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Dimensions of hope: emotional and relational pathways out of homelessness in Istanbul

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Abstract

This article examines pathways out of chronic homelessness and the role of hope in this process, addressing a gap in the literature predominantly focused on the causes of homelessness, conditions and coping strategies associated with life on the streets. Drawing on qualitative field research with a phenomenological approach based on in-depth interviews with ex-homeless individuals and service providers in Istanbul (May 2022-April 2023), funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TUBITAK, Project No. 121K287), the article explores how formerly homeless men navigate transitions out of long-term street homelessness. The article tries to reconceptualize hope as a socially embedded and relational process rather than an individual psychological or clinical resource. Hope emerges through a set of interrelated tensions: between hope and despair, where negative experiences too can catalyze transformation; across temporal dimensions, where future orientations enable the exit process; and reality and imagination, where everyday practices and informal capabilities support the reconstruction of agency. The field research reveals that exiting homelessness entails a complex reorganization of affective and temporal orientations, sustained by everyday routines that allow for the imagination of a viable future. The study also highlights the centrality of gradually reconstructing trust in relationships with peers, community members and service providers in sustaining hope.

Keywords

homelessness; sociology of emotions; hope; exiting homelessness; social recovery; social networks

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Dimensiones de esperanza: caminos emocionales y relacionales de salida del sinhogarismo en Estambul

Resumen

En este artículo se examinan las vías de salida del sinhogarismo crónico y el papel de la esperanza en este proceso, abordando una brecha en la literatura, que se ha centrado principalmente en las causas del sinhogarismo, las afecciones y las estrategias de afrontamiento asociadas a la vida en las calles. A partir de la investigación cualitativa de campo con un enfoque fenomenológico, basada en entrevistas en profundidad con personas que han salido del sinhogarismo y con proveedores de servicios en Estambul (mayo de 2022-abril de 2023), financiada por el Consejo de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica de Turquía (TUBITAK, Proyecto n.º 121K287), el artículo explora cómo las personas que han salido de largas etapas de sinhogarismo navegan por la transición de salida. El artículo intenta reconceptualizar la esperanza como un proceso socialmente integrado y relacional, en lugar de un recurso psicológico o clínico de carácter individual. La esperanza surge a través de un conjunto de tensiones interrelacionadas: entre la esperanza y la desesperación, donde las experiencias negativas también pueden catalizar la transformación; en las dimensiones temporales, donde las orientaciones hacia el futuro permiten el proceso de salida; y entre la realidad y la imaginación, donde las prácticas diarias y las capacidades informales respaldan la reconstrucción de la agencia. La investigación de campo revela que salir del sinhogarismo implica una reorganización compleja de orientaciones afectivas y temporales, sostenida por rutinas diarias que permiten imaginar un futuro viable. El estudio también destaca la importancia de reconstruir gradualmente la confianza en las relaciones con compañeros, miembros de la comunidad y proveedores de servicios para mantener la esperanza.

Palabras clave

sinhogarismo; sociología de emociones; esperanza; salida del sinhogarismo; recuperación social; redes sociales

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, homelessness has emerged as a persistent and growing social issue, closely linked to the restructuring of welfare regimes and the transformation of urban poverty. While a substantial body of research has examined the causes, forms and lived realities of homelessness, as well as the coping strategies developed on the street, far less attention has been paid to the process of exiting homelessness. This article addresses that gap by focusing on the phenomenon of escaping homelessness and foregrounding the role of emotions – particularly hope – in shaping such transitions.

A substantial body of research has treated homelessness not simply as a static condition but as a process involving different pathways into, through and out of homelessness (Dworsky & Piliavin, 2000; Johnson, 2010; Pearl *et al*., 2022; Piliavin *et al*., 1993; Thurston *et al*., 2013; Wilks *et al*., 2008; J. H. Wong & Mason, 2001; Y.-L. I. Wong & Piliavin, 1997). Within this literature, exits from homelessness have been examined across diverse populations and from multiple disciplinary and analytical perspectives, including people experiencing mental illness (Lachaud *et al*., 2021; Smartt *et al*., 2021), substance use (O'Shaughnessy *et al*., 2024; Zlotnick *et al*., 2003), older adults (Cai *et al*., 2022; Crane, 1988) and young people (Pearl *et al*., 2022; Wilks *et al*., 2008). While some studies have approached exit primarily through psychological concepts such as self-efficacy, coping and agency (Epel *et al*., 1999; Morgan, 2011; Parsell *et al*., 2014; Patterson & Tweed, 2009), others have focused on housing interventions, social policy, service provision and the structural conditions that facilitate or constrain exits (Atatanır, 2024; Balampanidis, 2020; Marr, 2015; Thurston *et al*., 2013). The literature is geographically diverse, with a strong concentration of studies from the United States, the United Kingdom, continental Europe and Australia, alongside research examining pathways out of homelessness in contexts such as Croatia (Šikić-Mićanović & Greiner, 2024), Ethiopia (Smartt *et al*., 2021), Greece (Balampanidis, 2020), Japan (Marr, 2015), South Africa (Tekwa, 2024) and Türkiye (Akyurt *et al*., 2023, 2025; Akyurt & Ekinci, 2023; Atatanır, 2024; Ercan, 2024; Gürel, 2024; H. Karaman, 2024; M. F. Karaman, 2024). A further strand has focused more specifically on the facilitating and constraining factors (Patterson & Tweed, 2009) associated with successful exits, including housing, social relationships, personal capacities and institutional support. Taken together, this literature shows that exiting homelessness is a multidimensional and often non-linear process shaped by the interaction of individual, relational and structural conditions.

Existing research has shown that self-efficacy, time perspective, perceived abilities, human agency and imagined future trajectories can play an important role in facilitating exits from homelessness (Epel *et al*., 1999; Morgan, 2011; Parsell *et al*., 2014; Patterson & Tweed, 2009). These studies are closely aligned with the present study in emphasizing that leaving homelessness involves more than the provision of material resources and requires individuals to perceive alternative possibilities for their lives. Building on this line of inquiry, however, the present study shifts the focus from agency and future orientation themselves to the social and emotional processes through which hope makes such future-oriented agency possible and sustainable. In this sense, rather than treating hope as an individual resource that facilitates exit, it examines how hope is gradually produced through the interplay of future imagination, everyday agency, social recognition and relational trust.

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The analysis draws on qualitative research conducted in Istanbul, a metropole in Türkiye where homelessness remains under-documented yet increasingly visible. There is no systematic record of homeless people in Türkiye, including data from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and the OECD. Existing data on homelessness are fragmented and unsystematic, largely relying on estimates produced by non-governmental organizations and municipal services. For example, SEFKAT-DER, an NGO with extensive experience in homelessness since 1995, reported an estimated 7,000 homeless people in Istanbul in 2011. This figure included both rough sleepers and the "hidden homeless", with approximately half living on the streets (Emek ve Adalet Platformu, 2011), relative to Istanbul's total population of roughly 14 million that year. According to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB), which provides shelter for homeless people during cold weather under its "Winter Work" programme, ca. 5,000 homeless people benefited from this sheltering during the winter periods in 2016 and 2022 (İBB İPA, 2021, 2023). Given the poor conditions in temporary shelters in places such as gyms and hotels (Bekaroğlu-Doğan, 2018, 2021), the total number of homeless people is likely at least twice that figure. According to Bekaroğlu-Doğan (2018, 2021), the number of homeless people benefiting from sheltering services increased 9 times over 12 years, from 2005 to 2017. Although these figures remain approximate, they point to the growing scale and complexity of homelessness in the metropole.

Another contextual point is that researchers cannot examine homelessness in Istanbul independently of the intense migration flows the city has experienced in recent years. The loss of economic, social and cultural capital, language barriers and downward social mobility can leave migrants vulnerable to housing and social insecurity, including homelessness. The only study focusing on migrant homelessness in Istanbul (Çelik, 2024; Çelik & Akyurt, 2023) suggests that migrants often experience homelessness as a temporary phase of migration, with future-oriented aspirations, such as moving on to Europe, shaping how they make sense of this experience. This suggests that social networks and hopes for the future also shape the relationship between homelessness and migration.

Against this empirical backdrop, the article qualitatively examines transitions out of long-term homelessness and the functional role of hope within these pathways. It is guided by four central research questions: **1)** How do formerly homeless individuals in Istanbul narrate their trajectories out of homelessness? **2)** What role do emotions, particularly hope, play in shaping these transitions, especially in relation to adverse street experiences? **3)** How do individuals construct meaning across past experiences, present conditions and future expectations, and how is this related to hope? **4)** How do social interactions and relationships – with both street peers and institutional actors – influence levels of hope and the possibility of exiting homelessness?

To address these questions, the article first tries to develop a conceptual framework that understands hope not as a static, individual, atomistic and psychological attribute but as a dynamic, socially embedded process. In this context, hope among homeless individuals may be better understood through four interrelated tensions. First, drawing on Simmel, hope and hopelessness are not opposites but mutually constitutive elements within an ongoing cycle. Second, a temporal tension, inspired by Bloch's notion of "not-yet-being", highlights how even fragile future orientations shape the possibility of recovery. Third, the interplay between reality and imagination shows how small routines and future-oriented thinking enable individuals to reclaim agency and personhood, echoing Arendt's emphasis on labour and creativity. Finally, hope is deeply relational, emerging through interactions with peers and service providers that support pathways out of homelessness.

1. Dimensions and tensions of hope in the context of recovery from homelessness

Contemporary literature often confines hope in homelessness to a medicalized paradigm, treating it as a clinical variable or a functional tool for rehabilitation. This healthcare-centred view reduces a profound existential state to a mere coping mechanism, as seen in Tsai's (2010) quantitative measurement of hope as a cognitive-motivational state. To reclaim sociological depth, hope must be reconceptualized as a dynamic process situated across four fundamental dimensions and tensions, particularly in the context of recovery from homelessness:

1.1. The dialectic of hope and despair

Drawing on Simmel's (1971, p. 70) conception of conflict, hope and despair can be understood not as opposites but as mutually constitutive forces within an ongoing emotional cycle. Just as conflict and harmony coexist in social life, despair may function as the very condition through which hope emerges. In this sense, hope often arises from accumulated hopelessness, particularly when individuals reach a breaking point. This dynamic is reflected in Ravenhill's (2008, pp. 185-186) catalysts for change: hitting rock bottom, finding street life unbearable (Moverman, 2015) or experiencing a sudden traumatic event. Among homeless individuals, witnessing a peer's death, surviving violence or enduring repeated suicide attempts can disrupt adaptation to street life and force a painful re-evaluation of the future. In this way, the deepest moments of despair may become the starting point for imagining a different trajectory.

This perspective contributes to the literature on pathways out of homelessness by showing that hope is not simply a pre-existing resource that enables exit, but can emerge through the disruption of adaptation to homeless cultures and the reconfiguration of support networks, as accumulated despair renders continued street life untenable and opens the possibility of imagining and pursuing an alternative future. It thus serves as a reminder that, in certain situations, a social worker or service provider should not always interpret a homeless person's deteriorating emotional state as entirely negative, but rather observe the deepening darkness from a distance and patiently await the emergence of the light that will lead to an end to homelessness.

1.2. The temporal tension: the "not-yet-being"

The second dimension concerns the temporal tension between the present and a potential future, grounded in Bloch's "not-yet-being".

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This ontology frames the human condition as a suspension between current existence and "being-in-possibility" (Gili & Mangone, 2022, p. 2). It highlights the interplay and dynamic relationship among past, present and future, and how future orientations make recovery imaginable. According to Bloch (1986, pp. 13, 74), unlike "filled emotions", hope is a "positive expectant emotion" oriented towards the not-yet-available. Whether homelessness is perceived as a permanent identity or as a temporary "suspension" from which one expects to exit in the near future shapes both resilience and the possibility of recovery.

This perspective contributes to the literature on pathways out of homelessness by showing how temporal orientations shape the possibility of exit: when homelessness is experienced as a temporary suspension rather than a fixed identity, the future becomes a meaningful horizon for imagining, sustaining and pursuing recovery. In this sense, hope is not merely an expectation of change but a temporal orientation that enables individuals to move beyond adapting to the present conditions of homelessness and towards an alternative social position.

1.3. Reality vs. imagination: the agency of the ordinary

The future dimension of hope is closely tied to the capacity for imagination[1] and the tension between reality and possibility. Situations that appear hopeless to outsiders may be experienced differently by homeless individuals who maintain routines, engage in periodic work and retain a sense of ordinary personhood. Drawing on Arendt's emphasis on labour and emancipation, imagination can function as a creative force, turning everyday practices into tools for reclaiming agency and dignity (Gili & Mangone, 2022, p. 3). This perspective highlights the significance of the small, everyday repertoire of practices, rituals and habits through which homeless individuals sustain a sense of personhood and keep possibilities beyond their present circumstances open. Similarly, De Certeau's (2011) notion of "tactics" and Appadurai's (2009) "capacity to aspire" show how marginalized individuals use everyday practices to sustain agency under conditions of exclusion. Studies challenging portrayals of the urban poor as passive or defeated emphasize that homeless individuals are not entirely hopeless (Bayat, 1998; Rancière, 2009). As illustrated in Lead Me Home (Kos & Shenk, 2021), ordinary routines such as packing belongings, shaving or feeding a stray dog can serve as acts of self-affirmation. Likewise, Molina-Jackson's (2008) Homeless Not Hopeless demonstrates how homeless men maintain social agency through informal networks and future-oriented self-images that extend beyond their immediate circumstances.

This perspective contributes to the literature on pathways out of homelessness by shifting attention from the visible conditions of homelessness to the imaginative capacities through which alternative futures can become thinkable. It suggests that the potential for exit cannot be assessed solely through an individual's outward appearance, material circumstances or observable health and functioning, but also through the vitality of their imagination and their capacity to develop a meaningful image of life beyond homelessness. For social workers, volunteers and other practitioners, attending to such future-oriented imaginaries may therefore provide an additional way of recognizing the potential for recovery and exit that may remain invisible when assessment is based primarily on present circumstances. In this sense, the agency of the ordinary lies not only in maintaining dignity within homelessness, but also in sustaining the imaginative capacity to envision – and eventually pursue – a different social position.

1.4. The relational arrival: hope as deus ex machina

Finally, the relational tension between "self" and "other", the dynamic between "me" and "you", draws attention to the significance of interpersonal ties, both among homeless individuals and between them and local social service providers, in sustaining hope and enabling exit pathways. This aspect depends mostly on the concept and instances of "concrete utopia" (Bloch, 1986, p. 17) in which seemingly unlikely possibilities have materialized.

Hope, in this sense, is not always generated within the individual. It may arrive relationally, from outside the self, through encounters, gestures and relationships that interrupt the temporal and social closure of street life. In a manner akin to "externalism" in the sociology of science – where progress may emerge from outside the immediate laboratory – hope can sometimes enter a person's life as a *deus ex machina*. Just as chance events can redirect the course of scientific invention, a chance encounter with a childhood friend or a child's casual greeting can reawaken a sense of connection to a life beyond homelessness.

This "relational intrusion" can be triggered by seemingly minor encounters, such as a casual greeting from a child (datteltäter, 2019), an unexpected meeting with a childhood friend, the sudden shame of being recognised by someone from one's old neighbourhood or the discovery of a weathered photograph of one's own child. Such moments may reconnect individuals with identities, relationships and futures that have become obscured by prolonged exposure to street life. Hope may also be sustained through enduring solidarity networks and supportive relationships, including street peers, protective older homeless individuals (Zammit, 2019), sympathetic neighbourhood residents who let homeless people take a shower in their houses (Hamada & Sinkler, 1988), local shopkeepers (Brown, 2010; Duneier, 1999) and social service providers. These relationships can provide not only material assistance but also recognition, belonging and a sense of being socially anchored within the neighbourhood.

As Ravenhill (2008, p. 186) notes, the positive and fourth catalyst of "someone caring" is often the most potent foundation for, and key contributor to rebuilding hope. Whether through marriage, parenthood, the respect found in a stable work environment or membership to supportive social circles, such relational pathways provide the social "anchoring" necessary to move from the margins

1. As Di Prima (1971/2005, pp. 103-106) puts in her poem "Rant", "without imagination there is no memory / without imagination there is no sensation / without imagination there is no will, desire", "the ultimate famine is the starvation / of the imagination", and "the only war that matters is the war against / the imagination / all other wars are subsumed in it".

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towards a recognized social existence. Importantly, however, these relationships do more than provide resources for an already existing desire to exit homelessness. They may themselves generate or reactivate the desire and capacity to imagine an exit. In this sense, support networks should not be understood merely as instrumental resources that facilitate recovery after hope has emerged; they can be constitutive of hope itself, making alternative futures socially imaginable and emotionally credible.

This perspective contributes to the literature on pathways out of homelessness by shifting attention from the individual's internal motivation to the relational conditions under which the motivation to leave homelessness can emerge and be sustained. It suggests that the capacity for exit is partly distributed across relationships: a person may begin to imagine a different future because someone recognizes them, cares about them, reminds them of who they were or offers a relationship in which they can become someone else. The framework therefore moves beyond an individualistic understanding of recovery capital by showing how interpersonal encounters and networks can function not only as resources for exiting homelessness but also as generative forces that make hope "sociologically possible" in the streets of Istanbul.

2. Methodology

This study is based on the findings of a 2-year qualitative research project (November 2021-November 2023) examining the processes of escaping homelessness in Istanbul. Funded by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TUBITAK, Project No. 121K287), the research uses a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2009) to capture the lived experiences, subjective meanings and emotional trajectories of individuals who have exited long-term homelessness.

The study focuses specifically on formerly homeless men who experienced chronic street homelessness in Istanbul's central districts. Women, children and family homelessness were excluded from the sample in order to maintain analytical coherence and to concentrate on a relatively homogeneous group in terms of street experience. The sampling strategy prioritizes individuals who have successfully transitioned out of homelessness, enabling an in-depth exploration of exit pathways rather than the reproduction of deficit-oriented narratives.

Methodologically, the research is informed by the "appreciative inquiry" approach (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Reed, 2006). Rather than focusing on problems and failures, this perspective emphasizes processes of resilience, upward mobility and transformation, treating formerly homeless individuals as knowledgeable agents and, in some cases, as role models. This orientation enables a more nuanced understanding of how hope is cultivated, sustained and mobilized in the process of leaving homelessness.

This research was conducted in accordance with Ethics Committee Approval No. 458968, dated September 12, 2021, issued by the Ethics Committee for Research in Social and Human Sciences at Istanbul University. As part of the research, documents such as novels, documentaries, films, TV shows and videos on homelessness were examined, and empirical data were collected through multiple qualitative methods in Istanbul between May 2022 and April 2023. First, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with service providers from public institutions, non-governmental organisations and private-sector initiatives, focusing on their perspectives on the lives of homeless people, with a particular emphasis on intervention practices and support mechanisms. In addition, interviews were conducted with formerly homeless individuals, focusing on their life histories, street experiences and pathways out of homelessness. The transcriptions of the audio recordings were analysed in the MAXQDA software alongside the field notes.

This qualitative design was intended to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the experience of escaping homelessness. While the broader project addresses multiple dimensions of this process, the present article focuses specifically on the emotional dimension, particularly the role of hope as it is shaped by lived experience, temporal orientation and social interaction. In interviews with formerly homeless individuals, the following three questions, specifically regarding their life on the streets, are particularly useful for uncovering their hopes. The first question concerns their thoughts: Was there an event that affected you in the past, challenges you faced while experiencing homelessness or dreams you had for the future? The second question concerns the topics of conversation with other homeless individuals, such as the past, the present, the future, food or health issues. The third question directly addresses their plans for the future: moving into a home, getting married, finding a job, etc. Findings of the research will be discussed and analysed below.

3. Findings and discussion

Exiting homelessness is not merely a material transition but a complex social, temporal and relational reorganization. Our analysis of semi-structured interviews, conducted to examine hope and homelessness through a sociological lens, revealed a set of interrelated questions about the place and function of hope under conditions of extreme marginality. Can the "culture of homelessness" (Ravenhill, 2008) coexist with hope? What is the true opposite of despair? Does hope emerge as the only remaining possibility in the face of adverse circumstances, or can it itself take a "negative" or even "compulsory" form? How do future plans and the gradual formation of trust in relationships with others contribute to the emergence and sustenance of hope? These questions led us to examine, in the context of hope, three interrelated dimensions of the pathways out of homelessness: 1) negative experiences on the street and the departure from the "culture of homelessness"; 2) future plans and orientations towards the "not-yet"; and 3) the formation of trust and the relational emergence of hope.

3.1. Breaking with the culture of homelessness: negative experiences and despair as catalysts

The "culture of homelessness" (Ravenhill, 2008) can be understood, particularly for those newly homeless, as a process of adaptation and socialization through which individuals acquire a street-based lived habitus or develop forms of cultural capital specific to life on the street. In that sense, it functions as a conservative force that stabiliz-

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es life on the street and gradually normalizes homelessness as a way of life. In this context, we use the term "negative cultural capital" to refer to the increasing internalization of dispositions, practices and competencies specific to street life, and "negative social capital" to refer to the growing predominance of relationships with other homeless people. Neither form of capital is inherently dysfunctional. Indeed, both provide essential resources for surviving on the street, including knowledge of informal economies, street-based solidarity, protection, companionship and strategies for navigating insecurity. Relationships among homeless people, in particular, can offer recognition and belonging in circumstances where ties to housed society have weakened or been disrupted.

They become "negative," however, in relation to the possibility of exiting homelessness. As a person becomes increasingly immersed in a social world dominated by other homeless people, these relationships may gradually displace ties with housed people and reinforce a sense of estrangement from them, sometimes accompanied by shame. At the same time, prolonged immersion in street culture may consolidate dispositions and competencies well adapted to life on the street but increasingly difficult to reconcile with life outside homelessness. Thus, the very forms of cultural and social capital that enable adaptation and survival in the present may, over time, contribute to the reproduction of homelessness by narrowing the individual's social world and making alternative ways of living more difficult to imagine and pursue. In this sense, the incorporation of a newly homeless person into a predominantly or exclusively homeless social circle can be understood as the formation of "negative social capital": not because these relationships are intrinsically harmful, but because they may strengthen attachment to the street while weakening the relational and cultural resources needed for exit.

This tension is particularly important for understanding the relationship between homelessness and hope. Street culture can provide sociality, recognition and belonging, but it may also offer what could be described as a form of "belonging without hope". Its routines and norms help individuals adapt to an adverse present, while narrowing the temporal horizon within which alternative futures can be imagined. Despair can reinforce this temporal closure by making long-term investment appear futile or even dangerous. In this sense, the absence of hope may itself function as a protective adaptation: by "living as if there is no future", individuals can avoid the disappointment associated with expectations that are unlikely to be fulfilled. Hope is suspended not necessarily because individuals have no desires, but because maintaining desire may become too costly under conditions of chronic uncertainty.

Our findings, however, indicate that this adaptation can reach a point at which it becomes unsustainable. The formation of hope among chronically homeless individuals is neither linear nor simply the result of accumulating positive resources. In some cases, it emerges paradoxically from the intensification of negative experiences. Ravenhill's (2008, p. 185) catalysts of "hitting rock bottom" and of finding street life increasingly unbearable are particularly relevant here. Rather than extinguishing the possibility of hope, experiences of extreme deterioration, loss, violence and exhaustion can disrupt adaptation to street life and render the continuation of the existing trajectory intolerable. The very despair that previously narrowed the horizon of possibility can, under certain conditions, become the force that breaks that closure.

This process took two main forms in our accounts. In some cases, despair operated through a sudden rupture: a traumatic event, a near-death experience, witnessing the death of a peer, or an acute confrontation with one's own physical deterioration could abruptly interrupt an otherwise continuous trajectory of adaptation. In other cases, the process was cumulative. A diffuse sense of dissatisfaction, exhaustion, shame or fear developed over months or even years, until it crystallized into a decision to leave. Ahmet (all names have been changed), a formerly homeless participant, described this gradual process: "I carried this feeling for 7-8 months, and then one day, I made a decision." Halit similarly described how his perception of the unsustainability of street life gradually condensed into an acute recognition of his own condition: "I thought I would die if I didn't get out of this situation. Seeing myself in the mirror – very thin, bearded – or seeing it in the eyes of a dying homeless friend, or an old acquaintance I met on the street..."

Other accounts illustrate a more abrupt form of this rupture. Celil's decision to leave was preceded by extreme self-harm and suicide attempts: "I poured thinner over my head and struck the lighter... I reached a complete collapse... I said I don't want to live anymore." Similarly, the realization that "this street has no end; it's either death or prison" transformed an apparently closed present into a situation that demanded a different trajectory. These experiences did not automatically produce a concrete pathway out of homelessness. Rather, they disrupted the taken-for-granted acceptance of street life and created a moment in which another future could become thinkable.

This distinction is important. Our findings do not suggest that suffering or trauma is inherently beneficial, nor that "hitting rock bottom" is a necessary stage in recovery. Rather, negative experiences can become catalysts when they destabilize the adaptation that has made homelessness tolerable or sustainable. In this sense, despair is not simply the opposite of hope. Following Simmel's (1971, p. 70) understanding of social life as constituted through tensions between apparently opposing forces, hope and despair may be understood as dialectically related states within an ongoing process of transformation. Sudden or cumulative despair can become a turning point precisely because it renders the present intolerable, thereby reopening the question of the future.

This dialectical relationship also helps explain why dissatisfaction with homelessness is significant for pathways out. One NGO worker summarized this observation, stating, "The one who is in conflict with himself recovers... he must not internalize homelessness." Participants who maintained a distinction between themselves and the identity or norms associated with street life – sometimes expressed by maintaining a "clean" appearance, preserving a "gentleman's" demeanour, or refusing to fully identify with street culture – appeared to retain a degree of distance from the homeless habitus. Such practices should not be interpreted merely as signs of individual respectability. They can also be understood as forms of resistance to the normalization of homelessness and as indications that an alternative social identity remains imaginable.

From this perspective, leaving homelessness involves not only acquiring the material resources needed to secure housing and employment, but also breaking with a set of dispositions, relationships and expectations that have developed as adaptations to street life. Negative experiences can contribute to this process by revealing the limits of those adaptations. Yet the disruption of the street habitus does

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not by itself constitute recovery. It creates an opening: the existing present is no longer acceptable, but a viable alternative future must still be imagined, and the social and relational conditions necessary to pursue it must become available. This is where despair connects to hope. Despair can generate the rupture through which hope becomes possible, while hope provides the temporal orientation through which that rupture can be transformed into a sustained pathway out.

The findings therefore complicate accounts of exits from homelessness that emphasize the accumulation of positive resources alone. The crucial transformation is not simply from "having no resources" to "having resources", but from accepting the present as the only viable horizon to recognizing that it is no longer sustainable and that another future might be possible. Negative experiences and despair thus operate ambivalently: they can deepen entrapment and temporal closure, but they can also undermine the very adaptation that sustains homelessness. Their significance for exit lies not in suffering itself, but in their capacity, under particular relational and temporal conditions, to turn adaptation into dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction into rupture and rupture into an opening towards hope.

3.2. Future plans as a motivational anchor

The previous section showed how negative experiences and accumulated despair can disrupt adaptation to street life and create a space in which an alternative future becomes thinkable. The present section examines what happens within that space: how future-oriented imaginaries are sustained, translated into plans and used to sustain movement towards exit. Contrary to the assumption that homelessness necessarily forecloses future-oriented thinking, our findings indicate that homeless individuals may retain, reconstruct or develop orientations towards what Bloch (1986) calls the "not-yet". The important issue, therefore, is not simply whether homeless individuals have plans for the future, but how realistic those plans are, whether they can be translated into a concrete pathway out of homelessness, what kind of future remains imaginable and how far that future extends.

Future plans took various forms and differed in their degree of concreteness. Among younger participants, aspirations were often articulated as relatively specific projects involving work, entrepreneurship, marriage or the establishment of a more conventional household. Emre, for example, described a detailed plan to open a small business: "I am thinking of opening a small shop... I calculated everything to the finest detail." Such accounts suggest that the temporal horizon of homelessness is not necessarily closed. Even when everyday life is dominated by immediate survival, some individuals continue to project themselves into a possible future social position. The significance of these plans lies not only in their feasibility but also in their capacity to organize present action around an anticipated future. Planning, in this sense, becomes a form of temporal agency.

This finding qualifies interpretations of homelessness that cast street life as a condition of radical presentism. The street may narrow the temporal horizon by making immediate needs, risks and routines dominant, but it does not entirely eliminate the "not-yet". Rather, the future becomes unevenly distributed: some individuals retain a relatively expansive horizon of possibility, while for others it contracts to the next day, the next meal or the possibility of avoiding further deterioration. Future orientation should therefore be understood not as an all-or-nothing psychological attribute but as a variable capacity shaped by age, social position, accumulated experience and the perceived availability of pathways towards change.

Age was particularly significant in this respect. Younger participants were more likely to articulate concrete and relatively long-term aspirations, whereas older participants often expressed markedly reduced expectations. As one NGO social worker observed, many participants over fifty no longer imagined a substantial new beginning but instead expressed a desire to complete their lives without further suffering: "Those over fifty... are just looking to complete their lives... they say, 'I wish God would take my soul without me getting sick.'" Here, however, the narrowing of expectations does not necessarily indicate an absolute absence of hope. Rather, it represents a transformation in the temporal and substantive content of hope. For some older homeless individuals, hope may shift from aspirations for substantial social reintegration towards more modest forms of dignity, security and relief from suffering. The "not-yet", therefore, can take different forms depending on the individual's position within the life course.

At the same time, fieldwork suggests that even older or long-term homeless individuals could maintain a future orientation by framing homelessness as a transient phase rather than a permanent condition. In doing so, they used the future to resist the permanence of the present, even when their aspirations were modest or distant. Thus, narrowing expectations should not be equated with closing the future. Rather, even limited expectations could preserve a sense of the "not-yet" and keep an alternative social position within the horizon of possibility. This distinction is important for understanding pathways out of homelessness: what may appear externally as resignation or the absence of ambition can coexist with a latent refusal to regard homelessness as a permanent identity.

This variation is important for understanding pathways out of homelessness. A future plan need not be ambitious to be sociologically consequential. What matters is whether an individual can situate themselves in a future that differs from the present and orient current action towards that future. For some, this may take the form of opening a business or establishing a household; for others, it may involve repairing a relationship, securing stable work, reconnecting with children or simply imagining a life no longer organized around the street. Future orientation thus serves as a motivational anchor, providing continuity between the present self and a possible future self.

The importance of social roles is particularly evident in participants' relationships with their children. One participant continued to live on the street while sending his earnings to his children, explaining, "I am doing this so I can have the face to go and meet my children." His future orientation was therefore not merely an individual aspiration but a relational project. The imagined future self was inseparable from the possibility of recovering a socially meaningful identity as a father. In this case, hope was sustained by an anticipated relationship: the future provided a reason to endure the present, while the relationship with his children gave that future concrete meaning. This finding also links the temporal and relational dimensions of hope, showing that future plans are often anchored in obligations, identities and relationships rather than in individual achievement alone.

At the same time, our findings caution against treating future plans as straightforward predictors of successful exit. Some aspirations remained distant, vague or disconnected from the material

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and relational resources required to realize them. The existence of a future-oriented imaginary therefore does not automatically produce recovery. Rather, it constitutes an important intermediate condition: it keeps an alternative trajectory imaginable and can orient present practices towards its realization. Whether this potential becomes an actual pathway out depends on the availability of social support, trust, economic opportunities and other forms of recovery capital.

The findings thus contribute to the literature on pathways out of homelessness by showing that exit involves not only a change in material circumstances but also a transformation in temporal orientation. Rather than viewing homeless individuals as either future-oriented or trapped in the present, our findings reveal a differentiated "temporal field" in which the horizon of possibility can expand, contract or be reconfigured. Hope operates within this field by connecting the present to a "not-yet" that is sufficiently imaginable to guide action. Future plans, even when modest, fragile, or only partially realistic, can therefore serve as motivational anchors: they preserve continuity between who a person is now and who they might become after homelessness. In this sense, the capacity to imagine a future beyond the street is not merely a psychological by-product of recovery; it is part of the social and temporal process through which recovery becomes possible.

3.3. Hope as action: the gradual formation of trust and the transformation of social capital

> "What was love? Love was kindness, friendship, and hard work." (Asya) (Yılmaz, 1977)

The previous sections showed, first, how negative experiences and despair can disrupt adaptation to street life, and, second, how future-oriented imaginaries can preserve a sense of possibility beyond the present. Yet neither disruption nor imagination is sufficient on its own to sustain an exit from homelessness. Escaping homelessness is not simply a break with the street but a process of relational reorganization. The street is not merely a site of deprivation; it is also a social world that generates forms of recognition, belonging, solidarity and everyday support. Consequently, exiting homelessness does not necessarily require the complete dissolution of street-based relationships. Rather, it involves transferring some of the social functions those relationships provide into a different social context. In this sense, the transition out of homelessness can be understood as a movement from predominantly street-based forms of social capital towards new and more diverse forms of social capital that support exit from homelessness.

This perspective also clarifies the relational nature of hope. Hope is neither a purely internal motivation nor simply something supplied from outside by a service provider. It is produced, weakened and rebuilt within the networks of relationships in which individuals are embedded. It should therefore be understood not so much as something individuals "possess" as something they "do": a relational practice continuously reconstructed through everyday interactions, small achievements, recognition and the gradual establishment of trust. Just as love has been conceptualized as something that must be enacted repeatedly rather than merely experienced as a feeling, hope can likewise be understood as a practice that requires continuous enactment. Hope is sustained by showing up, keeping appointments, maintaining routines, accepting responsibility, responding to others' trust and repeatedly making small investments in a future that has not yet fully materialized. In this sense, hope requires work. It is fragile precisely because it must be continually reproduced through action and relationships.

Self-confidence, which is an important component of sustained hope, is partly fostered by being trusted by others. In this respect, Cooley's (1956) concept of the "looking-glass self" is particularly useful. The transformation is less about an isolated "I" becoming confident than about the "me" gradually being reconstructed as one sees oneself reflected in the eyes of others as reliable, responsible and capable. Trust from others can therefore become a mechanism through which individuals begin to trust themselves. Hope, in turn, becomes more durable when this altered sense of self is repeatedly confirmed through everyday experience.

Street-based social capital offers an important starting point for understanding this process. Although forms of male solidarity among homeless individuals are often loosely structured, they serve several key functions: mutual surveillance and care, small but vital support networks, sharing food and spatial knowledge, warnings about danger, and, perhaps most importantly, recognition and visibility. Individuals may become known to street vendors, shopkeepers, neighbourhood residents, other homeless people or service providers. Such recognition, although fragile, can provide a sense of belonging and social existence. Yet the same networks can also stabilize the individual within the street habitus. Relationships that provide protection and recognition in the present may simultaneously make remaining within the existing social world more viable. This is the ambivalence of what we describe as "negative social capital": it is not simply bad or dysfunctional capital, but social capital whose benefits are increasingly tied to the reproduction of homelessness.

This ambivalence helps explain why exiting homelessness is often difficult and fragile. If resettlement consists primarily of providing physical shelter, individuals may lose the relational fabric through which they had previously navigated everyday life, without acquiring a functional alternative. A roof can therefore remove a person from the street without necessarily providing the social conditions required to sustain life outside it. As Ravenhill (2008) suggests, the issue is not simply having a "roof", but the kind of social world established beneath and around that roof. Exiting homelessness must therefore be understood as an extended process of reintegration – physical, emotional, psychological and social – rather than a one-off transition into housing. Even with close, individualized professional support, this process may take many months (Çabuk & Atamtürk, 2023; Ravenhill, 2008, p. 183), and it frequently remains fragile or unsuccessful.

Our findings indicate that this relational reorganization is gradual. For individuals who have spent extended periods on the street, initial encounters with volunteers and service providers were often marked by suspicion. The street environment had cultivated a form of hypervigilance in which distrust served as a survival mechanism. Cemil, for example, recalled his initial reaction to volunteers: "We were looking at their hands, their waists, their pockets. We were thinking, 'Are they going to throw something into the food?'... because we were afraid of organ traffickers." Such accounts show that trust cannot simply be requested or assumed at the start of the exit process. It must be built through repeated interactions that contradict previous expectations and demonstrate that the other person is reliable.

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The temporal dimension of trust was particularly striking. Cesur emphasized that it took about a year of consistent and non-transactional support from volunteers before he began to regard them as "family". This suggests that trust should not be treated as an immediate intervention outcome but as an accumulated relational achievement. Repeated encounters, continuity, predictability and the absence of exploitation gradually transform the meaning of the relationship. What initially appears as an external service relationship can eventually become a source of belonging and emotional security. The significance of this process for hope is considerable: when another person remains reliably present over time, the future itself may become more credible.

Trust also operates reflexively, transforming how individuals perceive themselves. Ramazan's account of being entrusted with a bank card or shop keys illustrates this process. As he explained, "Older Brother Cüneyt directly gave me the bank card... I could have withdrawn that money... but people trust me so much because I never did anyone wrong." The importance of this episode lies not simply in the material responsibility entrusted to him. Being trusted provided an opportunity to experience himself as trustworthy. Through others' recognition, a different social identity became available to the individual. The "looking-glass self" therefore becomes directly relevant to pathways out of homelessness: trust from others can generate self-confidence, while self-confidence can support the adoption of new routines and responsibilities. Relational recognition thus becomes a mediating mechanism between social support and sustained exit.

The emergence of hope followed a similarly gradual and non-linear trajectory. Participants often described an initial, fragile "sense of possibility" – a vague realization that "it might be possible to get out of here." At this stage, individuals remained partly embedded in the street habitus but had begun to see homelessness as non-absolute and potentially reversible. This fragile orientation was sustained less by individual willpower than by repeated social interactions: the continuity of social workers, support groups, new acquaintances, neighbourhood relationships and other weak ties provided a social environment in which hope could survive. Small achievements – attending appointments, maintaining accommodation, completing a day without conflict, keeping a room or establishing a routine – gradually transformed an abstract possibility into an embodied experience of capability.

In this sense, hope resembles a practice more than a possession. It is repeatedly enacted and confirmed through small acts rather than simply experienced as a stable emotional state. A person does not become hopeful once and remain so thereafter; rather, hope may have to be renewed with each successful appointment, each night spent safely in accommodation, each day without returning to the street, each responsibility successfully undertaken and each relationship that proves trustworthy. This is why the process can be both labourious and fragile. Securing housing does not automatically confer the capacity to live securely within it. Reintegration requires sustained effort from the individual as well as sustained presence from others.

This dynamic is also evident in cultural representations of homelessness. *The Soloist* (Wright, 2009), for example, depicts the difficulty of establishing a sustained relationship of support with a person living on the street and illustrates that progress may involve repeated attempts, setbacks, resistance and renewed engagement rather than a single transformative intervention. The significance of such representations lies not in their status as empirical evidence but in their capacity to make visible a temporal feature that our findings likewise emphasize: relational support works through persistence. The decisive factor is not simply that someone offers help once, but that a relationship endures the inevitable frustrations, refusals, disappointments and reversals of the transition.

Hope, however, frequently weakened or temporarily disappeared. Ongoing attachment to street networks, substance use, bureaucratic obstacles, financial difficulties, and experiences of rejection repeatedly disrupted the process. These interruptions should not necessarily be understood as individual failures. They reflect the structural and relational difficulty of moving between two different social worlds. Individuals may oscillate between the present-oriented temporality and relational security of street life and the more future-oriented but initially unfamiliar social world of housed living. Exit is therefore better understood as an uneven process of oscillation and reorganization than as a linear movement from homelessness to housing.

This also complicates the simple opposition between "negative" and "positive" social capital. The transition out of homelessness does not necessarily involve replacing one set of relationships with another overnight. Rather, individuals gradually reorganize their relational world. Street-based recognition and solidarity do not simply disappear; some of their functions are transferred, transformed or supplemented by relationships with social workers, volunteers, neighbours, local businesses, employers, family members and others undergoing similar transitions. The transformation is therefore less a quantitative increase in "positive" social capital than a qualitative reconfiguration of the social networks through which recognition, trust and belonging are produced. For example, one homeless participant, Yıldıray, after finding work at different times in a restaurant and in delivery companies, used the connections and credibility he developed through these jobs to help other homeless friends find employment. In this way, his position within the homeless social network was not simply diminished by his movement towards employment; rather, his emerging access to the housed world became a resource that enhanced his standing and enabled him to support others in their attempts to exit homelessness.

The relational character of this process also helps clarify the problem of misplaced or unrealistic hope. Participants sometimes expressed the expectation that obtaining money or housing would, by itself, resolve the problems associated with homelessness. As one service provider explained, "They think they will be saved by money... but after a month, the bills pile up, they don't go to work, and the cycle starts again." Such accounts suggest that hope can become fragile when it is detached from the relational, behavioural and institutional conditions required to sustain the imagined future. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether an individual possesses hope, but whether that hope is grounded in experiences that enable the individual to gradually develop the capacities, relationships and routines necessary to make the anticipated future sustainable.

This finding extends the literature on pathways out of homelessness by suggesting that hope is not merely a motivational resource individuals bring to the recovery process. It is itself an outcome of relational reorganization. Trust, recognition and repeated experiences of competence can gradually transform a fragile future imaginary into a credible and sustainable possibility. Conversely, the absence

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of reliable relationships can undermine even strongly articulated aspirations. Hope is therefore socially distributed: its durability depends partly on whether individuals are embedded in relationships that recognize their capacity to change and provide opportunities to demonstrate that change.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the most resilient form of hope is neither purely internal nor simply bestowed by others. It emerges through an iterative process in which individuals are recognized by others, come to see themselves differently, act on new possibilities and receive further recognition through the consequences of those actions. The pathway out of homelessness can therefore be understood as a gradual movement from one relational ecology to another – from social capital predominantly oriented towards surviving on the street towards forms of social capital that support sustaining life beyond it. In this process, trust is not merely a condition for hope; it is one of the mechanisms through which hope is produced, tested and stabilized. Hope, in turn, is not a feeling that one simply "has", but a form of "relational labour" (Denegri-Knott *et al*., 2024) or relational work: something repeatedly enacted, sustained and repaired until a different future becomes not only imaginable but livable.

Conclusion

Homelessness has become an increasingly pressing social problem worldwide since the 1980s, as the retreat of the welfare state and the restructuring of social assistance have reshaped the contours of urban poverty. While a substantial body of research has examined the forms, causes and lived hardships of homelessness, as well as the coping strategies developed on the street, considerably less attention has been paid to the processes through which people exit homelessness and sustain that exit. This article addresses this gap by examining how chronically homeless individuals in Istanbul move beyond street life and demonstrating that such transitions involve not only material change but also a profound reorganization of temporal orientations, social relationships and emotional dispositions. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in Istanbul between May 2022 and April 2023, the study examined the trajectories of formerly homeless men who had experienced long-term street homelessness across the city's central districts. Based on in-depth interviews with formerly homeless individuals and service providers, and informed by a phenomenological approach, the analysis traced how participants made sense of their experiences, reconstructed their identities and gradually developed pathways towards reintegration.

The article's central argument is that hope should not be understood as an individual psychological resource that homeless people either possess or lack. Rather, hope is socially produced, relationally sustained and temporally oriented. The study therefore challenges approaches that treat hope primarily as optimism, individual resilience or a component of clinical rehabilitation. Drawing on Simmel, Bloch, Arendt, De Certeau, Appadurai and the sociology of social capital, the article conceptualizes hope through four interrelated tensions: the dialectical relationship between hope and despair; the temporal tension between the present and the "not-yet"; the tension between reality and imagination through which ordinary practices can sustain agency; and the relational tension through which recognition, trust and social ties make alternative futures socially credible.

Taken together, the findings suggest a process that can be summarized as breaking with the present, imagining the not-yet and making the future socially sustainable. First, negative experiences and accumulated despair can disrupt adaptation to street life and create a rupture in the taken-for-granted acceptance of homelessness. "Hitting rock bottom" or finding street life increasingly unbearable does not automatically produce recovery, but can render the existing trajectory unsustainable and open a space in which another future becomes thinkable. Second, homelessness does not simply eliminate the future; *it restructures the temporal horizon of aspiration*. Future plans may become narrower, more fragile or differently distributed according to age, social position and life circumstances, but they can nevertheless preserve an orientation towards the "not-yet". Such plans function as motivational anchors, allowing individuals to locate themselves in a possible social position beyond homelessness and to connect present action to an anticipated future. Third, this future becomes sustainable only when it is supported by relationships through which trust, recognition, responsibility and belonging are gradually rebuilt.

This process also complicates the notion of "exiting homelessness" itself. Exit is not simply a movement from the street to a dwelling, nor is it a linear transition from dependence to independence. The street is a social world that provides recognition, solidarity, practical knowledge and forms of belonging, even as its social and cultural arrangements may reinforce homelessness. Consequently, successful reintegration does not necessarily require completely abandoning street-based sociality. Rather, it involves the gradual reorganization and transfer of some of its functions into a new relational environment. In this sense, the transition can be understood as a movement from forms of social capital oriented towards surviving street life towards relationships capable of sustaining life beyond it. The crucial transformation is therefore not simply an increase in "positive" social capital, but a reconfiguration of the relational ecology in which individuals live.

This relational dimension also reshapes how we understand hope itself. The findings suggest that hope is less something one "has" than something one repeatedly *does*. It is enacted through attending appointments, maintaining accommodation, keeping routines, accepting responsibility, responding to trust and continuing to invest in a future despite setbacks. Hope is consequently fragile and labour-intensive. It may weaken, disappear and re-emerge as individuals oscillate between street-based and housed forms of life. The gradual development of trust is particularly important in this process. Consistent relationships with social workers, volunteers, peers, neighbours, local businesses, family members and other members of the community can provide the recognition through which individuals begin to see themselves differently. As Cooley's (1956) "looking-glass self" suggests, being recognized as trustworthy and capable can become a basis for developing trust in oneself. Hope is thus not merely supported by relationships; it is partly produced through them.

The findings further indicate that not all future-oriented thinking is equally conducive to sustained exit. Aspirations detached from the material, relational and institutional conditions required to realize them may remain fragile, while overly narrow expectations may constrain the possibility of change. What appears most conse-

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quential is not simply having an optimistic view of the future, but developing a "grounded hope" connected to concrete practices, relationships and opportunities. This distinction helps explain why the exit process is often characterized by setbacks and reversals. Housing, employment or financial assistance may open a pathway out of homelessness without guaranteeing that the individual can sustain it. Reintegration is an extended physical, emotional, psychological and social process that may take many months, even with intensive individualized support (Çabuk & Atamtürk, 2023; Ravenhill, 2008, p. 183). The difficulty of sustaining exit therefore lies partly in transforming a newly imagined future into an everyday social reality.

The study's theoretical and empirical dimensions do not map one-to-one, and this is analytically significant rather than a limitation of the framework. The four theoretical dimensions – dialectical, temporal, imaginative and relational – intersect across the three empirical processes identified in the findings. Negative experiences and street culture illuminate the dialectical transformation of despair into possibility; future plans reveal the temporal and imaginative dimensions of the "not-yet"; and the gradual formation of trust demonstrates how hope becomes relationally sustained. Rather than functioning as separate stages, these dimensions continuously interact. Despair may make the future visible; future orientation may motivate investment in new relationships; and relationships may, in turn, make the imagined future more credible. Hope therefore emerges not as a final emotional state reached at the end of recovery, but as a process that develops through the interaction of rupture, imagination, action and recognition.

This perspective contributes to the literature on pathways out of homelessness in three ways. First, it shifts attention from the conditions that enable exit to the processes through which exit becomes imaginable and sustainable. Second, it contributes to the literature on the culture of homelessness by showing that street culture is neither simply an obstacle to recovery nor merely a source of resilience: it is an ambivalent social world that supports survival while also stabilizing homelessness. Third, it contributes to sociological approaches to hope by demonstrating that hope is not reducible to an internal emotional disposition. It is embedded in temporal horizons, everyday practices, social recognition and support networks. The possibility of exit therefore depends not only on whether individuals receive resources, but also on whether they can develop a credible future, sustain relationships that recognize them as capable of change and gradually inhabit a social world in which that future can become ordinary.

These findings also have implications for practice. Interventions aimed at exiting homelessness should not assess readiness for change solely by visible physical condition, current health, housing status or expressed motivation. The capacity to imagine an alternative future, to maintain even modest future-oriented aspirations, to preserve a sense of ordinary personhood and to develop trust in others may provide important indications of how a pathway out can be supported. Equally, interventions should recognize that trust cannot be produced through a single encounter and that relational continuity may be as important as the initial provision of material assistance. Rather than replacing street-based networks with institutional relationships, support may be more effective when it helps individuals transfer forms of recognition, reciprocity and belonging into new social contexts. In this respect, the task is not simply to provide a roof, but to help create the social world that can make life beneath and around that roof sustainable.

The study has several limitations. First, it focuses primarily on formerly homeless men and therefore cannot claim to represent the experiences of women, whose pathways out of homelessness may be differently structured. Second, the study does not systematically examine refugees and migrants, whose experiences of homelessness in Istanbul may be shaped by distinct temporal and geographical horizons. Existing research on migrant homelessness in Istanbul (Çelik, 2024; Çelik & Akyurt, 2023) suggests that, for some migrants, homelessness may constitute a temporary stage within a broader migration project, particularly when Istanbul functions as a transit point towards Europe. In such cases, aspirations for onward migration may sustain a future orientation even under highly precarious conditions, while the failure of migration projects may instead erode hope and consolidate homelessness. These cases highlight an important extension of the present argument: the temporal horizon of homelessness may extend not only beyond the street but also beyond the city itself. Future research should therefore examine how migration status, transnational aspirations and different migration trajectories reshape the relationship between hope and pathways out of homelessness.

Future research could further develop this processual sociology of hope through ethnographic and longitudinal studies that follow individuals through different stages of (re)settlement. Such research could examine how hope, despair, shame, trust and ambivalence are produced, interrupted and reconfigured over time, and how micro-social infrastructures – relationships with social workers, neighbours, local businesses, family members and peers – shape these emotional trajectories. Comparative research across welfare regimes and urban contexts could also illuminate how institutional arrangements and cultural norms affect the possibilities of developing durable, future-oriented dispositions. Methodologically, diary studies, participatory research and other longitudinal qualitative approaches could capture the temporal fluctuations and embodied dimensions of hope more effectively than retrospective interviews alone. Finally, future research should move beyond a simple hope/despair binary by examining configurations such as cautious optimism, resignation, ambivalence and conditional hope. Such work could further clarify when hope functions as a resource for sustaining agency, when it becomes detached from viable pathways, and how emotional, relational and material processes combine to make exits from homelessness possible.

Ultimately, the study suggests that exiting homelessness is neither simply a material achievement nor the realization of a pre-existing psychological desire. It is a process in which the present is disrupted, an alternative future becomes imaginable and that future is gradually made socially credible through relationships, practices and repeated acts of trust. Breaking with the present, imagining the not-yet and making the future socially sustainable are not separate moments but mutually constitutive dimensions of reintegration. Hope, in this process, is not merely something that makes recovery desirable. It is part of the social work through which recovery becomes possible.

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