membership base using methods that garnered previous

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<sup>17</sup> The closely related concept of coupling, distinguished by “loose” and “tight” forms, pertains to the matching of organizational structure and goals with practices on the ground. Hallett and Ventresca assert that “tight coupling” was an assumed characteristic of bureaucracy before the advent of the new institutionalism. Loose coupling is associated more with neoinstitutionalism (2006a: 221).

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as highly institutionalized fields have come to be seen less as stable and singular in logic, researchers consider multiple competing logics present in any organizational field (See Harrison et al 2015: 343).

success in creating change. Some long-time, old guard USW leaders acknowledged that they were merging with smaller unions to stay relevant but that this strategy was not viable for long-term organizational survival (Harrison et al. 2015).

Although the statement below from Sophia Mohr is not meant to be a theoretical piece on decoupling, its appearance on SquareOne Villages' website indicates the assumption that decoupling—the divergence between vision and practical outcome—is necessary, if not functional, for organizations.

A vision is a compass. It's an ideal. It's vision. Then there's life: messy, imperfect, resource-constrained, ego-filled. Life as a human being is about moving between these two worlds – the ideal that we hold and are – within, and the messiness of the world. That's why a vision serves as a compass, a guiding light – not as a plan to execute. What matters is that we are moving toward our vision. That we have stepped fully onto the road of pursuing the dream. That we allow our dreams to be a guiding force in our lives. Calm, trusting, dedicated action taken from that place will pull us closer to the vision.

The quote from Mohr allows time for organizational reality to develop closer to a vision. Without stating whether or not a singular logic exists or if multiple logics contribute to realization of vision, Mohr assumes that vision is clear and that practical action is messy. In fact, vision is considered part of an individual or community's self-identity: “the ideal that we hold *and are*”. This passage also provides hope and perhaps a focus on smaller victories leading to longer-term survival, which some scholars and participants have shown to be important to member persistence in social movement organizations (Molinar 2011). Lastly, Mohr's implied admonition is that people (or organizations) with dreams should not follow a bureaucratic yardstick but be patient and pursue the vision as perhaps its own source of authority. To convey a dream as an internal (intraorganizational) authority, at the least, might be to encourage participants that vision can still be achieved when mired in the mess.

In my research on Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE) there are also processes indicative of decoupling, which occur at the intra-organizational level. By examining how OVE's vision was implemented on the ground, I argue how in some ways that vision failed resident and advocate expectations, and how this demonstrates the potential for dysfunctional decoupling. Tensions that signified divergence between OVE's vision and implementation are broadly related to: 1) residents transitioning out of the village, including a shifting focus from offering microbusiness opportunities to some case management services; and 2) methods of promoting the village to outsiders yet responding to resident and village needs in ways that sometimes contradict the public presentation, a

distinction I describe above as *provision versus promotion*. These divergences can result in short-term benefits or challenges for villagers. The benefits include getting to stay with little pressure due to looser handling of transition. The drawbacks are feelings of resentment, abandonment, and the interference of promotional concerns with the life of the village and its residents (e.g. limits on privacy due to media attention). Using the framework of inhabited institutionalism, I illuminate both micro interactions and tensions among different actors within the organization and the ways in which these actors negotiate external pressures to maintain and promote the village.

### **Expectations and Meanings of Transition Out of the Village**

At the most basic level, transition pertains to exiting the village, with the hope that OVE resident(s) have secured more permanent housing. In the meantime, the village was to be a safe, secure place to be, in a community that agreed upon a specific set of rules. OVE quarterly reports to the city—during its first approx. year and a half—reveal that it averaged 29 residents per 3 month period for the first six quarters, with each quarter becoming progressively larger. The most relevant data regarding transition in the reports is found in four questions: destination for those who left (N=38); reasons for leaving (N=38); length of stay for exiters who left during their respective quarter (N=37); and length of stay for current residents (N=34). The most frequent destination for those who exited between the village opening and the last day of 2014 was “homeless” (31.6%), followed by rental house or apartment (23.7%), family or friend’s place permanently and family or friend’s place temporarily (15.8% each), Section 8 housing and jail/prison (5.3% each), and transitional housing for homeless persons (2.6%). Of the *reasons for leaving*, 60.5% left voluntarily while almost half of that percentage (31.6%) left for rule violations. Of 37 former residents, approximately 8% left for unknown reasons. Approximately two-fifths (40.7%) exited within two months, while 48.6% of exiters left between 3-6 months, and 10.8% left within 7-12 months. And of 34 current residents (on Sept, 30, 2014, three months earlier than the statistics above), 15.1% had been living at OVE for 2 months or less, 18.2% lived there 3-6 months, and nearly 70% resided at OVE between 7 to essentially 13 months.

In an OVE vision statement that appears in Andrew Heben’s *Tent City Urbanism: From Self-Organized Camps to Tiny House Villages*, the goal for transitioning the unhoused was to get them into more “sustainable” or “permanent living situations”... “[t]hrough a combination of peer support, skill building, opportunities for income generation [e.g. microbusiness, fundraising events], and connections with community resources [which ended up being facilitated in part through volunteer

case management]” (2014: 181). A broader and more radical goal from this vision was to “transition” the way we think about permanent living situations into something more environmentally and socially sustainable. Mostly this meant questioning inequalities produced by housing markets, as well as the harmful effects upon the natural environment through current zoning and construction requirements favoring the creation of larger American homes and commercial buildings.

The vision statement above was one of a few that OVE created in its nascence, in part setting an important foundation for how planners thought transition might play out. Many sources could be considered for initially analyzing how expectations of transition were created at the village, but I begin with the OVE-city contract. An agreement that can be understood as an outcome of numerous meetings and political pressure involving activists, nonprofit leaders, and local authorities, the contract provides a reasonable starting point in its formalization of rules/regulations and expectations for village behavior and nonprofit oversight. In general the OVE-city agreement spells out: site/village boundaries, purpose, and its temporary status; relevant federal, state, and local laws; relationship and responsibilities between both parties; criteria to admit residents (including application, background check, and medical questionnaire); safety and security plans for the village, policy on pets; and template for quarterly reports to communicate with the city. Importantly, while several places within the 33-page document refer to the village’s pilot or temporary status, the concept “transition” is not mentioned. However, as previously mentioned, OVE’s 5-page quarterly report does track length of stay, reasons for exiting the village, and destination post-village residency. Moreover, in OVE’s “Community Agreement”, signed by all residents, the word “transition” or reference to time limits are absent as well. Without specified limits for length of stay, resident transition out of the village is left to an informal process of negotiation. Yet the very definition of OVE as “temporary” carries the expectation that turnover will occur so others can obtain a needed place to stay.

It should be noted that in addition to mentioning the temporary status of the village as a whole, clear written guidelines did exist for violations that could or would result in a resident’s expulsion. But no rules specified how long villagers could stay if they were never expelled. Therefore, transition became a subject of numerous conversations and ideas in the context of how the village could help move people to improved living situations. Upon being asked, one interviewee (a long-term villager) provides a description of OVE as a stepping-stone for more stable opportunities:

Lita: I would describe OVE as a homeless village where people who have lived on the streets, um are just trying to—it's a safe place for people that have been homeless, you know to get a safe, to get a step *up*.

Rob: *Okay*.

Lita: Transitional housing. Just a place for them to take showers, use a phone, get something to eat, have their own privacy so they can change their clothes, and sleep. So they can be, um, a stepping stone, you know to get a job and get schooling or get an apartment (Interview 2015).

OVE operated under the implicit assumption that residents desired to move to a more stable living situation after leaving the village. The City of Eugene cared about this too, as indicated by OVE's quarterly report form, whose question about post-village destination included more and less desirable outcomes: rental house or apartment; supportive housing; homeownership; jail; a return to homelessness. This assumption likely reflects, in part, broader expectations set forth in the federal government-sponsored Continuum of Care<sup>19</sup> response to homelessness (Gowan 2010; Groton 2013). Despite assuming that people generally saw the village as transitory, residents, Board members, and support volunteers were divided in how they felt about a stair-step approach to getting people out of homelessness, which dealt with transition to "something better". For some residents, the village was better than most living situations. A portion of these residents would choose not to leave in the foreseeable future. For others such as Lita above, OVE was (as officially designed) a temporary place to gather one's thoughts and resources, make connections with people along the way, and move onto more desirable locations (This closely matched the perception of the village that OVE framed for outsiders as well—as a step to more permanent housing). Nevertheless, approximately a few months into being a resident, the Board expectation was for villagers to develop "transition plans,"<sup>20</sup> sometimes in consultation with volunteers and/or individual board members.

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<sup>19</sup> The Continuum of Care model is an approach to addressing homelessness that was adopted by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the mid-1990s. Its major goal was to move people experiencing homelessness from emergency shelter to "housing readiness." The three phases of this stairstep approach (Padgett et al. 2016) are providing: 1) shelter accommodation; 2) getting people on their feet through transitional housing with service provision; and 3) providing subsidies, the permanent housing aspect (Gowan 2010: 189).

<sup>20</sup> I never saw a written transition plan, although I assume at least a few to several existed and were seen or reviewed. A Board or Support Committee member would occasionally remind residents that transition plans should be written down. However leeway existed as long as any report—verbal or written—of "moving forward" on a transition plan was believed.

Around one year into the village's existence, some Board members began feeling pressure (and some of that from residents) to more strongly emphasize transition. At least a few residents who did not necessarily plan to depart in the near future started to panic. In this budding organization, one year functioned as an unofficial time marker in which residents should be considered settled and starting to think concretely about life beyond OVE. Several times during my participation at the village I heard a few board members mention one year as a time to begin questioning resident length of stay. The following interview excerpt takes place a few months before the village's 2-year anniversary:

Todd: I tried to get out there on this, transition thing. You know "well let's deal with transition" like a year ago and, got kind of ignored and stuff.

Rob: And then what did it take for the board to, start thinking about transition more instead of ignoring it?

Todd: Well uh as I say it's been—a lotta [residents] have been there more than a year. So it's like all of a sudden "heeeey" you know like people aren't transitioning out, like they're supposed to and it's real important to the city that [the village is] a transitional thing. And that's another thing we need to show on our quarterly report, that not everybody's just kinda there, and just stayin' there and we're doin' everything for 'em ya know.

Board member concerns with some residents taking advantage or being complacent were present before the new push, but now worries became more salient and frequent. These concerns were contextualized by OVE's contract with the city. Todd continues:

Todd: cause like when they [OVE] had that first open house and Jon Ruiz the City Manager and a couple of the councilors were standin' and I was talkin' to 'em about [transition]. I said, you know, "yeah it's designed as a transitional village" and they're [using a gruff voice] all goin' like this [laughs] and that was what really you know,...what they *really* want ta see, is taking...people out of homelessness and *getting* 'em into homes or jobs instead of just havin' 'em, sit there and stuff so,

Rob: Yeah

Todd: there's just too many people that are kinda comfortable. And then they're startin' ta really break the rules now and, ya know pushin' the boundaries (Interview 2015)

Todd's relaying of his conversation with city officials suggests that their concerns reflect those of the broader society about the potential for homeless people to become complacent when given shelter opportunities. Elliot Liebow wrote that for the homeless poor, shelters operate under the idea that "we musn't make things too easy" for them (1993). Underlying this idea is the notion of "sin-talk", a discourse that explicitly blames people experiencing homelessness for their situation (Gowan 2010). Rather than criticizing the job market for inducing complacency, laziness is taken as an individual trait of the homeless. Noting a similar logic that focuses on personal responsibility,

Sharon Hays points out that welfare “reform” legislation--passed in 1996--assumes equality in terms of “opportunity.” This means that as long as poor people have access, they should be able to take advantage of resources and experience upward social mobility, without regard to other obstacles (2003).

At times Board and support members (as well as residents, who were sometimes the most outspoken about this) expressed frustration with what they felt could be villager complacency or disinterest in opportunities. However, rather than merely blame residents for their situation, volunteers also recognized systemic barriers that propel people into homelessness for which resources are needed in order to exit. For example, Marge, a very active support member who began with Occupy and assisted in creating OVE’s vision, saw transition as something rehabilitative and integrative for OVE’s homeless residents. Invoking Wanda’s (another prominent early member) categorization of the homeless as “economic refugees”, Marge states that OVE functioned as

...a *safe* place...safety, shelter, food, access to health. People could get back on their feet. And, go back into the community. So, uh it was always very loosely, defined what transition, was. But we were very definitely, not conceiving ourselves as, a long-term shelter, but as a safe place, for people to, get their stuff together...And that, that might be getting on *disability*. It might mean, uh going back to *school*. It might be getting, you know other resources, and it might mean going to work. So the idea *was*, that we were *looking* for people. And that we were looking for people, who were *capable*, of transitioning. And, we had had quite--*very*, very many discussions, on the drugs and alcohol. And the *decision*, was to be drug and alcohol free, *on* the site. (Interview 2015)

Marge’s excerpt speaks to the expectation of upward mobility given adequate resources of health care, food, shelter and safety. As a place to “get their stuff together,” Marge invokes individual self-sufficiency (perhaps the equality of opportunity notion too) while speaking to the rehabilitative process of getting people back on their feet so they might think about opportunities such as schooling or a job. Further, Marge implies “types” of the homeless, where “economic refugees” were those that OVE primarily sought, due to their assumed capability of transitioning. The implied “other” in Marge’s comments is persons who need added support for drug problems that the village likely couldn’t provide. The decision to make the village drug free helped define OVE as community for the “higher functioning” rather than a rehabilitative space for homeless

people with drug problems<sup>21</sup>. Numerous times in the field—and Heben mentions this in his book (2014)—I heard participants say things like “this place / OVE isn’t for everyone” or “so-and-so resident just wasn’t a good fit here.” One instance of this sentiment comes from a long-term Board member:

I’m *guessing* that, it’s about, seventy, thirty, in terms of seventy percent of the people who’ve transitioned out of OVE have transitioned into something that was more sustainable and *better* for them. Um, I would say thirty percent of them transitioned because, OVE was not the right place for them or they just couldn’t live in community. Um, so, all of the way from *choosing* to leave, and go back to the street or, um being evicted. Thirty percent of them, you know have, have left in that way, have transitioned in that way. So I think we’re feeling that, for the *most* part, people who’ve transitioned have transitioned into a better situation for them. (Interview 2015)

Assuming different needs, one implication is that some OVE applicants or residents might fit well somewhere else. Again, homeless and transitional services, to the degree that ample resources exist, become a way of customizing programs to fit people with varying needs. One danger of assuming a monolithic category of “homeless” is, of course, ignoring that variety of needs and experiences. Alternatively, the shortcoming of assuming that the homeless are “not the same as you and I” (Baum and Burnes 1993), but all are different, is that fundamental contributors to homelessness (e.g. poverty, lack of affordable housing) are ignored.

On the other hand, for many residents OVE and its implicit logic of transition represents a significant opportunity. As a response to my question about what a successful village means to him, Sloan gives at least some credence to OVE as the be-all, end-all for some.

I would say that you know that the signs of success are that seventy percent of the people who trans[itioned], transitioned *out* of the village in a positive way. And, that we still have a very viable village. We have villagers who have *been* there from the very beginning. And, they still are *housed* [at OVE]. They’ve got a safe place to be...they’ve got an opportunity to, make their lives better. And, that it continues to *be* that kinda place for the ones who have been there from the beginning *and* that has provided a space for transition for others, is, is great (Interview 2015).

Sloan notes a dual purpose of transition in practice. The first is successful transition to something else. The second is perhaps divergent (or at least provides room for exception) from

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<sup>21</sup> This last sentence speaks to practical ways in which the homeless services industry—and charitable as well as even radical volunteers—seeks to match resource needs to categories of the homeless. It’s common for the industry to assume that a variety of people experience homelessness and tailored programs and places must emerge to meet their diverse needs.

written policy: successful stability. It's less likely that SOV as an organization would seek public or media attention for keeping the homeless housed well in a transitional village. Still, what seems to make the village successful is its ability to manage OVE in a way that doesn't impose austere time limits with unrealistic expectations. Even as an advocate of expectations for individual residents, Sloan is mostly interested in expectations with consequences in order to protect the village as an entity. Moreover, his interview indicates an understanding of the lack of affordable housing to which residents can move.

Later in our interview, Sloan is even clearer when I directly ask about how he feels if a small percentage of villagers never wanted to transition. After explaining that some residents see the village as a temporary stable place while they look for work or await benefits, he notes:

I'm assuming that there are some people that, that, have been at OVE, for a long time, who find this to be just *fine*. This was the transition they wanted and they're not lookin' to transition into somethin' else... This is *great*, bein' *off* the streets, being in a community has just, you know has worked fine for them... I'd be perfectly happy with it [having a proportion of roughly 1 in 6 residents reside at OVE permanently]. In fact, *pragmatically* that's what we're doing. Because there, there are some villagers there, who will *never*, transition to, anything better (2015).

Sloan provides one example of a villager who he thinks is not capable of transitioning:

Louise for instance. Louise is not going to transition to something else. *This* is the right thing for her. And the community has tolerated her. You know, she *does* have her antics and she has her moments and she gets mad and she you know, cusses people out and, and then goes, you know to be by herself for a while. All that's true, but I haven't ever heard anybody, or any group of people say, "she needs to transition outta here. She's been there since the very beginning." I think there is an innate sort of understanding that, y'know, Louise's goin' nowhere. Um, there's not another *step* for her... [A] caseworker might help her find, you know some better living situation for her. Um, but I don't see, even people not liking, you know somebody else's *behavior*. At a particular juncture, I don't see them pushing, you know somebody to be evicted from the village, because they've been there too long, or, you know, or they're not workin' on their transition plan (Interview 2015) [Approximately one year later, Louise was removed from the village].

However, Sloan does state a caveat for residents that could be pushed out for staying too long and not working on transition. One reason is for disruptive behavior that becomes so detrimental that it cannot be tolerated, as with a former villager named Danny. Essentially, Danny served as an example of a resident that seemed more interested in causing trouble than working productively in the community to exit OVE. However, Sloan mainly focuses on Shauna as the

example of his caveat, as a resident who is *capable* of transitioning but does not. At the time of interview, Shauna had lived at the village for approximately sixteen months.

[F]or whatever reason and...I have my take on what I think those reasons are—wants to be in the village and control village life...and that feeds her soul. Instead of going, get a *job*[laugh], and *using* what she *has*, in a *constructive* way, to make her life better...What she's done is she's stayed too *long*. She has too much power in the village. And now she has a whole group of people who really don't *like* her. And, yeeah, they--I'm sure they would love it if she would leave. Um, while they don't find any way that they can really push her *out*, um *of* the village, they, they have done that effectively by just, *ignoring* her, and, and/or pushing her out of council and making sure that she doesn't have, any, you know any power.

Indeed, Sloan points to the indirect ways in which villagers can invoke transition as a way to force people out. Claims can be posited about whether or not a specific resident is working adequately on her transition plan. And although failure to make progress on transition is a contested area of claims-making, this failure is not a necessary ground (but could be sufficient ground) for expulsion.

With the contrast between Louise and Shauna, differing expectations about transition creates an atmosphere that some villagers have likened to a popularity contest. In other words, whoever is not liked for whatever reason stands a chance of losing their residency. Chances of expulsion are increased if you have less power, though that was not universally true as was the case with Louise who was able to stay for a lengthy period of time despite being perceived as relatively powerless. Indeed, for some their chances of expulsion increased because they had too much power and demonstrated too much competency. For example, Shauna was considered “high functioning” by some, and from her interview, clearly wanted to get out of OVE.

Some residents viewed “having things too good” in the village as a barrier to transition. The village certainly asked things of residents, from the expected \$30 per month in utilities (\$35 at least since Jan. 2018) to the myriad ways in which residents could support the village: being a model resident, including showing up to village meetings, communicating any absences, working or going to school or working their transition plan, not getting in trouble or when pushing the envelope, doing that respectfully; volunteering for council; volunteering to cook, for village fundraisers, or involvement in micro-business possibilities; etc. But as Shauna put it, disagreeing with those she sees as adopting OVE “as a lifestyle,” having things too good was a potential barrier to transition:

And talkin' about benefits here they bitch about what they're *not* getting, but what we get back is in, if you had to translate into *cash* value, we're payin' thirty bucks and we're gettin' like two-hundred dollars worth a shit

every month[laughs]...with free food and clothes and, supplies and, internet and all these things that if I had to pay for *myself*, far exceeds that thirty bucks I gotta come up with. Soooo when they—you know but, when you're only payin' thirty bucks and you can go drinkin' everyday, and on weekends and you're partyin' like a *rockstar*, and you're livin' so *cheaply*, it makes it really hard for you to *wanna* transition and get outta here because, this gravy train is *reeeally, really* good (Interview 2015).

Lita similarly contends that the provision of *too many* resources (shelter, food, clothing donated) allows some residents to be idle. This point supports that shelters or similar organizations shouldn't "make things too easy" (Liebow 1993). Her point emphasizes her perception of a fundamental tension between providing enough resources to create opportunity, and offering beyond what is necessary, which facilitates complacency.

On the other hand, some villagers who had clear goals or otherwise had every intention of leaving empathized with others' desires to stay longer. For example, Wes and Shirley, a couple who came into disability money and bought a new car and moved to a more stable living situation, lamented that some villagers *couldn't* stay long-term. Wes and Shirley reiterated that the village was transitional in its purpose, but felt for villagers who were more comfortable there.

Villagers that sought a quicker transition were not subject to much criticism about their plans. They would simply on occasion receive a defensive response from residents who expected to be there a longer time who needed to justify why it was okay to remain at the village. More often, however, potential long-termers gave a normative response about the importance of transition on principle or by explaining what income opportunity might possibly be in the works for them. For a while at least, invoking vague transition plans worked to stave off real or perceived pressure.

There was also an ebb and flow regarding pressure to transition while I was doing my observations of the village. It was late 2014 and into 2015 when the one-year transition push occurred. Case management was becoming slightly more consistent and built into OVE's structure as the "culture of transition" that Gavin had previously mentioned began to take hold. In March 2016, OVE was on the cusp of hiring a quarter-time "Village Coordinator" to be a liaison between the village and board. Except for being a point of contact for outside agencies or groups working with resident, which might include transition plans, the coordinator position would not be dedicated to transition assistance.

For transition in OVE to be considered part of a decoupling process, where expectations to transition diverged from actual organizational practices, one manifestation would have to be OVE/SOV not pushing transition, or "letting it slide" (Sloan, for example, claims that this is what happens in practice, for some). A number of further points are relevant to this assessment. First,

and to reiterate, OVE did not have a written policy directly on transition; it can be seen as an informal process. OVE/SOV is a relatively young organization, so I expect substantial development of a policy in this regard. Second, divergence regarding transition was most clear at the intraorganizational level, where tensions existed on the ground between residents and Board members' expectations. Third, this divergence and tension occurred in the context of broader concerns. For example, resident pressure from the Board to transition reflected Board concerns emanating from city expectations. Although OVE was on good terms with the city, it seeks to maintain legitimacy and realizes that the latter has power to terminate OVE's agreement and Conditional Use Permit. Therefore, Board concerns were real in that, potentially, the whole village could be shut down if no transitioning progress toward housing was made. Further, OVE had to address broader cultural representations of the homeless, as well as expectations of self-sufficiency in finding more stable housing. To the degree that homeless people, especially the most visible, are vilified and held responsible for their homelessness, organizations must frame their vision and programs in ways that point to the potential of the unhoused to "move up". Historically, OVE is one of many organizations working in the context of over 20 years of transitional-type shelters institutionalized through the federal government's adoption of the "Continuum of Care" approach (Padgett et al. 2016). Transition of homeless persons is expected, and often funded more than permanent housing (Lyon-Callo 2008). Like many organizations, OVE relied heavily on private donations, making its relationship to broader representations of the homeless important.

One way to begin answering whether transition at OVE provides an instance of organizational decoupling is to look at Sloan's interview. He notes that he would be fine with having a small percentage of OVE residents live there indefinitely, which are those who are incapable or don't have means to transition out. He indicates that "pragmatically" that's what they're actually doing. And even though Sloan says there is no need to cover up any of OVE's "dirty laundry", he confirms that OVE doesn't "air" that laundry either. What that means to me is that they don't need to publicly advertise all the bad and hard tensions that they experience. Sloan reasons that there is no need to cover up any imperfections because the city and police know that OVE is imperfect. Further, according to Sloan the city's perception is that OVE works better than any alternative and some decoupling of expectations and practices with respect to transition is the key way that stakeholders manage those tensions.

### **Tensions Regarding the Board's Role in OVE: *Provision* vs. *Promotion*.**

If OVE as a nonprofit organization was not fully living up to its vision of providing a community and opportunities to assist residents to transition, one might first look to the different constituents to which the Board was responsible, namely, the broader public, the city, neighborhood groups, and residents. The Board had several priorities to juggle: maintaining relationships and a mildly authoritative yet supportive presence at the village; ensuring that the village had its basic material and communal needs met, intervening when necessary; keeping up a good public image with the city and neighbors; and promoting the village and organization as “models” to address homelessness and affordable housing in sustainable, cost effective ways.

As time progressed the Board’s shifting focus became clearer; the organizational vision was definitely stretching beyond OVE, as discussed above. For instance, in mid-2015, the name change from OVE to SOV (SquareOne Villages) reflected the development of a new affordable housing project / village, Emerald Village Eugene (EVE, which promised to start filling a gap in truly affordable—and tiny—housing, a step “above” OVE. EVE got off the ground in later 2017). Both current and developing villages became projects of the newly-named organization, with further projects envisioned for the future. From the outset OVE was promoted as transitional housing; according to federal definitions all OVE residents are “homeless.” In the early stages of planning and promoting EVE, some residents already began to feel like OVE was becoming forgotten. Just a year or two earlier, Opportunity Village Eugene was the new (pilot) project in town, a social experiment in Eugene for people who were unhoused living in a self-governed community in private tiny homes mixed with communal facilities. Now, the focus of the Board on OVE seemed to gradually decline, as it ramped up fundraising, finding land, and planning efforts for EVE. The Board’s resolution to resident feedback about feeling less prioritized was to create a “working group”, consisting of about half of the current board members. The other half would focus more on EVE’s development, and there would be some overlap in terms of financial and administrative oversight for both projects.

According to some villagers’ descriptions, the board’s orientation toward the village changed as time progressed. When OVE was new, residents that were part of the early village felt the board was more attentive to their needs, especially in terms of securing (*providing*) resources and pouring energy into helping create the community and a governing structure (“council”) that functioned well: was fair, well-attended, upheld community rules, and felt responsible for the wellbeing of the village. Some impending villagers helped craft the original village manual, which spelled out the rules,

policies, and structure of the village. Board attentiveness at the beginning was key as the village developed its physical infrastructure, as well as its culture. However, it should also be noted that building the village infrastructure—especially aesthetically-pleasing tiny houses—was always part of *promoting* the village, not just providing resources for residents. Prior to the village opening, and shortly afterward, meeting minutes reveal a concern among planners that the village looked more respectable and durable than any old homeless “camp”. This orientation beyond OVE is understandable given that spaces where homeless people exist are still largely associated with disorder, and given that dominant explanations for homelessness continue to presume the responsibility of the individual (Gowan 2010).

As a nonprofit organization forming around issues related to homelessness, OVE/SOV inevitably became involved in discourses of poverty and homelessness. And much of OVE’s message sought to challenge stereotypes and dominant discourses that blame or criminalize people without housing. Indeed, *promoting* OVE’s “transitional village model”, especially its self-governing structure, entails a narrative that supports homeless people managing themselves. This narrative must be communicated to outside audiences who might hold questionable or unfavorable views of the homeless, transcending the village itself. Given the importance of this type of narrative for people experiencing homelessness, it remains vital to consider how villagers perceive or experience the promotion of OVE to the outside.

As I began interviewing residents nearly one and a half years into the village’s existence, I would sometimes hear comments about feeling thankful for the village and all its resources, including private space and a community yurt with internet access, food, and more. At the same time some villagers (e.g., Jeremy, Greta) felt that certain members of the Board acted most interested in their own agendas of promoting the village as a model community of the homeless. Greta, an original resident, discussed feeling used and “on display” when groups, including media, would constantly come to the village for a tour or a story. When I interviewed her, Greta was one of few villagers going to school. She had been working to get out of the village for a while, [although she was originally committed to OVE’s vision.] Although Greta noted that media and groups of people were interested in the village for the entire time she was living there, a discernible difference surfaced when OVE moved from gaining local to national attention:

And I think that’s kinda when it, started *changing* in the minds of a lotta villagers too...I think a lotta people including myself, kinda got bitter, about being used all the time. Having all these *tour* groups and having all these *people* come ta the property and, constantly you know, supposedly we’re getting losta donations and yet

*nothing* ever changes *Nothing's* ever better, you know. But we're constantly put under pressure ta look our best and do g—ya know. And I think that probably, shy people away from participating and trying ta make the village the best village it could be (Interview 2015)

In questioning for whom is all the touring and publicity Greta asks, who ultimately benefits? In her case, it is not the residents, since “nothing ever changes” at the village. Instead, residents feel pressure to become the face of the village and put forth their best presentation. Importantly, Greta connects greater publicity and lack of progress for the villagers with lower participation at OVE:

During my interview with Greta, Luke joins us. Luke is a close friend and both are original villagers, although Luke stayed at OVE a relatively short time. Their interview dynamic is mixed with building off of each other's points/comments, as well as having points of disagreement. The disagreements push Greta to explain her feelings further. In the following excerpt, Greta responds to Luke's normative explanation of resident behavior when outsiders are given village tours.

According to Luke residents are supposed to accentuate the positives, specifically in order that the village might help change the perceptions of the general public toward the homeless.

Greta: Okay thank you for the ideal there mister but if somebody was walkin' through *your* house, twenty-four seven, and you're like gettin' ready to go to your, bed after a hard day's work and all this other stuff and they start takin' pictures and all this other stuff when is there a time for us to just relax?

Luke: When you close the gate. Sorry. That's it dude. Nah. End of *story*.

Here, publicity of the village is associated with lack of privacy for residents, or is taken for granted as something to be used to. Each perspective about publicity is a matter of scope. Luke's professed focus is on the movement, the vision/ideal, and the broader homeless community. To Luke, residents might realize the gains made on a broader level from any discomfort or intrusion caused by public attention. Greta concentrates more on the immediate community, the people that surround her and the village she is a part of, as well as on the expectations she seems to internalize about the proper role of a resident. She does not want to be responsible for constantly educating the public.

This does not mean Greta fails to see a bigger picture, nor that Luke is indifferent about OVE as a community. But while Greta refers to herself as a more private person, Luke strikes me as one who wouldn't mind cameras and media attention “intruding” on his life. My observations of Luke are that he emerged as an early leader at OVE, seemed to like giving his viewpoint, was a

featured speaker on a homelessness panel I attended, and that he is an idealist according to Greta. Below, Greta's comment further states the need for privacy, yet also exemplifies how publicity of the village can interfere with the goals OVE has set out for its residents.

They—for the first year and a half, *opened* this place up and there *was* no privacy. *Every* week there was cameras. *Every* week there was pictures and tours and everything. And through all that, they're asking you "please go get a forty-week--a forty hour a week job, and get out. You need to be the face of homelessness and the face of all these people" and you know, [slightly more pronounced] "this is *bigger* than we are" and everything. But you know, that really takes the individualism, *out* of the whole thing. And "you need to work on *your* transition plan and *your* thing and whatnot." There's only so many hours in a day (Interview 2015).

Greta's experience helps contextualize the tension between the ability to be an individual at the village, and the pressure to represent the homeless (Shauna mentions this too, although her focus is more on the difference between working her own transition plan and getting caught up in helping the village as a whole). Villagers are encouraged to be self-sufficient and find a job, work to transition out, etc., which puts pressure on them as individuals. However, being "the face of homelessness" is not what Greta expected.

Villagers such as Greta do not only negotiate getting back on their feet with pressures to act as positive cultural representations of homelessness. They also must negotiate their own well-being and transition plans with that of the village collective. A handful of residents spoke about this negotiation in terms of having what Edgar and Mara (a resident couple) called a "collective mentality." This mentality entailed a focus on what is good for the group. The five main village rules upheld a collective focus, which included rules such as no violence, no drugs, and helping to maintain the village through sharing community tasks. A focus on the collective could be positive for the organization or for maintaining the village while being detrimental to individuals like Greta, who sees herself and is seen by others as a resident truly working her transition plan.

If village publicity has the downside of interrupting some resident's focus on transition, another point of contention regarding "promotion" is the perception by residents that a Board member's self-interest takes precedence over the village good. Moments before the above excerpt in my interview with Greta, she mentions "the board's greed", interpreting that being the face of homelessness is for them. Another resident sardonically perceives a former Board member's self-interest in wanting political attention for the cause of homelessness, even though the member

appears to be doing the right thing. Perhaps akin to Greta's idea of greed, Jeremy's assertion about power with Landon, a former Board member still involved in the project, is striking:

Read that fuckin' article [featuring OVE people, including Landon] *closely* because what's you'll see is on the one hand Landon is saying ya know well just the way people treat...the homeless, it's a horrible way they treat them. And then the people are—then other people are *talking* about Landon and saying “Landon is very political and nothing can stand in his way...” But what *Landon* doesn't seem to realize is bringing that sort of ya know political *can-do* nothin' will stop me attitude, to a situation when you're dealin' with a *homeless* person, you wanta talk about a fucking *power* imbalance. I don't think he *realizes* that. He comes off *very* arrogant, because he is. I mean this is a man who will drive his [expensive type of vehicle] wearing his flashy [clothes], ya know to the village because he's gonna be *interviewed* by somebody. He doesn't always show up like that, ya know. But ya know anytime there's any sort of media publicity type thing oh my God, the only thing more dangerous than being between Louise and a pizza is being between *Landon* and a camera (Interview 2015).

Jeremy connects his perception that Landon desires media attention with political striving. Especially important is noting a “power imbalance” between Landon and the homeless. According to Jeremy, along with my observations, Landon is confident in his political prowess and ability to make change in collaboration with others. He is known in the community for his good will and connections. His “nothin' will stop me attitude” brushes up against a homeless person's needs and reality on the margins of the political system. Research corroborates Jeremy's skepticism that power imbalances do exist when it comes to the involvement of more privileged people in advocating for the homeless. For one, Rob Rosenthal's study of homelessness in Santa Barbara, CA distinguishes between “empowerment” and “efficiency” when it comes to the interests or motivations for movement participation among the homeless and housed, respectively. In other words, when people experiencing homelessness participate in a movement that includes them, they are more likely to strive for empowerment (1994). Empowerment manifests in many ways, including having one's voice heard and seeing their experiences as something besides shameful (cf. Mosher 2010). Middle-class advocates, on the other hand, generally aim for efficiency, including use of resources and networks to accomplish political aims (Rosenthal 1994). This distinction is important as it relates to the broader claim that middle-class or more privileged people often dominate poor and/or homeless peoples' movements in the U.S. (Casanova, with Blackburn 1996; Piven and Cloward 1977).

Being efficient and/or holding some type of self-interest does not mean housed leaders are without good intentions. However, outcomes may diverge from their intentions. One former board member lightly scoffs about “the boys that build”, a term she conjured up for a few well-intentioned and caring male organizational leaders. *While* trying to implement the vision for self-governance and

ownership as best they could, “the boys that build” *could not help* but erect a village. Since board members had community / family ties and resources, they were compelled to use them. Failure to do so would perhaps be a waste: a waste of time, talent, resources, and responsibility—especially to the poor. Wanda implies that it would be better to build a movement more slowly, in order to be more inclusive of the homeless, who would eventually lead “their” own cause. Instead, the boys that build sacrificed the homeless’ sense of community/village ownership for the gains they received. I would argue that is *a skill* for a middle-class person with middle-class ways of perceiving the world to facilitate local poor people leading the cause, and would be much more uncomfortable for the middle-class folks (Piven and Cloward 1977; cf. Rivera and Erlich 1998).

In a chapter on the Welfare Rights Movement, Piven and Cloward noted that the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), which lasted a short time, adopted values of having poor people lead the movement, while “organizers” offered up technical skills or developed/trained people with leadership qualities among the poor. Granted, some board members I observed did mention being uncomfortable, and having to make tough decisions. However, middle-class worldview / perceptions and the ways they play out among housed advocates are key factors in reproducing the subordinated status of homeless individuals and groups involved in social change.

Although not directly related to *provision / promotion*, two activists who got involved with Occupy and then specifically with OVE discuss their middle-class expectations of self-governance, as well as of residents’ transitioning and developing community. Bonnie and Marge, both on the Support Committee (a committee that originally steered the organization and subsequently took on a support role for villagers), have some cultural capital, in that they know something about how formal organizations operate—such as how to run efficient meetings, keep minutes, keep a “stack”, etc. Further, both mention having subtle expectations that residents should know how to govern themselves, expressing impatience at times that villager meetings were not as efficient as they could be. Bonnie also first assumed that residents wanted to share meals together in order to build community. She learned through the process that residents had varying levels of trust and some needed privacy more than building camaraderie through a meal or movie night. In terms of transitioning out of the village, Marge, Bonnie, and sometimes others (e.g., Todd, a Board member) were often frustrated with what they felt could be complacency or disinterest in opportunities among villagers. Equally concerning to several SOV Board and OVE support members was if their offers of support were actually what residents needed.

Landon, the former Board member previously mentioned, recognized middle-class bias as SOV responds to a balance between the Board's role of village oversight versus empowering villagers to make decisions. Landon explains this in the context of SOV's unique structure of village governance, which is neither entirely in the hands of residents nor the Board:

[O]urs is a little *different* because we have the *nonprofit* so it's about learning the *balance* between having the nonprofit make the decisions versus having the *village* make the decisions. And trying to give as much *power* to the village itself, to run its own affairs. And not overstep the bounds and, you know make decisions for them. It's, real easy for, middle class people ta do that. We think we know *better*...so, we have ta constantly kinda remind ourselves, you know our limits. And ta be careful about using that power and influence. And I've seen this many times where a board member, well-*meaning*, you know will just make a suggestion and then everyone [says] "yeah," because the board member says that, therefore it must be the right thing ta *do*, but don't really own the decision. And in fact what I've discovered recently is, when I separated them and discovered they really didn't like the decision [laughing] they felt they should do somethin' *different* (Interview 2016).

I cannot provide a definitive answer to the paradox in which Landon is criticized by a resident (and not just Jeremy) for not recognizing a power imbalance between him and residents, while personally recognizing his (and other board members') middle-class bias(es) in the excerpt above. Using popular terms I can surmise that: 1) Jeremy is biased toward Landon or angry in life, which places responsibility on Jeremy; 2) even if Landon verbally recognizes a middle-class bias, again, there is a difference between intentions of privilege and outcomes.

The tension between provision and promotion relates to expectations of *reciprocity* that I previously noted—i.e., what's the balance between what residents and the org are receiving, to sustain the village? For instance, if residents don't feel like enough is provided for them at the village, or that they are being ignored they won't be as supportive in promoting the village as a whole or its vision. Some residents, such as Lita and Greg clearly support the vision and goals of OVE. Along with that, they criticize others who complain that OVE doesn't do enough for them, stating either that residents could step up and be involved, or at least be responsible for taking advantage of opportunities. By this logic, the alternative is that those who complain about resources at OVE are less likely to support the village practically through volunteering, or symbolically through caring about OVE's mission or vision. Perhaps another explanation for the "alternative" is that people can complain about OVE forgetting them or not providing enough, but still agree with the vision (Greta) or not go against it (Ethan, another villager). Greta definitely volunteered for things, such as coordinating donations and serving on council, although her participation waned

after a while. In our interview she makes clear, for instance, that she felt purpose in helping to create and uphold the ideals of the village manual. Ethan did not seem to complain about the village resources, nor was he excited about OVE's vision. He seemed more indifferent about OVE goals.

## **Conclusion**

Lita's metaphor of a stepping-stone at the beginning of the chapter matches what visionaries wanted to produce when creating the village (outwardly portrayed, as well as conveyed in meetings I witnessed). When I ask if the village works well for that, Lita responds affirmatively. Overall Lita's interview seems to support what the board has tried to do, even if imperfect. However, translating basic necessities that are offered into opportunities depend upon residents themselves. Lita does acknowledge that the board could have provided more motivation by making explicit its expectations for residents "getting out there" and trying to transition. The board could have had more order and been harder on villagers, such as "you need to do this", followed up with harder consequences. Indeed, given the tension between creating a supportive environment and promoting the SOV model the board might have been expected to more stringently enforce implicit expectations about transition, echoing the mindset that "we musn't make things too easy for them" because clients (or residents) won't learn (Liebow 1993). Yet OVE musn't make things too hard on residents either, giving them time and space to acclimate before making too many demands or rules. Tensions of this sort are intrinsic to OVE, but actors within this system rarely resolve these tensions decisively, instead living with them in part through decoupling in a way that allows ideals and practicalities and even rival ideals to coexist and interact without final resolution.

Hallett and Ventresca (2006b) utilize Alvin Gouldner's 1954 qualitative study of a gypsum mine in the 1940s as an example of coupling, which simply put means that an organization's stated goals or policies and practices converge. According to the authors, Gouldner found three patterns of bureaucracy, each associated with a degree of coupling/decoupling. Prior to the introduction of bureaucracy—a new institutional form at the time—the mine was characterized by an "indulgency pattern" in which supervisors knew each other a long time and "management responsiveness toward the workers, leniency and the flexible application of rules, second chances, and a blind eye toward pilfering" were the order of the day (Hallett and Ventresca 2006b: 914). After the introduction of new management with stricter rules a more "punishment-centered" bureaucracy formed consisting of "tight coupling," followed by a pushback from workers used to the old "indulgency pattern", which resulted in a second pattern of "mock bureaucracy" with "loose coupling." With "mock

bureaucracy...bureaucratic rules are in place but are largely ignored or inoperative” (Hallett and Ventresca 2006a: 220). A third pattern, “representative bureaucracy” points to coupling that grows out of shared interests and cooperation between workers and management. In this pattern, coupling can be loose *and* tight in different aspects of the organization. For example, management and workers agreed on safety standards, which signified tight coupling between bureaucratic regulations and organizational practices (Ibid: 2006a).

*OVE also partly represents a case of “loose coupling”*

If we think of the first few years of OVE’s existence, particularly the relationship between residents and the board in terms indulgency or punishment-centered, the relationship is more collaborative and indulgent. Board members rarely levy punishment, unless in cases of violence or egregious drug use that causes strife in the community. Still, then, most punishment-oriented action is done by the collective village, often after a longer process of warnings (some considered fair, others unfair). In this way, perhaps, neoliberalism is alive and well, if the onus of responsibility and oversight for the well-being or downfall of the poor and homeless is moved first from government to a nonprofit (with fewer resources), and then once again transferred to PWH.

In its nascent stages, OVE as a “pilot” program is given leeway to work out kinks between its policies and actual practices. As the organization moves further toward formalization, aspects of OVE that involve loose coupling (e.g. ideal expectations of transition compared with transition policies enacted given real people’s circumstances) may change. For example, the institutionalization of case management for each resident could change the pattern of relationship between those that provide oversight and PWH. Finally, loose coupling appears in OVE as similar to Gouldner’s characterization of mock bureaucracy. But in addition to some of OVE’s rules being “largely ignored or inoperative,” I would argue that the rules themselves are *malleable*, especially in the context of self-governance as a goal. Residents at OVE did change the manual on occasion, informing the board as to the changes. Further, handling consequences for violations of the Community Agreement often came down to a case-by-case situation, where the policy was still discusses or invoked, yet open to change.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Tent cities comprised of the homeless have seen a resurgence in the last decade or so, with the development of publicly-sanctioned, self-governed communities as part of this trend. At first glance this resurgence appears to be the result of social movement pressures along with increased understanding and resources from local governments concerned with the growth of visible homelessness. While these two changes reflect some of the increase, tent city growth can also be interpreted as an outgrowth of neoliberal policies.

My overarching question in this research has been: How do self-governed communities of the homeless in general, and Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE) in particular, contribute to the mitigation of homelessness as a social problem? If “solving” homelessness will require intervention both materially and ideologically, how does an organization that has created a transitional, self-governing community of the homeless intervene? My question carries the assumption that any material reality of homelessness will not be solved but only lessened, because the disappearance of homelessness would require, among other things, an end to poverty, changes in the structure and practices of the labor and housing markets, as well as government policies such as full-employment and universal, public health care. The ways in which OVE might intervene lay both in (materially) increasing the supply of “tiny” affordable housing, and (discursively) in favoring a horizontal leadership approach that places homeless people in more dignified decision-making positions.

Of course, encouraging self-management or self-governance among the homeless both challenges and reflects current neoliberal ideology. Despite spatial strategies of marginalizing homeless encampments through exclusion (Wright 1997; Smith 2014) or seclusion (Herring 2014), the allowance and even encouragement of villages run largely by residents challenges criminalization and shelterization of the homeless. Rather, self-management can symbolize that people experiencing homelessness are capable of managing their own affairs. At the same time nonprofits, whether secular or faith-based, have increasingly filled a gap in social services that government has been relinquishing. To the degree that self-management encourages people in transition to police themselves in exchange for privacy and little-to-no harassment, there is little incentive to work toward changing laws that criminalize homelessness. If that is the case, major goals of deregulation, increasing privatization of public resources (e.g. housing), and the preference of self-sufficiency (for

poorer people) are served. Local government is more likely to sanction self-governance and autonomy if there is a nonprofit to provide oversight—without becoming too political.

In the context of local movements for the rights of homeless people, OVE works within the system. In Rosenthal's (1994) terms, OVE is the "good cop" that can gain the respect of local authorities while receiving some benefits that also come from the political push of "bad cops" like Whoville (when it first began) and SLEEPS. The latter two groups utilized more direct action tactics and garnered less respect from authorities. Still, the result of a good cop/bad cop dialectic is that some progress toward mitigating homelessness is made (Rosenthal 1994). One interviewee, Wanda, saw SLEEPS as a response to piecemeal progress by the city of Eugene. Rather than form a legal camp or village like OVE, SLEEPS advocated for the "right to sleep", setting up spectacles in public such as people sleeping in illegal areas in order to highlight unjust criminalization. Although OVE was the least radical of these organizations, all three groups share the belief that people experiencing homelessness are normal and deserving of autonomy, which contrasts with the preponderance of "sin-" and "sick-talk" (Gowan 2010).

These two discourses are employed in ways that hold individuals responsible for being poor or homeless. Sin- and sick-talk take the form of "we musn't make things too easy for them", lest homeless people take advantage of "free" resources like shelter or food stamps, and lack self-sufficiency (Liebow 1993; Hays 2003). Whether lack of self-sufficiency or motivation is blamed on personal/moral failure or illness/addiction, poor and homeless people or somehow their sicknesses are assumed to be taking advantage of the general public and the government. In the context of the United States' shift to a neoliberal economic and political ideology since at least the 1980s, with the reduction of the social safety net for the economically marginalized, I refute claims of mere personal responsibility. Situating OVE's development within the broader recent growth of self-managed communities, Occupy's call to challenge class inequalities is also reflected in OVE's discourse.

In the introduction, I argue that OVE emerged out of the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in September 2011. More broadly, I consider OVE as one case in a spectrum of tent cities, encampments, and "villages" for homeless people that is more formalized, sanctioned by authorities, and equipped with greater amenities than most. I view self-managed villages as potential models of empowerment that challenge the hierarchical structure of longer-standing parts of the homeless services industry (e.g. shelters). In addition, I see villages as part of a growing array of communities that comprise the institutional service apparatus to temporarily house low-income

people. As shelters have undergone differentiation and appeal to different “segments” of the homeless, tent cities and villages are doing the same.

Throughout my research I heard variations of OVE being *a place “not for everybody”*. This included defining OVE as a place that could not very well accommodate people with mental or sometimes, physical disabilities. While some communities of the homeless are mostly self-selected (e.g, Dignity Village, in which a spontaneous community formed and was governed by homeless people—see Mosher 2010), housed advocates mostly led OVE’s more selective process, with support from people experiencing homelessness. Still, however open the selection process, the purpose is to have a proper fit for individual residents, the community, and the overall program/village.

The variety of places to stay also appeals to various homeless people at different times. In fact many villagers had either come from the local Mission or had stayed there at some point before. One might assert that a more rigid, religious program such as the Mission is beneficial to some. However, both the Mission and OVE may benefit the same person at different moments. One OVE resident described the Mission as a place where she could serve others and get closer with God. OVE, on the other hand, challenges her to continue on the path that God has provided, while giving her freedom from strict bed and mealtime hours, plus the ability to stay with a partner.

Insiders generally see OVE as a secular space that respects different religious practices, provides relative autonomy to residents, requires community involvement and attendance at meetings, and respects fellow residents / community rules. From interview data, residents that “don’t do well” at OVE include: those that don’t want the responsibility of attending meetings; people that cannot get along with and disrupt fellow residents, whether this is apparent right away or takes more time to develop; and those that violate a community rule such as committing violence or possessing illegal drugs on premises, albeit selectively or in order to be made an example.

### **Substantive Findings (Chapters 2-4)**

Chapter two examined how various factors influenced OVE to develop in the ways that it did, with tiny houses and some shared facilities to provide the physical infrastructure, as well as a self-governing structure of decision-making overseen by a nonprofit board. I also sought to answer how new organizations gain legitimacy in the eyes of local authorities and the general public. Perhaps the most important finding is that controlling information and having (essentially) a “brand” for a village for the homeless (cool looking tiny houses) were keys to gaining legitimacy,

while distinguishing itself from usual characteristics by which the homeless are criticized (e.g. we're a community village, not a camp; we ask for opportunities rather than handouts).

The vision itself was not a beginning but an outgrowth of funding constraints, competing ideologies, and social movements that address class inequalities, poverty, housing, and homelessness. Specifically, in developing the vision, original planners had to negotiate with other members at meetings (find ways to move forward despite resistance), negotiate with the city and neighbors, and generally convince outsiders to buy into self-governance and the belief in creating opportunities for self-sufficiency among the homeless. By spelling out the context for OVE's development, we have a base from which to establish hopes and expectations, and to observe where divergences lie.

Hopes and expectations are indeed part of the parameters loosely set by a vision. For OVE activists and planners, this meant residents practicing self-governance, having dignity through self-sufficiency, and having a safe, stable place. My conceptualization of "vision" in OVE as an ideal to be worked toward is mostly a reflection of participant definitions. That the vision shifted reflects vision as a process. In showing how the vision shifted from a subset of Occupy participants and advocates for the houseless to a legal nonprofit organization with a Board of Directors, I illustrate how OVE became politically viable, as well as how viability produced challenges for implementing the original ideas. One way the organization sought to be politically viable was by distancing itself more publicly from OWS yet retaining some of Occupy's guiding principles: democratic decision-making and building a community of solidarity.

OVE's moderate political stance is reflective of the type of community that it chose to be. The reason why OVE is a vetted community instead of an intentional or spontaneous one is at least twofold. For one, having a contract with the city (key to gaining legitimacy and political viability) encouraged OVE to vet members that stood a good chance of following community rules. Second, and related, OVE planners wanted a selection process involving future residents and oversight members that accounted for who might fit well into this nascent community. Not only was it important for residents to follow rules for the sake of local authorities. Respecting basic rules was considered good for all people who lived together daily in close proximity. This vetting process, combined with the more durable tiny houses that weren't present in other "camps", created status differentials. OVE was at times jokingly labeled a "gated community for the homeless", and people inside and outside of OVE associated it with more amenities than homeless encampments (but less amenities than established shelters, although other benefits were increased autonomy and privacy).

In Chapter Two I also argued that the promotion of self-sufficiency as a concept had the possibility to mobilize real changes in the lives of residents. However, as self-sufficiency was tied with moving out of the village into a more sustainable living situation, the possibility of creating change beyond the individual was low. When the concept of self-sufficiency was connected with building micro-business, more potential existed for empowerment and less ultimate reliance on nonprofit or local government assistance. A village comprised of people that were technically homeless, who also were making their own money, growing their own food, and acting as a resource in the community (as some envisioned at the beginning), could present a challenge to the ideas of homelessness that guided local authorities and neighbors to criminalize the homeless. Micro-business or micro-enterprise, however, would have to have been very successful at the village, generating sufficient income for at least some residents to pose such a challenge. It never took off in this way, however, thus muting its potentially more radical challenge to existing ideas.

This vision is not self-implementing, however, a reality I further explored in Chapter Three, asking what are the preconditions, or requirements, for a vision of self-governance to lead to real improvements in the dignity and autonomy of residents? In addition to its value as a research question, this issue is manifest in perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of self-governance from the standpoints of people in all three bodies of OVE: residents, Support Committee, and the board. Not surprisingly, it was common for the ideal and actual practice of self-governance to diverge. In other words “decoupling” occurred, and had important effects. The main divergences were around limited self-governance, and meanings of transition, but these divergences had mixed effects, both blunting the fullest reach of increased dignity and autonomy but also allowing for the persistence of contradictory forces within the village, preserving elements that increased dignity and autonomy even when they conflicted with other imperatives.

From interviewees and others in the field setting, I suggest that overall, self-governance takes a limited form at the village. While it works to some degree, contributing to democratic organization among residents, self-governance was limited by unrealistic expectations of residents from the board, lack of buy-in – as well as lack of empowerment and ownership – by residents), and life circumstances mixed with expectations to transition. Early on my data suggested that *housing status* (homeless or housed) and *position within the organization* (resident, support, board) contributed to the confusion over expectations and lack of buy-in and empowerment, a feature of having nonprofit oversight. Therefore an important additional question of Chapter 3 became: *How do community*

*definitions of—or experiences with—self-governance differ according to one’s housing status and organizational position?*

Further investigation revealed some commonalities according to organizational position, but overall patterns could not be neatly established across the three bodies of OVE. There were also splits within each major position, which made for shared understandings that were more complex than simply shared among villagers or among Board members. Between the Board and residents the major issue was that residents were given a responsibility to hold other villagers accountable but didn’t feel they had authority to keep their peers in check (*responsibility without authority*). Technically, each villager was granted authority (e.g. to write up their peers for violating aspects of the community agreement) from the board and through the Village Manual. In practice, however, holding others accountable could strain relationships, give the resident an undesirable reputation at the village, or otherwise feel unsafe. Many Board members and SC members believed that the residents did not lack authority but lacked the knowledge and confidence that they held authority. That viewpoint is consistent with the idea that homeless people come into living situations as disempowered individuals.

Another aspect of ambivalence surrounding self-governance pertained to expectations for how much regulation was necessary. SC and Board members may have been more influential in creating the structure for the rules and manual, but by and large they expected residents to run with it and thereby regulated the village less. In contrast, many residents expected more direction and regulation by the Board, seemingly conceding to limits on their autonomy. At least a few SC and Board members (Bonnie, Marge, Gavin, Landon) cited middle-class expectations of self-governance that needed to be adjusted. One implication of this lacuna in rule-making and enforcement is that an advantage was given to villagers who felt comfortable with—or expected—more autonomy and less regulation. Other villagers “sacrificed” increased autonomy for stability and clearer expectations.

Although on the whole, Board members thought self-governance was more successful than did villagers, the Board itself had mixed feelings about the workings of self-governance at OVE. The position of being a board member facilitated taking self-governance seriously, at the very least to keep credibility within the organization. Only one board member believed that self-governance worked *because* of the problems, not just despite them. That Board member (Peter) discussed having a “built-in equilibrium” where if self-governance is threatened, residents rise to the occasion and volunteer or otherwise take on important roles (e.g. accepting a nomination to be on Village

Council). Most board members—and some on the SC as well—took threats to practicing self-governance as an important problem in need of remedy. However, Peter interpreted the “threat” as part of democratic organizational ebb and flow.

Among residents (and to several SC members) self-governance was often seen as a sometimes-annoying requirement that they participate in the village community. Most village interviewees never brought up feeling empowered in making decisions about the village. A few cited having a “voice”; most references to power carried negative connotations about other residents (e.g. having a power trip, wanting to control the village). Many residents appreciated the ability to vote on village matters, an act that was seen as less risky than writing up rule violations. Others thought voting did not matter much, or—among other practices of self-governance—was akin to a popularity contest. A smaller minority of residents seemed indifferent to self-governance as a core value of OVE. Part of this indifference related to questioning the purpose of village meetings, especially since meetings would sometimes devolve into what seemed like petty arguments or platforms to voice complaints.

Residents were split in terms of level of agreement with the way that the Board oversaw governance at the village. Those that agreed with the Board’s handling of village matters characterized them as fair and understandable when making decisions, given what they dealt with. Residents that agreed were also more likely to make distinctions among fellow villagers pertaining to motivation to exit the village (e.g., I want to transition out, but they seem to want to stay here.). However, even though board members did not explicitly “take sides” with regard to specific residents, the board got along better with (or better understood) some villagers more than others. The contrasting examples of Greg and Shauna illustrate two residents considered highly motivated and participating in the life and progress of the village. However, the board saw Greg as more willing to work with others and less divisive than Shauna.

The barriers to self-governance existed at multiple levels, including at the discursive level, where goals of self-governance, dignity and autonomy challenged popular discourses that focus on individual rather than social change in resolving homelessness. In practice, doing self-governance at the village includes both challenges to and reproductions of discourses focusing on individual change in order to exit homelessness. For example, within and outside of the village, distinctions were stated or implied about deservingness of the space and services that OVE provided. Being deserving was most associated with contributing to the village (especially as a collective), trying to transition out, and having life motivations in general. Villagers often utilized popular discourses

such as being from the “street” or having a mental illness in explaining why some residents lacked participation or kept to themselves (sick-talk for the “less functioning”?). In addition to interpreting participation in village governance, these tropes contributed to power dynamics in terms of who was heard and who was taken seriously. Villagers that were “higher functioning” could more effectively run meetings, keep documentation, or generally perform tasks associated with middle-class expectations of running an organization.

The barriers to self-governance also existed at the level of the organization, embedded in its processes and structures. For instance with barriers to self-governance connected to differing interpretations and applications of the village manual and rules, residents experienced uncertainty about the limits or reach of their authority, power dynamics, and community-mindedness. These processes within the organization occurred while OVE members also negotiated external field pressures from city government bodies, their neighborhood, the general public, funders, and others. In negotiating this dimension of self-governance, the Board had to adjudicate how much the village as a whole was threatened by any particular negative incident, while balancing the rights of individual villagers. In the early period of OVE’s development, even if the threat was not looming, all organizational bodies had to pay at least minimal attention to the possibility of the city closing the village down.

A subtler, yet important finding in terms of barriers to self-governance is that residents who advocated handling tough situations on a case-by-case basis rather than following the letter of the manual are essentially active in advocating for loose coupling at the organizational level. Loose coupling means that written rules are still abided by but can be reinterpreted depending upon the specific violation and person(s). At the village, handling matters case-by-case is related to fairness and empathy, something that allows the community to keep running while fostering dignity for residents. Dignity is part of a broader goal with OVE, both as an organization and in terms of being a project that addresses housing and homelessness. From this standpoint, OVE can be seen as having rational actors who “decouple”—or “loosely couple”—when it comes to the village manual in order to accomplish more important organizational ideals. Yet a key to understanding self-governance at OVE is that other residents challenge loose coupling with more of a constitutionalist reading of the manual. Therefore, actors *within* organizations are positioned differently when it comes to decisions to decouple (corroborating Harrison et al. 2015). And as the inhabited institutionalist approach argues, actors matter in shaping organizations.

Another factor to consider in self-governed communities that have board oversight is resident perceptions of neglect. In my study residents perceived board neglect in two primary ways. The first was due to the board's focus on building the organization and its capacity/reach, as with future projects like EVE. Residents, especially those that believed in OVE's vision, felt they helped to build the success of the village, and were gradually being left behind. These feelings were mitigated for some by the possibility of transitioning out of OVE and into SOV's second (and permanent) village; few OVE residents made it to EVE. The second way residents felt neglected was by the Board making references to let them manage or govern themselves, rather than get too involved. While empowering residents to make decisions can reflect autonomy and dignity, the fact that many villagers sought more direction made perceptions of empowerment challenging.

In either scenario perceptions of neglect can produce the effect of undermining morale and motivation, despite attempts by the board to practice otherwise (i.e. developing a Working Group devoted solely to the project of OVE as EVE developed). Over the course of the first 2-3 years of this organization's life, a discrepancy arose between original excitement and motivation by the board to focus on getting OVE up and running, and the board's growing dual focus on its first two projects. The expectations of initial and earlier residents were partly set during the board's early level of involvement. Those expectations stuck for a time at least until most early residents had left or, for some, had become disillusioned or self-focused. During that time, as noted, OVE became a more successful (at least well-known) project than many anticipated.

In Ch. 4 on Tensions, I extend the discussion about decoupling and loose coupling to the matter of transition at OVE. Namely, decoupling occurs surrounding expectations of transition, focusing on getting people into more sustainable or permanent living situations.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the first major tension, transition out of the village is neither defined nor specified in OVE's key contract documents. As I note, even if there is no official policy on transition, this expectation is so embedded in the organizational vision that the processes and consequences of decoupling are similar. For example, transition is built into OVE quarterly reports to the city, as well as the OVE-city agreement that defines the village as "temporary." Moreover, even if transitional places are in high demand, turnover is expected in the homeless services industry.

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<sup>25</sup> The major organizational-facilitated method of transition moves from microbusiness opportunities to minimal case management. Microbusiness as an idea and practice at OVE got underway when the Steering Committee had more authority, yet continued for a while longer after "Steering" became "Support" and organizational authority transferred to the Board. While the Support Committee generally approved of case-management services for residents, the Board initiated and coordinated them.

Another tension is reflected in the Board's orientation to OVE, whether its focus is "OVE as a Community" or "OVE as a project / model," that is, to provision or promotion. Concretely these orientations differed according to the internal or external focus of the Board, perceptions of the Board by residents as helpful or as self-interested, and others.

Ultimately the Board's orientation toward OVE has implications for service and/or social movement organizations, as some studies indicate that middle-class housed advocates' expectations for efficiency in an organization rub against the desire of people experiencing homelessness to have empowerment (Rosenthal 1994). In my study the efficiency/empowerment dichotomy was not applicable in all areas, since many residents desired efficiency in village meetings. Perhaps being heard and leading aspects of the movement are a separate issue. With an eye on the concept of self-sufficiency, I have argued that tensions in these areas allow for both the reproduction of neoliberal, self-reliant subjects while still challenging the discourse of self-reliance by enshrining some elements of respect, dignity, and community into the structure of the organization and the interactions of people involved in it.

## **Implications**

One of the most important lessons of OVE is that people experiencing homelessness at OVE manage day-to-day affairs and keep the village community going, challenging ideas about their helplessness and incompetence. However, since villagers didn't handle the bulk of OVE's fiscal responsibilities, nor did they have wider community credibility by themselves, it is difficult to know how the village would have begun and been managed if the Board was absent. However, with this study, it is possible to clarify how self-governance works when organizational actors are differently situated in terms of social class, housing status, and other background factors. The transitional village model with Board oversight (Heben 2014) and three overall bodies allows some comparison between and among various actors.

Although political in its beginnings, connected with Occupy, OVE as a non-profit organization has not been overtly political since its inception. Notwithstanding OVE's entrance and influence in conversations related to power, its goal is not to challenge government to solve homelessness or the affordable housing crisis, at least as it's been done before. Instead, by having tiny houses built and applying the "village" concept to small groups of impoverished people, OVE is part of a movement that questions the size of American dwellings and the meaning of adequate housing (Heben 2014). In this way, OVE uses the homeless as a case with which to interrogate the

needs, or perceived needs, of the broader society (Stern 1984). Moreover, OVE questions part of the American Dream, and perhaps attempts to redefine it. Akin to Dignity Village several years into their history (Mosher 2010), much of the time OVE shows an insular focus, and a concomitant limitation of its political significance beyond the village itself, concentrating on the issues arising in the immediate community or on how individuals may transition out rather than on the broader critique of neoliberalism, housing policies, and ideas about homelessness that were present and important at its beginning.

Another implication of this study is the observation that self-governance at the village was both facilitated and limited by having Board oversight. OVE's form was less "pure" self-governance than—for at least a time—at Dignity Village in Portland. Furthermore, most residents did not feel very empowered. Middle-class advocates, while good-hearted and respected in various communities, have difficulty knowing how to work with people in homeless situations; some are easier to work with than others. Yet their access to social and cultural capital—as individuals but also through the organization—was helpful in connecting some residents with resources as well as stable homes. Overall, social location continues to matter in progressive organizations, or organizations that emanate from progressive movements like Occupy.

It was also difficult to establish institutional memory at the village level with a fair amount of transition, at least in the beginning of this organization's history. The Village Manual did assist residents by having written rules that were current. Some villagers read the manual more closely than others, but equally important is that the manual could be interpreted and deviated from in actuality. When the manual could be interpreted, it became a matter of adjudicating claims made by different villagers about what was the right way to proceed on a matter. Moreover, in general residents lacked long-term ownership of the village. A few mentioned wanting to leave some sort of imprint, but as time elapsed more and more residents were unaware of the original intentions of the village, or how self-governance was envisioned. This was part of the reason why a group of nine Dignity Villagers in Portland created a video to communicate DV's mission, so new members could have a reference (Mosher 2010). Lastly, at one point OVE had trouble keeping records, and individual files were missing. Whether purposefully—as some claimed—or accidentally, the lost information reduced future access to institutional memory regarding how residents managed the place.

At least two implications exist regarding transition at OVE. First, findings indicate divergence between expectations to transition and actual transition, which is due to several factors

(e.g. the likelihood that some residents won't be able or willing to transition to a more stable or permanent place). This sort of "successful stability," where instead of OVE as a stepping-stone to something greater, it is seen as a potential "end" for a handful of villagers. However, the perception or hope of OVE as an end goal does not guarantee that is where people remain. They must continue getting along with others at the village.

A second implication pertains to *when* tighter and looser coupling (treating these terms as part of a continuum rather than strict starts and ends) are invoked, or occur, in newer organizations, as well as the actors involved in these processes. A certain level of divergence existed between how OVE, and then SOV, presented itself to broader audiences, and how it had to operate daily. Without a stated time limit, the expectation to transition essentially became an issue of "sooner versus later". I have associated "sooner" with greater perceived success according to city government and most constituents outside of the village proper (as well as by homeless services industry standards); thus, I treat the shorter time frame as implied policy of OVE. After one year, many original villagers and people who joined shortly thereafter remained. At that time the "policy" on transition was pushed to a greater extent, showing evidence of tighter coupling. One explanation for beginning with looser coupling (in later 2013 and much of 2014) is that much of OVE's vision was born out of Occupy and that OVE planners considered the resident community and governance important. Vision developers of OVE sought to create the "safe and stable place"—with dignity—recommended by community members from the Mayor's task force. Pragmatically, this vision facilitated residents settling into a new place, getting to know others in the community, and helping to figure out the workings of self-governance. More research is needed to assess the particular circumstances and influences associated with starting with looser as opposed to tighter coupling. Since my study followed approximately the first two-and-a-half years of OVE's existence, a longer-term (or revisited) research strategy might clarify if and how coupling shifts at different times in the life of similar organizations.

The Board's orientation toward OVE-as-Community vs. OVE-as-Project/Model has implications for building trust with residents as well as trust and participation among residents. Feelings of being on display or being used by housed people in order to accomplish tasks or promote their work are not new to those experiencing homelessness. The quip from one former Board member about "the boys who build" speaks to the difference between having good intentions and building a movement more slowly. Housed, middle-class advocates with the ability to focus on longer-term goals without immediate consequences for a next meal or future housing don't face the

same short-term pressures as do people in homeless situations (again, Rosenthal’s “efficiency” versus “empowerment” distinction, 1994). It is a *skill* for a middle-class person with greater resources and privilege to facilitate local poor people leading the cause, and would be much more uncomfortable for the middle-class folks (Piven and Cloward 1977; cf. Rivera and Erlich 1998).

Further, the criticisms of residents lacking privacy and individual autonomy due to media attention propose a challenge for future villages. One likely response to increasing privacy and autonomy is to build bigger “tiny” homes for residents or provide personal nooks within shared spaces to facilitate people doing work, homework, etc. This development can lead toward increasing formalization along with privacy, as well as toward institutionalizing the village model, which has its benefits and drawbacks.

Nonprofit organizations sponsoring or otherwise overseeing a community of the homeless face a dilemma: they must help create and maintain a healthy, supportive community while simultaneously building capacity. SOV’s answer to this has been to build both another village, one that is more permanent, yet affordable with community support. SOV has also established a “toolkit” to help people or groups in other cities start up similarly organized villages (i.e., transitional or permanent communities). Therefore, their reach is expanded. Through the toolkit and assuming an increase in the number of villages in the recent future, this differentiation will continue to need contextual analysis. The Pathways Housing First model that was originally established in New York in the 1990s, for reference, has undergone a fair amount of differentiation with the main goals to stabilize the unhoused with a home first, and then work on necessary services (e.g., mental health counseling, obtaining veterans or other benefits, addiction services) within the context of consumer choice (Padgett et al. 2016).

I’ve argued that homelessness can be mitigated along three connected dimensions; this argument has been amply stated in research addressing or trying to solve homelessness (Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2008), but practicing self-governance among communities of the homeless has been a factor little explored. First, homelessness must be addressed in concrete, material ways, such as an adequate amount of affordable housing units and living wage jobs. Second, homelessness and poverty are addressed at the level of discourse, in which everyday talk about these problems contributes to how they are defined, as well as how causes—and solutions—are proposed and implemented. For example, focusing on a lack of skills to explain why some people remain homeless generates causes and solutions that are largely individually-based (e.g. assist individuals with skills training so they become more employable). Third, the mitigation of homelessness and

the promotion of autonomy occurs at the organizational level through organizational structure and the patterns of interaction, as well as the barriers and pathways to autonomy, that the organizational structure fosters.

Finally, when it comes to implications we can also ask, *what promise does the actual practice of self-governance at OVE hold in contributing to the mitigation of homelessness, locally and beyond?* First, to reiterate, the mere existence of (or at least, attempt at) horizontally-organized communities of the homeless challenges some of the sin- and sick-talk that previous research has blamed on reinforcing rather than reducing homelessness. However, as stated previously, this promise, like the practice of self-governance, is mixed. At the heart of the promise is investment in or ownership of decision-making processes by residents themselves. My assumption is that ownership in the village by residents contributes to the promotion of such places in the community, further strengthening their reach. Increasing the number of transitional units is part of this reach, which could contribute to a slight reduction of street homelessness. Other studies have found that when people experiencing homelessness take ownership it increases self-esteem and dignity (e.g., Mosher 2010), which may affect expectations of how authorities and the general public treat them. Discourse surrounding experiences of homelessness is then infused with a discourse of dignity. Greta and Patricia stand out as two of the villagers who took pride in helping craft the village manual, even though it wasn't their original brainchild. Still, this pride did not last their entire tenure at the village, nor necessarily get passed down to someone they might have influenced.

### **Research Limitations and Final Comment**

In previous work I have met some warranted criticism for “getting too close to the data” (e.g., Berg 2009). Attempting to become more of an “Observer-Participant” than a “Participant-Observer” (Burawoy et al. 1991) influenced me to avoid a deeper ethnography. In other words, I did not dwell in the daily lives of residents and I tried to avoid too intimate of a connection with anyone in the setting. Rather, I attempted to balance distance (to minimize biases) with involvement and support (to establish and maintain rapport). Therefore, data I collected depended quite a bit upon recalling information or presenting it to a somewhat trusted member of the broader OVE community, as I remained an outsider to the village and Board. During my research, another graduate student worked on their dissertation at OVE as well, and for a time lived at the village and participated in its governing council. My observations did not access the day-in and day-out intimate conversations and reflections of villagers in the setting; they were limited to meetings and

conversations when I showed up. Rather than be a “spy, a shill, or a go-between” in Erving Goffman’s language, I was ultimately committed to being a “sociologist” (Murray 2002). My original interest in studying OVE was the promise this village “model” held for contributing a real solution to—or at least intervention in—homelessness. However, my argument is that homelessness will remain an intractable problem and can only be curtailed with effective programs and federal money. Villages like OVE and the village model will likely become part of the homeless services apparatus, if it isn’t becoming that already. Villages, however much autonomy or dignity they may provide, look to become incorporated into the way that cities deal with the problem of homelessness, and therefore necessarily reproduce elements of the guiding ideology and apparatus of governance of these systems, even as they achieve modest but real reforms within those structures. The village model may just be seeing its time in history as part of the neoliberal era, where local governments are still strapped for cash and individuals are considered the primary bearers of their own life chances. The concept of self-sufficiency may be closely related with conceptions of autonomy and dignity, which reinforces an “I/We-can-do-this-myself/ourselves” logic that relinquishes responsibility from systems of power. “Self-sufficiency”, as others have written about (Hays 2003), interprets poverty as something to exit from with industriousness, resources, and if not pulling up one’s self by the bootstraps, then needing only opportunities to do so. Self-governance, for all of its value, is similarly fractured, one part a relinquishment of responsibility, the other part a modest but real and hard won effort to increase the dignity of people experiencing homelessness.

## APPENDICES

Materials related to this work are included in the appendices as supplemental files with this dissertation. Appendix A is the Task Force recommendations that grew most directly from the local Occupy movement. Appendix B is the organization's Operations Agreement with the city, while Appendices C and D are internal documents. Respectively, C and D are the Community Agreement spelling out major rules that all residents sign, and the Village Manual, the group's major governing document. Finally, readers will gain a sense of the village layout and dwelling structures through ten pictures in Appendix E.

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