



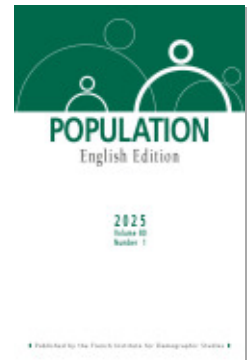
PROJECT MUSE®

Vivre au camping : Un mal-logement des classes populaires by
Gaspard Lion (review)

Hugo Wajnszok

Population, English edition, Volume 80, Number 1, 2025, pp. 108-110
(Review)

Published by Institut national d'études démographiques



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/984775>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[202.120.237.32] Project MUSE (2026-06-05 01:59 GMT) Fudan University

Gaspard Lion. 2024. *Vivre au camping : Un mal-logement des classes populaires* [Living on a campsite: Inadequate housing for the working classes]. Seuil. 315 pages.

In France, where income and wealth inequality are at record levels and the affordable housing crisis is steadily worsening, an increasing fraction of the working classes is choosing ‘wheel estate’ over real estate—mobile housing over the rental market. This phenomenon is, of course, less pronounced in France than in the United States, where more than 22 million people live in mobile homes (Sullivan and Olmedo, 2015). It nonetheless marks out a fault line separating precarious households facing residential instability. This shift is still largely ignored. While sociologists have given much attention to the housing of the poor, residential camping remains a little-explored field of study, and work on the subject has often examined it through a miserabilist lens. Gaspard Lion’s fine book offers a welcome corrective to this situation. In a limpid and accessible style, Lion plunges the reader into these peri-urban and rural spaces, uncovering the lifestyles of these inhabitants: their strategies and constraints, as well as the sometimes-unexpected resources that they draw on to adapt to difficult residential conditions. The book ends with the story of an eviction, the result of the closure of a campsite where Lion carried out his study. He describes the cold mechanisms of the procedure, but also the intimate echoes of this drama in the lives and experiences of the people affected.

Over 3 years, Lion carried out fieldwork in the Île-de-France region and in surrounding areas, living intermittently on a series of residential campsites. There, he devoted himself to observing, listening, and understanding the social dynamics at work. When he left the campsites, he continued his investigation, carrying out interviews and complementary observations. Lion combines this ethnographic investigation with statistical data and meticulous analyses of documents and archives, enriching and refining our understanding of this reality.

This research provides precise data on the extent of the phenomenon of inadequate housing through the lens of residential campsites. Lion seeks to shed light on the metamorphoses in ways of life linked to habitat, unveiling the singular relationship of the working classes, in all their diversity, to housing. The first three chapters set out a typology of campsite residents, highlighting their varied profiles. For each category, Lion examines the biographical trajectories that led them to this habitat, their relationships with their living space, the challenges they have encountered, and the resources they are able to mobilize.

From the opening pages of the book, Lion criticizes the idea that residential campsites are the last refuge of the poorest and most vulnerable. He focuses his attention on a category of inhabitants who sit at the intersection of the increasingly precarious working classes and the middle classes. These residents, although of modest means, have not faced the extreme poverty of precarious workers or the long-term unemployed. Their stable incomes and their jobs, often subaltern but regular, distinguish them from these situations. Their settlement in mobile homes located on the more expensive campsites is not a choice, but an alternative

to the unattainable ideal of the detached house. The chapter also emphasizes the considerable constraints they face, imposed by the often-arbitrary rules dictated by the management of these campsites.

In the second chapter, Lion explores the trajectories behind the faces of residential downward mobility on campsites that have captured the attention of news media. These inhabitants, previously in stable situations, were pushed into these situations in the aftermath of one or more unhappy life events. For them, it is a transitory solution. They must cope with the shame of living in tiny spaces, discomfort, and the painful sentiment of social decline. For them, life on a campsite symbolizes a loss, a backward step with respect to the norm of decent housing.

In the third chapter, Lion focuses on people who see the campsite as a space conducive to the reinvention of their lives. Many are men from the precarious fringes of society, living below the poverty line, with unstable jobs and low levels of education. The question here is to understand why, despite their inadequate housing and in contrast to other groups, individuals in this category see their residence in a positive light. Lion highlights the resources that this environment offers them, notably through practices of 'making do' (*débrouille*), forms of working-class sociability and informal exchanges, which contrast with the conditions of their earlier precarious situations.

The fourth chapter, on the eviction of the residents of a campsite, is a particularly poignant one. In it, Lion describes how, because their habitat is not recognized as housing, the residents are deprived of rights and protections. Not only can they easily be evicted, but they lose their residence and their possessions without any form of compensation. Lion emphasizes how the heterogeneity of the residents' social positions makes it difficult to create collectives to defend their interests.

The book concludes with avenues for reform, such as the extension of tenant rights to these residents (housing benefit, a ban on evictions, legal support, automatic renewal of rental contracts, etc.) and additional rights, including regulations on rent and energy prices, as well as the appropriation of secondary residences. This book fills a gap in the sociological literature and brings to light the diversity of the working-class groups affected by this growing phenomenon. Lion's arguments are solid and compelling. He writes in a lively, simple style that immerses us in the lives and stories of these inhabitants. And he makes their points of view intelligible through a fine-grained analysis of their trajectories and social characteristics, revealing the social relations at play on these campsites.

The analysis would have been enriched by the integration of a more detailed explanation of the dynamics specific to the various categories of campsite residents. While Lion emphasizes working-class solidarity, it would be interesting to examine possible internal hierarchies that may structure these interactions. Residents who have gone through significant downward mobility are the only ones to explicitly establish a distinction with respect to the stigmatized categories of benefit claimants and the unemployed. This observation raises the prospect

of exploring other, less visible forms of differentiation which also deserve to be integrated into the analysis.

Another potentially fruitful avenue would be to examine the differentiated relationships to ecological issues depending on social class. How do different fractions of campsite residents perceive and implement 'green' imperatives? This includes inequalities in environmental practices, whose contours could be usefully clarified, as well as their integration into lifestyles. These practices extend beyond socially legitimate forms of greening, encompassing forms of frugality specific to the working classes, such as repair, production for home consumption, and waste avoidance. Often linked to economic or social constraints, it would be interesting to study these practices to understand their role in today's ecological concerns and see whether they contribute to the emergence of new types of 'eco-habitus' (Carfagna et al., 2014).

Hugo Wajnszok

References

- CARFAGNA L. B., DUBOIS É. A., FITZMAURICE C., OUIMETTE M. Y., SCHOR J. B., WILLIS M., LAIDLEY T. 2014. An emerging eco-habitus: The reconfiguration of high cultural capital practices among ethical consumers. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(2), 158–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540514526227>
- SULLIVAN E., OLMEDO C. 2015. Informality on the urban periphery: Housing conditions and self-help strategies in Texas informal subdivisions. *Urban Studies*, 52(6), 1037–1053. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014533733>