

The role of housing providers and intermediaries in migrant access to (in)formal housing markets in the New York City

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IMISCOE Conference, 07 July 2021



Outline of the presentation

- Literature on migration industries
- West African migrants in the Bronx
- The study method
- Findings
- Conclusion

Literature on migration industries

- Investigates actors and actions that are involved in shaping mobility patterns and mobile identities (Cranston, 2016). Emerged from the literature on migration infrastructures.
- Help with documents, legal and tax advice, remittances, crossing borders (Ambrosini, 2017) and migrant employment (Groutsis et al., 2015)
- Actors: smugglers, co-ethnic brokers, employers, NGOs, ordinary citizens and civil servants, etc.

These industries accompany the journey of a migrant before they move, support their travel and help them access resources on their arrival (Alpes, 2012)

West African migrants in the Bronx

- A long-standing history of West African migration to the US
- High levels of **poverty**: a median income of \$25,000, 35% lower than the citywide median
- 80% of the Bronx' residents are **renters**
- 79% of the housing stock is **rent-regulated**
- A high number of **recipients of public assistance**



Source: Catholic New York, 05/08/2015

The study method

37 semi-structured interviews with actors performing functions related to housing access in the Bronx

Housing providers

- (1) non-profit
- (2) public
- (3) private providers
- (4) property management firms

Intermediary organisations

- (a) housing advocacy non-profit organisations
- (b) public authorities (providing housing benefits, and constituent service staff from elected officials' offices)
- (d) religious institutions

Findings: the formal pathway to accessing housing is through a unified application process

Application Form	Public	Non-Profit	Private	Property Management
Biographic Data: housing history and reasons for leaving the previous address		X	X	X
Income and Employment	X	X	X	X
References		X	X	X
Bank Information	X	X	X	X
Documentation	X	X	X	X

Findings: Informal pathway to accessing housing is through informal referrals

- Referrals are provided by either an existing tenant or a credible intermediary

*"[I receive applications] from the same immigrant community, or even tenants who are in the apartment. For example, I have a tenant that's paying me every month. **I would rather that person bring me somebody**, a family member, a friend, a relative, than getting someone off craigslist that I don't even know. [...] so far, I'm happy with the result." (Housing Provider 3)*

- Referral through a particular ethnic migrant network and strong preference for West African migrants

"In my building, everyone works; that's what we like in our tenants. Africans, they always work and go about their business. [...] you do your best so you do better in life financially and mentally" (Housing Provider 6)

Findings: the role of intermediaries

- **Housing advocacy non-profits and public authorities:** failed to reach West African migrants who were fearful of authorities and unwilling to ask for help

*"The African community seem to be **comfortable with their rights being infringed on**. ... if a [non-African] lived in a house and there's no heat, no hot water that person would, on a legal ground, refuse to pay and then go to court... But the African man will say it just happened in the month for a week or two or maybe it's just been happening randomly so they'll contend with that and move on... Landlords are more comfortable having African tenants because **they are not problematic**. "*
(Public Authority 3)

Findings: the role of intermediaries. Religious institutions

- **As space and platform for trust-based connections:** West African nationalities to meet, bond, and share knowledge on employment opportunities and housing offerings

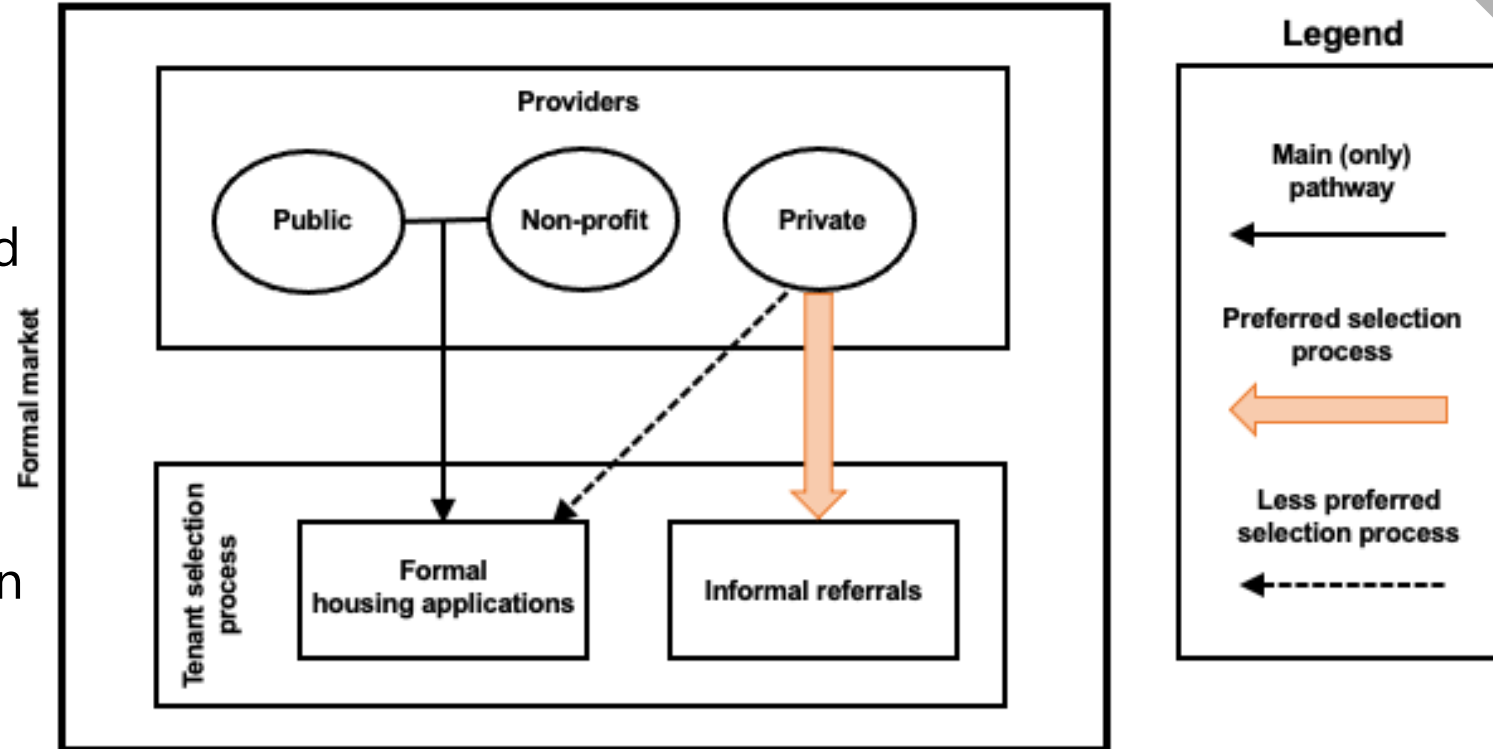
*"When someone is a member and we find they have a need, we sit down and assess it, and see how we are able to help. ... With housing, for example, if someone has a 2-bedroom apartment and wants someone to share it with, **we can help make that connection**".
(Religious Institution 3)*

- **As arbiters and facilitators:** the clergy supports informal housing transactions by making connections

*"If you have rented a room from another brother and you think they are overcharging you or something, maybe my solution will be to **help you find another place. Or maybe I will help you get a refund** of some kind. (Religious Institution 4)*

Conclusion

- Housing providers act as key gatekeepers to the formal housing market
- Intermediaries' roles differ: public and non-profit organisations are barely involved, whereas religious organisations act as gatekeepers and mediators
- The paper opens a broader discussion within the migration industries and urban informality



Formal and informal housing processes. Source: elaboration by authors.

Thank you for attention

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