The Role of the State in Developing Homeless Strategies : Portugal and Ireland in Comparative Perspective

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❯ **Abstract_** *This paper provides a comparative analysis of the role of the state in devising homeless strategies in Ireland and Portugal. Conceptualising the role of the State in both Portugal and Ireland requires cognizance of the substantial shifts that have occurred over the past three decades. Thus, rather than providing a static portrait of the role of the State, we aim to provide a temporal dimension by mapping changes in the role of the State over time. To provide a framework for the paper, we first briefly explore Jessop's strategic-relational theory of the 'State', which argues that it is problematic to understand the role of the 'State' in general ; rather we can only understand the 'State' in specific contexts. On this basis, we seek to understand the role of the State in Ireland and Portugal in shaping policies in relation to homelessness, by locating these developments in their particular historical, institutional and strategic contexts. In both Ireland and Portugal, there is evidence of changes in the understanding of homelessness among key stakeholders and in the development of national and local strategies. The key trend identified in both countries is that of the State taking ownership or control over homeless policy and attempting to devise reasonably coherent frameworks in which to address the issue. However, homeless strategies in Portugal and Ireland do not have a predetermined path, rather the future ability of these projects to realise the promise of coherence in the delivery of services is conditional on a range of other state projects.*

❯ **Key Words_** *State projects ; homeless strategies ; welfare regimes ; Ireland ; Portugal*

Introduction

This paper aims to review the role of the State in devising strategies to combat homelessness in both Portugal and Ireland. In recent years, both countries have adopted a 'strategic' approach to resolving homelessness, whereby all actors concerned with the issue have attempted to devise more coherent and integrated approaches, in contrast to the largely fragmented and ad-hoc approaches that characterised earlier efforts. The countries selected, while having distinctive national characteristics, are to a substantial degree dependent on NGOs (often Catholic in orientation) in delivering services to the homeless; the role of the State in either 'steering or rowing' in this area was minimal until relatively recently. This is not particularly surprising as, particularly since the 1930s, Catholic social thinking has stressed the principle of subsidiarity – that the State should not take upon itself what could be left to 'lesser and subordinate' organisations, particularly the family and voluntary agencies. Although the role of Catholic social thinking in both countries is currently considerably muted, the historical legacy bequeathed by this ideology is still evident in the provision of homeless services.

In broad socio-economic terms and particularly in the fields of welfare provision, Ireland is, more often than not, described as neo-liberal while Portugal is generally portrayed as part of a 'Southern European welfare regime'. In both cases however, the labels fit somewhat uneasily and both countries are awkward members of the welfare families they allegedly occupy. This reflects in part the static nature of the typologies devised and highlights the need for a temporal dimension in comparative research. This is exemplified in a recent study by Castles and Obinger (2008: 337-338) where both Ireland and Portugal are now classified as part of a group of "nations exhibiting the lowest degree of statism (the lowest levels of public disbursements, social security transfers, low educational spending and low Government employment)". In addition, while both countries have a vibrant NGO sector, the funding of such agencies and their primary area of service delivery, display interesting variations.

Thus, in selecting Ireland and Portugal for detailed comparative analysis, we aim to contribute to a "better understanding of common features and crucial differences between not only individual welfare states but particular policy programs in order to unravel why and how welfare needs, or demands are being transformed into social policy" (Clasen, 1999: 4). This seems particularly important in an environment where many are suggesting a convergence amongst the various social models evident in Europe and brought about by the nefarious influence of globalisation. Although evidence for this proposition is slight (Hay, 2006), we need to be mindful of the consequences of such pessimistic stances.

Conceptualising the role of the State generally is problematic and a voluminous litera-
ture exists on the question of how best to understand the 'State'; as one leading
commentator has somewhat pessimistically observed: "the state is a complex
phenomenon and no single theory or theoretical perspective can fully capture and
explain its complexities" (Jessop, 2007: 1). Conceptualizing the role of the State in
both Portugal and Ireland also requires cognizance of the substantial shifts that have
occurred over the past three decades. In the case of Portugal, pivotal moments of
change include: the democratic revolution of April 1974; the subsequent develop-
ment of the welfare state; and membership of the European Union in 1986 (Soares,
2007). In respect of Ireland: the state-led industrial development from 1958; member-
ship of the European Union in 1973; and the gradual embracing of new forms of social
and economic governance since 1987 (Lee, 1989).

Thus, rather than providing a static portrait of the role of the State, we aim to
provide a temporal dimension by mapping changes in its role over time, but also as
Smith (2006: 522) suggests, we need to be aware that a range of policy areas "may
themselves exhibit different temporalities". This seems particularly important when
dealing with an issue such as homelessness, both in terms of how the issue is
framed – within for example, a housing paradigm or a social exclusion paradigm
– and within the context of the ebb and flow of other social and economic policies
and governmental strategies. To provide a framework for the paper, we firstly briefly
explore Jessop's strategic-relational theory of the State, which argues that it is
problematic to understand the role of the State in general; rather we can only
understand the State in specific contexts. This would appear to be a useful starting
point in relation to understanding homeless strategies in Ireland and Portugal. In
the case of Ireland, we have seen in recent years the reinforcement of the role of
local authorities in the provision of housing and the assessment of housing needs;
the development of housing strategies at local level since 2000, which have
enhanced the identification of housing needs of homeless people; new initiatives
on collection of data on homelessness, linked to the assessment of housing needs;
the political demand for an Integrated Strategy in recognition of the multiple needs
of homeless households; and the shift of homelessness from a marginal concern
to a relevant issue in the Irish administrative and political system. In the case of
Portugal, the link between housing and homelessness has been absent and is more
couched in terms of anti-poverty strategies, which at the local level have recently
started to play an important role in the enhancement of local networks or strategies
to address homelessness. We then view the treatment and classification of both
Ireland and Portugal in the comparative welfare state literature, going on to explore
the role of the State in governing homelessness and the lessons that can be
generated from our discussion.

Strategic-Relational Theory of the State

The strategic relational theory of the State is less concerned about what the State *is* and more about how it comes to be a concrete, societal force in particular policy arenas. For Jessop (2002 : 40), "the state can be defined as a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularised, and strategically selective institutions, organisations, social forces and activities organised around (or at least involved in) making collectively binding decisions for an imagined political community". Different actors undertake purposeful action, albeit constrained by the capitalist structure, pursuing particular 'state projects', which make and remake what we understand to be the State. By 'state projects', Jessop (1990 : 360) refers to the political agenda of a particular group of state actors as they engage in "explicit attempts to coordinate the action of different organisations, structures and systems to produce specific results". Ultimately then, state projects give the State 'a certain organisational unity and cohesiveness of purpose', effectively bonding together the 'institutional building blocks' of the State system and setting them in motion (Jessop, 1990 : 353). Only with this coupling of state structures and a particular strategic state project can the State be described as an actor with the potential to impact on other societal spheres. At any given time, there are multiple state projects in existence, each trying to unite and mobilise political resources in particular directions.

These strategies are constantly in flux, and consequently so too are the boundaries of the State resulting in a "dynamic and constantly unfolding system" (Hay, 1999 : 170). Whilst the attributes of the State at any particular point in time are structured by these strategies, the realisation of such strategies "depends on the structural ties between the State and its encompassing political system, the strategic links among state managers and other political forces, and the complex web of interdependencies and social networks linking the State and political system to its broader environment" (Jessop, 2001 : 167). Ultimately for Jessop, the State is a paradox in that it is responsible for ensuring the cohesion of the society of which it is also a part. As a consequence of this paradoxical position, "it is continually called upon by diverse social forces to resolve society's problems and is equally continually doomed to generate 'state failure' since so many of society's problems lie well beyond its control and can even be aggravated by attempted intervention" (Jessop, 2001 : 167). Overall, Jessop is of the view we can only ever understand the role of the State in particular institutional, historical and strategic contexts. On this basis, there can be no general theory of the capitalist state, only specific ones. Therefore, we seek to understand the role of the State in Ireland and Portugal in shaping policies in relation to homelessness, by locating these developments in their particular historical, institutional and strategic contexts. To begin this process, we next outline the historical and institutional context in which both countries need to be viewed.

Ireland and Portugal in the Worlds of Welfare Capitalism

In this section we provide a broad overview of the role of the State in both Ireland and Portugal in welfare arenas, with a specific focus on housing and social exclusion. In addition, we attempt to conceptualise the 'welfare regimes' in both countries with reference to the well-established framework outlined by Esping-Andersen (1990)

The Irish Welfare Regime

In many accounts the role of the State in Ireland until the late 1950s, is viewed as largely passive (Breen *et al.*, 1990). In more recent years, it is argued that Ireland's recent economic and social policies are fundamentally neo-liberal in orientation and that this shift in orientation was made possible by the corporatist institution of 'social partnership'. Social partnership is the short-hand term for the institutional arrangements that have, since 1987, brought together Government, Employers, Unions and NGOs (since 1996) every three years to negotiate a strategic consensus on economic and social policy. Recognising that the policies pursued over the past two decades have brought profound economic and social change, such as effective full employment and sharp decreases in the rate of consistent poverty, critics of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy have nonetheless argued that social policies have been subordinate to economic policies, and that deepening inequalities have character-ised Irish society over the past decade. For example, according to Meade, "(a)t the core of Ireland's economic triumph appears to be our willing compliance with the dictates of neo-liberalism, where flexible, unstable and low-paid employment is increasingly the price of profit" (2005: 354). In a similar vein, Kirby (2002: 162-163) argues that what makes Ireland comparatively unusual, is that while the Irish state is neo-liberal in its orientation, having a subordinate relationship with the global market and generating an in-egalitarian social impact, the institution of social part-nership has legitimised this reorientation of the state. For O'Hearn (2003: 48-49):

> "the overriding ideological position of the 1990s in the Republic of Ireland was that growth was the result of neo-liberal policies, including privatisation and 'responsible' fiscal policies. Successive state budgets after 1987 favoured tax cuts for the rich and failed to provide the necessary spending to correct Ireland's severe social problems… Due to such Government policies, many social services broke down."

Thus, for many commentators, the Irish policy has enthusiastically embraced neo-liberalism. However, others contest this interpretation, noting that replacement rates have risen markedly in Ireland in recent years with a substantial redistribution towards those least well-off; neither development being particularly compatible with the neo-liberal interpretation of the Irish State (Callan *et al.,* 2006: 3). The

National Economic and Social Council (2005) characterises the Irish welfare state and its approach to public policy more generally as 'hybrid', suggesting that this hybridity has resulted in continuous change and adaptability to new social risks, albeit in forms that do not necessarily conform to easily understood models. In comparative terms, Ireland's current welfare state has disparate elements that resemble, respectively, the citizen-based Nordic welfare model, the social-insurance Continental European model and the residual Anglo-Saxon welfare model.

In this article, we argue that characterisations of public policy in Ireland more generally, being essentially neo-liberal in orientation, do not fully capture the complexity and hybrid nature of institutional arrangements. This is particularly the case in relation to the governance of homelessness as demonstrated later in the paper. Part of the difficulty encountered in interpreting and classifying the nature of the Irish State lies in the particular historical and specific trajectory of the State in the post-independence period (Hay, 2006). For example, depending on the variables operationalised, Ireland can range from a laggard to a pioneer in decommodification (O'Sullivan, 2004). More significantly, Adshead (2008: 71) argues that:

> "… one of the most interesting features of the Irish state is its pragmatic and opportunistic approach to policy, which has contributed to some extremely flexible and rather innovative responses to various policy problems. Such innovation is possible largely because of the relative lack of ideological boundaries or constraints to Government behaviour, as well as limited ideological differentiation, and wholescale areas of consensus, between political parties outside and within office."

This approach to policy-making in Ireland has had a significant effect on the relationship between the State and NGOs. Broadly, 'partnership' has involved the participation of NGOs in decision-making, to a certain point. For some, this participation is a form of co-option whereby the State gains control over the NGOs, while others see it as providing opportunities for NGOs to develop new methodologies of engagement (see Daly, (2007) for an overview of these debates).

The Portuguese Welfare Regime

In a fashion somewhat similar to that of Ireland, the Portuguese welfare regime is sometimes characterised as being underdeveloped when compared with the core European countries. A debate exists within the literature as to whether Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal constitute a "fourth world of welfare capitalism" or simply a subcategory of the conservative welfare regimes of Continental Europe. The primary features of the Continental regimes are: status divisions in the provision of social security system; residual social assistance schemes; and familialism, whereby public policy assumes or insists that households must carry the principal

responsibility for their members' welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Katrougalos and Lazaridis (2003) argue that the Southern European countries are merely a variant of the conservative welfare regime. Effectively, Southern European countries differ from their Continental European counterparts because of their comparatively late development and the relative inefficiency of their social protection systems.

For others, Portugal forms part of a distinctive southern European welfare model with Spain, Italy and Greece (Ferrera, 1996: Andreotti *et al.*, 2001). Those countries had similar trajectories of dictatorial political regimes and a late development of their welfare states. While acknowledging that they share characteristics with the conservative corporatist welfare regime, they also have distinctive characteristics, particularly the centrality of the family as a safety net and a welfare mix encompassing the state, family, the Church and charities. Karamessini (2008: 51) argues that whether or not we accept that a Southern Model of Welfare exists in strong form,

> " … we can discern the following similarities in the pattern of social reproduction in SE countries: a) the family is the primary locus of solidarity whose role is both social (provision of care and support) and productive (creation of family businesses); b) the male breadwinner enjoys high employment protection and job stability, while other labour force groups (women, young people, migrants) suffer from high unemployment and are disproportionately involved in irregular forms of work, mostly in small businesses and the underground economy; c) social security is based on occupational status and work performance and is organized around the male breadwinner/female carer family model (derived rights for dependants); d) social assistance schemes are residual[1] since those without a normal working career must primarily rely for support on the family; e) child and elderly care are basically provided by family members and mainly women's unpaid work; f) labour market segmentation creates gaps and inequalities in both employment and social protection; g) the unemployment compensation and vocational training systems are underdeveloped; h) jobs in the public sector or cash benefits are selectively distributed through clientelism and patronage networks; and i) welfare-state institutions are highly inefficient. "

In addition, Ferreira (2005) argues that the past reinforces several characteristics of the Portuguese welfare regime, in particular the role of NGOs. She suggests key characteristics include the deployment of the principle of subsidiarity, but this ideology is confronted by a high level of state centralisation in terms of public administration and decision-making, with social partners having a very limited

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[1] The low level of income provided by social assistance schemes and also by minimum income schemes (Social Insertion Income and the Solidarity Complement for the Elderly), do not generate sufficient resources for most families dependent on these benefits to rise above the poverty threshold.

participation and local government participation is residual. Finally, she suggests that Portuguese civil society is characterised as being both fragmented and weakly organised. The existence of a very heterogeneous civil society with a high level of fragmentation made difficult the organisation of the social dialogue in order to pursue desirable social objectives.

According to Andreotti *et al.* (2001 : 59) "Southern European countries addressed the high fragmentation of the state's regulatory framework with a series of reforms in the 1990s ranging from labour market regulations to social assistance. These reforms are allowing some convergence towards a continental norm. The problem is that there is a timing gap between the reforms i.e. no synchronization". In this context, Mozzicafredo (1997) argues, the structuring of the welfare state in Portugal has been a discontinued and fragmented process, both as a result of different power pressures and imbalances coming from social groups as well as available public resources.

The social and political changes brought about by the 1974 Revolution opened up the opportunity for the emergence of the Welfare State. As shown in Figure 1, in terms of social expenditure, albeit a crude measure of welfare effort, the Portuguese expenditure was considerably below the OECD average during the 1980s, but began to increase rapidly from the early 1990s, exceeding the OECD average by the year 2000 and now accounting for nearly one-quarter of GDP. In the case of Ireland, almost the reverse is found. In the mid-1980s, social expenditure in Ireland exceeded the OECD average, but declined from that period to the early 2000s; while it has seen a modest increase in recent years, it remains considerably below the OECD average.

Chart 1: Social Expenditure as a percentage of GDP in Portugal, Ireland and the OECD, 1980-2003

Source : OECD. SOCX database.

Portugal   Ireland   ---- OECD
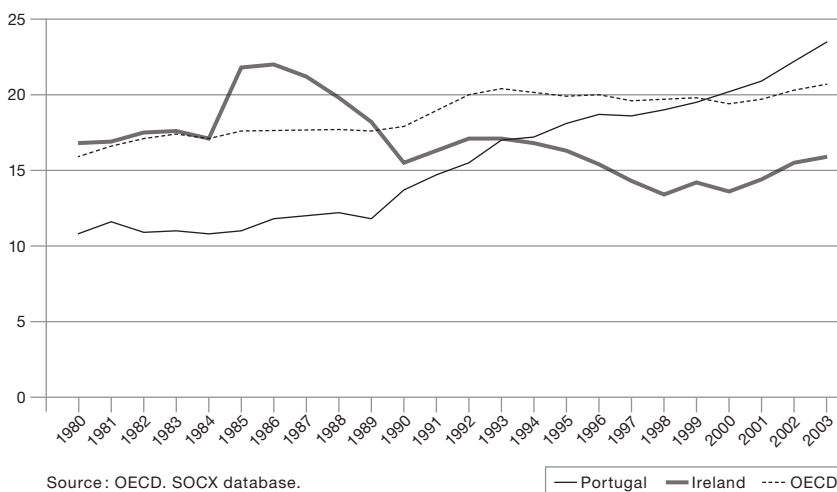
The Non-profit Sector in Ireland and Portugal

Based on data collated by the John Hopkins Center for Civil Society, broadly comparative information is available on the dimensions of the non-profit sector in Ireland and Portugal. Based on the *International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations* (ICNPO), which classifies the non-profit function across twelve domains, we identify four as being particularly relevant to our paper. These are: Health; Social Services; Development and Housing; and Civic and Advocacy. In Ireland, 34% of all full-time employment in the non-profit sector is in these four areas compared with 65% in Portugal. This reflects the dominance of social service providers in the Portuguese context, where half of the employment is in this area. In terms of the funding of these four domains of non-profit activity, the State is a signifi-cantly more important player in Ireland compared with the situation in Portugal. Over 90% of the activities of development and housing non-profit providers come from the State in Ireland compared with 40% in Portugal (Chart 2). In a recent review (Franco *et al.*, 2005: 20) it was argued that, albeit in a weak form, the non-profit sector in Portugal shared a number of characteristics with a group of countries, including Ireland, which they argued had a 'welfare partnership model' characterised by: "a relatively large civil society organization workforce; more extensive paid staff than volunteer staff; a decided service orientation to civil society employment focusing particularly on basic social welfare services – health, education, and social services and extensive support for civil society operations."

**Chart 2: Percentage of Revenue from Government Sources
to the Non-Profit Sector in Ireland and Portugal**

Source: John Hopkins Centre for Civil Society   ■ Ireland ■ Portugal
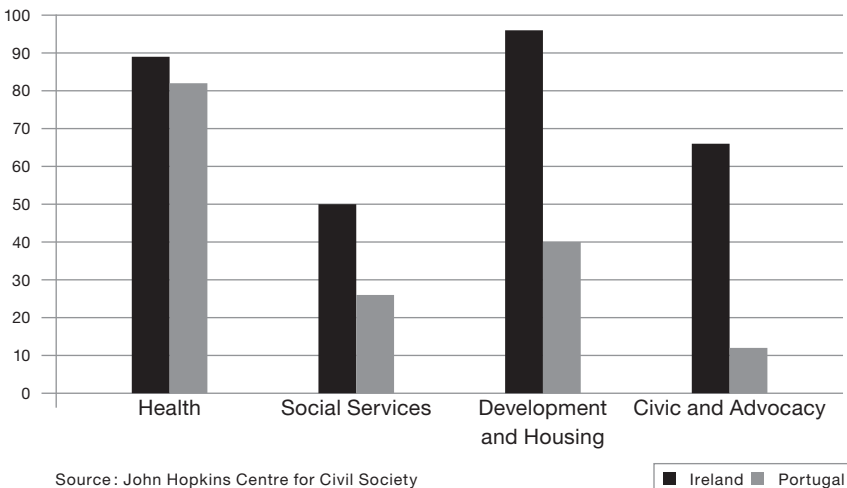
Thus, in both countries, existing classifications of their welfare arrangements are both problematic and contested and have exhibited rapid change over recent decades. Moving from the broad analysis of welfare arrangements to a specific focus on homelessness in the next section of the paper demonstrates a similar pattern of change and contestation. These patterns are broadly what we might expect from a strategic-relational approach to the state, which lays stress on the dynamic nature of state strategies.

Homelessness in Ireland and Portugal

In February and March 2007, Eurobarometer (2007) conducted a survey on public opinion about poverty and exclusion in the European Union. As part of this broad survey, a number of questions were asked specifically about homelessness. One question sought public opinion on the causes of homelessness. In broad terms, public opinion in both Ireland and Portugal views homelessness as resulting from personal deficits rather than from adverse structural conditions. For example, public opinion in both countries highlighted addiction, debt and illness as key factors; in the case of addiction this departs significantly from the European norm. The public in both countries are sympathetic to the plight of the homeless with a much smaller number than the EU norm, saying that they would not help the homeless. The public in both countries were more likely to give money to the homeless than were the EU average and also more likely to give money to charities; this being particularly the case in Ireland.

Portugal

In Portugal, homelessness has only recently gained the status of an 'identified problem', but has not yet been the object of concrete measures in terms of housing policy. Traditionally, there has been a lack of coherent or integrated proposals, either at the local or central state level which involved social services, housing and the myriad of other different agencies in each area. More significantly, homelessness was understood to be an issue that should be tackled primarily by social services, rather than housing services. The social services provided included, in roughly descending order of importance: food and temporary lodging; professional training; social, psychological, medical and psychiatric support. The analysis of the types of solution available for homeless people with regard to housing shows that they tend to be temporary, or indefinitely protected (the case especially for some forms of shelter for specific groups of women). While the "growth of the dramatic phenomenon of home-lessness" (Ferro Rodrigues, 1996: 13) has been recognised in official speeches and documents (Ferro Rodrigues, 1996: Mendes, 1999) as one of the most serious housing problems in Portuguese society, homelessness remains absent from inte-grated policies that have been adopted by the latest initiatives concerning urban re-housing and rehabilitation. The housing issue and homelessness in Portugal

specifically, should be understood within the context of a country which, in the late 1970s was still engaged in putting together a whole set of public policies at a time when, in other European countries the discussion was already moving on to the changing role of the Welfare State. Within an internationally adverse economic environment and confronted with the need to create and consolidate the three major pillars of the welfare state: education; health; and social security, the State postponed its investment in the housing area. Weak state intervention left this area open to the involvement of a variety of private actors in the provision of housing. On the one hand there were construction firms building for the market, while on the other, a large number of families engaged in self-building solutions. In the last thirty years, the dynamics of the housing market have been characterised by four main interlinked features: a continuously high pace of construction; a weak dynamic in the rental market; a continuous growth of home ownership; and an increasing percentage of vacant dwellings, many of which were badly degraded. Unable to produce effective changes in either social or private rental sectors, the Portuguese State founded its housing policy almost entirely on a system of subsidised mortgage credit and on the support for the production of housing which, in the late 1990s, included major metropolitan rehousing programmes enabling the construction of over 20,000 social dwellings between 1999 and 2005.

At the present moment, a first National Housing Strategy for the period 2008-2013 has been drafted and is under public discussion. This initiative may be an opportunity for a substantial change in the trajectory of the housing policies in Portugal and in the role of the State. The emphasis given to the promotion of owned housing (Allen, 2006) and the limitations on the supply side of the rental market, together with cultural factors, have undermined the actual range of alternatives in access to housing. For instance, a large number of families with lower economic resources, who have traditionally been marginalised with regard to access to housing, have tried to solve their housing needs in the informal housing market through the self-construction of illegal shelters. Social housing policies have not been capable of responding to the housing needs of low income families, given their scattered and residual character. The growth of owner-occupation in recent years has led to a significant burden on family budgets which in turn has clearly contributed to over-indebtedness and to a growing number of evictions due to lack of payment. This is especially true in some middle class areas surrounding Lisbon and Porto where, in 2001, home ownership represented 75% of the total housing stock compared to 65% in 1991 and 71% in 1998. This has contributed to the high and growing number of vacant houses, particularly in the two major metropolitan areas, half of which present very high levels of degradation which obliges rehabilitation measures prior to any occupation.

Social welfare support linked to access to housing has an extremely limited scope. The availability of such support is mainly related to the Social Rehousing Programmes launched in 1993 (PER) and also to specific programmes enabling access to supported accommodation, as in the Lisbon Municipality between 2003 and 2006. Other welfare support is available to people for temporary accommodation in low cost hostels or rented rooms in major cities. As well as having their rent paid by social security, recipients of such support also continue to have access to other types of social welfare through the local social action.

In April 2008, the first *Strategic Housing Plan* (2008-2013) was presented to Government and is now open to public debate. The document was produced by the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation. The Plan recognises that "the identification of needs as far as housing is concerned raises a huge diversity of problems which arises from the very concept of *housing needs*, given their imprecise boundaries which allow us to include from the mere symbolic dissatisfaction with the house to the needs coming from the lack of shelter." (CET-ISCTE *et al.*, 2008: 24) The perspective adopted by the Plan departs from a diagnosis of housing needs and dynamics and focuses on the needs of families who have high levels of insolvency and therefore need the State support in order to fulfill their right to housing, not only in the sense of access to a dwelling, but also for other public support aimed at reinsertion trajectories. Thus, there is an explicit concern in terms of the Plan's objectives "to ensure the articulation between the housing policy and other policies, namely social policies and city policies" (CET-ISCTE *et al.*, 2008: 36).

Although the Plan is still under discussion, the document represents a significant shift in relation to both housing policy and homelessness as it is the first attempt to produce a strategy on housing, and because of the centrality given to peoples' needs. In addition, the Plan ensures continuity of the State's responsibility, but allowing for a more comprehensive engagement of other relevant stakeholders, particularly the participation of local authorities, not only in the implementation but also in the definition of local public housing and urban renovation policies.

Homelessness is included in the Plan, in specific measures under the scope of two of the five strategic objectives, namely regarding new support measures for the dynamism of the rental market and innovative solutions for housing. However, in overall terms, the dominant perception amongst governmental agencies is that homelessness is still a marginal concern. This is evidenced by the fact that no data is available that allows an analysis of trends over time and that the first national collection of homelessness data on 'rough sleepers' took place as recently as 2005. However, another positive development occurred in mid 2007 when an inter-institutional group was formed under the responsibility of the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity, composed of statutory bodies (housing, social security, employ-

ment, immigration, health, drug-addiction, security forces and gender equality) and non-governmental representatives. This group is preparing the first national strategy on homelessness, which should be completed in September 2008. At the present moment, the group has been able to discuss and propose a concept of homelessness to be adopted by agencies working with homeless people, that is based on the ETHOS Typology (Edgar and Meert, 2005). The concept adopted is a narrow one, embracing only the roofless and the houseless categories of the ETHOS framework. Nevertheless, it has been possible to establish a wide consensus that the strategy would comprise objectives and measures addressing both the risk situations leading to homelessness and the continuity of support related to integration and resettlement. Thus, the work developed until now has allowed the establishment of, and agreement on, a set of guiding principles which will frame the whole development of the strategy, and also the definition of three main areas to be addressed: prevention; intervention; integration and resettlement.

In close relationship with the work that is being developed by the Strategy Working Group, a very dynamic group was established within the recently created Lisbon Social Network[2]. This group is preparing a local strategy to combat homelessness in the city of Lisbon. The work has created a strong participative dynamic from organisations directly working with homeless people and has recently proposed a model for an integrated intervention in this area, considering three levels of intervention: information and emergency support; motivation and support through services; resettlement and integration.

Looking at conditions that might have contributed directly or indirectly to the emergence of this initiative, the following have been important:

• The first national count of 'rough sleepers' at the end of 2005. In spite of the criticisms linked to the 'low figures' presented (less than 500 people identified in the whole country) this gave increased visibility to the phenomenon, particularly after the public presentation of the results in 2006;

• The lessening of the pressure regarding the re-housing of the hundreds of thousands of families living in shanties, by the conclusion of major re-housing programmes in most of the major urban municipalities;

• The evaluation by the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity regarding shelters for the homeless population and the recognition of flaws in the coordination of different services;

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[2]   The Social Network Programme is a structuring programme and an essential tool in the process of local development and in promoting social inclusion which has adopted territorialised strategic planning methodologies and aims at dynamising the local integrated support networks.

- The growing importance of the local social networks in an integrated approach to addressing social problems at the municipal level, as well as the emergence of some working groups within these networks specifically to address the issue of homelessness (e.g. Lisbon);

- The involvement of the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity in the FEANTSA working groups addressed at statutory entities and a growing awareness of European approaches to tackling homelessness;

- Political climate favourable to addressing poverty and related issues.

Ireland

In the case of Ireland, by the late 1990s, it was increasingly recognised that homelessness was more than a question of housing supply; rather other services were required to successfully exit homelessness on a long-term basis. In 1998, under the auspices of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, the Government established a Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness. With the publication of their deliberations in 2000, *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government), the beginnings of a coherent policy approach to the needs of homeless households became apparent for the first time in the history of the Irish State. The terms of reference for the cross-departmental team preparing this strategy were to "develop an integrated response to the many issues which affect homeless people including emergency, transitional and long-term responses as well as issues relating to the health, education, employment and home-making" (2000: 3).

The broad principles enunciated by the strategy document were: that a continuum of care should exist from the time someone becomes homeless, with sheltered and supported accommodation and, where appropriate, assistance back into independent living in the community; emergency accommodation should be short-term; settlement in the community should be an overriding priority through independent or supported housing; long-term supported accommodation should be available for those who need it; support services should be provided on an outreach basis as needed and preventative strategies for at-risk groups should be developed. To achieve these broad objectives, Homeless Forums were to be established in every county and three-year action plans prepared. Both the homeless forums and the action plans were to include input from both the statutory and non-profit sectors. In early, 2002, a Homeless Preventative Strategy was published with the key objective of ensuring that "no one is released or discharged from state care without the appropriate measures in place to ensure that they have a suitable place to live with the necessary supports, if needed" (Department of Environment and Local Government *et al.*, 2002: 3).

In January 2005, The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government announced the undertaking of an independent review of the Homeless Strategies. The terms of reference for this review were: (a) evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies and their associated Homeless Action Plans; (b) make recommendations to promote further progress in addressing the issue of homelessness. This review, which was published in February 2006, reviewed the forty-three specific policy proposals identified in both the Integrated and Preventative Strategies and put forward twenty-one recommendations to aid the implementation of the strategies, all of which were accepted by Government. In addition, both the substance of the report and the recommendations, were accepted almost universally by those voluntary agencies working with the homeless.

The report argued that while the provision of emergency accommodation in Ireland was now sufficient, the key challenge for the future was to refocus attention on the provision of long-term housing options and to "develop appropriate short and long term care mechanisms that prevent institutionalisation in 'emergency' accommodation and limit the recycling of homelessness" (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2006: 32). To aid the achievement of this objective, the report recommended that that the two existing strategies need to revised and amalgamated, a national homeless consultative committee be established and all Government policy should be proofed for any impact it might have on homelessness. This recommendation was accepted by Government and in late 2006 a National Homeless Consultative Committee (NHCC) was established to provide input into the development of the revised Homeless Strategy and ongoing Government policy on addressing homelessness.

While the statutory agencies committed to the preparation of a revised strategy with the target of eliminating long-term homelessness by 2010, voluntary agencies formed an alliance (MakeRoom.ie) to campaign for an end to homelessness by 2010. Their agenda was somewhat more ambitious than that proposed by the statutory sector, as they boldly stated "[b]y an end to homelessness we mean nobody sleeping rough, nobody living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an emergency and nobody becoming homeless because of a lack of appropriate services". The MakeRoom campaign was successful in getting every political party to commit publicly to ending homelessness by 2010. Thus, by the end of 2006, an unprecedented consensus had emerged between the State, voluntary agencies and political parties that homelessness should and could be ended by 2010. However, as documented in O'Sullivan (2008) this consensus had largely eroded by 2008 when a new national homeless strategy was launched, due in part to the deteriorating economic situation, but also reluctance on the part of some NGOs to embrace necessary changes in their operations.

Conclusion

In both Ireland and Portugal, there is evidence of changes in the understanding of homelessness among key stakeholders and in the development of national and local strategies. It is also evident that, increasingly, the shared understanding of homelessness is located within a housing framework, albeit with supporting services. On the other hand, the social image of homelessness among the wider public is still very much that of personal pathology. Nonetheless, the key trend identified in both countries is that of the State taking ownership or control over homelessness policy and attempting to devise reasonably coherent frameworks in which to address the issue. This is despite a view that both countries exhibit low levels of statism, highlighting the necessity of devising more subtle indicators of state activity other than purely monetary ones. It is also of note that both countries have largely eschewed a punitive approach to managing the homeless by utilising the criminal justice system to quarantine them in a range of penal institutions, halfway houses and other disciplinary sites. In the countries under review, the formal strategies for managing those deemed homeless by an ensemble of agencies is largely inclusionary rather than exclusionary. A key element underpinning the strategic approach to homelessness policy is the multiple forms of 'partnership' exhibited at a local and national levels in both countries. As Jessop argues more generally, these linkages resulted in a " complex web of interdependencies and social networks linking the State and political system to its broader environment " (Jessop, 2001 : 167). These networks and interdependencies allowed for the realisation of a state project, albeit often hesitant, tentative, vague and fragmentary, to emerge in relation to homelessness. These projects are not static, but rather are constantly in flux, as the homelessness state project competes with other state projects for recognition, status and finance. Homeless strategies in Portugal and Ireland do not have a predetermined path, rather the future ability of these projects to realise the promise of coherence in the delivery of services is conditional on a range of other state projects. Thus, while state strategies on homelessness hold the promise of achieving rational responses to identified issues, if we understand the homeless strategy as just one of a number of competing state projects, the fragile nature of the strategy and the social networks and interdependencies than sustain it can be better understood.

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