European Observatory on Homelessness

# European Journal of Homelessness

## Homelessness, Poverty and Social Exclusion

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The *European Journal of Homelessness* provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal will also assess the lessons for Europe which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

**Editorial Team**

## Contributors

Jordi Bosch Meda
Independent Researcher
Viladomat, 211, 3º, 3ª.
08029 Barcelona, Spain
jordibosch28@hotmail.com

Catherine Boswell
School of Health Sciences
UWIC
Cardiff CF5 2YB, Wales, United Kingdom
cboswell@uwic.ac.uk

Jonathan Bradshaw
Department of Social Policy and Social Work
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD, United Kingdom
jonathan.bradshaw@york.ac.uk

Michele Calandrino
Policy analyst
European Commission
1049 Brussels, Belgium
michele.calandrino@ec.europa.eu

Sarah Coward
Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing
University of Sheffield, Samuel Fox House
Northern General Hospital
Herries Road
Sheffield S5 7AU, United Kingdom
S.E.Coward@sheffield.ac.uk

Maureen Crane
Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing
University of Sheffield, Samuel Fox House
Northern General Hospital
Herries Road
Sheffield S5 7AU, United Kingdom
m.a.crane@sheffield.ac.uk

Maciej Dębski
Instytut Filozofii Socjologii i Dziennikarstwa
Wydział Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego
80-952 Gdańsk ul. Bażyńskiego 4, Poland
mdebs@wp.pl

Guillem Fernàndez Evangelista
ProHabitatge Association
C/ Consell de Cent no. 254, pis 2º2ª
08011 Barcelona, Spain
gfernandez@prohabitatge.org

Henk Fernee
Sociall en Cultureel Platbureau (SCP) (Netherlands Institute for Social Research)
Room C 0503,
Parnassusplein 5
2511 VX The Hague, The Netherlands
h.fernee@SCP.NL

Maja Flåto
The State Housing Bank,
Postboks 1243, Vika
0110 Oslo, Norway
Norwaymaja.flato@husbanken.no

Finn Kenneth Hansen
CASA
Kigkurren 8M
2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark
fkh@casa-analyse.dk

Katja Johannessen
Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research
Gaustadalléen 21
0349 Oslo, Norway
katja.johannessen@nibr.no

Sarah Johnsen
Heriot-Watt University
School of the Built Environment
Heriot-Watt University
Riccarton
Edinburgh, EH14 4AS, United Kingdom
s.johnsen@hw.ac.uk

Claire Lévy-Vroelant
Professeure de sociologie
Université de Paris 8-Vincennes
2, rue de la Liberté
93526 Saint-Denis Cedex, France
clevyvroelant@gmail.com

Stuart Lowe
Department of Social Policy and Social Work
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD, United Kingdom
stuart.lowe@york.ac.uk

Emese Mayhew
Department of Social Policy and Social Work
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD, United Kingdom
emese.mayhew@york.ac.uk

Bálint Misetics
The City is for All (Budapest)
balint.misetics@gmail.com

Magdalena Mostowska
Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR)
Gaustadalléen 21
0349 Oslo, Norway
mmostowska@yahoo.com

Frans Oldersma
Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen
(Department of Research and Statistics, Municipality of Groningen)
Postbus 1125
9701 BC Groningen, The Netherlands
frans.oldersma@os.groningen.nl

Silke Paasche
FEANTSA
194 Chaussée de Louvain
1210 Brussels, Belgium
silke.paasche@web.de

Roel Popping
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Dept. of Social Science Information Technology,
University of Groningen
Grote Rozenstraat 31
NL 9712 TG Groningen, The Netherlands
r.popping@ppsw.rug.nl

Ingrid Sahlin
Dept of Social Work
P.O. Box 720
405 30 Göteborg, Sweden
Ingrid.Sahlin@socwork.gu.se

Marybeth Shinn
Vanderbilt University,
Peabody College #90
230 Appleton Place
Nashville, TN 37203-5721, USA
beth.shinn@vanderbilt.ed

Lynette Šikić-Mićanović
Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar
Marulicev trg 19/1
HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia
lyn@pilar.hr

Thomas Specht
BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. – BAG W
Postfach 130148
33544 Bielefeld, Germany
thomasspecht@bagw.de

Anthony M. Warnes
Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing
University of Sheffield, Samuel Fox House
Northern General Hospital
Herries Road
Sheffield S5 7AU, United Kingdom
a.warnes@sheffield.ac.uk

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# Editorial

In June 2010 the European Council adopted the new Europe 2020 strategy, which sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the twenty-first century. In this strategy, the new EU poverty target is defined as 'promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion'.[1] A specific target concerning homelessness has not been set, but the Commission's proposal for Europe 2020 includes a European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which will 'transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion, and take concrete action'. One of the tasks for member states mentioned in this context is 'to define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk'. 'The homeless' are explicitly mentioned as one of these groups.[2]

The *European Journal of Homelessness* seeks to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidence base for policy development and innovation. In September 2009 the European Observatory on Homelessness, in collaboration with the European Network of Housing Research Working Group on Welfare Policy, Homelessness and Social Exclusion, organised the 4th Annual Research Conference on Homelessness in Europe. The theme of the conference was 'Homelessness and Poverty' and a number of papers from this conference are included in this edition of the journal. The publication of this, the fourth volume of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, will, we hope, contribute to the ongoing task of defining and implementing measures to address the needs of homeless people in Europe successfully.

1 Conclusions of the European Council, 17 June 2010, p.12, www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/loadDocument.aspx?id=339&lang=en&directory=en/ec/&fileName=115346.pdf.

2 European Commission (2010) *Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, COM(2010) 2020, pp.17–18, http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf.

## Peer-Reviewed Papers

Shinn explains differential rates of lifetime homelessness in the United States and Europe, as indexed by household surveys, by exploring the interrelationships between income inequality and tax and benefit programmes that increase or reduce poverty. Her paper explains the higher rates of homelessness across some nations in terms of four forms of social exclusion based on income, wealth, housing and incarceration, and argues that relative levels of homelessness across societies stem from societal choices in these domains.

In contrast to the wealth of information on homelessness in the US and northern and western Europe, research in central and eastern Europe is limited and Šikić-Mićanović provides new information from a qualitative research project on homeless people in Croatia. The paper demonstrates that homeless people in Croatia are disadvantaged in multifaceted ways that inevitably hinder their routes out of social exclusion.

Warnes, Crane and Coward examine the financial circumstances of 400 single homeless people in England who were resettled into independent accommodation: after six months, nearly nine-tenths had retained their tenancy and only sixteen were known to have become homeless again. Their findings indicate that resettlement into independent accommodation does work for many single homeless people, but that more attention needs to be given to specific aspects of current resettlement practice, most particularly the rarity of advice about the financial implications of being resettled.

The final paper in the peer-reviewed section provides an ethnographic account of the economic strategies that homeless people make use of when managing daily life. Based on interviews and participant observation among persons who have experienced long-term homelessness, Johannessen and Flåto argue that within the 'harvesting economy' the actors rely on their social relationships to cope, and find that their social networks and economic strategies reinforce each other.

## Policy Review

The first paper in this section builds on the journal's previous reviews of national homeless strategies in Scotland, Ireland and Finland. Hansen outlines the Danish national homelessness strategy for the period from 2009 to 2012. With an overall aim to reduce homelessness, the strategy has four goals: no one should live on the streets, young people should not stay at homeless hostels, no person should have to stay in a homeless hostel for more than 120 days, and better accommodation solutions must be in place for people being released from prison or leaving institutional care. This paper reviews the main features of the new strategy and argues that it does not fundamentally alter approaches to homelessness in Denmark, but it does provide a much stronger framework to develop effective initiatives at the local municipality level.

Calandrino explores the process that led to the choice of homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) as the 2009 social inclusion focus theme of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The paper highlights the main problems in addressing HHE in the current EU policy framework, and the ways in which they have been overcome. It analyses the activities carried out in 2009 and their main outcomes, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of such a process. Finally, it points at the key factors that could contribute to keeping HHE at the core of EU social policies. Although written on the eve of an important restructuring of the EU governance processes in the context of Europe 2020, this paper aims at drawing the most important procedural lessons from the OMC over the past ten years.

Bosch Meda explores homelessness among migrant groups in Spain. There is evidence that migrants are increasingly strongly represented in the homeless population of Spain. Experience of homelessness also appears to be particularly acute among recent migrants and to be becoming less common among more established migrant groups.

Fernee, Oldersma and Popping provide a detailed exploration of the process of shelter exits for homeless individuals and for different shelter types in the public shelter system in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. The results indicate that the use of day shelters, as well as demographic variables such as age, gender and nationality, are associated with a differentiated likelihood of continuing homelessness. The results of this study in the Dutch context are compared with research on the process of homelessness in the US, and the implications of these findings and future directions for research on the process of homelessness are discussed.

Bradshaw and Mayhew provide an authoritative overview of the debates on how best to measure poverty in the EU. The EU headline measure of poverty is the at-risk-of-poverty measure derived from the percentage of the population in households with incomes less than 60 per cent of the median. It has been incorporated into the EU 2020 poverty and social exclusion target, although combined with other indicators. The paper provides a critique of this approach, especially that it underestimates poverty in the new member states, and suggests alternative methods of measurement.

## Think Pieces

We are keen to stimulate debate on aspects of homelessness in Europe and this volume of the journal contains four contributions seeking to provoke such discussions.

Fernàndez Evangelista attempts to apply Amartya Sen's 'capabilities theory' to the study of homelessness. This involves understanding the concept of social exclusion as a constituent part of poverty that incidentally highlights the relational roots of poverty. The paper first provides definitions of 'home', 'homeless people' and 'homelessness' in terms of capabilities, in order to show that in many cases government policies are assessed according to the budget allocated to the area, or the amount of specific assets offered, rather than according to the entitlements of people and the capabilities they generate.

Boswell observes that older ex-homeless people are rarely regarded as contenders in the employment market and that it has been argued that resources aimed at improving their employability are unlikely to provide a sufficient return. Yet, routes out of homelessness are frequently identified as requiring shifts in lifestyles and networks. This paper looks at two organisations (one in Poland and one in the UK) that work with homeless people who are or have been roofless. It is argued that the language and ideology framing the work of an organisation strongly influence its model of provision and that a holistic approach with community and meaningful activity at its centre may be the way forward for some homeless people. There are two responses to this contribution in the debates section of the journal.

The German welfare state has undergone comprehensive reforms, especially in the field of integration of unemployed welfare recipients, and Specht highlights the negative consequences of these reforms on service provision for homeless people. This paper argues that, together with the appearance of new forms of poverty, the structure of homelessness has altered and the system of service provision for this target group must change accordingly. This requires more prevention services, greater cooperation between private and public bodies and a new vision of what social inclusion/integration into social life means in a radically restructured society.

Misetics provides an account of recent efforts to exclude homeless people from public spaces in Hungary through police sweeps, exclusionary adaptation of public furniture and anti-begging ordinances. The paper argues that such punitive measures gain legitimacy from a discourse that dehumanises homeless people, excludes them from the moral community and blames them for their homelessness.

## Debates

This section provides an opportunity for people to respond to other contributions to the journal.

Paasche outlines the lively debate that has emerged about the role that people experiencing homelessness should (or should not) play in designing, implementing and evaluating homelessness strategies and policies at local, national and European levels. With reference to the criteria for an ideal speech situation, as developed by Jürgen Habermas, the paper examines the validity of some of the key arguments that are usually put forward against the political participation of homeless people at European level. It concludes that, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, there is little scope to oppose the political participation or mobilisation of homeless people at European level without implicitly questioning one's own legitimacy to participate in the political discourse.

The next two contributions are responses to Boswell's paper in the policy review section of this volume on the experiences of the Barka and Emmaus organisations in providing self-help services to the homeless. Focusing on the Barka communities in Poland, Dębski questions whether they are suitable for all homeless persons, regardless of age, causes of homelessness or current life situation and contends that such communities do not help individuals to gain independence and integrate with society. On the contrary, he argues that they sometimes create an addiction to assistance and to the community of the homeless. Johnsen reflections on some of these issues from the perspective of a UK-based homelessness researcher. She advises that advocates of such communities, who endorse the model as an effective means of empowering homeless people and of fostering their economic independence, should exercise caution until the evidence base relating to these outcomes is more comprehensive.

## Conclusion

Our thanks go to all the contributors for ensuring that Volume 4 of the *European Journal of Homelessness* maintains the high standard set in the first three volumes. Collectively, the papers provide an important basis for reflection and debate on homelessness and dimensions of poverty across Europe.

We are pleased to announce that the journal will comprise two issues per annum from 2011 onwards. The first will be a themed issue, largely based on the theme of the previous year's research conference organised by the European Observatory on Homelessness and its partners. The second issue will be open to all papers that address aspects of homelessness in Europe. We look forward to receiving contributions to future volumes of the *European Journal of Homelessness* and the call for papers for the 2011 issues can be found at www.feantsaresearch.org.

# Articles

## Part A

# Homelessness, Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United States and Europe

Marybeth Shinn

Department of Human and Organizational Development, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, United States of America.

**Abstract_** *This paper explains differential rates of lifetime homelessness in the United States and Europe, as indexed by household surveys, from income inequality and tax and benefit programmes that increase or reduce poverty. These lifetime rates do not reflect recent efforts to reduce homelessness in some countries. The United States and the United Kingdom have higher lifetime rates of homelessness, more income inequality and, especially in the US, less generous social welfare policies than most European countries. The meagreness of family benefits in the US seems particularly associated with family homelessness. Two groups of people experience high rates of homelessness everywhere: racial minorities and people who experience mental illness. This paper explains their higher rates of homelessness across nations in terms of four forms of social exclusion based on income, wealth, housing and incarceration, and offers experimental as well as correlational evidence that discrimination remains important, at least in the US, today. Relative levels of homelessness across societies stem from societal choices in these domains.*

**Key Words_** *Poverty ; social exclusion ; homelessness ; race ; mental illness ; policy*

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## Introduction

Poverty and social exclusion are key causes of homelessness across developed nations. This paper takes a comparative perspective on the ways that social policies and cultural practices in the United States and Europe shape both levels of inequality and the particular groups who lack resources, and hence both rates of homelessness and the groups who are most likely to experience it. It argues that patterns of social exclusion are related to homelessness at two levels: they influence the overall generosity of social welfare programmes and they affect the ability of particular households to access income, wealth, jobs and housing. Structural factors such as poverty and social exclusion may interact with individual vulnerabilities to produce and maintain homelessness.

## Rates of Homelessness across Nations

A comparative analysis of the causes of homelessness must start with some estimate of its extent. It is difficult to get accurate figures on rates of homelessness within a society (Pleace et al., 1997), and differences in definitions, institutional structures and approaches to counting hamper comparisons across nations (Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008). One approach that generates reasonably comparable figures is a household survey that asks respondents whether they have ever experienced homelessness (in forms specifically defined). Most of the surveys reported here (Link et al., 1994; Manrique and Toro, 1995; Burrows, 1997; Toro et al., 2007; Miguel et al., 2010) asked about times when people were literally homeless, corresponding to the 2007 European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) categories 1 living rough, 2 in emergency accommodation and 3 in accommodation for the homeless, or times when they were living temporarily with relatives and friends (ETHOS category 8.1), also described as 'doubling up.'

These surveys of people in ordinary dwellings are far from perfect. They clearly underestimate lifetime rates of homelessness because they miss anyone who is currently homeless, as well as people at high risk of homelessness who are in institutional settings such as a prison or mental hospital or who are too poor to afford a phone. Such exclusions make the surveys worthless for estimating current homelessness or the effectiveness of recent policy changes, but are less serious over longer periods such as a lifetime. Telephone surveys may additionally exclude people with unlisted numbers and those with only mobile phones, but it is less clear how those situations affect reported rates. Despite these issues, the surveys provide some evidence about relative rates of homelessness across nations.

Rates of lifetime literal homelessness and homelessness plus doubling up temporarily with relatives or friends found in household surveys conducted between 1990 and 2006 are shown in the first two rows of Table 1. The standard errors of the observed proportions in the estimates from Toro et al. (2007) based on samples of 250 to 435 per country are on the order of 1 per cent; however, the relatively low response rates for most of the surveys (13 to 29 per cent) suggests somewhat less precision.

Two surveys did much better. Link et al. (1994) conducted a telephone survey in 1990 of a nationally representative sample of 1,507 households in the US and achieved a substantially higher response rate (63 per cent). An initial question asked, 'Have you ever had a time in your life when you considered yourself homeless.' As of 1990, 14.0 per cent of Americans reachable by phone in conventional dwellings reported having been homeless, 4.6 per cent in the previous five years. Follow-up questions led to the categorisation of respondents as literally homeless or doubled up, as shown in Table 1. Burrows (1997) reported on a 1994/5 representative sample of 9,933 households in England. When the respondents were asked, 'In the last ten years would you say that you have ever been homeless?', 4.3 per cent said they had been homeless over a ten-year period that encompassed the five years in the US survey. In both surveys, follow-up questions showed that homelessness was more common among some sectors of the population, especially poorer or lower class people, but the questions are not comparable, and the questions in Burrows did not distinguish literal homelessness from other forms or yield lifetime rates.

Two caveats suggest that telephone surveys may differentially underestimate rates of homelessness in the US relative to Europe. First is the use of slightly different wording in the questions: Americans were asked whether they had ever been homeless, followed by questions about where they had stayed, to allow classification into literal homelessness and doubling up; Europeans (except in Burrows, 1997) were asked whether they had 'ever been in a difficult situation, such as…' followed by comparable examples of the two states (Toro et al., 2007). That is, the Europeans did not have to define themselves as homeless to be counted, whereas the Americans did, likely biasing reported homelessness in the US downward. This is especially true since homelessness, rather than 'precarious housing' (Rossi, 1989), is typically defined more narrowly in the US than in Europe. Second, as shown later, imprisonment rates are sufficiently higher in the US that exclusion of people currently in prison from household surveys may depress estimates of homelessness in that country.

The dates of the surveys vary somewhat. Large-scale homelessness appears to have arisen later in Europe than in the US, if the timing of research reports is taken as an index. Philippot et al. (2007) note that, among European countries, only the UK and France had much literature on homelessness prior to 1996, whereas literature in the US had begun to burgeon a decade earlier. Recent efforts to combat homelessness, for example in Germany and the UK (Anderson, 2007 ; Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008), are unlikely to have much effect on lifetime history of homelessness ; however, any expansions in homelessness after the dates of the surveys would not be reflected.

Taking into account all of these caveats, it seems reasonable to conclude that rates of homelessness are higher in the US than in the UK (relying in particular on the studies by Link et al., 1994 and Burrows, 1997), but that rates in both countries are higher than those on the European continent, especially in Germany and Portugal (relying on the smaller telephone surveys).

**Table 1: Selected social and economic indicators: Countries with household survey results and selected others**

| | | US | UK | Italy | Belgium | Germany | Portugal | Sweden | France | Czech Republic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lifetime literal homelessness (1990–2006)[a] | 6.2/ 8.1%[b] | 7.7% | 4.0% | 3.4% | 2.4% | 2.0%[c] | – | – | – |
| 2 | Lifetime literal homelessness plus doubling up (1990–2006)[a] | 12.9/ 14.0%[d] | 13.9%[e] | 10.5% | 9.6% | 5.6% | 6.5%[f] | – | – | – |
| 3 | Share of income or consumption by lowest 10% (1996–2000)[f] | 1.9% | 2.1% | 2.3% | 3.4% | 3.2% | 2.0% | 3.6% | 2.8% | 4.3% |
| 4 | GINI coefficient (1996–2000)[f] | 40.8 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 33.0 | 28.3 | 38.5 | 25.0 | 32.7 | 25.4 |
| 5 | GINI market income (1994–2000) (Luxembourg)[g] | 45 | 45 | | 50 | 43 | | 44 | 49 | |
| 6 | % Reduction in market GINI by taxes, benefits (1994–2000)[g] | 18% | 24% | | 48% | 42% | | 43% | 47% | |
| 7 | Social benefits and transfers as % of GDP (2000)[h] | 10.6% | 15.6% | | | 20.5% | | 20.2% | 19.6% | |
| 8 | Social expenditures for families as % of GDP (1980–1998)[i] | 0.5% | 2.2% | | | 2.7% | | 3.3% | 2.7% | |
| 9 | Social rental sector as % of stock[j] | 3.2% | 18% | | | 7% | | 17.7% | 17.3% | 17% |
| 10 | Imprisonment per 100,000[k] | 760 | 149/ 154 | 97 | 94 | 90 | 105 | 74 | 96 | 210 |

[a] Toro et al., 2007, unless otherwise indicated.

[b] 7.4%, Link et al., 1994; 8.1%, Manrique and Toro, 1995.

[c] Miguel et al., 2010.

[d] 14%, Link et al., 1994.

[e] 4.3% self-defined homelessness over ten years in England, Burrows, 1997.

[f] UNDP, 2007, Human Development Indicators, section 15.

[g] Smeeding, 2005.

[h] Alesina and Glaeser, 2004, Table 2.1.

[i] Alesina and Glaeser, 2004, Table 2.2.

[j] Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007.

[k] International Centre for Prison Studies, 2009.

## Poverty and Inequality

Why are lifetime rates of homelessness in the US and the UK higher than elsewhere? Many authors have observed that English-speaking countries have greater income inequality (McFate et al., 1995; Smeeding, 2005) and less generous social programmes (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Smeeding, 2005) than other developed nations. Rows 3 to 8 of Table 1 illustrate this point with selected indicators of inequality and social transfer programmes.

Row 3 shows the share of income or consumption for the poorest 10 per cent of a country's population (UNDP, 2007), and row 4 gives the GINI coefficient, which indexes the extent to which the distribution of income (or consumption) in a society deviates from an equal distribution (UNDP, 2007). The GINI coefficient is thus sensitive to deviations from equality throughout the income distribution, not just at the bottom. By either measure, the US has greater inequality than any country in Western Europe. It has also seen greater increases in inequality over the past two to three decades (Smeeding, 2005). The UK is also high in terms of inequality and homelessness and Germany is low on both counts. Only Portugal, with high inequality but low homelessness, fails to follow the pattern.

Inequality is not simply a function of market forces. Smeeding (2005) calculated the extent to which inequality in market income was reduced by taxes and benefits in selected countries (based on data from the Luxembourg income survey). The results, given in rows 5 and 6 of Table 1, show that the US and UK are not outliers in terms of market income, but their tax and transfer programmes do less to reduce inequality than those in continental Europe. Thus, poverty is a function of low levels of social benefits as well as low wages in the US and UK (Smeeding, 2005).

Social benefit and transfer programmes are also directed at different groups of people in different countries, as shown in rows 7 and 8 of Table 1, based on calculations by Alesina and Glaser (2004). The US spends far less, as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), on transfer programmes than does continental Europe, with the UK in between, and much of the US spending benefits older adults (Alber, 2010), who consequently have much lower poverty rates than children (US Bureau of the Census, 2010). Alber (2010) points out that private spending in the US, particularly on pensions and health, is extremely high, but most of this spending is not redistributive in nature. People at the top of the income distribution are far more likely than low-wage workers to have both private pensions and health insurance. Almost one-third of the US population under the age of 65 lacked health insurance at some point in 2002 and 2003 (Alber, 2010). Recent health care reform legislation in the US should change these patterns over time.

Disparities in social spending between the US and Europe are particularly large in the case of social benefits to families, where the UK falls much closer to the other European than to the US values. Income supports for poor families in the US, including public assistance (welfare) and tax benefits, are increasingly conditioned on work effort (Blank, 2010), but erratic child care and volatile employment situations make it difficult for low-income single mothers of young children to maintain steady work (Chaudry, 2004).

Low rates of family benefits in the US are associated with high rates of family homelessness. One-quarter of all episodes of poverty in the US begin with the birth of a child (Waldfogel, 2001) and homelessness among families is also associated with childbirth (Weitzman, 1989). Indeed, infancy is the age at which shelter use is highest (based on calculations from age distributions in US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007), and almost one-third of the people in homeless shelters and other specialised homeless assistance programmes are members of families with children; 34 per cent of such homeless adults are female (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2009). Firdion and Marpsat (2007) find, across several European studies, that between 17 and 21 per cent of homeless adults are female (including those with and without children).

Many people in the US shelter system for single adults are in fact parents of minor children who have become separated from them. Burt et al. (1999, pp.12–13) reported that 60 per cent of all homeless women and 41 per cent of all homeless men in the US in 1996 had children under 18 years, but only 65 per cent of those mothers and 7 per cent of fathers lived with any of their children. In contrast, in Paris, few homeless men and about one-third of homeless women had children who were not with them (by subtraction from figures in Firdion and Marpsat, 2007), and it is not clear how many of these children were still minors. The larger proportions of homeless parents who are separated from their children in the US and the larger number of families in the homeless population are both likely consequences of US social policy.

Empirically, higher levels of inequality and lower levels of social benefits are associated with higher rates of homelessness. Although these associations do not prove causality, a causal relationship is plausible. O'Flaherty (1996) points in particular to a drop in the size of the middle class as a cause of the increase in costs for low-quality housing and a decrease in the stock of low-quality, low-rent housing.

Economic changes can also lead to homelessness. For example, Firdion and Marpsat (2007) emphasise industrial restructuring, which led to income loss for blue-collar workers in France. Similarly, in Central and Eastern Europe under socialism, housing and other forms of welfare were typically delivered through the workplace and social welfare spending remains low (Hladikova and Hradecky, 2007; Stephens and Fitzpatrick, 2007). In the Czech Republic, for example, homelessness became notable only after the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, despite continuing high levels of income equality. People retain a right to work but any social disruption or personal problem that leads to loss of an identity card also leads to loss of access to employment, housing and medical services (Hladikova and Hradecky, 2007).

Historically, economic cycles are also associated with cycles in homelessness. O'Flaherty and colleagues have shown the links between two recent recessions and increases in homelessness in New York City (O'Flaherty and Wu, 2006; Cragg and O'Flaherty, 1999). It is too early to judge the full effects of the current worldwide recession. The US Conference of Mayors (2009) reported that homelessness among families in the US increased in three-quarters of the cities participating in its survey for the year ending September 2009, whereas homelessness among single individuals decreased in a majority of cities. The report attributed increases to the recession and the lack of affordable housing and decreases to the success of policies aimed at ending chronic homelessness among adults with disabilities. It also reported the largest increase in requests for food assistance observed in eighteen years.

## Housing Policy, Poverty and Homelessness

Stephens and Fitzpatrick (2007) point out that housing systems may reinforce or counterbalance the effects of welfare regimes on poverty and inequality. In the US, housing policy tends to augment inequality. Homeownership is encouraged by tax deductions for mortgage income and property taxes, and these benefits flow mainly to wealthier individuals with larger mortgages and more expensive homes. In contrast, housing subsidies for poor renters come from direct budget outlays. In 2002 housing tax benefits to Americans in the top one-fifth of the income distribution totalled $89 billion, [1] whereas outlays to households in the bottom one-fifth totalled only $26 billion (Dolbeare and Crowley, 2002).

Across nations, the size of the social housing sector is not closely related to rates of homelessness (see row 9 in Table 1, based on Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007). For example, in the UK about 18 per cent of the housing stock is in the social housing sector, whereas in Germany it is only 7 per cent, but the ordering of homelessness in the two countries is reversed. What may be more important is the extent to which housing costs for available low-cost units exceed what poor people can afford to pay. The rise in homelessness in the US corresponded to the rising gap in housing affordability, with the loss of affordable units concentrated in the private sector (Shinn and Gillespie, 1994). Across several US data sets, homelessness was

1 All currency amounts are given in US dollars.

higher when rental costs were higher relative to incomes and when vacancy rates for inexpensive housing were lower (Quigley et al., 2001), although the quality of the estimates of homelessness could be challenged. O'Flaherty (1996) suggests that the key factors are increasing rents for low-quality units and decreasing the stock of low-quality, low-rent units. Currently there is no state in the US where a full-time worker employed at the minimum wage can afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment at the 'fair market rent' (a low average rent) determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, which assumes that people should spend no more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. Indeed, a worker would need to work from 63 hours per week in an inexpensive state (West Virginia) to 163 hours per week in an expensive state (Hawaii) to afford the fair market rent for a property with two bedrooms (Waldrip et al., 2009).

Further evidence that poverty is at the root of homelessness, at least for families in the US, comes from the fact that housing subsidies virtually eliminate it. These subsidies typically pay the amount by which the fair market rent for an apartment exceeds 30 per cent of the household's income. Studies in New York City have found that homeless families who received subsidies were far less likely to return to shelters (Wong et al., 1997) and far more likely to attain long-term stability (Shinn et al., 1998). Formerly homeless families who received subsidies attained the same levels of housing stability as poor families generally. The policy of providing subsidies to families in shelters also reduced shelter populations in New York (Cragg and O'Flaherty, 1999 ; O'Flaherty and Wu, 2006) and Philadelphia (Culhane, 1992). Subsidised housing and welfare and disability benefits were associated with exits from homelessness for adults and families in California (Zlotnick et al., 1999). A nine-city study in the US offered subsidies with various packages of social services to families chosen for their recurrent histories of homelessness and other risk factors. Housing retention was excellent : 88 per cent of the 601 families remained in housing for up to eighteen months in the six cities with follow-up data, but cities with more intense service packages did not have higher rates of housing stability (Rog et al., 1995a and 1995b).

Housing subsidies also prevent homelessness for poor families who receive them. A national random assignment study showed that provision of housing subsidies to families receiving public assistance reduced subsequent homelessness by 74 per cent in an analysis (treatment on the treated) that took account of the fact that not all families who were offered vouchers used them (Wood et al., 2008).

Cross-city surveys of rates of subsidised housing and of homelessness, such as the cross-national study of the size of social housing sectors (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007), do not show clear relationships between the two rates. Some researchers find clear benefits to subsidies (Mansur et al., 2002), others do not and this is perhaps, the researchers suggest, because housing subsidies are not well targeted at those in need of them (Early, 1998 and 2004; Early and Olsen, 2002). Although giving housing subsidies to homeless families draws some poor families into shelters, O'Flaherty and Wu (2006) find that the net effect is a reduction in homelessness. However, the 2008 FEANTSA annual theme report on housing and homelessness warns that housing subsidies, in contrast to social housing, may simply bid up prices at the bottom of the cost distribution. Under these circumstances, subsidies might help those who receive them, but not reduce overall rates of homelessness.

## Cultural Attitudes, Social Welfare Policy and Social Exclusion

Tax and transfer policies that shape income inequality do not arise in a vacuum, rather they reflect underlying cultural beliefs about the causes of poverty and the people deemed worthy of help. For example, in a sample of thirty nations, Alesina and Glaser (2004) found that the average extent to which survey respondents in a country believed that poverty is society's fault explained 43 per cent of the variance in social welfare spending. Among nations with per capita GDP of over $15,000 in 1998 (i.e. with the means to offer generous benefits), it explained 82 per cent of the variance. Specific to homelessness, Toro et al. (2007) found less compassionate public attitudes towards homelessness in the English-speaking countries with less equal income distributions and less generous social programmes than other nations.

Alesina and Glaser (2004) also explain the variability in social welfare spending as a proportion of GDP as an inverse function of ethnic fractionalisation in different societies. They argue that ethnic fractionalisation shapes social welfare policy directly, because majorities are unwilling to pay for redistributive policies that favour minority groups, and indirectly, because it interferes with the formation of a unified labour movement. In cross-national data they found that racial heterogeneity explained 66 per cent and linguistic heterogeneity (taken separately) explained 41 per cent of the variance in social welfare spending as a proportion of GDP. The greater racial heterogeneity of the US accounted for two-thirds of the gap in social spending between the US and Europe. Within the US, where the generosity of welfare benefits is decided by individual states, there was an inverse correlation between maximum welfare benefits and the percentage of the state population that was Black. By this argument, social exclusion of racial and linguistic minorities plays an indirect role in the origins of homelessness because it influences the generosity of social welfare programmes. But there are other more direct effects of racism and social exclusion.

## Racism, Social Exclusion and Homelessness

In a review of literature concerning homelessness in Europe, Philippot et al. (2007) suggest that stigmatised and excluded groups are more likely to become homeless everywhere. Across nations, two characteristics stand out: minority racial or ethnic status, and experience of mental illness. In the US, African Americans and Native Americans are overrepresented among people who become homeless (Burt et al., 1999; Hopper and Milburn, 1996). In France, Africans and people from overseas *départements* are at higher risk than others (Firdion and Marpsat, 2007). In England, Blacks are at risk (Burrows, 1997); in Australia, it is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples (Homelessness Task Force, 2008); and in Japan, discrimination against ethnic minorities such as the Ainu, Koreans and Okinawans and groups such as the Eta and Hinin who fall outside of the main social classes leads to their segregation in poor residential districts and hence, presumably, their heightened risk of homelessness (Okamoto, 2007).

People who experience mental illness are also overrepresented among those who become homeless in Europe (see review by Philippot et al., 2007), Australia (Homelessness Task Force, 2008) and the US, at least among single adults (Koegel et al., 1996), although the frequency of mental illness among homeless groups is often exaggerated by poor sampling and measurement (Lehman and Cordray, 1993). Fitzpatrick and Christian (2006) suggest that well-functioning housing markets, generous social welfare policies and high levels of employment may lower the overall prevalence of homelessness, but people who nevertheless become homeless may have more complex personal problems (see similar arguments by Shinn and Weitzman, 1990 and Buckner, 2008).

Although the state of homelessness can certainly lead to anxiety and depression, Philippot et al. (2007) find that the relationship between homelessness and mental illness tends to follow a social selection model; that is, people who experience mental illness are differentially likely to become homeless. Two facts suggest that the relationship between mental illness and homelessness is at best indirect. First, homelessness in the US arose well after the time when large numbers of people were released from mental hospitals, but coincided with the loss of inexpensive housing when many people with and without mental health problems became homeless (O'Flaherty, 1996). Second, people with serious mental illnesses can be stabilised in their own apartments, even after long histories of homelessness, with appropriate economic and social supports and respect for their personal choices (Tsemberis, 1999; Tsemberis et al., 2003 and 2004).

This paper argues that the relationship between homelessness and mental illness, like that between homelessness and minority status, is a function of societal choices, in particular the social exclusion of people with devalued identities. In the case of race and ethnicity, alternative explanations involving culture would have to take account of the great variety in cultural characteristics of excluded groups across nations. The mechanisms by which social exclusion leads to homelessness are quite similar for mental illness and minority status. For both, social exclusion in the areas of income, wealth, housing and imprisonment seem particularly important. Documentation is clearest in the case of race in the US, however, cross-national research suggests that the structure of prejudice is very similar in the US and Western Europe (Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995 ; Pettigrew et al., 1998) and it is plausible that links to homelessness are also similar.

### *Income*

The first form of exclusion is in access to adequate income, whether from employment or from social benefits. Whether people can afford housing is a joint function of housing costs and incomes, so people with lower incomes are at greater risk of homelessness. In the US, the earnings and employment of Black Americans relative to White Americans eroded in the 1980s, as homelessness began to rise, and in 1997 the median income of Black families was only 55 per cent that of White families (Conley, 1999). In 2008 the unemployment rate (among people available for work) was 10.1 per cent for Blacks and 5.2 per cent for Whites. Among full-time wage and salary workers, Black men earned 75 per cent of the amount paid to White men ; Black women received 85 per cent of the earnings of White women (US Department of Labor, 2009).

Differential outcomes do not necessarily prove discrimination if different groups bring different qualifications to the labour market. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) tested discrimination directly using a methodology developed by Jowell and Prescott-Clark (1970) in the UK. The researchers sent out up to four résumés in applications for each of over 1,300 jobs listed in newspapers in two US cities (Boston and Chicago). The résumés met the minimum requirements for the jobs but were of higher or lower quality in terms of experience, gaps in work history and additional credentials. Within each résumé pair (high quality or low quality), the researchers randomly assigned one a 'Black' name (e.g. Lakisha or Jamal) and the other a 'White' name (e.g. Emily or Greg), with the designation based on both the proportions of Black and White children actually given the names and perceptions of the names in survey data. The dependent measure was whether the employer called to invite the supposed applicant for an interview. Putative White applicants got an interview invitation for every ten résumés sent out, Black applicants for every fifteen ; a difference that held across occupational categories tested. The White advantage was equivalent to that conferred by eight additional years of experience on the résumé. Further, the return to higher versus lower quality résumés was greater for White than for Black applicants. Thus, current, ongoing discrimination in employment is an important mechanism linking race to social exclusion on a dimension (income) related to homelessness. A number of studies describe unemployment (i.e. inability to secure income) as a cause of homelessness (Firdion and Marpsat, 2007; Philippot et al., 2007).

Low levels of both social benefits and employment put individuals with mental illness at risk. In 2008, 7.5 million Americans received federal supplemental security income, 84 per cent on the basis of a disability, most frequently mental illness. The average monthly payment was $478 and more than half of recipients had no other income (Social Security Administration, 2009). Some states supplement federal disability payments, but in no state is the maximum combined payment sufficient to allow an individual to rent an efficiency apartment (a one-room unit without a separate kitchen or bedroom) at the fair market rent while spending no more than 30 per cent of income on rent. Indeed, in fifteen states, the fair market rent for an efficiency apartment exceeds the entire disability payment (Waldrip et al., 2009).

People who experience mental illness also face discrimination in employment (Draine et al., 2002), although this is illegal under the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, just as racial discrimination is illegal. Further, the structure of disability benefits in the US discourages work, since benefits depend on not earning too much. The law allows exclusion of some work income in the calculation of eligibility for benefits and continuation of health insurance under some circumstances in order to encourage work, but earnings while receiving disability benefits remain severely limited and recipients' work involvement remains low. Most people with serious mental illnesses have worked at some time, but job tenure tends to be short. Draine et al. (2002) suggest that poor employment records are associated less with mental illness per se than with other forms of social exclusion, namely prejudice in hiring, disruptions in educational attainment and living in poor neighbourhoods. They note that people with mental illness often take entry-level jobs in industries with high turnover, although the fact that they are differentially steered into these jobs represents yet another form of exclusion.

### *Wealth*

A second form of social exclusion is inability to accumulate wealth. In the case of race, historical discrimination in jobs, housing and credit markets affects the distribution of wealth, which is far more strongly associated with race in the US than is the distribution of income. For example, in 1994 the median net worth of White families was nearly eight times that of African American families (Conley, 1999, p.5). Thus, minority families have less of a cushion to fall back on in the event of a loss of income or housing crisis. For poor families, most wealth is tied up in housing, so the disparity in wealth translates directly into a disparity in secure housing. Further, African Americans' informal social networks of friends and relatives are also less likely to have assets, in the form of cash or housing, with which to help out.

Lack of wealth can affect homelessness across generations. Firdion and Marpsat (2007) note that many homeless adults grew up in low socioeconomic status or impoverished families. Such findings suggest three different underlying mechanisms. One, based on a 'culture' of poverty, suggests that children who grow up poor lack motivation to extricate themselves from that state as adults. A more economic theory suggests that adults from poor backgrounds have less individual or family wealth to draw on when they encounter difficult times. The fact that in a New York study of families receiving public assistance (Shinn et al., 1998) childhood poverty predicted shelter entry but had no effect on long-term housing stability after families received housing subsidies suggests that the second explanation may be more important. Any psychological factors lost potency when economic resources were provided. Firdion and Marpsat (2007) suggest a third mechanism, whereby growing up in poverty is related to poor physical and mental health in adulthood, which may make it harder to sustain employment. Childhood poverty is also related to the opportunity to acquire human capital (education and skills) that provides income in adulthood (Conley, 1999). Associations between race and educational attainment, unemployment and premarital childbearing in the US are all greatly diminished and sometimes reversed by taking the social class of the family of origin (parents' education and various forms of assets) into account (Conley, 1999), and this could be the same for homelessness as well.

In the case of mental illness, disability benefits in the US cease if an individual accumulates more than $2,000 in assets, with some exclusions. The most important such exclusion is for a home: people lucky enough to own a home are not turned out of it before they can receive disability benefits, but renters have no possibility of accumulating enough assets to purchase housing. The exclusions of income designed to foster work do not extend to exclusion of assets, although under special circumstances an individual is allowed to save the funds needed for a particular vocational goal (e.g. funds for education, training, work-related equipment or transportation). Permanent housing is not included among the approved goals (Social Security Administration, 2009).

### *Housing*

Discrimination in the housing market is a third form of social exclusion relevant to homelessness. One widely used measure of residential discrimination is the dissimilarity index, which calculates the difference in the distributions of two groups across a given geographic area. Across all US metropolitan areas, the dissimilarity index for African Americans relative to Whites in 2000 was.640, meaning that 64 per cent of African Americans would have to move from heavily Black to less segregated areas to achieve the same distribution as Whites. Dissimilarity was lower for Hispanics.509, and for Asians and Pacific Islanders.411 (Iceland and Weinberg, 2002, p.96). Of course, residential segregation is also associated with segregation in schooling (Pettigrew, 2004) and proximity to jobs (Kain, 1968; Wilson, 1996), both of which feed into economic disadvantage. But, as in the case of jobs, differential distributions do not prove active discrimination; experiments do.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) assesses racial discrimination via systematic paired tests in which two otherwise comparable renters or buyers, one minority and one White, visit rental or real estate agents to ask about advertised housing units. The test partners are matched on income, asset and debt levels, family circumstances, job characteristics, education levels and housing preferences. Discrimination is observed when only one member of the pair is offered the unit or gets some other form of favourable treatment such as a lower rent.

Although it is illegal, housing discrimination remained rampant in the latest round of national tests in 2000, with Whites receiving more favourable treatment than African Americans in 21.6 per cent of tests for rentals and 17.0 per cent of tests for sales. For the first time, Hispanics had even worse treatment, with 25.7 per cent of renters and 19.7 per cent of buyers experiencing discrimination relative to Whites (Turner et al., 2002). Real estate agents also steered White homebuyers into neighbourhoods that are overwhelmingly White, and Black homebuyers into areas where minorities are overrepresented in 12 to 15 per cent of cases (Galster and Godfrey, 2005). The authors suggest such steering into areas where homes are more and less likely to appreciate in value contributes to racial disparities in wealth. Because the HUD study examined only advertised units, and many rentals and sales occur more informally within segregated neighbourhoods, it is likely to underestimate overall levels of discrimination, particularly for African Americans.

Banks compound the problems of African American homeowners by systematically offering them higher cost loans than they offer to Whites. For example, in 2006 nearly 45 per cent of loans to purchase homes in low-income minority communities were high-priced ‘subprime’ loans, compared with 15 per cent of loans in high-income, predominantly White areas (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2008).

In the case of many people who experience mental illness, low incomes make renting on the private market nearly impossible. Although, as already noted, supported housing programmes that offer people private apartments and supportive services with respect for residents’ choices have successfully housed many people with histories of both homelessness and mental illness, many individuals are shunted into far more restrictive settings. A federal court recently ruled that New York State discriminated against thousands of mentally ill people in New

York City by placing them in privately run 'adult homes', where residents are segregated from other community members. Some homes even forced individuals to undergo unnecessary surgery to garner money from federal insurance programmes for their 'care' (Barron, 2009).

The consequences of housing discrimination and residential segregation for homelessness go beyond their effects on the prospects of individual households. Because owners are far more likely to default on high-cost than on low-cost loans, home mortgages in low-income minority areas are more likely to be foreclosed, destabilising communities and depressing property values for neighbours. Foreclosures of rental properties may also make tenants homeless (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2008). It has been found that individuals who experience homelessness in the US are disproportionately likely to come from impoverished neighbourhoods, which may have fewer resources to assist them (Culhane et al., 1996), although this study did not control for individual income.

## *Incarceration*

Imprisonment is another form of social exclusion that disproportionately affects both African Americans and people who experience mental illness in the US. Incarceration rates (in prisons and jails) are 6.5 times higher for Black men and 3.8 times higher for Black women than for their White counterparts. Approximately 11 per cent of Black males in their twenties were in prison or jail at mid-year 2006. Rates for Hispanics are 2.5 and 1.6 times higher than for Whites, but not as high as for Blacks (Sabol et al., 2007). Cross-national studies suggest that in every country, incarceration rates are higher for at least some minority groups than for the majority, with Black/White disparities in Ontario, and disparities involving Aboriginal peoples in Australia and in Canada even greater than the Black/White disparity in the US (Tonry, 1997). Further, those minorities with the highest crime and imprisonment rates also suffer other forms of social and economic disadvantage. However, not all disadvantaged groups have high crime and incarceration rates. For example, in the Netherlands, people from Morocco and Surinam have high crime and incarceration rates, but similarly disadvantaged people from Turkey do not (Tonry, 1997), although the cross-national studies of prejudice show higher Dutch prejudice against Turks than against Surinamers (Pettigrew et al., 1998).

Cross-national research suggests that although part of the difference in incarceration rates by race may have to do with simple bias, it has more to do with legally relevant factors that have differential consequences for different groups (e.g. different penalties for drugs favoured by different racial groups), and still more with actual rates of offending (Tonry, 1997). Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) suggest that offending rates are highly influenced by community-level poverty and social disruption to which African Americans in the US are differentially exposed – factors strongly associated with homelessness as well (Culhane et al., 1996).

Studies of individuals with serious mental illness who are living in the community in the US have found high lifetime rates of arrests (between 42 and 50 per cent). Draine et al. (2002) attribute this fact to the high rate of arrests in the US generally, and to overlap of study populations with other groups with high arrest rates, including people with low incomes and educations and high rates of unemployment, minority group members and substance users. Fischer et al. (2008) found that people with serious mental illnesses were not very likely to commit crimes, but the same individuals were more likely to do so during periods when they were homeless than during periods when they were housed. Offences included 'subsistence crimes' such as stealing food, failing to pay fares on public transport and trespassing or breaking into a place to sleep, as well as more serious crimes, which may have been precipitated by stressful and sometimes dangerous living conditions in shelters.

The US leads the world in terms of the proportion of its population – 760 people per 100,000 – behind bars. The base here is all people, not just adults. Countries in the former Soviet Union also have high rates (e.g. Russian Federation 618 and Georgia 423 per 100,000), followed by some countries in Eastern Europe. Among countries in Western Europe, rates are highest for the UK, as shown in row 10 of Table 1 (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2009). Because former prisoners are more likely than others to become homeless (Firdion and Marpsat, 2007; Philippot et al., 2007), and because individuals who are incarcerated are missed in telephone surveys, the far higher rate of imprisonment in the US than in Europe may create a differential bias in telephone survey estimates of homelessness.

Whether or not homelessness and crime share common aetiologies, there is strong reason to believe that imprisonment is causally related to homelessness in the US, both for the individuals incarcerated and for their families. Approximately 1.7 million children had a parent in state or federal prison in 2007, including 6.7 per cent of Black children, 2.4 per cent of Latino children and 0.9 per cent of White children; about half of the parents had provided primary financial support for their children prior to their incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Families lose income while a wage earner is imprisoned, and the offender's employment prospects are diminished after release. A felony conviction also entails a range of civil disabilities that often last long after completion of a sentence. Depending on the state, people convicted of felonies, especially drug offenders, can be denied welfare benefits, food stamps and financial aid for higher education (Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2002). When a released felon returns to live with family, the entire family is barred from many forms of subsidised housing, regardless of need. Similarly, families can be evicted from public housing if any member is found using an illegal drug (Rubinstein and Mukamal, 2002). In England and Wales, hostels provided for ex-offenders are often squalid, and social housing, when offered, is often in poor locations (Carlisle, 1997).

Former offenders also find it difficult to gain employment. Pager (2003) used a variant of the audit methodology employed in housing tests to examine this phenomenon. He sent paired testers of the same race (both Black or both White) to visit employers and apply for advertised entry-level jobs on successive days. One member of the pair was assigned to have a criminal record: a non-violent felony drug conviction for possession with intent to distribute cocaine, with a consequent eighteen-month prison sentence. Members of the pair rotated in who portrayed the offender, and were equated in other ways. The putative offender disclosed the offence on applications whenever requested (74 per cent of application forms asked), listed work experience in the correctional facility and offered his parole officer as a reference. The dependent variable was a call-back for an interview. Whites without a criminal record were twice as likely to receive a call-back as Whites with a criminal record (34 versus 17 per cent a 2: 1 ratio). Overall levels of call-backs were far lower for Blacks (although this comparison was quasi-experimental, since Black and White pairs applied for different jobs), and the effect of a criminal record was (non-significantly) stronger: 14 per cent of Blacks with no criminal record were called for an interview compared with only 5 per cent of those with a record, almost a 3: 1 ratio. African Americans with criminal records thus suffer two forms of social exclusion, which may compound each other.

The collateral consequences of imprisonment extend beyond families to communities. The census practice of counting prisoners in the county where the prison is located rather than in their home community transfers political power away from poor urban communities (Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2002). Further, because felons are disenfranchised in many states even after serving their sentences, differential rates of imprisonment by race lead to high levels of disenfranchisement in urban, minority communities. Four million Americans, disproportionately African American, were disenfranchised in the 2000 elections (Mauer, 2002). By way of contrast, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against blanket disenfranchisement of current prisoners in 2004 in *Hirst v United Kingdom*.[2]

2 *Hirst v United Kingdom (No. 2)*, Application No. 74025/01, European Court of Human Rights, Fourth Section, 30 March 2004.

## Poverty, Social Exclusion and Individual Risk Factors for Homelessness

The different forms of social exclusion described here all too often intertwine with one another and with poverty to put people at risk of homelessness. This paper's focus on poverty and social exclusion does not deny the role of individual vulnerabilities such as experience of mental illness in the path to homelessness. Rather it asks why, and in what sort of society, is homelessness the all-too-frequent penalty for mental illness? What sort of society allocates housing and homelessness at least partly on the basis of race? What sort of society routinely flouts its own laws against discrimination?

In any society, individuals will have bad luck and make bad choices. Societies reasonably impose consequences for some of those choices, such as prison sentences for criminal offences, although reasonable people may debate the extent and severity of those sentences. Serving a prison sentence is colloquially called 'paying one's debt to society'. What sort of society imposes continuing poverty and homelessness on people who have paid those debts?

Similar analyses could be extended to other risk factors for homelessness. For example, the breakdown of relationships is frequently cited as a contributor to homelessness (Firdion and Marpsat, 2007; Hladikova and Hradecky, 2007; Okamoto, 2007; Philippot et al., 2007; Toro et al., 2007) and may be particularly important because it disrupts access to income and housing. Jencks (1994) suggested that divorce is the primary cause of homelessness among US families. However, rates of both divorce and single parenthood are as high in Belgium as they are in the US, but Belgium has half the rate of homelessness (Toro et al., 2007). The difference is most likely in the strong family supports provided by the Belgian government. International comparisons demonstrate that here, as elsewhere, social policy can compensate for many individual vulnerabilities.

National tax and social welfare policies shape the structure of inequality in nations, and are associated with levels of homelessness. Patterns of social exclusion determine which groups in a society are at greatest risk. Welfare policies can counteract individual risk. Just as individuals sometimes make choices that may lead them to homelessness, nations make choices that can lead to high rates of homelessness for their citizens, and differentially high rates for socially excluded groups.

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# Homelessness and Social Exclusion in Croatia

Lynette Šikić-Mićanović[1]

Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar

**Abstract_** *Homelessness is a relatively new phenomenon in most Croatian cities and has been largely ignored by policy makers and social scientists. This paper is based on the research outcomes of a qualitative research project that aims to contribute new data on a previously unresearched social group in Croatia and respond to the urgent need for a fuller understanding of the perceptions and experiences of homeless people in Croatia. The project's holistic approach takes a broad ecological and gendered perspective, viewing an individual's homelessness within larger processes in society. This paper has a social exclusion focus with the intention of identifying the disadvantages that homeless people in Croatia face. Following a brief description of their demographic characteristics, the implications of their material poverty will be discussed. The paths and consequences of (repeated) periods of homelessness and how it reflects on the individual's social well-being will then be examined. The findings show that homeless people in Croatia are disadvantaged in multifaceted ways that inevitably hinder their routes out of social exclusion.*

**Key Words_** *Homelessness; social exclusion; Croatia; qualitative research*

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## Homelessness and Social Exclusion

Rather than being linked to poverty or deviance, homelessness is increasingly being viewed as a component, expression or manifestation of social exclusion (Pleace, 1998; Edgar et al., 2000; Edgar and Doherty, 2001; Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001), as a process by which individuals and groups become isolated from major societal mechanisms providing social resources (Room, 1992). It has been noted that having a roof over one's head is 'a gateway through which we connect to our immediate environment and society at large. It reflects social status, belonging to community, a centre to gather with friends and family and has a direct bearing on the extent to which we experience social inclusion or exclusion' (Chisolm, 2001).

Since poverty alone is too static a term and is often too narrowly understood in terms of income, this study uses the social exclusion concept, which takes into account more dimensions of people's lives and the dynamics that affect people's situations over time. Clearly, belonging to the socially excluded is well beyond the mere experience of being poor. Whereas poverty is essentially an economic concept denoting lack of disposable income, exclusion entails a relative loss of social and political rights (De Venanzi, 2003, pp.474–5). As Wright (2005, p.926) purports, people 'become' homeless because they are socially constructed as unworthy of the rights of citizenship that others enjoy and because their very being is defined as existence on the economic, social, cultural or political fringe. Thus, social exclusion, broadly defined, implies exclusion from formal citizenship rights, the labour market, educational opportunities and participation in civil society and social arenas.

While social exclusion remains a highly contested term, Kennedy and Fitzpatrick (2001, p.2003) propose that commonalities can be identified in the definitions and most imply that:

- Social exclusion is a multidimensional concept that embraces income poverty but is broader: it also encompasses deprivation across social, economic and political spheres of life.
- Social exclusion is concerned with the processes that sustain disadvantage. The socially excluded are those whose long-term life chances are severely restricted.
- Social exclusion is often, but not necessarily, concentrated in particular neighbourhoods and social groups.

Silver (1994, p.539) argues that the meaning of social exclusion depends on the nature of the society, or the dominant model of the society from which exclusion occurs, and it varies in meaning according to national and ideological contexts.

## The Post-Transition/War Context

Homelessness as a social phenomenon and a sign of social exclusion takes different forms depending on economic, political, legislative and social factors in a given social system and context. Post-transition countries have experienced significant socio-economic and political changes in which economic reforms and political liberalisation have transformed institutional structures, including social services, beyond recognition. The elimination of job security and security of tenure, the explosion of public utility prices, the disappearance of workers' hostels and the decrease in hospital beds, amongst other things, have led to an increase in homelessness in the larger cities of Eastern and Central Europe (Hertting et al., 1999).[2]

A rapid and large growth in social inequalities has been observed in all transition countries (Bićanić and Franičević, 2005). Many citizens were unprepared for these changes, which jeopardised their 'cradle to grave' security and seriously affected their well-being in the post-transition period. Social policy was part of the ideology of socialist countries; it was integrated into the political systems and was part of the political rhetoric. Many of the advantages enjoyed during socialism[3] (e.g. full employment, social security, food/flat subventions, free health care, free education, gender equality) were lost or transformed, which increased vulnerabilities.

The transition phase from a socialist to a market economy was further complicated by the war in Croatia (1991–1995), which had a devastating impact on Croatia's economic and social fabric and was characterised by hyperinflation and a decline in output, especially industrial output, depreciation of the country's currency, increasing rates of unemployment, higher levels of poverty and the growth of an informal economy (UNDP, 1997). This 'produced' an enormous population of poor unemployed persons, displaced persons and refugees who were dependent on relatives, friends, humanitarian organisations and the state. Moreover, there was a marked lack of non-governmental organisations in Croatia in the early 1990s to alleviate these problems.

Unfortunately, very little data is available on the social inequalities that were exacerbated, and the poverty that emerged, prior to and as a result of these changes. Survey-based social statistics were not developed in Croatia in the pre-transition period as the collection of data on inequalities during socialism was considered to be unnecessary and was largely ignored by policy makers. Correspondingly, hardly any media attention was given to these themes and any attempt to document

2 Similarly, as the experiences of newer EU member states have shown, the latest transition (integration) has increased the number of homeless people in Europe. Candidate country status was granted to Croatia by the European Council in mid-2004.

3 Social policy under socialism repeatedly rewarded those classes that showed themselves to be politically loyal, while social rights themselves remained an unachievable ideal (Novak, 2001, p.111).

inequalities was hidden from public view. In any case, following the collapse of socialism, countries were literally unprepared for such a phenomenon as homelessness as they lacked resources and an understanding of the issue.

Thus, knowledge about the incidence and scope of poverty and social exclusion in Croatia is very limited, with little academic research conducted on the topic before the late 1990s.[4] Many vulnerable groups have either not been sufficiently covered by research or are too small or hidden to be included in large-scale surveys (e.g. homeless people). There is very little data available to date on poverty dynamics in Croatia, on how long people remain in poverty and on what happens to them during that period.

## State of Affairs for Homeless People in Croatia

In a context of economic transition/recession and high unemployment, political agendas that focus mostly on financial savings often translate into cutbacks in social services for the most vulnerable. There are also a number of structural causes of vulnerability that contribute to increasing homelessness in Croatia:

- The right to housing is not explicitly specified in the Constitution (Croatia, 2001) even though this is a basic human right.[5]
- Only one per cent of GDP is reserved for the unemployed and the poor (Babić, 2007); almost all homeless persons struggle to make ends meet as they are not part of the formal economy.
- Homeless people have no legal status and there is no law that guarantees their social inclusion.[6] This situation creates enormous problems for persons with no address, since a legitimate address is a precondition for most civil rights and social benefits (including access to housing, formal employment, medical insurance, education, unemployment and other social benefits and the right to vote).

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4 There have been a few studies on poverty and/or social exclusion since transition (see World Bank, 2001 and 2006; *Poverty Monitoring Study*, 2004; UNDP, 2006).

5 Instead the Constitution states that the state must ensure the right to assistance for weak, helpless and other persons unable to meet their basic needs owing to unemployment or the incapacity to work (Article 57). Articles 35 and 62 refer to a dignified life and the promotion of the right to a decent life but do not make specific reference to housing.

6 There is no official definition of homelessness in Croatia, which makes it particularly difficult to acknowledge the growing number of homeless citizens; the true number may remain unknown if homelessness is narrowly defined.

- Since homeless people are inadequately represented politically, their needs are not being met and it is unclear who is directly accountable for their welfare.
- There are no national housing programmes for vulnerable groups such as homeless people.
- There are no national prevention programmes, for example for those who were raised in institutions and become homeless as adults.

These are all factors of prevailing social exclusion that make the exit from homelessness very difficult. The establishment of shelters for homeless people, particularly in the last decade, is evidence of their ever-increasing numbers and vulnerability. Rough estimates on the numbers of homeless are around 400 for Zagreb, between 50 and 100 for Osijek, around 30 in both Split and Rijeka and between 20 and 25 in Varaždin (Bežovan, 2008, p.22). In response to an obvious need, seven more shelters are planned throughout Croatia (in Pula, Vukovar, Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Dubrovnik, Sisak and Petrinja).

Although homelessness is not mentioned in any legislation, homeless people are entitled to various forms of assistance through the social welfare system if they have a registered address within the Croatian county where they are seeking assistance. This assistance can only be obtained through a centre for social welfare and includes shelter, financial assistance, food and clothes. For those who do not have an address (due to loss of their identity card or because they cannot find anyone to provide them with a fictional address following the expiry of their identity card), assistance is usually sought from religious or humanitarian organisations.[7]

To reiterate, this paper on homelessness in Croatia has a social exclusion focus with the intention of identifying the multifaceted disadvantages that hinder homeless people's routes out of homelessness. The overall aim of this study is to see how different dimensions of people's lives, and the dynamics which affect people's situations over time, relate to the homeless people who are part of this research sample. First, it examines the implications of their material poverty in light of their demographic characteristics; it then looks at the paths and consequences of (repeated) periods of homelessness; and finally it discusses their social capital networks to determine further the degree of their marginalisation.

7 This assistance is not always free of charge. For example, the Red Cross shelter in Zagreb charges 40 HRK (€5.50) a night if homeless persons do not have a referral from the social welfare centre.

## Research Methodology

This qualitative study focuses on the ways in which women and men experience homelessness; it was not designed to obtain a representative profile of homeless people but to increase understanding of homelessness and social exclusion in Croatia. In particular, this pioneering national qualitative study[8] focuses on social background and life histories as well as presenting the living standards, life cycles, experiences and aspirations of those who are homeless. Ethnographic methods (participant observation and open-ended interviews) were employed in the research project. Through the fieldwork it was possible to gain a better understanding of cultural behaviour and actions, as well as beliefs. With regard to our presence and interaction in the field, we experienced what Scheper-Hughes (1992) so movingly described in her own research work: most people welcomed the chance to talk, to be heard and to feel that their experiences held significance for others.

Fieldwork was carried out in seven cities – Zagreb (capital of Croatia), Varaždin, Karlovac, Osijek, Rijeka, Split and Zadar – by a team of researchers (under my coordination) from the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar and a number of students. As homeless people are a hard-to-reach group, research was mainly conducted at shelters throughout Croatia. Arrangements were always made with shelter coordinators prior to fieldwork and in many instances shelter coordinators/workers set up meetings with shelter users or at least suggested who would be able to participate in this study at the beginning of our research at each shelter.

Field research was conducted between April and November 2009 and involved both day and night visits, depending on the opening times of the shelter. Cooperation and collaboration with shelter coordinators and workers was essential for the success of this study as they also assisted in recruiting participants and providing 'private' spaces (e.g. offices, rooms, outdoor benches) for fieldwork interviews and participant observation.

Ten shelters for homeless people were included in this study. Each of the above-mentioned cities has one shelter for homeless people with the exception of Zagreb, where there are three (which are also the largest shelters), and Split, where there are separate shelters for men and for women. Four of the shelters are run by a Catholic organisation (Caritas), three are non-governmental organisations, two are

8 Although one quantitative study had been conducted on the socio-demographic features of homeless people in Zagreb in 2002 (Bakula-Anđelić and Šostar, 2006), the only qualitative research concerning this marginalised group was a study involving two focus groups with eleven homeless persons in Zagreb and seven in Split (UNDP, 2006).

operated by the city in which they are located, and the remaining one is run by a humanitarian organisation (Red Cross). All but two of the shelters had opened during the last decade.

Shelter life offers homeless people a number of advantages such as food, water, shelter, security, a 'safe' night's sleep, a place for their possessions, health care, a structure to their day, companionship, independence, dignity, self-respect and hope, though some of these largely depend on the objectives, services and staff of the shelter. For this reason, a national sample proved very useful in understanding the spectrum of care that is available for homeless people throughout Croatia. The range of shelters varies from very basic shelter/emergency assistance to supportive holistic assistance (e.g. life skills, therapy, housing, job training) that aspires to provide rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration. Most of the shelters in the sample belong to the basic shelter/emergency type that provide 'a place to sleep and wash' without any supportive services.

Quality standards are not governed by law nor are there any regulations with regard to staff at shelters that cater specifically for homeless people in Croatia.[9] This lack of regulation was apparent ; for example, mice and cockroaches at one shelter pose health risks, discomfort and anxiety to the homeless people who use it.

The first part of the research involved a questionnaire on demographic details that was completed by twenty women and sixty-five men at different shelters for homeless people throughout Croatia. Subsequently, all twenty women and forty-three of the men participated in semi-structured interviews that allowed discussion to flow freely and for participants to explain something further when they wished to. Participation was not compulsory and participants were given the option of ending the interview at any time.

Interview questions focused on the following areas : life prior to homelessness ; paths into and out of homelessness/aggravating factors ; typical routines – daily activities, relationships, social capital, etc. ; problems – existential, psychological, health, institutional, etc. ; ideal constructions of femininity and masculinity ; identity ; plans for the future and suggestions for improvement. Interviews were of varying length ; most lasted for an hour while the longest went on for three hours. Almost all interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word with the knowledge and oral consent of participants. The project was designed to give participants a voice,

9 More generally, there is a regulation consisting of 165 articles on children's and adults' homes (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 1999), which refers to the types, activities and conditions of homes. Although Articles 80, 89 and 130 relate to building regulations (i.e. accessibility, space, conditions) as well as staff requirements at homes, they do not specifically refer to homeless people or shelters for homeless people.

and interview transcripts are essentially a collection of their perspectives that were sometimes confirmed, refuted or clarified by other shelter users and shelter coordinators and workers.

Ongoing consultation with shelter coordinators and workers was essential throughout the research and proved to be invaluable when participants were not able to respond to questions or when questions were perceived as invasive or threatening, as well as when there were too many inconsistencies in their stories. Novac et al. (1999, p.4) also confronted these difficulties and concluded that pooling the observations of those with many years of experience is a particularly effective method for learning about the experiences of persons who are unlikely or unable to answer demanding questions for research purposes.

## Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Twenty women and sixty-five men who were using shelter facilities at the time of the fieldwork were included in this analysis. Access to female participants depended on the number of women using shelter services. The number of shelter beds available for women at each shelter is always much smaller than the number available for men, which seems to suggest that homelessness is a much more dangerous condition and more hidden for women than men.[10]

With regard to the demographic characteristics of the sample (see Table 1), the average age for males is 52.4 years, which is only slightly higher than the average age for women of 50.6 years. A high majority (72 per cent) of participants were born in Croatia and just over one-quarter (26 per cent) were born in the former Yugoslavia. Over one-third (36 per cent) have lived (from birth) in the city where the fieldwork was conducted. Almost all participants hold Croatian citizenship (95 per cent) and are of Croatian nationality (88 per cent). Most of participants are Catholics (70 per cent) while a smaller number (13 per cent) do not belong to any religious denomination.

Most of men in the sample are divorced (57 per cent) or single (32 per cent). As for women, most are single (35 per cent) or divorced (30 per cent) and a smaller number are married (20 per cent). About two-thirds of the research participants have children (70 per cent of women ; 57 per cent of men).

Most males as well as most females had finished (some level of) secondary school (68 per cent for men ; 55 per cent for women) or (some level of) primary school (25 per cent for men ; 35 per cent for women). In terms of skills, a relatively high number

10 According to Webb (1994), hidden homelessness takes many forms, for instance a nomadic existence of moving from household to household among family and friends, or being trapped, sometimes suffering harassment or abuse, but unable to secure alternative accommodation.

of participants know another language (42 per cent) and almost one-third hold a driver's licence (28 per cent) but only a small number are computer literate (9 per cent). With a lack of available educational opportunities (requalification), this population does not have the cultural capital necessary to overcome the obstacles of the competitive market economy. Undoubtedly, the risk of poverty is particularly high when low levels of education are combined with unemployment.

**Table 1: Main demographic characteristics of the shelter population**

| **Characteristic** | **(N=85)** | **Male (N=65)** | **Female (N=20)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age (in years)** | | | |
| Average | | 52.4 | 50.6 |
| Range | | 22–77 | 19–79 |
| **Place of birth** | | | |
| Croatia | 61 (72%) | 45 (69%) | 16 (80%) |
| Former Yugoslavia | 22 (26%) | 18 (28%) | 4 (20%) |
| Elsewhere | 2 (2%) | 2 (3%) | – |
| **Marital status** | | | |
| Married | 7(8%) | 3 (5%) | 4 (20%) |
| De facto/cohabiting | 4(5%) | 3 (5%) | 1 (5%) |
| Divorced | 43 (51%) | 37 (57%) | 6 (30%) |
| Widowed | 3 (3%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (10%) |
| Single | 28 (33%) | 21 (32%) | 7 (35%) |
| **Level of education** | | | |
| (some) Primary school | 23 (27%) | 16 (25%) | 7 (35%) |
| (some) Secondary school | 55 (65%) | 44 (68%) | 11 (55%) |
| Post-secondary education | 7 (8%) | 5 (7%) | 2 (10%) |

## Access to Economic Capital

Employment and its implication of belonging somewhere is a key solution to many forms of social exclusion. The majority of research participants (69 per cent) in this study are not formally employed but depend on social welfare (between 500 and 1,000 HRK or €67 to 135 monthly) or pensions (disability, war veteran or retirement pensions of between 1,000 and 3,000 HRK or €135 to 406 per month). Relying exclusively or primarily on the social service infrastructure for assistance fosters a sense of dependence that many find debilitating and inadequate. Almost half (45 per cent) of the participants attempt to supplement their income by working in the shadow economy (e.g. collecting recyclables/bottles, construction work, care work).

Many of the participants in this study have financial problems and do not feel valued, independent or connected to others because their social benefits/pensions are insufficient in themselves to secure a route out homelessness and the work that they do to make ends meet is often characterised by irregularities, difficult conditions, poor pay, lack of security, discrimination and ill-treatment. When asked about their 'most serious' problem, almost all participants in the study pointed to a shortage of money that often and unavoidably affects their physical and mental well-being.

One research participant, Katarina (aged 56), had worked in the formal economy for twenty-three years, but is now compelled out of desperation to sell clothes on the streets illegally (and avoid police harassment) in order to meet her basic needs:

> 'The most serious is financial… every day I pounce like a rat from a hole to earn money. It is terrifying to be without money. I essentially get up every morning for what – 10 kuna [€1.30]… and that is good, that is great if I get that. So if you are thirsty and want to drink something you have to put up with your thirst until you get some money.'

Only 34 per cent of research participants have a bank account, which suggests that many do not have savings to alleviate their financial problems. With regard to previous formal employment, almost all research participants were employed prior to homelessness (94 per cent of men and 95 per cent of women). Alarmingly, the number of years spent working in the formal economy tends to be very high; most (39 per cent) participants had spent between ten and twenty years working, while 22 per cent had worked for between twenty and thirty years.

Overall, these demographic characteristics illustrate the limited access of the homeless people in this study to economic and cultural capital, which contributes considerably to their marginalisation and inevitably hinders their routes out of social exclusion.[11] In most cases they do not have enough money to live on, nor do they have other assets (e.g. land, flat or house, investments) to alleviate this deficiency. They do not have opportunities for further education or training, something that would improve their chances of finding a job in the formal economy. Many are either too sick or are considered too old to work: 22 per cent of research participants are between 41 and 50 years of age while most of the sample (62 per cent) are aged

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*11* Bourdieu (1986) claimed that an individual's position in a social space is not defined by class but by the amounts of capital he or she has access to. He distinguished four different forms of interconnected, interdependent and context-specific capital that together constitute advantage and disadvantage in society: economic – wealth inherited or generated from interactions between the individual and the economy; cultural – the collection of non-economic forces such as varying investments in and for education and different resources that influence academic success, as well as commitments to family background and social class; social – all actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition; and symbolic – any ability or asset that is considered by a group of people as being valuable.

over 50. This sample can thus be described as 'rather old', which further explains their exclusion from the labour market during a recession marked by escalating levels of unemployment.

By virtue of their demographic characteristics, homeless people are clearly more vulnerable to social exclusion than others: they are marginalised and excluded from participating in economic, social, cultural and symbolic activities that are the norm for other people. Men are in a particularly helpless and vulnerable position; they are seen as failures due to the prevalent breadwinner ideology that was successfully promoted in the post-transition period (the expectation that men should be the sole, or at least the main, breadwinners and providers).[12]

Highlighting the significance of employment and the monetary reward that is usually the outcome of a job, one research participant, Dario (aged 61), explained the difference between homeless persons and 'others' as well as the way he perceives the relation between money and manhood: 'We are just like everybody else, all except we don't have a roof over our heads… and a job. If you don't have money you are not a man!'

Results clearly show that the experience of poverty is different for men and women; this difference is related to men's experience of 'gender shame' and their persistent reluctance to seek help. As many of the men in this sample are unable adequately to fulfil the breadwinner/provider role and achieve economic independence, they often retreat and conceal themselves in shelters indefinitely. As a result, they become more vulnerable to chronic homelessness than women. Without doubt the war also has had a detrimental effect upon many of these men, who were often unable to return to their families and jobs on their return from the frontline due to post-traumatic stress disorder.[13]

Homeless people in general are also prone to the health problems typically associated with poverty (e.g. malnutrition, infectious diseases and psychosocial stress caused by solitude and insecurity) and they may also be more vulnerable to such health problems than the rest of the population (World Health Organization, 2000, p.24). Inevitably, acute and chronic illnesses often prevent homeless people from working or even getting a job in the first place. Fatigue is also a problem for many of the research participants in this study. As a result of early mornings at shelters, where they are required to 'get up and out' without the luxury of 'sleeping in' or 'sleeping in peace', many feel exhausted and not fit for work, which further disadvantages them.

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*12* In this deliberate reinforcement of the 'traditional values' of a patriarchal society, discursively and in practice, women in the new democratic Croatia were urged or even compelled to return to their 'private' domains.

*13* As many as 220 war veterans have been registered as shelter users according to data obtained from the homeless shelters in this study. Shelters often assist users to obtain war veteran pensions.

## Paths to and Periods of Homelessness

In this study we found that there is never just one path into homelessness, but that it is a process with many possible routes and aggravating factors. Paths into homelessness that were mentioned included: violence and trauma (abuse and neglect) in childhood (dysfunctional families, institutionalised childhoods); unemployment; financial problems and debts; poor health; forced exile; family break-up following divorce; loss of home, including displacement due to war; death of a spouse; imprisonment; flight from abusive relationships; and life choice. Aggravating factors included: inadequate services; unemployment and/or lack of finances; personal inertness; and lack of support from family and friends.

Analysis of interviews reveals that many research participants experienced long-term and multifaceted difficulties that could in some cases be traced back to their childhood. While men's homelessness can be attributed primarily to unemployment and poor access to different forms of capital, the impact of violence on homeless women, past and present, is a strikingly significant factor in women's paths into homelessness in this study. Findings show that the process of becoming homeless can begin in childhood; the abuse and/or neglect that women in particular sustain inevitably constrains further life chances and increases the probability of social exclusion. Thus, in most cases, individual experiences of homelessness were connected to larger social processes and conditions, and routes into homelessness were triggered by situational factors rather than anything inherent in the individual.

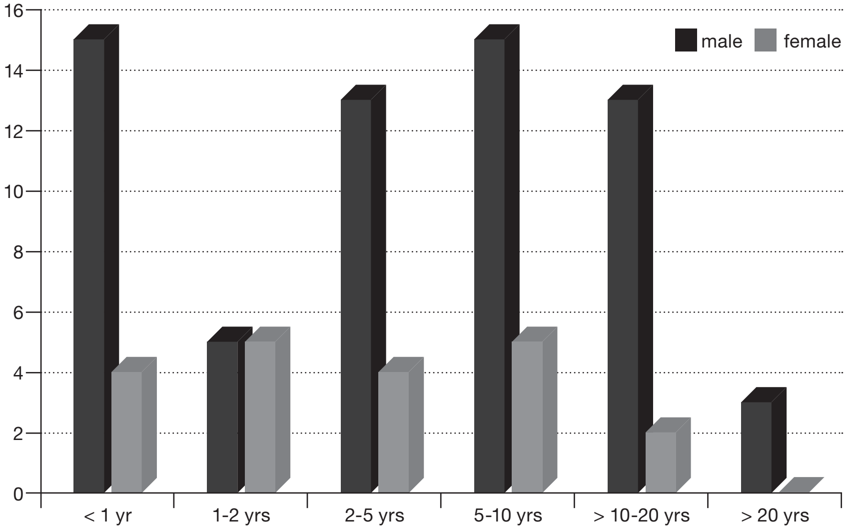
This is succinctly summarised by one research participant who was placed in a children's home at birth by her parents who refused to have any contact with her even after she left the home at the age of 18. Her dysfunctional family background and limited capital have inescapably exacerbated her multiple disadvantages, as a result of which she has been homeless 'on and off' for almost twenty years, but is trying very hard to provide a home for her son who is presently in foster care.

'I don't prostitute myself, I don't do drugs, I don't do anything bad in my life but I am in this situation. I'm not in this situation now because I have lost what I had. I have never had anything. Not in childhood, not now! I don't have anyone who has left me a flat or an inheritance. I don't have anything… I have always been a tenant, without anything.' (Evita, aged 42)

In this study, a person's involvement in substance abuse, crime and prostitution was viewed within the broader contexts of poverty, unemployment, the lack of educational opportunities and affordable housing, recession and neglect of social safety nets.

The literature on homelessness tends to define chronic homelessness as being without a permanent domicile for at least one year (Brown and Ziefert, 1990). Results from this study show that only about one-fifth of the sample (22 per cent) had been homeless for less than one year, such that all other participants in this study can be defined as chronically homeless (see Figure 1). Alarmingly, the average length of homelessness among men in this study was 6.78 years while for women it was 3.81 years. Longer periods of homelessness relentlessly restrict homeless people's access to economic, cultural, social as well as symbolic capital, which in turn hinders their routes out of social exclusion.

**Figure 1: Length of homelessness**



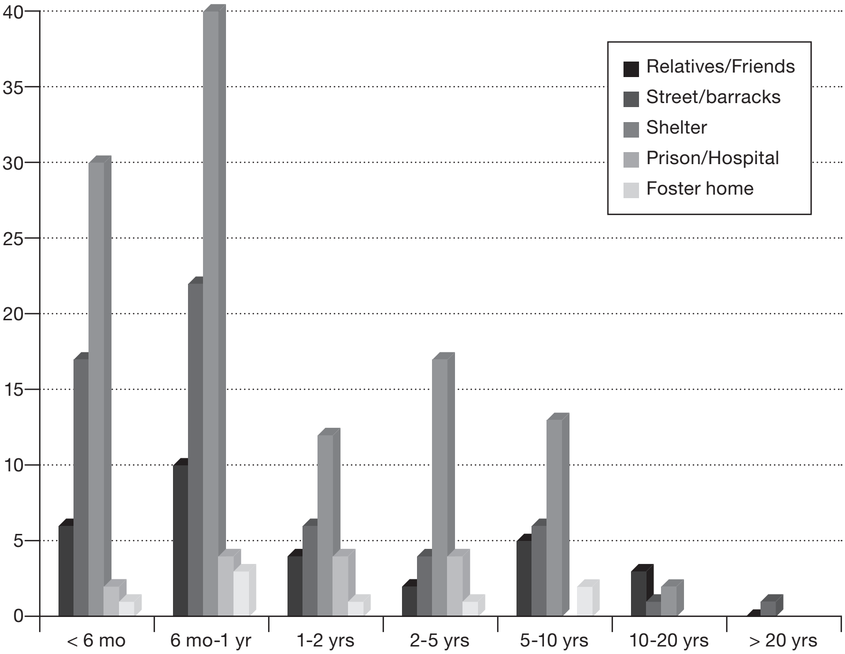

Out of a need to view homelessness as something dynamic that may involve movement into and out of housing and other supports over time, this study also investigated periods of homelessness. Findings show, especially for women, that homelessness may include repeated flight strategies from home, from abusive relationships, from foster homes, from relatives or friends and so on. Thus, homelessness in this study cannot be described as a one-off or infrequent experience, but is more likely to include a series of homeless periods in different locations. This pattern inevitably increases disadvantage and vulnerability.

In some cases, homelessness is experienced as a single, temporary episode, but this study markedly reveals that homelessness is often a manifestation of continuing poverty of personal and social resources involving repeated episodes of homelessness at different locations.

Figure 2 shows that shelter services constitute the accommodation type used by the largest number of participants across all time periods except by those in the 'over 20 years' bracket (>20yrs). The average length of stay at shelters for men was

2.7 years, while for women it was 2.3 years. The longest stay for a male (Ivan, 64) was 16 years during five different periods of homelessness while for a female (Zora, 70) it was 14 years on a continual basis. It is also evident that most of those who have lived on the streets or in abandoned houses or barracks did so for shorter periods of time due to the inevitable hardships of living in subhuman conditions, especially during the winter months.

**Figure 2: Lengths of homelessness at different places**




Almost as many of the women (45 per cent) as men (49 per cent) interviewed had slept rough at some point in the past. Notable too was the fact that a small number of the women had slept rough on a continual basis for considerable periods of time – from three days to five years in the case of one female participant, while for men this ranged between ten days and ten years.[14]

14 There were a few exceptions among the males where this extended to over twenty years. Due to health and safety issues these persons have recently sought assistance at shelters.

Short-term transitory periods of accommodation (staying at a friend's or relative's house) are also noted in Figure 2. As has been pointed out in the literature, this is inevitably a short-term solution because people often 'use up' their social networks by over-relying on friends and family for support and a sofa for the night, eventually 'wearing out their welcome' and ending up on the street (Radley et al., 2006).

## Social Capital Networks

According to the World Heath Organization's definition of 1946, social well-being is jeopardised if people are excluded from former or regular social contacts and a stable social situation; mental well-being can also be influenced by being socially excluded, being offended, by a lack of any real expectation for a life beyond the street, and by suicide ideation (cited in Hodgetts et al., 2007, p.692). Generally, the participants in this study lack durable social capital networks (actual or potential) to alleviate hardship brought about by their homelessness.

The hardships of day-to-day living (e.g. hunger, loneliness, illness, lack of clothing, unemployment and fear for personal safety) are aggravated when a homeless person lacks social networks and the support and information these can provide. In addition, wide-ranging and diverse social networks are more likely to provide homeless persons with various forms of ongoing support and information to facilitate their routes out of homelessness.

The absence of social capital networks may be by choice, for example a person may feel ashamed of being homeless and so decide to hide it from others or disconnect from former work circles or family support or he or she may have already exhausted all channels of assistance and may not wish to further burden relatives and friends. The social isolation that is experienced by many is well illustrated in the following quote from a research participant, Pavao (aged 55), who confesses it is better that he is single and without children because he would not be able to face a wife and children or fulfil his obligations towards them knowing how he has fared so far in life: 'What can I do, I have been through a lot, now I'm alone… I don't like to bother anyone, you know, that's why I'm here.'

The women in this study are more likely to stay in contact and secure support from their families or supportive social networks than the men. Apart from the obvious benefits of this social contact, this may also alleviate the psychological conditions linked with homelessness such as hopelessness, despair and loneliness. It has also been noted that women are more readily viewed as dependent and they arouse more sympathy and less hostility than men (see Novac et al., 1997). Correspondingly, Passaro (1996, p.2) argues that homeless women 'are seen as the apotheosis because their individual failures are not compounded by gender failure—a dependent needy woman, after all, is no challenge to dominant beliefs'.

Consistent with other findings (Novac et al., 1997), homeless women in this study are more likely than men to have dependent children for whom they maintain some responsibility, as children commonly remain with their mothers in cases of separation or divorce. Homeless women with children are at a considerable disadvantage as there are no resources for mothers and their children at homeless shelters in Croatia. However, children can also be a motivating and driving force in exiting homelessness as it is usually impossible for a homeless parent to regain custody of children who are in homes.

## Concluding Remarks

> 'You have all possible problems; there isn't a problem that you don't have. You are an expert at problems, that is, bait for problems. You attract all problems.' Katarina, 56

This paper has attempted to discover the social and cultural conditions that are linked to an individual's experience of homelessness, as well as to offer a portrait of the complexities of this lived experience. A general finding of this study is that homelessness is a risk that is becoming increasingly relevant for a wider part of the population in Croatia. Findings consistently show that many of the homeless people in this sample had been leading 'conventional' lives prior to homelessness.

As homelessness carries implications of 'belonging nowhere' rather than simply 'having nowhere to sleep', the concept of social exclusion is relevant and useful. For the homeless people in this study, this encompasses processes of continuing deprivation across social, economic and political spheres of life that in many cases resulted in a series of homelessness periods at different locations, which in turn served to increase their disadvantage and vulnerability.

Homeless people in Croatia are disadvantaged in multifaceted ways that inevitably and severely hinder their routes out of social exclusion. Homelessness means hard living, particularly when access to different forms of economic, cultural and social capital is limited; this often translates into lacking the power to transcend their present destitute circumstances. With their humanity under constant threat, most are engaged in an ongoing struggle to remain human in the face of inhumane conditions.

Research findings suggest that homelessness is a mortifying (to use Goffman's term, 1961, p.24) and impoverishing experience in which a person is stripped of all identity and deprived of a multitude of rights, such as the rights to housing, suitable health care, social services, a respectable job, self-dignity, social networks, legal rights and so on. It is crucial to take the cumulative effect of all these problems into account in a context of non-recognition, stigmatisation and lack of support.

Pertinently, the lack of an official definition of homelessness (i.e. naming this as a social problem) explains to a certain extent the lack of response to this phenomenon in Croatia. For this reason, and as this is a relatively new phenomenon, it is especially important to research homelessness in transitional countries extensively. Without this research, policies are unlikely to be effective. The lack of data is undeniably a major impediment to the development of coherent policies and meaningful strategies on homelessness (prevention) in Croatia. It is thus important to conduct further qualitative research with homeless people (that extends beyond shelters) to learn about their situations and experiences, as well as to identify their needs and how these could be met more effectively.

Based on the research findings of this study, a number of recommendations can be made for the provision of comprehensive information, services and assistance to lessen social exclusion among homeless persons as well as to facilitate their routes out of homelessness:

- Special attention – apart from accommodation – needs to be paid to the quality (or lack) of services that homeless people urgently require such as medical, counselling, legal, supportive holistic assistance from professional qualified and sensitised staff and so on.
- Continual and systematic evaluation is required at shelters and among the wider homeless population by teams of qualified persons, researchers and/or non-governmental organisations for the assessment and articulation of their needs, abilities, aspirations and problems.
- Programmes need to be developed at the local level to meet different contextual needs. These could include more accessible (less public) soup kitchens, perhaps with special menus (e.g. for diabetics); the introduction of public bath houses, day centres, doctor's/dentist's surgery or subsidised accommodation for homeless persons, depending on the context.
- Volunteers from all age groups should be found and trained with a view to increasing public awareness of homelessness and social exclusion and dispelling the myths and stereotypes about homeless people.
- Former shelter users should be monitored and assisted with accommodation and other support services (e.g. utility bills, furniture, therapy, financial aid, help with education) to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

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# Coping on Marginal Incomes when First Rehoused : Single Homeless People in England

Anthony M. Warnes, Maureen Crane and Sarah Coward[1]

Professor of Social Gerontology, Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing
Reader, Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing
Research Associate, Sheffield Institute for Studies in Ageing

› **Abstract_** *This paper examines the financial circumstances of 400 single homeless people in England after they were resettled into independent accommodation. Particular attention is given to changes in their income and debts over the first six months and to the expenditure associated with setting up a new home. After six months, nearly nine-tenths had retained their tenancy and only sixteen were known to have become homeless again. Most were on low incomes, started with no furniture or domestic equipment, incurred the costs of setting up a new home and also had to adjust to being responsible for paying the utilities and ensuring that the rent was paid. Many coped well with their new financial responsibilities, developed a routine for paying utility bills and learned how to survive on a low income. Many experienced an income gain during the first six months, especially those who had newly obtained employment. The prevalence of debts also increased, particularly among those in private-rented tenancies, although the median debt decreased. Overall the findings indicate that resettlement into independent accommoda-*

1 The authors thank the management and staff of the six collaborating organisations (Broadway, Centrepoint, St Mungo's and Thames Reach in London; Framework in Nottinghamshire; and St Anne's Community Services in Yorkshire) for their critical contributions to the design and execution of the FOR-HOME study. We are also indebted to the respondents for their time and cooperation. Thanks to the anonymous referees and editor for their valuable suggestions. The study was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (grant RES-062-23-0255).

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*tion does work for many single homeless people, but that more attention needs to be given to aspects of current resettlement practice, most particularly the rarity of advice about the financial implications of being resettled.*

› **Keywords_** *Single homeless people ; rehousing ; income ; debts ; employment ; independence*

## Introduction

This paper examines the financial situation of single homeless people in England after they have been resettled (rehoused) into independent accommodation. The evidence is drawn from the FOR-HOME study (described below) of the housing and welfare outcomes for 'single homeless' people who were rehoused from hostels and transitional (or temporary supported) housing operated by not-for-profit homelessness organisations. Note that the study did not examine the rehousing of 'statutory homeless' people, i.e. those people who local authorities have a duty to rehouse because they have a recognised priority need (e.g. a dependent child or a disability), became homeless unintentionally and have a 'connection' to the local authority (Warnes et al., 2003). The paper is a partial evaluation of two UK 'welfare reforms', the long-standing drive to reduce dependency on social security benefits and encourage people into work, and recent measures to change hostels from places of long-term residence to 'places of change' in which single homeless people are helped to address their problems and gain the skills to live independently.

The paper has five sections. The first reviews the relevant current policy and service contexts and the second describes the FOR-HOME study and profiles the respondents and the housing to which they moved. The incomes of the respondents at the time of resettlement and over the subsequent six months are then analysed. The penultimate section considers their financial circumstances more broadly, including how they managed their personal budgets and the payment of bills. In the concluding section, some strengths and weaknesses of current resettlement practice and procedures are discussed and recommendations for improvement are proposed.

## The Policy and Service Provision Contexts

An evaluation of the achievements, strengths and weaknesses of current resettlement practice, as the FOR-HOME study intends, clearly requires an understanding of the objectives of homelessness and related policies. In many countries the arrangements whereby the state supports specialist accommodation for vulnerable and special-needs groups are complex and change frequently. This is not the right place for a detailed account, but to understand the rationale and aims of contemporary resettlement programmes and practice it will be helpful to explain how they relate to broader policies on homelessness and welfare dependency.

### *Homelessness policies in the UK*

Homelessness policies in the UK have three distinguishable goals: prevention, alleviation and 'restoration', the last being the advice and support provided to help homeless people overcome their problems, build life skills and return to independent living and self-reliance. Hostels and to a lesser extent day centres are the visible face of homelessness interventions but, at least until the 1990s, primarily addressed the alleviation goal, i.e. they provided shelter, food and services to meet basic needs. The other goals – prevention and restoration – are much harder to realise and positive outcomes are seen in the long term, which might explain why until recent years they have taken second place. The state's social protection measures provide a minimum income and social housing policies make minimum standard housing affordable for those on low incomes. Both address broad social policy goals (e.g. reducing inequalities and promoting solidarity and community relations) and undoubtedly contribute to the prevention of homelessness. Several specific homelessness prevention programmes have been introduced since the late 1990s, including housing advice, family mediation schemes and targeted assistance for those leaving the armed forces and for young people leaving statutory care (Allender et al., 2005; Crane et al., 2006; Hennessy et al., 2005; Weeks, 2008).

Since the late 1970s, UK government interventions have progressively elaborated resettlement programmes for single homeless people. The first stimulus was the closure of many large, obsolete hostels and common lodging houses, some inherited from nineteenth-century poor-law institutions. The associated resettlement programmes increased the involvement of not-for-profit homelessness organisations and brought into being the first specialist teams and outcome evaluations (Dant and Deacon, 1989; Duncan and Downey, 1985; Vincent et al., 1995). Late into the 1980s, however, only a few homelessness organisations had planned resettlement programmes and the turnover of hostel residents was slow (Garside et al., 1990). In response to a rise in the number of homeless people on the streets in London and other cities, the Conservative government launched the Rough Sleepers' Initiative in 1990. This initiative funded street outreach workers, temporary and permanent accommodation and tenancy support for rehoused homeless people. In 1997, the Labour government began developing these interventions to reduce rough sleeping and to strengthen the spectrum of support from the streets to hostels and temporary supported (semi-independent) accommodation. Although these measures have reduced the number of rough sleepers on any single night, many homeless people still stay in hostels for extended periods because of insufficient move-on accommodation and many others leave for negative reasons (e.g. eviction or abandonment). Various estimates suggest that among those resettled, between 16 and 31 per cent of tenancies end for negative reasons (Crane and Warnes, 2002; Crane and Warnes, 2007; Dane, 1998; Edwards et al., 2001).

Recent developments have made 'managed' resettlement more widespread. The government has reformed its capital subsidies and revenue funding programmes for single homeless people's hostels and temporary supported housing. Beginning in 2005, the Hostels Capital Improvements Programme (HCIP) provided £90 million (€100m)[2] of capital funds over three years to modernise and change the functions of hostels. HCIP was succeeded in April 2008 by the three-year Places of Change programme with a budget of £80 million (€89m) (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). The programme's aims are to help hostel residents 'move more quickly, and on a more sustainable basis, to independent living… [hostels will be] centres of excellence and choice which positively change lives' (Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, 2005, p.4). Better opportunities are being created for homeless people to overcome problems, to move into education and employment and to become self-sufficient, with an assumption that they will be ready to move on from hostels within two years (Harding and Willett, 2008).

These new emphases in resettlement practice have been reinforced by changes in the Supporting People (SP) programme, the principal source of public funding for housing-related support services for people with special needs, including homeless people. Since the SP programme began in 2003, total expenditure has been over £8.7 billion (€9.7bn), but there have been cuts in the annual budget for several years. The funds were originally ring-fenced to ensure that they were allocated solely to housing-related support, but from April 2010 the SP grant to local authorities is not ring-fenced. The UK government is keen to reduce the amount it spends on supporting long-term residence in homeless people's hostels and has implemented more comprehensive 'stick and carrot' measures to encourage people to become self-supporting and to reduce welfare dependency (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). The policy drivers include: (a) the increasing cost of supported and institutional residence, (b) a wish to repeat and spread its successes in reducing

2 All conversions are based on the exchange rate of 18 April 2010, i.e. 1.14 euro equals 1.00 British pound.

both the number of people accepted as 'statutory homeless' and the number of rough sleepers, (c) a presumption that 'welfare to work' principles can be applied to homeless people; and (d) since 2008 the imperative to reduce the massive deficit in the public expenditure account.

### *Approaches to resettlement in the UK and elsewhere*

In the UK, in many European countries and in the United States, Canada and Australia it is generally accepted that hostels and shelters are not a long-term solution for homeless people and that the emphasis should be on resettlement into mainstream housing with security of tenure and support if required (e.g. Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). There are, however, various approaches to rehousing homeless people and it is only in the last ten to fifteen years that evaluations of their effectiveness have been conducted. The 'staircase of transition' approach is common in Sweden and other Nordic countries, the aim being that homeless people progressively move to more independent housing by demonstrating that they are 'housing ready', i.e. able to cope with independent living and have addressed problems such as alcohol misuse (Benjaminsen and Dyb, 2008). In Sweden, however, it has been found that the staircase of transition can reinforce rather than solve homeless people's problems and dependency. The flow through the system is generally slow and only a minority progress to being ready for fully independent living, and then have to wait several years before being offered permanent housing. More homeless people were deemed incapable of independent living in the municipalities using the staircase approach than in the other municipalities (Sahlin, 2005).

In contrast to the staircase of transition, the 'housing first' model builds from the premise that stable housing for homeless people is the key factor in 'restoration' and needs to be secured before other problems (e.g. substance misuse or mental illness) can be effectively tackled (Atherton and McNaughton Nicholls, 2008; Stefancic and Tsemberis, 2007). In the US the model is thought appropriate for chronically homeless people with multiple problems, and high tenancy sustainment rates have been achieved (Tsemberis et al., 2004). A similar approach has been used in Canada by the City of Toronto's Street to Homes programme and one evaluation found that nine-tenths of the monitored clients were still housed one year later (Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, 2007). In 2008 in Finland the government established a three-year programme to reduce long-term homelessness that employs the housing first way of working rather than its traditional staircase model (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009).

Homeless people and their problems are very diverse and it is likely that the staircase and housing first approaches are most appropriate for different groups. The UK non-profit service providers use both approaches pragmatically. Some clients are resettled directly from hostels into independent housing. Many also run specialist and supported housing projects for special-needs groups, including those with addiction or mental health problems. Some also provide transitional accommodation for a year or so, where there is supervision but not continuous support, and the residents are responsible for their own cooking and cleaning. Some organisations engage residents with alcohol and drug misuse problems in treatment programmes and require evidence of the habit being controlled before a resident is resettled, whereas others rehouse people who are still drinking heavily or misusing drugs.

In many European countries it has been customary for single homeless people to be resettled into social housing (local authority or not-for-profit housing association tenancies). Shortages of social housing in recent years, however, have led several countries to consider the feasibility of resettlement into the private-rented sector. This approach has been advocated in the UK over the last five years and a few homelessness organisations, such as Broadway in London, have developed schemes to help their clients move into private-rented tenancies. Broadway's scheme, 'Real Lettings', leases properties from landlords, sometimes managing them on the landlord's behalf, and provides support to the tenants.[3] Some homelessness sector staff and homeless people in the UK, however, have reservations about the practicalities and suitability of private-rented tenancies as a resettlement option, including concerns about placing vulnerable people in short-term tenancies (that characterise the sector), about the condition and high rents of some properties and about the small number of exploitative landlords (for a fuller review, see Rugg and Rhodes, 2008).

Concerns about rehousing homeless people in the private-rented sector have also been raised in other European countries because of the high rents, the lack of long-term security for tenants, landlords' primary motivation of making a profit and the poor quality of properties for rent. Reports from Finland and Greece note that the private-rented sector does not provide affordable housing for low-income people unless the standard of accommodation is extremely poor. In Austria it was found that the high rents of private-rented accommodation pushed even those with jobs into poverty. In Spain it has been necessary to rely on the private-rented sector because of the lack of social housing, but high rents have led to high rates of sharing and overcrowding (for more details, see European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), 2008).

3 www.reallettings.com/Home.

## The FOR-HOME Study

Although UK resettlement policies and practice have recently changed, there has been very little outcomes evidence to guide the reforms. It was in this context that the FOR-HOME study was designed in collaboration with six homelessness service-provider organisations (Broadway, Centrepoint, St Mungo's and Thames Reach in London; Framework in Nottinghamshire; and St Anne's Community Services in Yorkshire). FOR-HOME is a longitudinal study over eighteen months of the outcomes of the resettlement of single homeless people. The overall aims are to collect information about the experiences of homeless people who are rehoused and the factors that influence the outcomes in terms of tenancy sustainment, housing satisfaction, settledness, achieved levels of independence and well-being. The study was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Research ethics approval was granted by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee.

### *The study design and methods*

The population of interest was single homeless people aged sixteen years or more who were being resettled from hostels and supported housing into independent accommodation by the six collaborating organisations. The key criterion for inclusion in the sample was that the individuals were moving to independent accommodation where they would be responsible for the rent, other housing expenses and their own meals, laundry and house cleaning. Those who moved into residential or group homes where personal and domestic tasks are carried out by paid staff and those with dependent children at the point of resettlement were therefore excluded.

Data collection was through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the respondents just before they moved and again after six months and eighteen months. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. The questions asked derived from a theoretical model that resettlement outcomes are influenced by: the resettled person's biographical and current attributes; the help and support received before and after resettlement; the condition and amenities of the accommodation; and the respondents' experiences post-resettlement. The three interviews covered housing, homelessness and employment histories; finances and debts; engagement in work, training and other activities; health and addiction problems; family and social networks; the characteristics of the resettlement accommodation; help and support pre- and post-resettlement; and experiences in the new accommodation. With the respondent's consent, a structured questionnaire about help given was also completed by the resettlement worker. There were substantial inputs from the resettlement staff and managers of the collaborating organisations into the design of the instruments, each of which was piloted and revised twice. Tracking was carried out after twelve months (mainly through phone calls and letters) to establish the respondents' whereabouts and to update contact details.

## The Respondents' Characteristics and Housing Outcomes at Six Months

Recruitment started in June 2007 and lasted fifteen months. The target number of 400 was achieved: 223 respondents were interviewed in London and 177 in Nottingham, Leeds and Sheffield (hereafter Notts/Yorks). At the time of being resettled, 24 per cent were aged between seventeen and twenty-four, 39 per cent were between twenty-five and thirty-nine years of age, 23 per cent were in their forties and 14 per cent were aged fifty or older. One-quarter of the respondents were women. The ethnic composition of the two area samples differed markedly. In London 47 per cent of the respondents were 'White', as compared with 82 per cent in Notts/Yorks. The women respondents in London had the most distinctive profile, with 46 per cent being in a 'Black' ethnic group and 22 per cent falling into 'Other' categories. Nearly one-quarter of the respondents (23%) were born outside Britain and Ireland. The sample was broadly representative of those resettled by the six collaborating organisations during 2006.

The respondents have high social disadvantage scores. Most received no more than basic education, with 41 per cent of the men and 29 per cent of the women leaving school before the age of sixteen and a further 43 and 46 per cent respectively leaving at sixteen. Thirty-six per cent of the sample had been 'mostly employed' during their adult lives, 30 per cent 'intermittently employed' and 27 per cent had worked very little or not at all. Forty-two per cent had worked mainly in 'elementary' occupations, 21 per cent in various service occupations or as machine operatives, 16 per cent in skilled trades, and 11 per cent in white-collar jobs. A higher proportion of those aged over sixty had been in skilled trades (38%).

At the time of being resettled, 18 per cent of the respondents reported literacy difficulties and 37 per cent had physical health problems. Sixty-three per cent had suffered from mental health problems during the last five years, 33 per cent from alcohol problems and 56 per cent had used illegal drugs. Around 45 per cent of the men in both London and Notts/Yorks had previously been homeless. Among the women, just 18 per cent in London compared with 42 per cent in Notts/Yorks had previously been homeless. Aggregating all episodes of homelessness, 18 per cent of the respondents had been homeless for twelve months or less and 14 per cent had been homeless for at least ten years at the time of resettlement.

### *The resettlement accommodation and housing outcomes*

The majority of the respondents (86%) were resettled into social housing, but with a clear difference in type between London and Notts/Yorks. Seventy-one per cent of the Notts/Yorks sample but only 30 per cent in London moved to local authority housing tenancies (some managed by contracted organisations). In contrast, the London respondents were much more likely to move into housing association tenancies (54% London; 18% Notts/Yorks). These differences reflect the distinctiveness of London's housing stock, particularly the severe shortage of 'public housing' in the metropolis. Fourteen per cent of the sample moved to private-rented accommodation. Forty-eight per cent had never previously lived alone, including 85 per cent of those aged under twenty-five.

Six months after being rehoused, 87 per cent of the respondents were still in the resettlement accommodation and 3 per cent had moved to another tenancy. Some moved because they found accommodation that was cheaper, had more space or was better value, while a few moved for negative reasons, including the poor condition of the resettlement accommodation or because they had been burgled or harassed by local people. Twenty people (5%) had been evicted or had abandoned their accommodation: eleven had returned to the streets or a hostel, five stayed temporarily with relatives or friends and the whereabouts of the other four was unknown. A minority had died, were in prison or had been admitted to a drugs' rehabilitation unit.

## Income at Baseline and after Six Months

At the time of being resettled, only 9 per cent of the respondents were working (4% full-time and 5% part-time); the others were reliant on social security income. Various benefits were received: Jobseeker's Allowance (unemployment benefit), Incapacity Benefit (temporary sickness benefit), Income Support (for people with long-term conditions), Disability Living Allowance (for people with disabilities) and the State Pension.[4] The range of weekly incomes was from zero to £550 (€611), with the mean being £84 (€93) and the median £62 (€69). Because a few people had unusually high incomes, the mean is misleadingly high. The differences by gender were trivial.

Once rehoused, the vast majority of the respondents remained highly reliant on social security benefits. After six-months their mean weekly income was £100 (€111) and the median £81 (€90), increases from baseline of respectively 18 and 31 per cent. Despite the increases, their income levels were still very low compared

4 Since October 2008 those newly accepted as incapable of work through sickness or disability are paid an employment and support allowance, which replaces incapacity benefit and income support paid on incapacity grounds; see http://campaigns.dwp.gov.uk/esa.

with those of all UK households and 72 per cent had incomes below the UK poverty threshold for a single adult. The weekly income was clearly related to whether the respondent was in paid work and the type of social security benefit(s) received (see Table 1). The highest incomes at six months were among those with jobs (mean £192 or €213); and the highest among those on benefits went to people receiving the Disability Living Allowance (mean £139 or €154). Those receiving Job Seeker's Allowance had the lowest incomes (mean £55 or €61).

**Table 1: Weekly income at six months by social security benefit received and earnings**

| Type of income | Sample size | Mean weekly income (£) | Standard deviation (£) | Lowest income (£) | Highest income (£) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Social security benefits:** | | | | | |
| **Jobseeker's Allowance** | 74 | 54.71 | 14.86 | 34.00 | 155.00 |
| **Income Support** | 151 | 90.80 | 39.10 | 38.00 | 227.00 |
| **Incapacity Benefit** | 54 | 104.00 | 38.10 | 59.20 | 219.00 |
| **Disability Living Allowance** | 51 | 138.91 | 47.14 | 76.00 | 250.00 |
| **Other benefits** | 38 | 126.34 | 52.05 | 46.46 | 293.00 |
| **With earned income*** | 52 | 192.11 | 71.35 | 65.00 | 400.00 |
| **… earnings element** | 52 | 179.54 | 83.59 | 25.00 | 400.00 |
| **All** | 353 | 95.82 | – | 34.00 | 400.00 |

Note: The amounts are not necessarily the value of the weekly benefit but are the reported weekly income. Some respondents received more than one benefit (e.g. Income Support plus Disability Living Allowance) and a few received less than the benefit entitlement because they were repaying social security benefit loans or other debts.

* Reported weekly income, with the line below giving the reported income from earnings.

## *Changes in income levels*

Incomes at both baseline and after six months were reported by 345 respondents. When the changes in income for each respondent are examined, the most striking finding is that there was pervasive and substantial income instability. Ninety per cent experienced a change in income, with 60 per cent having an increase and 30 per cent a reduction. For a large number the change was not trivial: 14 per cent reported a decline in their weekly income of £10 (€11) or more, while 36 per cent saw an increase of £10 (€11) or more. The average increase was £38.65 (€43) and the average reduction was £30.49 (€34). Those with very low incomes at baseline tended to have above-average increases – a welcome feature, but those with above-average starting incomes experienced low income gains, and those in the highest quartile at baseline experienced reductions.

There were several reasons for the changes. Many who were employed were in marginal, insecure and short-term jobs and therefore entering or exiting work had a direct impact. Eleven of the people who were in work at baseline were not employed after six months and therefore saw their income decrease by, on average, 55 per cent. In contrast, 30 respondents started a job during the first six months and their incomes increased by 209 per cent (see Table 2). A few people held two jobs to boost their income. Other reasons for income changes included the 'reassessment' of a person's entitlement and a subsequent change of social security benefit. For example, several respondents who had been receiving Incapacity Benefit were deemed ready to work and switched to the Jobseeker's Allowance, which pays considerably less. A few respondents who were claiming jobseeker's allowance had their benefit stopped because they failed to 'sign on' regularly at the job centre or to attend a job-training programme.

**Table 2: Changes in weekly income during the first six months after being rehoused by work status**

| Work trajectory | Number of respondents | Mean income at baseline (£) | Income change | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | £ | % |
| In work at baseline, not in work at six months | 11 | 201.25 | –110.85 | –55.1 |
| In work at baseline and at six months | 22 | 154.59 | 18.20 | 11.8 |
| Not in work at either date | 282 | 77.17 | 7.43 | 9.6 |
| Not in work at baseline, in work at six months | 30 | 56.64 | 118.32 | 208.9 |

## Managing Financially

The move to independent living brought several financial demands for the respondents. Most were on low incomes yet had to buy basic furniture and domestic equipment for their new tenancy and pay utility bills. Some also had to pay off debts and loans acquired before or at the time of being resettled. Some spent money on drink, drugs or non-essentials. Several re-established or increased contacts with their children once they had their own accommodation and spent more money on their children. Even those in full-time employment found it difficult to manage: most were in low-paid jobs but were not entitled to either a grant to help furnish their accommodation or to the Housing Benefit subsidy towards their rent and Council (property) Tax (more details below).

The discretionary weekly income of the respondents varied greatly. The financial circumstances of five contrasting cases are shown in Table 3. The amount available each week to buy food, clothing, toiletries and household equipment and supplies after paying rent and utility bills was particularly low for those on Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support (Cases 3 and 5). Case 4 had the most money after essential bills were paid, because he received the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Income Support, and Housing Benefit covered all but £5 (€6) of the weekly rent. The relatively high rate of the DLA benefit enables the recipients to 'buy in' care or support at home if they require help with personal or household tasks or to pay for taxis if they have mobility problems. Case 4 had HIV/AIDS, became tired very easily and paid for a cleaner twice a week to help him manage at home. Case 1 had full-time work and her income was much more than those on social security benefits (apart from DLA recipients). She did not, however, receive any subsidy towards the rent and Council Tax and so her weekly balance or discretionary income was just £43 (€48).

**Table 3: Income, expenditure and debts at six months: Five cases**

| Variable | Case 1 | Case 2 | Case 3 | Case 4 | Case 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Income sources: | Earnings (two jobs) | Student loan and earnings | Income Support | Income Support + DLA | Job Seeker's Allowance |
| Weekly income (£) | 212 | 183 | 59 | 250 | 50 |
| Weekly expenditure (£): | | | | | |
| … rent | -107 | -125 | -6 | -5 | -14 |
| … electricity, gas, water | -10 | -13 | -15 | -15 | -20 |
| … Council Tax | -25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| … travel | -12 | 0 | -5 | 0 | 0 |
| … food | -15 | -20 | -30 | -40 | -15 |
| Weekly balance (£)* | 43 | 25 | 3 | 190 | 1 |
| Debts/rent arrears (£) | 2,000 | 1,360 | 0 | 0 | 2,194 |

DLA: Disability living allowance.

* Discretionary income for clothing, personal items, furniture and equipment for the new accommodation.

Twenty-nine per cent of the respondents received financial help from family and relatives after they were rehoused. For some, parents or siblings bought furniture or lent money, and a few respondents were helped when, for example, they had no money for food or electricity. In most cases, however, the respondents were either estranged from their family members or their family was unable to offer financial help. Women were more likely than men to receive financial help from family members (41% women; 24% men). There was an inverse association between age and the percentage receiving such help (44% of the 17–24 age group; 31% of the 25–39 age group, 18% of the 40–49 age group, and 15% of the 50+ age group).

During the first six months, almost three-fifths of the respondents experienced problems with budgeting and managing financially: 28 per cent said that they had difficulties 'frequently' and 29 per cent 'occasionally'. There was little difference by age, except that those aged fifty or more were less likely to report problems. There was a significant association between having budgeting difficulties before being resettled and experiencing these same problems after being rehoused: 75% of those who experienced problems before moving also had difficulties once rehoused. In contrast, only 47 per cent of those who did not have budgeting difficulties before moving subsequently experienced problems.[5] There was also a significant association between the anticipation of financial difficulties before being rehoused and subsequent problems. When initially interviewed, 24 per cent of the respondents were worried about their ability to manage financially after moving and 68 per cent of this group subsequently experienced difficulties; this applied to only 52 per cent of those who did not expect problems.[6] Thirty-eight per cent of the respondents received advice or training on budgeting from the hostel or project staff before they were rehoused and 42 per cent received advice about paying bills. There were, however, no associations between receiving such help and financial difficulties after moving. The following sections describe in more detail the expenses and financial problems faced by the respondents during the first six months.

### *The costs of establishing a home*

Most respondents (94%) were resettled in unfurnished accommodation and nearly all had little or no furniture or furnishings for their new home. Two types of social security payments are available to help those on low incomes set up a home: the Community Care Grant (CCG), which does not have to be paid back, and an interest-free budgeting loan that is repaid through deductions from the recipient's weekly social security benefit. Seventy per cent of the respondents received the CCG, with the amounts varying from £50 to £1,500 (€56 to €1667), and 4 per cent received a budgeting loan. The amount of the CCG is at the discretion of each local authority and is influenced by the number of applications received and the time of year that the application is made (commonly the budget is spent before the end of the financial year). Hence, some respondents received a grant that was sufficient to buy, second hand, all the furniture and equipment that they needed, but others did not. The CCG application cannot be submitted until a tenancy agreement has been signed and it generally takes several weeks to process. Many respondents were required to move a few days after the signing and as a result 57 per cent had no bed and 67 per cent no cooker when they first moved.

### *Rent payments and arrears*

The rents of the resettlement accommodation varied greatly, from £47 to £300 (€52 to €333) per week. Some included a service charge to cover the cleaning of communal areas or to pay for certain utilities, most often water. The rents of private-rented tenancies were two to four times those of local authority and housing asso-

5 The chi-squared statistic for the comparison was 26.36, df 1, $p < 0.001$.

6 The chi-squared statistic for the comparison was 5.78, df 1, $p < 0.02$.

ciation tenancies. People on very low incomes, whether from benefits or employment, are entitled to Housing Benefit (HB), a rent subsidy for all or a proportion of their rent. HB paid the full rent for 46 per cent and paid a large part for 43 per cent of the respondents; the remaining 11 per cent were in full-time work or education and had to pay the entire rent themselves.

During the first six months, 48 per cent of the respondents had rent arrears at some point. For 12 per cent, the amount of arrears reached £500 (€556) or more. When interviewed at six months 22 per cent still had rent arrears. Twelve per cent of the respondents had been threatened with eviction because of rent arrears and six people (1.5%) had been evicted or had left their accommodation because of financial problems and rent arrears. Similar proportions of those in local authority, housing association and private-rented tenancies had accumulated rent arrears since moving in, although a higher percentage of those in private-rented tenancies still had arrears at six months (27%). Those aged under twenty-five were more likely than the older tenants to report rent arrears. There was no difference between the London and Notts/Yorks respondents.

During the early months many of the arrears stemmed from HB administration problems, including office delays and respondents failing to make claims or complete the forms properly. At six months more of the arrears were associated with personal factors (e.g. respondent spending money on drink or drugs instead of the rent) or the suspension of HB (and other social security benefits) because the recipient failed to comply with the rules. A few people experienced problems when they started work or full-time education because they were no longer entitled to social security benefits and HB. One young woman started a full-time university course and her social security benefits and HB were stopped. She took out a student loan but her income was reduced to a level at which she could not afford the £300 weekly rent and she was evicted.

In April 2008 the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced for private-rented tenants as a different way of distributing HB. While HB is normally paid directly to the landlord, the LHA is paid to the tenant. The idea is to encourage the beneficiary to negotiate a lower rent and to find the best-value tenancies. If a tenant is deemed vulnerable, local authorities can pay the LHA directly to the landlord, but this is at their discretion. Five FOR-HOME respondents who received the LHA acquired rent arrears during the first six months: the allowance was paid directly to them in amounts of more than £1,000 (€1,111) and they spent some or all of it on other things. Some individuals simply did not understand the system. A survey in mid-June 2009 of 453 LHA claimants across nine local authorities in England also found that 62 per cent were constantly struggling to manage their finances, including 29 per cent who had fallen behind with the payment of their rent or other bills, and most said that they would prefer to have their LHA paid directly to the landlord (Frost et al., 2009). Shelter and Crisis campaigned for the LHA rules to be modified, particularly for vulnerable people. The Department for Work and Pensions (2009) recently revised the guidance about identifying a tenant at risk and then making the payment directly to the landlord.

### *Utility payments and arrears*

When resident in hostels and supported housing, the respondents paid a small service charge each week but were not responsible for the electricity, gas and water charges. Once rehoused, however, most had to pay the utility bills. Those who were working full-time also had to pay council (property) tax. Some paid for the utilities through pay-as-you-use schemes, although these have the highest unit prices. Many preferred this method of payment as they became accustomed to recharging their keys or cards when they received their social security benefits. Others made weekly, fortnightly or monthly payments to the suppliers or received bills every three or six months.

Although one-half of the respondents had little or no previous experience of managing their energy consumption or of dealing with utility companies and paying the bills, 63 per cent coped well with utility payments during the first six months. Some were proud of their accomplishment and more than one confided that it had boosted their self-respect. Thirty-seven per cent reported problems with paying utility bills and, when interviewed at six months, 25 per cent had utility service debts. A few said that they left their heating on continuously without thinking of the cost and were surprised when they received a huge gas bill. Several were trying to change from quarterly bills to pay-as-you-use schemes. There was a statistically significant association between being unemployed and having difficulties with utility payments: 40 per cent of the unemployed reported difficulties, compared with 29 per cent of those working part-time and 16 per cent of those working full-time.[7]

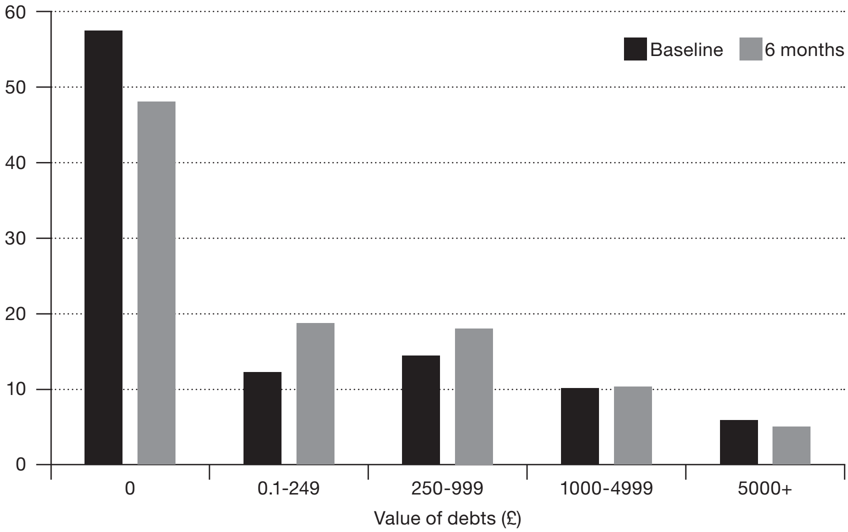
### *Debts*

When initially interviewed, almost one-fifth of the respondents said that financial problems had been a reason for becoming homeless, including forty-two who specified rent or mortgage repayment arrears. At the time of being resettled 45 per cent of the sample reported debts and, among them, only two-thirds were paying back some or all of the debts. Five individuals had exceptionally large debts of between £30,000 and £150,000 (€33,336 and €166,660) and were in the process of or intended to file for bankruptcy.

7 The chi-squared statistic for the comparison was 8.02, df 2, $p < 0.001$.

Over the subsequent six months the proportion with debts rose to 58 per cent, but for those able to estimate the amount of the debt, the mean reduced from £3,899 to £2,536 (€4,333 to €2,818). These means are much influenced by the few extreme values at baseline. At six months, four respondents still had debts of between £30,000 and £74,000 (€33,336 and €82,229). The median debt dropped from £500 (€570) at baseline to £400 (€456) at six months and the upper quartile value fell from £1,800 to £1,350 (€2,052 to €1,539). The pattern of debts clearly changed over the six months, with more of the respondents having relatively small debts but fewer having large debts (see Figure 1). Note that the given values are minimum estimates because many of the respondents (eighteen at baseline and fifty at six months) could not estimate the size of their debts.

**Figure 1: The prevalence and value of debts at baseline and six months***




* Does not include respondents who had debts but of unknown amounts.

At baseline men were more likely than women to have debts (45% men; 34% women) and there was a higher prevalence in Notts/Yorks (50%) than in London (37%). By six months there were no significant differences in the prevalence of debts between men and women or between the two areas, but there were age differences. At baseline 41 per cent of the 17–24 age group reported debts, but by six months the prevalence was 61 per cent. Debts also became more common among respondents in their forties, rising from 42 to 67 per cent. Those aged fifty or older were least likely to report debts at both interview waves. Debts at six months were also associated with debts at the time of resettlement, being unemployed, drinking heavily and/or using drugs since moving. The strongest relationship, however, was with tenure. Whereas at baseline the prevalence of debts did not vary with the tenure of the resettlement accommodation, the greatest increase in the prevalence of debt over the first six months was among those in private-rented tenancies (from 44% at baseline to 74% at six months).

Alternative assessments about the ‘burden’ of debt should be considered. At six months 68 per cent of the respondents reported debts of £250 (€285) or less, which is not a high level in relation to the level of debt in the general population, many of whom have mortgages. Given the respondents’ low income and lack of reserves, however, the debts caused discomfort and anxiety. Those with debts were more likely than others to report being unhappy or depressed, lonely and worried or anxious about how things were going. While it is encouraging that the aggregate amount of the reported debt decreased substantially, particularly through a period when the respondents had the exceptional expenses of equipping a new home, it is of concern that after six months higher percentages had debts and could not estimate the amount. One possible explanation is that some respondents became more aware of their personal finances after moving and taking responsibility for the utility payments and rent or having social security benefit reviews. A second is that at baseline some respondents overlooked unpaid hostel fees or outstanding local authority rent arrears, court fines and other debts that resurfaced when they took a new tenancy or applied for a loan or credit. A third possibility is that, like many householders, some respondents took out small loans (e.g. to purchase a washing machine or cooker). It is also possible that a few respondents were more willing to divulge financial information at the second interview.

## Discussion

### *Strengths and limitations of the evidence*

The FOR-HOME study is a detailed longitudinal examination of the outcomes of the resettlement of single homeless people in England. Substantial information has been collected about the characteristics, problems and needs of the respondents, of the help that they received from service providers before and after they were resettled, of the accommodation into which they moved and of their progress after moving. This paper has reported findings from the interviews at baseline and six months after resettlement. Reports of the outcomes after eighteen months will be available in late 2010.

Caution must be exercised in generalising the findings. It should be remembered that they apply to single homeless people and not to ‘homeless families’ (i.e. households with dependent children) and that the sample was drawn from the clients of six service-provider organisations in London and three provincial English cities.

Policies, funding and institutional arrangements differ outside England. The six organisations are themselves diverse; for example, Centrepoint works exclusively with young homeless people, and Framework and St Anne's work with many clients besides homeless people. It should also be noted that several aspects of resettlement practice are time-specific; for example, how housing vacancies are found and allocated and the level of funding for pre-resettlement training and post-resettlement tenancy support.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

This first analysis has shown that a large majority of the 400 FOR-HOME respondents who were resettled from hostels or supported housing into independent tenancies coped with the transition. At six months nearly nine-tenths had retained their tenancy and only sixteen were known to have become homeless again. This strongly supports the general consensus among many European, North American and Australian campaigning groups, service-provider organisations and researchers that homeless people can be successfully rehoused and that the long-term solution to homelessness is resettlement into mainstream housing with security of tenure rather than extended stays in hostels and shelters.

For many of the FOR-HOME respondents, the adjustment from living in hostels or supported accommodation to living independently was far from easy. Most were on low incomes, started with no furniture or domestic equipment and received little or no financial help from family and relatives. Most did, however, receive substantial help from the staff of homelessness organisations with finding the accommodation, setting up the tenancy and arranging utility connections. A minority had the assistance of a van and driver with moving their belongings and/or received second-hand furniture from local charities (a later paper will examine the help provided by service providers before and after moving).

Following their resettlement, the respondents incurred the costs of setting up a new home and also had to adjust to being responsible for the rent and utility charges (in some cases for the first time). Many coped well with their new financial responsibilities, developed a routine for paying utility bills and learned how to survive on a very low income. Two-thirds of those in paid work at the time of resettlement remained in employment and a few others subsequently secured jobs. Many experienced an income gain during the first six months (twice as many as experienced an income loss) and, although the prevalence of debts increased, the average level of the debt reduced.

The responsibilities that the respondents had to cope with are not exceptional; they are faced by any new tenant. The question is whether current policies and practices take sufficient account of the exceptional disadvantages of many single homeless people, specifically their very low income, thin family and social support networks, personal vulnerabilities and lack of furniture or household equipment. In England, at least, the way in which grants are allocated and processed to help financially disadvantaged homeless people to set up a home need to be reviewed if the level of ensuing debts and stress is to be reduced. Currently, for example, homeless people who obtain full-time employment while still in a hostel not only have to pay a much higher proportion of the rent and service charge and are consequently less able to save for their pending move, but also make themselves ineligible for a grant to help with the move. Two respondents in this situation reflected with hindsight that it had not been to their financial advantage to start working before being resettled. The length of time that it took for grants to come through also meant that many moved into an empty flat and had to sleep on the floor for several weeks until a grant was received.

Less than one-half of the FOR-HOME respondents received advice or training from staff before moving about managing money. Although many believed at the time that they did not need such help, they subsequently experienced problems. Young people were particularly likely to decline help and later to report financial problems. A few found themselves in impossible positions, notably some of those who attempted to move to independent living and concurrently to begin full-time education. Others had substantial debts that were not being repaid. More attention needs to be given to the financial implications of setting up a new home and of intended life choices and to tackling debts, which means making advice on forecasting and planning personal budgets available to homeless people who are about to be rehoused. This need was discussed at a workshop with the staff of service-provider organisations early in 2010. Several attendees said that they did not have the knowledge, skills or time to offer sound financial planning advice to their clients. Only a few homelessness organisations in the UK have specialist financial advice teams.

The importance of employment has featured in this paper. Although many of the employed respondents were in low-paid jobs, they had more discretionary income once essential bills were paid than those who were unemployed (apart from the DLA recipients) and were less likely to experience problems after being rehoused with paying bills or to have debts. Several of those who were unemployed had been looking for work but without success, suggesting that additional help is required to encourage and assist resettled homeless people to enter or re-enter the workforce. Being in employment is recognised as an important element in preventing homelessness. In 2002 FEANTSA established an ‘Employment Working Group’ comprising experts from various European countries, which aims to develop effective approaches to tackling homelessness and housing inclusion by engaging people in employment and related activities (FEANTSA, 2007).

Shortages of social housing have resulted in the increasing use of the private-rented sector for housing homeless people in England and some European countries. Among the FOR-HOME respondents, however, rent arrears and debts were associated strongly with this tenure, partly because of the high rents in the private-rented sector. If the use of this sector of the housing market develops further, more concerted financial advice and tenancy support (and monitoring) is essential to avoid counter-productive outcomes. Overall, the early findings from the FOR-HOME study show that resettlement into independent accommodation has positive outcomes during the first six months for many single homeless people. More attention needs to be given, however, to aspects of current resettlement practice and to ways of providing better targeted advice and support to those who have been rehoused.

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# Economic Strategies among Long-Term Homeless People : The Concept of Harvesting Economy

Maja Flåto and Katja Johannessen

The State Housing Bank, Oslo, Norway

Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, Oslo, Norway

**Abstract_** *The life and economic situation of a homeless person appear chaotic from the standpoint of the domiciled citizen, yet the social and economic strategies of homeless people can be understood as the outcome of conscious deliberation and as rational in light of their difficult situation. The frame of this paper's argument is the concept of a harvesting economy as applied to the economic strategies that homeless people make use of when managing daily life. Based on interviews and participant observation among persons who have experienced long-term homelessness, the authors argue that within the harvesting economy the actors rely on their social relationships to cope, and find that their social networks and economic strategies reinforce each other. Another important aspect of the harvesting economy is the short-term time perspective, which makes homeless individuals sufficiently flexible to cope with their day-to-day life. The paper also considers whether the role of homelessness service providers reinforces these economic strategies among homeless persons.*

**Key Words_** *Homelessness ; harvesting economy ; social network ; time perception ; marginalisation*

## Introduction

This paper explores the daily life of long-term homeless people in Oslo and in particular the economic strategies they utilise. It is based on data obtained during interviews with homeless people and through participant observation at a temporary shelter for homeless people with a drug addiction. The contention is that homeless people, as they adapt to homelessness, gradually acquire certain survival strategies, which in turn affect how they structure day-to-day life. This theme runs through much of the literature on homelessness; in particular, in 1990, Rowe and Wolch argued that the home is a 'pivotal station in a daily path' and showed how becoming homeless necessitates new strategies to acquire resources. They also emphasised that the lack of time–space continuity that comes with being homeless enhances the importance of a social network as provider of 'material, emotional and logistical support' (p.190). Later Van Doorn (2000, p.45) wrote:

> The general picture that emerges is that the longer the homeless live on the streets, the more their orientation shifts gradually toward the street economy, pressurized as they are by the hopeless situation in which they find themselves. We may conclude that the activities they engage in are not merely the result of chaos and disorder… Even if the action range of the homeless usually is a rather restricted one, it is not as if they 'simply do something'. They have their reasons to make use of certain strategies and reject others.

Building on this research, we seek to situate the issues around how homeless people structure their lives within a socio-economic frame. Our analysis of people's experiences within the framework of a 'harvesting economy' allows us to add an explicit economic perspective to existing research in this area. In so doing we wish to contribute to a broader understanding of the situation of being homeless and of the strategies applied when managing daily life without a home.

We begin by outlining the concept of the harvesting economy and describing the methods used in the research. The discussion of how homeless people adapt to their situation follows, and is divided into three themes. The first explores the economic situation of the research informants and shows how an alternative economic structure may be preferable for homeless persons. The second considers the social relationships in which our informants were embedded. Homeless people need to rely on others in the group to survive, yet friendships are often fraught with distrust, antipathy and antagonism. As an extension of these two themes, homeless people's conception of time is discussed in light of how our informants structured their days. These three entry points – economy, social network and time – allow us to discuss how homeless people, as they gradually get used to homelessness, also find the most profitable options given their circumstances.

## The Concept of the Harvesting Economy

Within the homeless literature there has been little work exploring the economy of homeless persons aside from begging and panhandling. We argue that the harvesting economy as an economic strategy is used by homeless persons alongside, and interacting with, the more official economy. When homeless persons use the strategies of this particular economy it is not because they are operating in a less modern economy, rather it is a way of managing daily life in a marginalised position.

The harvesting economy is an economic strategy used by persons who lack economic resources. Within the harvesting economy there is not much time between production and consumption. 'Resources are left as they are, consumed in their original state as soon as they become available' (Sørhaug, 1996, p.37, our translation). In the case of homeless persons the term 'production' can be misleading as they usually do not produce anything, rather they collect, use and share existing resources. Thus, when we use the term 'production' this simply means getting hold of resources. Within the harvesting economy the agent chases the resources, which requires mobility.

The concept of the harvesting economy is influenced by the anthropological view on hunting and gathering economies characterised by mobility and low cultivation. Mobility and property are contradictions (Sahlins, 2004, p.12), and homeless persons, who by definition do not have a permanent home, have the required mobility needed in this economy. Those who live within the harvesting economy live very much from hand to mouth and are often at risk of not finding enough resources. When they do find resources, they need to dispose of them as quickly as possible because they have nowhere to store them. Harvesting is unpredictable and supplies are not always divided equally. Sharing within the group is a way of coping with this. 'Each individuals' "hunting luck" varies, which makes sharing within the group a rational choice' (Sørhaug, 1996, p.38, our translation).

Harvesting also requires certain knowledge about people's surroundings. Managing daily life according to the strategies of the harvesting economy requires a network of people who also use the same strategies. We contend that the existence of the harvesting economy relies on social networks. This is not different from other economies. According to Lee et al. (2008), economies work or perform within a set of social relations and are not separate or separable spheres of social life. Hart (1973) emphasises this in his study of the economy in Ghana and uses the term 'dependency relationships' to show how his informants relied on each other to manage daily life; our informants relied on their social network in the same manner. We argue that participation in the harvesting economy reinforces the ties that exist between homeless persons. When engaging in this economy they rely more and more on each other and less on the main society.

Participants in the harvesting economy apply specific economic strategies. This way of doing business is not an alternative to the main economy; rather it should be regarded as additional to it. In the capitalist market, resources are used to produce more resources and the distance and time between production and consumption increases. Resources are used to make investments with future return on invested capital in mind. Smith and Stenning (2006) emphasise the importance of seeing diverse economies as interwoven sets of economic practices. They argue that 'economic practices are conceptualised as a wide range of mechanisms by which the individuals and the social units of which they are a part create livelihoods' (p.192). They identify three different markets where different economies function. First, the economic relations through the well-known market of capitalism are those structured through monetary transactions, such as the wage form. Second, the non-market relations are those structured through, for example, the exchange of goods for labour or forms of barter. Third, alternative market relations are those structured through market transactions but constituted by different forms of equivalence than those of commodity economies of capitalism, for example illegal markets. All of these economic practices are situated within the same society.

We argue that the harvesting economy is positioned somewhere between the alternative market and the non-market as its relations are structured through the black market, bartering and gifts, but also through the market of capitalism. Non-market relations and alternative market relations are part of the informal economy. The informal economy comprises the economic activities not registered for the purposes of taxation and/or regulation by the state. However, the fact that it is not regulated by the state does not mean that it is not regulated at all; there are many non-state means of regulation (Bourgois, 2003). There can be several reasons why an economic activity is not registered, for example because it is illegal or because it is so small that one does not think of it as worth registering (Harriss-White, 2003).

Hart (1973, p.69) provides some examples of informal economic activities in Ghana, several of which we found to be present in the lives of our informants. First, the economy among the homeless persons in our study involved various kinds of mobile exchange, one example is how they recycled things gathered from skips and the like and used them in exchange for other goods. Second, the economy is heavily dominated by criminal activity, especially concerning the buying and selling of illegal drugs; this element is also part of the black or illegitimate economy. In this paper, we use the term 'informal economy' as a reference to the overall economic system that many homeless persons find themselves operating in. When using the term 'black economy', we are referring more directly to the illegal activities (mostly concerning drugs) that our informants take part in.

## About the Research

The research consisted of ten in-depth interviews with homeless persons as well as extensive participant observation among long-term homeless people staying in a shelter for homeless people in Oslo. The data was collected in early spring 2007. At that time all the informants used drugs and/or alcohol on a regular basis. The youngest informant was aged 27 and the oldest was 52, and there were more men than women. All the informants were long-term homeless, which is defined in Norway as having experienced homelessness (including episodes in and out of housing) for several years (Dyb and Johannessen, 2009). To secure the anonymity of the informants, all names have been changed.

The local service provision for homeless people in Oslo is partly run by the municipality of Oslo and partly by non-governmental organisations. There are several shelters that offer temporary accommodation, differing in size and in the level of support and assistance provided. There is also a quite well-developed range of cafés for homeless persons, where food is served for free or for a nominal price. This service landscape is similar to other European countries (see, for example, May et al., 2006).

The persons with whom we conducted the in-depth interviews were recruited in different hostels and cafés catering for homeless people. Journalists and researchers in Norway have paid quite a lot of attention to homeless persons in day centres and we were unsure whether many homeless people would be fed up with giving interviews. Because of this the only criteria we had when recruiting informants was that they had experienced long-term homelessness and had been rough-sleeping for a period in their lives. Some informants were rough-sleeping at the time of the interview, whereas others were living in a shelter. The informants used the homeless day centres in the city independently of their living arrangements, but the people who slept rough seemed to use them more than the people living in shelters. All the informants had stayed at shelters around the city, and stayed there now and then when they were rough-sleeping.

The interviews were semi-structured and different themes were discussed. The questions were mainly about how the informants organised their lives when sleeping rough and in shelters, but also asked about their hopes for the future. The interviews were analysed using a theme-based approach that made it possible to examine what the informants talked about and to compare their answers.

The participant observation was carried out in one of several shelters owned by Oslo City Council that specialise in assisting homeless people with drug and alcohol misuse issues (hereafter called the Shelter). The Shelter accommodates fifty persons, both men and women. The mechanism is to provide temporary accommodation where residents have access to a raft of welfare services. 'Temporary' means in this case no more than twelve months. Tenant contracts rotate at three-monthly intervals. The Shelter is staffed around the clock; the residents do not have keys to the building and have to be let in and out by a member of staff. Visits from people not accommodated in the Shelter must be planned and approved by the staff 24 hours in advance. The rooms in the Shelter are small and there is not much furniture. Residents share communal toilets and showers. Food is served at least once a day; syringes are handed out; and a GP is available once a week and a qualified nurse every day.

The period of observation was one month, for between three and six hours every day. Different hours of the day and night were chosen according to relevance and the activities at the Shelter (Flåto, 2008). A common reason for choosing participant observation as a method is the idea that everyday life is expressed through social practice rather than deliberate thoughts and actions (Silverman, 2006). Using this ethnographic approach allowed us to observe and talk to the informants in their daily surroundings, and to participate in the social life of the Shelter. This extremely useful method opened a window into the everyday life of the Shelter, which is usually inaccessible to outsiders. Observing people over a period of time gives a more rounded picture of their culture and allows the researcher an opportunity to discover less obvious dimensions of the field studied (Fangen, 2004).[1]

The research informants were broadly typical of the population of homeless people in Oslo in terms of age and gender, though they were more likely to be long-term homeless and drug users. In Oslo there were 1,525 homeless persons in 2008[2] (Dyb and Johannessen, 2009). A majority (70 per cent) of homeless people were men. Almost half of them were long-term homeless. The vast majority (80 per cent) were aged between 25 and 54 years. Of all the homeless people in Oslo, 61 per cent used drugs on a regular basis; 24 per cent stayed in temporary housing[3] and 25 per cent of these had stayed in temporary housing alternatives for more than six months.

Although the shelters 'offer' temporary accommodation, many of the residents remain there for years, or alternate between different shelters in Oslo. Data collected in 2007 show that one person had been resident in one of the shelters run by Oslo

1 For a discussion of the method used in this study, see Flåto, 2008, pp.39–49; on the ethnographic method in studies of homelessness, see, for example, Madden, 2003.

2 The mapping of homeless persons in Norway was carried out for the fourth time in 2008. The study is a survey of homeless persons in contact with the health or welfare authorities and other relevant organisations. Respondents are asked to complete a questionnaire on every homeless person known to them. The number of homeless people in Norway as a whole in the last week of November 2008 was 6,091, or 1.27 homeless individuals per 1,000 population.

3 Temporary housing is defined as all temporary accommodation and ranges from places where residents can stay for several months to hostels where they can sleep one night and have to leave during the day (Dyb and Johannessen, 2009).

City Council for 8.5 years without moving out; the average length of stay in four council-run shelters (only counting those shelters with the most temporary profile) was 2.6 years (Lian, 2008). This means that for many homeless people the shelters are not temporary – they are their homes.

## Harvesting Economy as an Economic Strategy

Within the rationality of the harvesting economy apparently meaningless behaviours can be meaningful and are not as random as they first seem. For instance, a householder with mortgages and other outlays would be unwise not to save money for a rainy day, but spending every cent one has may be a rational decision if one is homeless. Only 3 per cent of homeless individuals in Norway state that paid work is their chief source of income (Dyb and Johannessen, 2009). None of our informants had an income from paid work, corroborating the findings of international research (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Van Doorn, 2000; Gowan, 2002; McNaughton and Sanders, 2007). Most of them lived from social benefits in combination with other activities in the informal economy.

None of the informants had a bank account or a credit card[4]. When homeless persons do not have a bank account, they have little choice but to carry their money on them or hide it in a safe place. Within this context, to avoid losing it or having it stolen, it makes sense to spend it. When prosperous, it was quite common among the informants to share goods such as food, cigarettes or even drugs with others. It is extremely advisable, says Van Doorn (2010, p.222), 'for homeless to spend money at once. For keeping money in one's pocket increases the risk of becoming the victim of robbery and extortion.' As one informant, Johannes, explained, 'If you're in the wrong company or if you're all alone, then you're in luck if you have all your belongings when you wake up. If you want to keep your things you have to sleep on top of them or chain them to your body.'

All of the homeless persons interviewed in this study had previously lived with friends and acquaintances. The informants emphasised that to possess an apartment meant that they could help other people in need. Although any resulting noise and neighbourhood disturbances often caused the tenant to lose the apartment, the informants told us that people will most likely return the favour when they are in need of a place to sleep in the future. One respondent said that he did not want to live in an apartment. He had had apartments before, but kept losing them because he could not say no to all the people who wanted to live there with him. Another informant, Jostein, told us that he would like an apartment, but it

4 This question was not asked of all respondents but none of those asked had a bank account or credit card.

should be a distance outside the city so that he would be less likely to lose it because of too many visitors. Drake and Padgett (2008) found a similar pattern among their respondents. Within the harvesting economy sharing with friends is not only a good deed, it is a sensible investment, a security for a time when one has nothing oneself.

Theft is rife among homeless communities, although bartering, where services and goods are exchanged, also plays a significant role (Johansen, 2002; Flåto and Johansen, 2008; Flåto, 2008; Johannessen, 2008). Kim told us that a common way for her to make money was to steal an item from a shop and then later to return it in exchange for a credit slip. After a period of time she would visit the shop again and sell the credit slip to a regular customer. Stories of shoplifting were common in the Shelter and were usually told in a humorous way.

The informants often spoke of debt to other homeless persons. Within the harvesting economy debt (mostly informal) plays a double role. Jostein told us that when he had bought what he needed for the day he counted his money and paid off his debts. Johansen (2002) found a similar pattern; an example he highlighted was an informant who bought drugs on credit from the same person for a whole month and then cleared his debts by doing practical chores and repaying what he owed once a month (p.150). The harvesting economy displays high levels of mutual reliance. On the other hand, the informants told us that it was quite common not to return what is lent or to expect favours. But even with the risk of not getting back what you invest; investment is still a rational act.

When it comes to formal debt, the rationale is somewhat different. Most formal debt requires an address to receive bills and a bank account to make payments from. This means that those living rough or in a shelter are shielded from some of the more formal debts. Thus, within the rationality of the informal economy described here, one can argue that it makes sense not to have an apartment if you have serious formal debt. Leo told us that the most positive thing about being homeless is that one avoids bills and written reminders. Of course this is only rational from a short-term perspective as the debt will increase the longer one does not repay it. In Norway 15 per cent of all homeless people are victims of debt, and there is reason to believe that the true number is much higher (Dyb et al., 2006; Dyb and Johannessen, 2009). These studies mainly show the formal debt of homeless persons; it is likely that many more are in informal debt.

### *A nomadic lifestyle*

The nomadic lifestyle that homeless people live is closely related to the economic strategies they use. Although many of our informants originally came from other parts of the country their mobility at the time of the research was mostly within the city. This mobility was a result of their lack of a permanent place to stay, and for some it was the only way to cope with homeless life.

The informants of this study were forced to deal with temporary substitutes for a permanent home in various places in the city. Whether they were staying temporarily with friends, in a shelter or sleeping rough, their situation was neither permanent nor tenable. A life marked by dislocation requires an ability to move around. Homeless people must keep their 'luggage' to a minimum because it may have to be moved at a moment's notice (Dyb, 2006; Johannessen, 2008). Johannes told us that all he owned was a bicycle and a few bags. He always carried most of his belongings with him; he had no place to store them. The night before the interview was conducted he had walked the streets all night with his belongings. Since his release from prison a few months earlier, he had lost all of his belongings six or seven times, each time he had found new things.

Gowan (2002) finds that the unsettled lifestyle of homeless people frequently stems from their intolerable housing situation. Our informants spent time moving around the city looking for things, either their own belongings they had stored somewhere, or new items to replace possessions they had lost, sold or given away. Jostein, for example, had possessions spread over many different places in the city: 'places I've slept, places where I've stayed for a few days, and also in deposit boxes. It's expensive to get my things out again. In general it is very difficult to hold on to your things, they get stolen or lost.' Possessions come and go and Jostein displayed a very superficial attitude towards his things. Leo was in the same situation: 'There's really no point in being material in my situation. You don't get all your stuff with you when you are evicted.'

The nomadic lifestyle is also visible when we consider where homeless persons eat, shower and sleep. Many homeless people have no alternative but to commute between various service providers located in different places. The mobility they show is a survival strategy in a difficult situation. Within the harvesting economy it is rational to pursue resources. Not only do people need to move to acquire the resources, they also need to move after they have got hold of them to dispose of them as soon as possible. Because the principles of the harvesting economy rely very much on individual luck, people also need to be mobile according to where their social network is located. Rahimian et al. (1992) and Cloke et al. (2008)

emphasise that homeless persons will journey to meet basic survival needs, but also their journeys are choices they make, for example to earn more money or to seek leisure, which go beyond the need to survive.

For homeless persons living in temporary shelters, the storage situation is different. They have a room where they can keep their belongings, but in the Shelter there are rules regulating the quantity and size of items you can keep there. For example, you are not allowed to store spare furniture in your room or to bring stolen items into the Shelter. Although this policy is understandable, it makes storage of possessions difficult. Each room is equipped with a refrigerator, however, few of our informants used this facility. Karl comments, ‘I never buy any food at the shop. I do not know what to buy, and anyway it is expensive.’ The Shelter is temporary and the residents can be evicted at very short notice. When moving out of the Shelter, it is expected that people will move all their belongings out as well.

The Shelter is a temporary solution for homeless persons and much of our informants behaviour there reflected a nomadic lifestyle. When food was served, the majority chose to use disposable plates and cutlery, even if porcelain was available. It was common for residents to eat breakfast in full outdoor clothing, during winter this could include huge jackets and even full suits. When leaving breakfast, it was not unusual for the residents to have their pockets full of packages of cheese, butter and the like. This is evidence of stockpiling, a way of gathering resources. Eric, who had stayed in the Shelter for more than three years, said he usually slept on the floor out of habit, even if there was a bed in his room. The nomadic lifestyle seems to be an enduring one as staying in the Shelter for a long time does not appear to change the experience of being ‘on the move’.

Within the harvesting economy the demand for mobility is greater than it is within other economies such as capitalism. When resources are in different locations it makes sense to have few ties binding you to one place. In addition to this, the life homeless people lead makes it more difficult to settle in one place. As Leo said earlier, avoiding paying bills or receiving other unpleasant mail might serve as a reason not to settle. One can assume the same applies for informal debt. Maria was wanted by the police because she was due to serve an old prison sentence. Her mobile situation helped her evade capture. Whether it is the economic strategies that lead to this mobile lifestyle or the mobile lifestyle itself that forces homeless people into this economy is difficult to say. It appears that the two factors reinforce each other.

## Social Life and Networks

As the economy among homeless persons is closely connected to their social networks, it is important to elaborate on the social life of the informants of our study. Among our informants, network membership seemed critical. The street culture mediated social connections and offered help and assistance. Most of our informants' daily needs that were not met by different welfare services could be met through the social networks.

### *Relationships*

Homeless persons enter social relationships on the same grounds that all others do, but life on the streets and in the shelters may also involve more complex dynamics. Participation in these social networks can serve as a substitute for not having place-based stations such as home and work. The networks provide time–space continuity and offer 'material, emotional and logistical support' (Rowe and Wolch, 1990, p.190).

Some of the informants had a partner who was also homeless and life together was problematic without a place to live. Eric's partner had been evicted from the Shelter where both of them had been living. When we met him, his girlfriend was standing outside, where the temperature was –15°C. She had nowhere to go and was not allowed to enter the Shelter as a visitor. Eric was frustrated and angry; he wanted to find a way to sneak his partner into the Shelter. As in most relationships, homeless or not, lovers seem to have quite high expectations of how their partner should share all goods, from food to drugs. Another couple living in the Shelter provided a good example of this. When she or he bought or asked others for cigarettes, they asked for two, always an extra for the other person. The same applied when one of them got coffee or showed up for breakfast, he or she asked for something to bring to the other who was still sleeping.

Research exploring homelessness from a women's perspective often finds that women face additional problems when compared with homeless men, for example they are more likely to experience violence (Radley et al., 2006). Such an understanding may explain why many homeless women consider it wise to be in a relationship that offers protection from other men (May et al., 2007). This theme was not explicitly elaborated on in our study, neither do our data point in this direction. Our female informants instead emphasised how it was better being on their own, avoiding the risk of being exploited by a partner. Most of the informants did not engage in close relationships that involved more than friendship, but the few relationships between men and women in our study, to our understanding, bore the same signs of reciprocity as platonic same-sex relationships.

Friendships were more frequent. They were usually between two people, but there were also groups of three or four persons who considered themselves friends. They seemed to have similar expectations of each other to those found in couples, especially with regard to sharing. Food, drink, money, places to sleep, drugs and alcohol were shared. One evening we sat together with a group of residents, it was quite cold outside, –12°C, and one of the women spoke about how she really hated the thought of going out to get money, but she was broke and her need for heroin was getting more severe. After a while she decided to contact a friend living in the Shelter, she said he used to help her because he knew she would pay him back.

### *Sharing within the group*

Gift giving, bartering and sharing were quite common among the informants. We interpret this as a way of using resources as soon as they are acquired. According to Mauss (1995), a gift is accompanied by an expectation of a reciprocal gesture at a later date. While giving appears to be an unselfish act, it imposes an obligation on the receiver. Several of the informants seemed to share this understanding of the role of gifts and it was cited as one reason for not accepting gifts. Eric said, 'There is no community among the homeless. Everyone has to take care of themselves. I try to share with others, it's better that others owe me, than me owing them. And if I'm in an emergency, other people help me out. That's uncomfortable. Then I owe them.' Giving away goods can be understood as an investment, not a direct material investment but a social investment that is expected to pay off at a later date. According to Eric, it is best to avoid indebtedness, which you could be expected to redeem at any time. It is not always easy to follow the precept though: sometimes the situation makes it impossible to turn a gift down. Sharing plays an important role within the economy because sharing of goods and favours is essential to manage daily life. The lack of resources can make it necessary to accept gifts of cigarettes, food or drugs. It may even necessitate asking for help. This double role of sharing and giving gifts is a characteristic of the harvesting economy. Sørhaug (1996) describes how 'the good hunter' gets power through how and with whom he or she shares goods.

Another important aspect of this economy is the low cultivation of the resources. Our informants used their resources almost immediately; this often meant giving away some of it to the person(s) close to them. However, people may also be selective about who they give their resources to:

> Geir is entering the living room; he has a pile of batteries with him. He puts them on the table, and then asks Peter if he wants some batteries. He says 'no thank you', stating that he doesn't think this kind of batter[y] is any good. He then leaves the room. Two minutes later a woman enters, when she sees the batteries, she asks if she can have a couple. Geir says 'no', he needs them himself.

Peter was a powerful man in the Shelter. Giving him gifts when prosperous could be a good investment, far better than saving the batteries for when you may need them. Sharing with the woman did not have the same value.

Few of the informants had contact with their families. Only two informants told us about social meetings with friends outside the street culture. None of our informants had a formal daily job. Being homeless and without work means two important factors in daily life are missing (Rowe and Wolch, 1990, p.190):

> The absence of a home base restricts the homeless individual's access to family and friends, and vice versa. The workplace, another source of social contacts, may no longer be relevant. This breakdown of traditional social networks and changes in daily/life paths leads homeless people to develop ways to acquire resources which do not depend on either a spatially fixed home base or a job site.

Rowe and Wolch claim that the network of other homeless people plays a vital part in the acquisition of resources. This corresponds with the situation of our informants, where the lack of other social networks extending beyond the culture of homeless persons emphasised the importance of their network.

Despite the apparent importance of the network, relationships are unstable affairs. According to the informants, the only sure thing about a friendship, or any other relationship, is that it will end. Relationships usually flounder over monetary differences or drugs. Trust does not seem to be an aspect of the relationships, neither the close friendships nor those across the wider network. 'There are few people you can trust, you better keep to yourself, 'Karl told us.

Neale (2001) labels the situation of being both homeless and a drug user as a 'double jeopardy': as homeless people they lack the borders of a home and as drug users they are attractive victims of crime. 'They are physically unable to resist offenders when intoxicated; carry valuable items such as money and drugs; lack capable guardians who might serve as protectors; and are often unable to appeal to the police for protection because of the criminal nature of their own behaviour' (p.367).

Stories about money, drugs and property being stolen were rife, with usually a friend or partner figuring as the main suspect. Svensson (1996) describes the drug scene of his study as 'sociality without solidarity'. This description fits the social network of our informants as well. They are among the poorest population in Norway; this fact contributes to the explanation of why one's own gain might be the most important thing in a difficult situation. When an agreement of reciprocity is violated, the relationship loses its worth. Within the rationality of the harvesting economy this means (at least) two things: a connection within the network is broken and there is an opportunity to move on and enter into new relationships. As our informants perceived broken relationships as a normal experience it is likely that the lack of permanency in their situation also affected their understanding of social relationships.

### *The role of the black economy*

Drugs are at the core of the social network and buying and selling drugs or getting the money to buy drugs dominated and defined our informants' lives. Much of their social life revolved around these activities.

The high activity around drugs may explain why behavioural codes associated with drug use appear to inform what is understood as social interaction. For example, disobeying the drug dealing rules (e.g. selling impure dope) can lead to exclusion from the group as a social outcast. Phrases like 'he's a good pal, you can always trust him to sell good stuff' describe how the understanding of friendship is mixed with business. The network in which our informants operated was therefore not simply a site of social interaction, economic transactions were just as important. Thomas, who sold drugs at the Shelter, stated that he did not perceive the other residents as friends but as business relations. Eva, a typical buyer, said, 'If you have money you are okay, if you don't you are nothing.' This clearly shows the importance of the (black) economy in the social network.

The social network of homeless persons may resemble an economic alliance, but it is not an economy measured only in terms of money. Economic relations in which every member partakes prevented members of the group studied by Svensson (1996) from maintaining friendships; this was again connected to the fact that economic issues were mostly related to drugs and the black economy, and most of the informants were addicted to drugs. The same applied to our informants. Kirsten told us:

> 'It's sad that friendships always end with arguments about money or conning. People say that the environment was better in earlier days; I don't know if I believe it. But it's more business now than before. No one wants to talk to you, the first month here after getting back from Tyrili[5] was hard, there we talked to each other, here there's none of that.'

Two quotes show the complicity of social and economic networks amongst our informants: 'the easiest way to lose your friends is by stealing from them' and 'it's easy to get friends amongst other homeless but not good friends'.

Lalander (2001, p.97) describes how the attractiveness of drugs among his informants constituted an inner threat to the solidarity of the group. The need for drugs ousts the worth of social relationships. This knowledge is helpful when seeking to

5 A rehabilitation institution.

understand the social relationships in which our informants were embedded. However, drugs and economic ties also bound our informants together as they relied on each other to obtain what they needed in the course of a day. For instance, it is a good idea to pair up if you are contemplating a burglary, and possibly a matter of life and death if you are injecting heroin. The dependency relationship therefore makes sense, despite the risk of betrayal. Claiming that the economy is based on the social networks is reasonable when we remember the exclusion of homeless people from the formal economy. A black economy can therefore be something of a necessity for homeless people.

## Perception of Time

When people lose their home, sooner or later their perception of the world around them changes and they adapt as best they can to their new setting. In this section we discuss how homeless people's perception of time also alters and how the harvesting economy may provide an explanation for this change.

Our informants were unable to make plans well ahead and often missed appointments that they made themselves. They were more focused on the here and now than on the future. However, as discussed earlier, sharing implies future obligations within the harvesting economy and therefore our data here point in different directions: the informants had a short-term perspective when it came to practical planning, but they took a long-term perspective about lending and borrowing within the homeless setting. This way of planning underlines the importance of the social network in the economy of homeless persons. In our experience, investment is made in social relationships rather than in material resources.

Although our informants had no permanent ties to the routines and rituals separating work and leisure time that organise main society, every day looked similar to the next one for them. Jostein noted, 'You do the same things every day at the same time, more or less.' Karl characterised himself and others in his situation as `people who are opposing to postponing the satisfaction of needs'. He was the only participant to tell us how he often planned what he wanted to do, but his plans were seldom carried out. From his and other informants' utterances we found that the main reason why plans are not put into action is the individual's unstable living situation: the main focus each day is to satisfy basic needs.

'I never make plans for the day, I take the days as they come,' said Martin. Most of our informants never planned further ahead than the next day. As for long-term planning, many of them had dreams and hopes for the future (which could be what Karl also had on a short-term scale). Maria told us that she could not do anything with her life at that moment because she was due to serve an old prison sentence. Imprisonment and homelessness are closely related (Dyb, 2009) and long-term planning can be interrupted by old and new sentences.

When we examine the economic strategies of our informants, where lending and borrowing are common, it becomes clear why a short-term time perspective may be the most favourable when living on the streets and in temporary shelters. The brief 'production process' under the harvesting economy shortens the individual's time horizons. 'Short-term horizons neither require nor encourage long-term planning and will eventually reduce the capacity to do so' (Sørhaug, 1996, p.38, our translation). There were several episodes in the Shelter when residents sat in the hall or the living room expressing regret at having missed an appointment. When asked if he was going to join an activity later on, Martin answered, 'That's impossible to say, my needs and wants change from one minute to the next.'

Another informant told us that he never 'worked' more than necessary to get the money he needed. He depended on drugs and spent most of his income on illegal substances. The most he planned ahead was to make sure he had enough dope for the following day's first dose. If he earned enough in a shorter space of time, he took the rest of the day off. He never did enough work to allow himself two days off. In such a never-ending cycle one is never 'off work'.

Van Doorn (2010) explains this inability to think ahead by reference to the change in perceptions of time affecting people who lose their home and become so-called 'street people'. Rather than following society's dominant 'linear' conception of time, time becomes cyclical. 'In the cyclic perception of time one day flows into the next and weeks, months and years are threaded together in one fluid motion… Its focus is more on the "here and now" than on the future' (p.1).

## Conclusion: The Trap of Homelessness

The harvesting economy affects all areas of life, and as homeless persons adapt to the informal economy their chance of re-absorption into mainstream society becomes increasingly remote. Through the mechanisms of the harvesting economy, social networks bind homeless persons closer together. Economic capital relies on social networks and time off becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish from work. The homeless persons involved in this study were never off work, even when it seemed like they were mingling with friends. Every day was a hunt for money to buy what they needed, and when they were not hunting there was still business going on in the shelters and on the street.

The harvesting economy/cyclical time horizon combination acted to undermine our informants' ties to the wider community. Inclusion in this economy, and a lifestyle characterised by a short-term time horizon, makes the transition to the main society harder. If a person wants to get something done outside the logic of the harvesting economy, it is essential to plan and make appointments. However, home and work are not the fixed compass points for homeless people that they are for others, and the life of homeless persons seems chaotic for that reason (McNaughton and Sanders, 2007). Mobility is the *sine qua non* of the harvesting economy and material things are always in transit. Here one minute, gone the next, is the basic principle. Flexibility and mobility become vital survival skills. 'Making plans and adhering to them is hardly functional because it seriously hampers flexibility. A perspective focusing on the short term is a way for homeless persons to manage daily problems' (Van Doorn, 2010, p.220). Living from day to day is energy-consuming because the satisfaction of basic needs, such as food and security, will always be paramount. Long-term planning has no meaning. Immediate satisfaction is part and parcel of the short-term horizon and the harvesting economy, and as a strategy will rarely be compatible with the conventions of society.

The shelters that cater for the everyday needs of homeless people might reinforce a harvesting rationality. Several of our informants commented on what staying in the Shelter did to their self-image. At breakfast one morning Christina was sleeping with her head on the table. When she woke up and saw us sitting right in front of her she rose quickly to her feet and excused herself for sleeping at the table. She looked rather messy, with a dirty shirt and the zip in her pants open. She later told us that she would usually never appear in this state in public, but her stay in the Shelter had made her less concerned about her appearance. Two other persons from the Shelter commented on what the Shelter was doing to them. 'I've stayed here for three years, you're lucky if you get out of here standing on your two feet.' 'I've stayed in places like this for six years now. My brain has stagnated, there's no hope for me.' Venues such as the Shelter give rise to feelings of ambivalence: they offer a free space, but they perpetuate the marginal situation in which homeless persons find themselves.

Another example involved a young man who had a doctor's appointment that the Shelter staff had made for him. On the day of the appointment he was offered tickets for the tram. 'You see what they do to us?' he said. 'They are teaching us helplessness.' Another resident described the Shelter as a place where your own will fades. 'Institutions are not good places to learn the point of applying oneself, of investing and of extended value chains. They do not create an environment where postponing gratification will result in significant gains' (Sørhaug, 1996, p.40, our translation). One can say the same about homeless people 'living' on the streets.

Life on the streets inhibits long-range planning, and living from hand to mouth is so exhausting that setting other goals beyond simply getting through the next twenty-four hours is clearly difficult.

The homelessness service provision, we argue, plays a significant role in the adaptation of homeless life. The shelters and other low threshold services provide temporary help for homeless people in an acute situation, as they should. The problem emerges when temporary shelters and services become a permanent way of life and therefore reinforce the principles of the harvesting economy and contribute to the marginalisation of homeless people, who remain in a situation where they live on the sidelines of society. The longer homelessness lasts, the harder it seems to be to return to a life with a home of one's own.

In recent years there has been an increased focus on homeless people living in temporary accommodation for long periods of time. The homeless strategies in Denmark and Norway aim to reduce homelessness by decreasing the length of stays in temporary housing for citizens prepared to move into their own homes (Benjaminsen et al., 2009). From the survey of homelessness in Norway conducted in 2008 (Dyb and Johannessen, 2009), we know that 25 per cent of homeless people stayed in temporary accommodation provisions for more than six months. It seems clear that the work in this field should be intensified. By providing homes for people living in shelters and the like at an earlier stage it is possible to stop the marginalisation process of people experiencing homelessness. What people such as our informants need is a fixed point in the temporary life they are leading. They have few permanent elements in their lives, mainly because they have a temporary living situation where it is impossible to plan ahead. They do not know where they are going to live next week or next month.

In addition, more research on the role of homelessness service provision is needed to assess its effects on homeless people's lives. The aims of the service providers are to reduce the burden of being homeless, but they might end up doing the opposite by contributing to prolonged homelessness. As identified, there seems to be a tendency for homeless people to stay in temporary shelters, sleep rough and use the day shelters for many years. Despite a shifting policy terrain, there remains a lack of focus on the transition from homelessness to permanent housing. When homeless persons make the move from temporary solutions to permanent housing it is important to recognise that the lifestyle that they have led, some for many years, is not necessarily consistent with the inflexibility of life in a permanent home. Service providers need to recognise that homeless people have lived by different strategies for several years, strategies that are far from those of capitalism.

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# Policy Review

## Part B

# The Homelessness Strategy in Denmark

Finn Kenneth Hansen

The Centre for Alternative Social Analysis (CASA)

**Abstract_** *The Danish government recently developed a national homelessness strategy for the period from 2009 to 2012. With an overall aim to reduce homelessness, the strategy has four goals : no one should live on the streets, young people should not stay at homeless hostels, no person should have to stay in a homeless hostel for more than 120 days, and better accommodation solutions must be in place for people being released from prison or leaving institutional care. This paper reviews the main features of the new strategy and argues that it does not fundamentally alter approaches to homelessness in Denmark, but it does provide a much stronger framework to develop effective initiatives at the local municipality level.*

**Keywords_** *Homelessness strategy ; Denmark ; housing first ; evaluation*

## Introduction

The Danish government recently developed a national homelessness strategy for the four-year period from 2009 to 2012 (Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, 2009). The philosophy behind the strategy recognises that working with homeless and socially vulnerable people is a cornerstone of social policy in a developed European country. The government considered the extent of homelessness to be unacceptable and, together with political parties involved in joint funding of the programme, decided to initiate a national homelessness strategy. The initiatives arising from the strategy are intended to reduce homelessness and to help as many homeless citizens as possible to exit homelessness and live worthwhile and stable lives in their own homes. Approximately 500 million DKK (€67m) has been earmarked for the strategy in the period 2009 to 2012.

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The development of the strategy has been influenced by a number of national and European factors. Danish homeless organisations and the Council for Socially Marginalized People[1] have for many years requested an investigation into the scale of homelessness in Denmark. It and others have campaigned for the funding and development of new initiatives to address the needs of homeless people and reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness. There has also been pressure from European organisations to develop policy in this area, including from the European Commission and FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless). There has also been inspiration from other EU countries, including Nordic countries, which have established a homelessness strategy (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009).

More specifically, in response to calls for better data, recent surveys have provided information on the scale of homelessness and on emerging trends over time. A count of homeless people in Denmark was compiled during week six of 2007 and then repeated in the same week of 2009 by SFI – the Danish National Centre for Social Research (Benjaminsen and Christensen, 2007; Benjaminsen, 2009).[2] Both counts revealed that around 5,000 persons were homeless during the week in question, suggesting that existing policy is not effectively tackling homelessness. The Danish National Centre for Social Research, SFI assesses that this figure corresponds to a total of between 11,000 and 13,000 persons affected by homelessness every year. (Benjamin and Christensen, 2007).

In addition to this, the Centre for Alternative Social Analysis (CASA) produced an analysis of the existing housing and accommodation services in Denmark in 2007, in cooperation with the then Ministry of Social Welfare. The analysis revealed unmet accommodation needs in half of the municipalities and assessed that around 1,000 extra residences and places at residential institutions would be required to meet these needs (Hansen et al., 2007).

This paper begins by introducing the main elements of the Danish homelessness strategy and reviewing existing knowledge on homelessness policy and provision in Denmark, including outlining the main models of homelessness interventions. It

1 The Council for Socially Marginalized People, established in April 2002, is an advocate for socially disadvantaged citizens and makes proposals for improving efforts aimed at vulnerable groups in society.

2 The Danish survey is conducted during one specific week through a range of services expected to be in touch with, or know of, homeless persons. Thus, the figures encompass and are delimited to homeless people in contact with, or known by, the respondents. The count includes such groups as rough sleepers, hostel users and individuals living in temporary supported accommodation, as well as in institutions or prisons from which they are due to be released within one month. The survey is a cross-section registration.

then returns to the detail of the homelessness strategy, discussing the approach and methods being taken to address the needs of homeless people. Finally, the paper reviews progress to date.

## The Danish Homelessness Strategy

The homelessness strategy (Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, 2009) takes an evidence-based approach, being formulated on the basis of analyses and the existing knowledge of the extent and nature of homelessness. It aims to produce targeted initiatives and develop effective methods to prevent and reduce homelessness, and to evaluate these methods in some detail.

The strategy's overall aim is to reduce the level of homelessness in Denmark. It has four main goals (p.6):

1. No citizens should live a life on the street.
2. Young people should not stay at homeless hostels, but must be offered alternative solutions.
3. Periods of accommodation in care homes or shelters should last no longer than three to four months for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support.
4. Release from prison or discharge from courses of treatment or hospitals must presuppose that an accommodation solution is in place.

The strategy combines three main elements designed to reduce homelessness in Denmark. First, it will help to strengthen the services available to homeless people by providing an extra 500 million DKK (€67m) to initiatives over the period 2009 to 2012. Support will, for example, be provided for the construction or conversion of housing for homeless people, and to assist social work initiatives, coordination and housing support, as well as outreach and contact work with the homeless.

Second, the strategy will help to ensure a focus on better monitoring of the initiatives throughout the process. The councils of the participating municipalities have had to set specific targets for the reduction of homelessness in line with the goals of the strategy. Progress towards these targets will form the basis of ongoing dialogue between the advisory function of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the municipalities.

Third, the strategy will support the development of improved methods to evaluate the effectiveness of existing and new approaches to homelessness. Very little systematic knowledge exists in Denmark in relation to the interventions that work best with particular groups of homeless people. Similarly, there is very little systematic knowledge of which groups of homeless people could manage by themselves in their own homes with the help of housing support, and which would require support within the framework of residential institutions. In general there is a need to improve the documentation of the effects of various types of initiative in order to reinforce the development of knowledge and methods in the field of homelessness in Denmark.

Initially, eight municipalities will be cooperating with the Ministry of Social Affairs to transform the homelessness strategy into specific initiatives to tackle homelessness. The eight municipalities have set concrete goals (under the four main areas) in relation to reducing homelessness, for example a decrease of almost 200 in the number of people sleeping rough across the eight areas (a reduction of 64 per cent for these municipalities; individual reduction targets for the different municipalities range from 50 to 85 per cent). The initiatives include improvement in the methods of working with homeless people, as well as the development of 373 new housing units across the eight municipalities, consisting of both council housing (162 units) and a range of specialised supported housing options.

## The Strategy's Starting Point: Existing Responsibilities and Models of Provision

### *Responsibility for the provision of homelessness services*

The local government reform programme, which entered into force on 1 January 2007, located the chief responsibility for social, housing and employment initiatives with the municipalities. Interventions on homelessness are generally integrated into mainstream social services via regulation and the Social Services Act 2002. The law on social services defines a specified range of interventions such as homeless hostels, intermediate supported housing, long-term supported housing, social support attached to the individual, social drop-in centres and substance misuse treatment. Whilst the Act covers homelessness services, it does not contain a statutory right to housing and does not satisfactorily address the need to assist those people who are unable to secure a home through the market with acquiring a home. As a result local social authorities have considerable room to interpret and develop modes of interventions in homelessness services and local policies. Services for vulnerable groups are almost entirely publicly funded, although non-governmental organisations are often involved in running the services.

Whilst this is the first formal national homelessness strategy, some previous initiatives have attempted to improve provision for homeless people and other marginalised groups, over and above existing mainstream social service provision. For example, a recent initiative (2003–2005) aimed to strengthen services and interventions for vulnerable groups in Denmark's six largest cities (the City programme) as part of the government's Our Common Responsibility programme (Meert, 2005). An evaluation (Benjaminsen et al., 2006) showed that the programme strengthened the supply of services by providing a range of targeted interventions such as alternative nursing homes for older homeless substance users, staircase communities and social support in ordinary housing. It concluded that the success of the programme, compared with previous programmes, was due to the very precise targeting of the projects at specific vulnerable subgroups such as people with mental health problems, substance users and homeless long-term substance users. Especially in larger provincial towns, municipal officials argued that by expanding the range of interventions available (both types and numbers) it became easier for them to match the users to specific services given the character of the users' problems. In Copenhagen, the programme helped increase the variety and capacity of supported housing available, although local actors argued that the gap between the demand from users with a need for special housing interventions and the range and availability of services remained quite substantial.

Under the City programme, municipalities received project-based funding from central government and it was a condition of this funding that they should guarantee a continuation of the projects after the programme period ended (including documenting that these new services did not replace existing ones, i.e. they represented additional service provision). The evaluation showed that this 'guarantee of added services' had been largely fulfilled by the municipalities involved (Benjaminsen et al., 2006). After the project period, an increase in general block grants was given to municipalities, which partly compensated them for new expenses. As the use of central government project funding is generally a widespread tool to increase service provision for vulnerable groups at the local level, the example shows how administrative measures can be used to enhance the effectiveness of policies at the implementation level.

### *Existing models of homeless intervention*

In Denmark, as in Scandinavia and most other Western countries, various schemes of supported housing have undergone considerable expansion in recent decades. There has been widespread discussion of the merits of different intervention types following Tsemberis's well-known randomised controlled experiment in the United States, which pointed to a better chance of remaining housed following the 'housing first' approach, compared with a control group that received no early housing-based intervention (Tsemberis, 1999 and 2004).

The argument within the 'housing first' approach is that housing needs to be secured before progress can be expected in, for example, treatment of substance misuse or mental health issues (see Atherton and McNaughton, 2008). In contrast, the 'continuum of care' or 'staircase of transition' approach is based on the assumption that progress on other problem dimensions, for example substance misuse, has to be achieved first in order to qualify for permanent housing; in other words behavioural conditions are assigned to the achievement of a permanent contract (Sahlin, 2005; Meert, 2005).

In the classification of different kinds of intervention, Benjaminsen and Dyb (2008) make a distinction between three models: a normalising model, a tiered model and a staircase of transition model (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Three models of homelessness intervention**

| | The normalizing model | The tiered model | Staircase of transition |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Measure** | Moving into independent living in one´s own dwelling | Independent living after an intermediate phase from hostel or similar establishment to independent living | Hierarchy/staircase of lodging and dwellings: independent living for those who qualify |
| **Method** | Individually designed support | Tiers of intervention during a settled intermediate phase before independent living | Differentiated system of sanctions based on withdrawal and expansion of rights and goods |
| **Ideology** | Homeless persons have the same needs as other people, but some need support to obtain a 'life quality' | A negative circle is to be broken through gradual adaption to independent living | Homeless persons need to learn to live independently and not all will succeed |

From: Benjaminsen and Dyb 2008

Looking at Denmark, existing intervention models tend to mainly encompass the first two categories, the normalising or housing first pathway and the tiered model, whilst studies have highlighted that different types of interventions may be found at the local municipality level.

In towns such as Aalborg and Odense a housing first strategy can be observed, although it is not explicitly stated in local policies. Eventual referral to social housing with social support is the most common type of intervention after a stay in a homeless hostel. Aarhus has developed a system that makes use of transitional housing to a greater extent (Fabricius et al., 2005); this integrates elements of the tiered model as referral of users to public housing with a permanent contract is quite widespread after a stay in transitional housing. Local housing interventions in Copenhagen are marked by widespread referral to public housing or use of transitional housing aimed at reintegration and normalisation. The 'alternative houses for alternative living' (*skaeve huse*) provide permanent rental contracts to (formerly) homeless people (FEANTSA, 2005). A similar example is found with the so-called 'alternative nursing homes' based on a combination of substance tolerance and permanent contracts.

## The Homelessness Strategy: Approach and Methods

### *A focus on housing first*

The homelessness strategy adopts a housing first approach. Experience from other countries indicates that an early housing solution for homeless persons can help to stabilise their life situation (Tsemberis, 2004; Lanzerotti, 2004). The goal of the housing first approach is to provide a permanent housing solution for the homeless person quickly, in combination with the necessary social support.

It can be argued that the principles behind the housing first approach are already dominant in Danish homelessness policy. For example, the *skæve huse* model provides homeless people with their own 'home' with a conventional tenancy agreement, and where they are free to continue their habits (e.g. drugs, alcohol) without any threat of losing this home. There is no permanent staff living in these communities, but social workers pay regular visits, monitor tenants' progress and provide services (e.g. health, employment) where possible and necessary. This is effectively a form of 'permanent' supported housing, although the model of providing alternative forms of housing in small communities catering for the special needs of homeless people may not meet some aspects of the normalising model described above.

Whilst a housing first approach is the strategy's starting point, the document also stresses three conditions to this approach (Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, 2009, p.8):

- Housing First cannot stand alone as an initiative in the area, but must be supported by associated initiatives which will contribute to managing the problems of the individual citizen.
- Housing and support must be goal-directed and tailored to the specific needs of the individual.
- It is important that the solution also focuses on the citizen's economic situation.

### *A focus on local municipalities*

The municipal councils are the principal players in the implementation of the homelessness strategy and any developments must have political support in the municipalities. The eight municipalities taking the lead in the strategy were selected according to the extent of the problem of homelessness at the local level. The funding for the strategy has been distributed between these municipalities according to where the problems are most serious and where the funding can therefore be expected to have the most beneficial effect.

During the spring and summer of 2009 the municipalities were required to investigate the problem of homelessness in their area and to develop a local draft homelessness plan (which was subsequently discussed and negotiated with the Ministry of Social Affairs). Following these investigations, the municipal councils identified which of the four key goals of the strategy they would concentrate on (Copenhagen is seeking to address all four goals but some smaller municipalities are focusing on only those goals relevant to their area). They also identified concrete targets that they would set for the period until 2012.

From the spring of 2010 all other municipalities were also able to apply for funds to strengthen their housing support work, concentrating on the same prioritised methods identified in the strategy (see below).

## *A focus on methods*

It has been decided that method development in the homelessness strategy will be concentrated on certain selected approaches, which can support the strategy's goals. The selected methods and approaches have been chosen because they have produced good results in other countries. The strategy, including these methods, will be evaluated by a research consortium of Rambøll Management Consulting and SFI.

Table 2 shows the methods and approaches that will be used by the eight municipalities. Three housing support methods are highlighted: assertive community treatment (ACT), critical time intervention (CTI) and individual case management. The development of effective programmes for good release from institutional settings is prioritised, as are reporting and planning tools to ensure quicker reporting. In addition, work will also be performed on method development relating to contact-creating and outreach work.

**Table 2: Methods and approaches under the homelessness strategy**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Housing support methods | Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) | ACT is a kind of housing support. The method is based on an interdisciplinary, mobile team of different professionals who can integrate various functions and efforts in relation to the homeless. |
| | Critical Time Intervention (CTI) | CTI consists of housing support in the transition phase from residential institutions, care homes or 'section 107' institutions to a home of one's own. |
| | Individual Case Management | Individual Case Management is a general method to ensure that there is a well-defined responsibility for the co-ordination of efforts for the homeless, and that the elements of the municipal plan of action are carried out. |
| Programme for a good release | | This method/approach aims to reduce the number of persons who are released/discharged to an uncertain housing situation. A model or roadmap must be created for the way in which collaboration between prisons, courses of treatment, etc., and the municipalities can be strengthened in order to ensure coherence in the actions taken during the transition from prison/treatment to a home of one's own. |
| Reporting and planning | | Reporting and planning is a manual/tool to ensure better and faster reporting, with a view to finding a suitable place of residence with individually-adapted support. |

Source: Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, 2009, p.17.

The process will be organised in a way that allows the municipalities to document their efforts and results on an ongoing basis, which in turn enables the ongoing control and adjustment of the initiatives with a view to obtaining the best possible results. Once the experiences from the method development process are known and evaluated, method descriptions will be developed as an element in the strategy and will subsequently be disseminated and used in the country's other municipalities.

## Progress to Date

At the time of writing, the homelessness strategy has been running for one year. This first year was essentially a planning year, in particular focusing on the methods and types of intervention policies that the eight municipalities will adopt. However, already it is possible to identify the kinds of methods and interventions that are dominating approaches. The municipalities have mainly focused on the use of the CTI and the individual case management methods. The ACT method will only be used in the larger municipalities, which have the capacity to involve the necessary professional staff.

The primary focus so far has been on the methods for housing support and very few steps have been taken to provide new housing for homeless people (either independent or special initiatives). Earlier research identified a shortage of 1,000 houses in the municipalities (Hansen et al., 2007). The municipalities' apparent hesitation to provide new houses may be problematic for the strategy's housing first approach, which will only work if there are enough permanent houses to meet the specific needs of various subgroups of homeless people, such as substance abusers or the young homeless. In the Danish context, it has been shown that homelessness is not necessarily about the shortage of housing per se, but about a lack of appropriate housing that can meet the needs of excluded people, such as has been developed in the *skaeve huse* model. However, caution is needed here as research indicates that placing homeless people in an environment where most of the other people are marginalised results in a risk that they will continue a life of homelessness and become functionally homeless (Lindstad, 2008).

Further, it is the experience in Denmark as well as in other countries that the housing first approach cannot stand alone. It is necessary to combine housing solutions for homeless persons with other forms of social support, depending on individual need. Homelessness is often the result of different complex social conditions and if it is to be prevented, it is necessary to create better conditions for people threatened by marginalisation in various forms: education policy, employment policy, health policy, housing policy, integration policy and general social policy, to mention only the most important domains.

## Conclusion

Looking back on previous Danish homelessness policies, it can be argued that the new homelessness strategy does not fundamentally alter approaches to homelessness. The principles underpinning the housing first approach have dominated homeless policy for many years in most of the municipalities providing houses and social support. However, what is new is the provision of a much stronger framework to develop effective municipal initiatives and in this way the strategy provides a much needed lift to Danish homelessness policy.

Even though we only have precise data on the number of homeless people in 2007 and 2009, there is a consensus that the number has not changed over many years and that existing legislation and homelessness policies have not been sufficiently effective (Meert, 2005 ; Koch-Nielsen, 2004). The goals set by the eight municipalities, and the methods being utilised, should reduce the numbers of citizens who sleep on the street and of young people staying in homeless hostels. Periods of accommodation in homeless hostels for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support will also be reduced and accommodation solutions will be put in place for individuals at the time of their release from prison or discharge from treatment. In these four key areas, the homelessness strategy should give a new perspective, and new hope, for many homeless people. It remains to be seen whether the strategy is strong enough to reduce the prevailing level of homelessness, but, at the very least, the robust methods and evaluation in place should allow us to appraise the level of success and disseminate the most effective solutions at both the national and the European level.

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# Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in the EU Social Inclusion Process

Michele Calandrino

Policy Analyst, European Commission[1]

**Abstract_** *Despite certain governance and analytical limitations of the EU social inclusion process in dealing with homelessness and housing exclusion, important advances have been made recently in this area. These achievements include the development of enhanced statistical data and indicators, a strengthened political commitment by the EU institutions and member states and new regulations extending the eligibility of EU funding for housing interventions. The elements that facilitated this progress included a better balance between general and thematic approaches within the EU social inclusion process, the role of the PROGRESS programme in channelling academic research into the policy debate, the evidence collected at EU level in the context of social monitoring of the economic crisis and the political agreement at EU level on an overarching policy framework (the active inclusion strategy).*

**Keywords_** *Homelessness, Open Method of Co-ordination, Social Exclusion.*

1 This paper reflects the personal views of the author only.

## Introduction

This paper starts by looking at the process that led to the choice of homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) as the 2009 social inclusion focus theme of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Social OMC). It highlights the main problems in addressing HHE in the European Union policy framework and the ways in which they have been overcome. It then analyses the activities carried out in 2009 and their main outcomes, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of such a process. Finally, it points at the key factors that could contribute to keeping HHE at the core of EU social policies. This paper has been written on the eve of an important restructuring of the EU governance processes in the context of the new Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010b), however, its aim is to draw the most important procedural lessons from the OMC in the past ten years.

## Homelessness and Housing Exclusion: A Priority for EU Social Policy?

The main instrument for the development and implementation of social policy at EU level is the Social OMC. Since its launch, homelessness has been highlighted as an important cause of concern for policies aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion (for earlier discussions of the OMC and homelessness, see Spinnewijn, 2009; Frazer, 2009). Homelessness is recognised as one of the most extreme forms of poverty and social exclusion, a severe form of deprivation that cannot be tolerated in wealthy European societies. It is acknowledged that homelessness not only is a manifestation of extreme poverty, but also jeopardises the chances that the individuals have to reintegrate themselves in society, creating a vicious circle (e.g. loss of employment can lead to homelessness that in turns reduces the chances of getting a job).

Despite this, for a long time homelessness remained at the margins of the Social OMC, failing to occupy the central place it deserves. Looking in more detail at the likely reasons for this, it is possible to identify four limitations in relation to the OMC's capacity to deal with homelessness. The first two limitations concern governance and are of a more structural nature, while the other two relate to analytical issues and are of a more contingent nature.

In relation to governance, it is useful to outline here some elements that are essential to an understanding of the relevance of the Social OMC in the field of homelessness. The OMC is mainly an intergovernmental process, based on shared objectives, on a reporting process by member states and on a joint policy assessment by the European Commission and the Council presented in the annual Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The main ‘engine’ of this process is the Social Protection Committee (SPC), a treaty-based committee composed of high-level officials from the national social affairs ministries and the Commission, specifically the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. In other words, the Social OMC is the domain of public administrations responsible for social affairs. However, homelessness is a shared responsibility between different levels of government ; in fact, the regional and local levels play a more crucial role than central government in addressing the plight of homelessness in most member states. Furthermore, it is not always the social affairs ministry that has the main responsibility for national policies on HHE. This situation has led member states and the Commission to proceed with caution when dealing with homelessness through an instrument such as the OMC.

Analytical issues also limit the capacity of the Social OMC to deal with HHE. Again, it is useful to recall here the relevant elements of the OMC. The policy evaluation that leads to the joint reports is based on a set of agreed indicators, which are elaborated by the Indicators Sub-Group of the SPC. Policy objectives logically precede the elaboration of indicators – and this was true in the development of the OMC. However, once established, indicators end up giving a more precise content to the broader and more generic policy objectives. Although they simply aim at ‘indicating’ progress in various fields, to a certain extent the indicators become ‘objectives’ in their own right. When developing evidence-based policy, evidence often becomes as important as policy (i.e. ‘what is measurable’ becomes ‘what is important’).

In order to develop useful indicators, there are two preconditions : an agreed, precise and quantifiable definition of the phenomenon ; and robust, timely and comparable data. Homelessness lacks a commonly agreed framework of analysis and a common definition. Arguably, this is not due to a lack of interest in the phenomenon, but to a number of differences in its perception in the different member states. Even more crucially, robust, timely and comparable data at the EU level are also lacking. For example, household surveys represent the best source of data that fulfil all the requirements for developing EU-level indicators. In the social field, the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the Labour Force Survey are the main sources of data. However, the sampling framework of such surveys misses out the target population under consideration, namely the homeless. Developing an EU indicator on homelessness that fulfils certain basic requirements[2] remains a challenge that neither policy makers and statistical offices nor academics and civil society stakeholders have managed to solve. The 2011 census offers a unique opportunity to obtain baseline figures on

2 For the characteristics that the OMC indicators should fulfil, see the portfolio of indicators at : http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=756&langId=en.

homelessness and current efforts to develop homelessness data are concentrated on this exercise. However, a census does not represent the most suitable source of data for the ongoing monitoring of policies.

It is clear that homelessness is a priority issue for EU social policy, however, there are procedural difficulties in dealing with this problem using the Social OMC, which is the current, most important instrument at EU level. The next section will try to assess the real weight of these difficulties and examine how they have been at least partially overcome.

## The Social OMC: An Appropriate Framework for Homelessness Policies?

Stakeholders have for a long time felt that the high-level declarations by the Commission and the Council on the importance of homelessness that are enshrined in the annual joint reports are not adequately translated into concrete policy initiatives. However, it can be argued that 2009 was a turning point in the way and the extent to which homelessness is being tackled at EU level. This development has been made possible by the support of NGOs such as FEANTSA in mobilising public authorities and researchers around this theme. The following section will look at recent attempts to address the governance and analytical problems mentioned above.

From the governance point of view, two recent developments can be singled out as factors that have changed the emphasis on homelessness within the Social OMC. First, the reorganisation of the reporting cycle of the OMC. At the onset, reporting was based on an annual cycle, with member states elaborating national action plans on all their social inclusion priorities and policies, to be analysed in a comprehensive joint report. However, a three-year cycle was introduced in 2005, with full reporting every three years and a thematic focus in the two intervening ‘light’ years. The OMC thematic years represent an opportunity to reach a compromise between a more universalistic approach and a more targeted approach to EU social policy.

The choice of homelessness as a thematic focus for a light year was at first met with a degree of scepticism because of the problems highlighted above. However, it was possible to argue that it was precisely because of these structural problems that the thematic year represented a unique opportunity to deal with homelessness in a more thorough way. In fact, the thematic years create a ‘space’ where the debate can be enlarged to actors outside the normal circle and where specific expertise can be gathered without the administrative burden of reporting on all the other social priorities at the same time.

The second important policy development is linked to the active inclusion initiative, which was launched in 2006. This initiative aimed at developing a policy framework that would support the integration of the most disadvantaged people into society and into the labour market. The framework involves a coordinated set of policies based on three pillars: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. The main innovation of this initiative consisted in improved governance and in more effective policy design and implementation through vertical coordination between different levels of government and horizontal coordination between the different policy instruments. The consensus-building process of the initiative resulted in the endorsement of a strong set of common principles and practical guidelines by all three EU institutions.[3] The Social OMC was given the role of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these principles.

Homeless people are one of the target groups of the active inclusion initiative and social housing and housing support are key elements of the third pillar of the strategy. More crucially, homelessness is a typical policy field where the overall active inclusion approach can bring the most benefits. Homeless people typically suffer from a very wide set of disadvantages, from lack of income to joblessness, lack of housing, poor health and so on; these disadvantages require the integrated approach and the sort of governance promoted by the active inclusion common principles. An important achievement of the initiative was to validate and spread a common language and to disseminate new approaches in order to create a common framework of analysis. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that the active inclusion initiative 'opened the doors' to a more in-depth analysis of the homelessness challenge and gave legitimacy to the involvement of a broader set of actors within the Social OMC.

Concerning the analytical problems in dealing with homelessness, namely a lack of agreed definition at EU level and of comparable data, two developments succeeded in at least mitigating these problems. The first was the elaboration of the ETHOS typology by the European Observatory on Homelessness and FEANTSA.[4] This elaboration benefited from EU funding from the PROGRESS programme, through the grant agreement with FEANTSA, a study and a transnational project. Without downplaying the efforts and the invaluable expertise of the academics involved, it is also useful to underline the importance of the PROGRESS programme. As opposed to other sources of EU funding for research, PROGRESS is directly managed by the relevant policy directorate-general, the priorities for research are agreed within the SPC and

3 See Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (2008/867/EC; OJ L. 307/11 of 18 November 2008); Council Conclusions of 17 December 2008 on common active inclusion principles to combat poverty more effectively; European Parliament Resolution of 6 May 2009 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (2008/2335(INI)).

4 See www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=484.

the projects and studies are managed by the same Commission officials that are in charge of drafting policy documents. So, although ETHOS has not been formally adopted by member states, the vast majority of them recognise its validity and apply at least a modified version of it at national level. In other words, the development of a common framework (ETHOS) within the PROGRESS framework allowed its immediate visibility and policy application.

The second interesting development is linked to the social monitoring of the present economic crisis, a regular exercise that the SPC agreed to perform in order to assess the consequences of the crisis. The limitations of the more traditional data sources, such as EU-SILC, in providing timely information on the crisis are quite self-evident. In order to improve the understanding of such an urgent and unforeseen priority, the SPC agreed to collect from member states, through a questionnaire, national data from different sources. In other words, the constraint of having comparable data was relaxed and an important set of national data started to be used at EU level. Among this data, much concerns homelessness-related issues, for example the number of evictions, defaults in mortgage repayments and housing loans more broadly, and arrears in payments for utility bills.[5]

When discussing the 2009 work programme, a number of elements came together: the opportunity to use a light year for a more in-depth analysis of homelessness, the common language and an agreed policy framework represented by the active inclusion strategy, the support of PROGRESS-funded activities for a methodological framework of analysis and a growing set of data on housing exclusion (also confirming its importance in the context of the economic crisis). It can therefore be argued that, despite its limitations when addressing issues such as homelessness, the Social OMC still offers scope for discussion in this policy area.

## The Social OMC as a Catalyst for Policy Developments

The 2009 thematic year on homelessness involved the mobilisation of a wide range of resources as part of its core activities or as complementary ones. These activities can be grouped in terms of statistics and research, and policy messages and EU funding.

### *Statistics and research*

Although an indicator on homelessness remains elusive, significant results have been achieved in the field of housing exclusion. In fact, it is more correct to say that although we have not succeeded in developing robust and harmonised data on

5 See the 2009 updated joint assessment by the SPC and the Commission of the social impact of the economic crisis and of policy responses and the updated 2009 report (doc. 10133/1/09 REV 1).

rooflessness and houselessness, important progress has been made in the fields of insecure housing (at least in terms of housing cost overburden) and inadequate housing (in terms of overcrowding and housing deprivation). The development of three indicators and context information on housing costs and housing deprivation required a significant joint effort on behalf of the Indicators Sub-Group and Eurostat, together with the national statistical offices. The key issues to be addressed ranged from the definitional (e.g. what threshold constitutes unsustainable housing costs, what combination of household and accommodation characteristics result in overcrowding) to the methodological (e.g. how to make the data on housing allowances comparable across different social protection systems).

The set of indicators elaborated on housing costs and housing deprivation is by no way perfect and further development work will be needed. But it is not an exaggeration to say that this was an important breakthrough. For the first time there is a rather complete and comparable picture at EU level on these dimensions and an available set of data, something that key stakeholders have demanded for several years. Furthermore, the fact that these indicators have been approved by the SPC and included in the set of indicators used to monitor the Social OMC's objectives, implies that Eurostat is committed to producing updated figures on an annual basis and that these figures will be presented and analysed in the future joint reports.

The analysis carried out for the Commission by the Social Situation Observatory constitutes another important output of the 2009 thematic year. This analysis has been published in the 2009 social situation report (European Commission, 2009), which includes a detailed section on HHE. The analysis is based on the 2007 EU-SILC ad hoc module on housing, on further analysis of the core EU-SILC, data from the Household Budget Survey and financial data on housing lending.

The PROGRESS programme supported a series of activities, including a study on housing exclusion, four transnational projects, two partnership agreements with FEANTSA and EUROCITIES – which runs two working groups on homelessness and on housing – and one member states' peer review on 'counting the homeless – improving the basis for planning assistance'.[6]

6 The study, coordinated by the University of York, is entitled 'Housing Exclusion: Welfare Policies, Housing Provision and Labour Markets'. The mutual learning projects are: MPHASIS: mutual progress on homelessness through advancing and strengthening information systems; BUILDING INCLUSION – access to housing and inclusion of immigrant people in Europe; Connections: organisational approaches to the complexities of multiple deprivation at a city level; and European cities against child poverty. The last two, even if they do not specifically concern HHE, have a strong focus in this area.

### *Policy messages and EU funding*

The main basis for this work was a detailed questionnaire sent to member states about their national and subnational policies on HHE. The responses to this questionnaire were analysed by the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, which produced national and European reports (Frazer and Marlier, 2009), and by the Commission services. This analysis also benefited from the statistical data and the project results described above. The main output of this process was the joint report (European Commission, 2010a) containing the key policy messages, its supporting document and country fiches.

One of the key messages of the joint report highlights the importance of HHE (European Commission, 2010a, p.3):

> The crisis has aggravated poverty in its multiple aspects, for instance housing exclusion. Over the last decade, affordability, homelessness, social and housing polarisation and new forms of housing deprivation have been an increasing concern for public policy, which in this field often lacks adequate information and evaluation systems. *Integrated strategies to address housing exclusion and homelessness have an important role to play in post-crisis policies, with a view to build cohesive and environmentally sustainable societies.*

Although the Social OMC process cannot issue recommendations, the policy messages agreed by the Commission and the Council represent a strong political commitment by member states and the Commission. In particular, the joint report underlines the following points:

- National or local strategies are essential to raise awareness, improve policy coordination and implementation, and identify financial resources.
- The most successful strategies in place display effective governance with strong cooperation between all actors involved.
- Strategies are generally made more effective with targets.
- Accurate and consistent data on homelessness is still lacking in most member states and this constitutes one of the main obstacles for the development of robust, evidence-based policies.
- The multiple causes of HHE are often compounded and integrated policies, in line with the active inclusion principles, are needed.
- Social and public housing are often the main solution for HHE, but excess demand is widespread and the quality of housing stocks remains a challenge. In this context, the EU Structural Funds, in particular the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), could play an important role in convergence regions.

In other words, the conclusions of the 2010 joint report point to the need for comprehensive and integrated homelessness strategies strengthened by robust data and quantified targets. The implementation of these conclusions, together with an enhanced role for public and social housing in the fight against HHE, would constitute in themselves important, concrete steps forward.

Concerning the ERDF, it should be noted that two important modifications to the ERDF regulation recently extended its eligibility to energy efficiency and renewable energy investments in housing in order to support social cohesion, and to housing intervention in favour of marginalised communities.[7] Although these legislative reforms are not a direct consequence of the Social OMC process, it can be argued that the political agreement it generated represented an important factor in promoting these reforms and was instrumental in bringing them to the attention of key stakeholders in the social policy area.

## Conclusion

Despite certain governance and analytical limitations of the EU social inclusion process in dealing with HHE, important advances have been made recently in this area. These achievements include the development of enhanced statistical data and indicators, a strengthened political commitment by the EU institutions and member states and new regulations extending the eligibility of EU funding for housing interventions. The elements that facilitated this progress included a better balance between general and thematic approaches within the EU social inclusion process, the role of the PROGRESS programme in channelling academic research into the policy debate, the evidence collected at EU level in the context of social monitoring of the economic crisis and the political agreement at EU level on an overarching policy framework (the active inclusion strategy).

These advances by the Social OMC have been complemented and supported by the political impetus of the other EU institutions and bodies, such as the European Parliament with its 2008 declaration on ending street homelessness by 2015 and the Committee of the Regions and its 2010 opinion on combating homelessness. Social NGOs such as FEANTSA also played a crucial role in increasing the visibility of the HHE plight at EU level and in elaborating responses to it. The key challenge

7 See Regulation (EC) No. 397/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 May 2009 amending Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of energy efficiency and renewable energy investments in housing; and Regulation (EU) No. 437/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 amending Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities.

ahead is to sustain these efforts in the longer term and to maintain the political momentum in order to move the agenda further and make a stronger contribution to the fight against HHE. The main objective in 2010 has been to disseminate the results achieved, including through a high-level Commission conference, and to consolidate them with the consensus conference under the Belgian presidency. But more opportunities lie ahead.

In March 2010 the Commission put forward the new Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010b), which was later endorsed by the European Council. This strategy contains two important steps forward. First, the fight against poverty and social exclusion has been put once again at the centre of the overall European strategy. Second, a new tool has been announced, the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The main rationale of the platform is arguably that of going beyond the traditional scope of the EU social inclusion process to coordinate all policy areas that can have an impact on poverty and social exclusion. More specifically, policies in different fields (such as the environment, energy, internal market, health, competition, macro-economic surveillance and territorial cohesion) all play a crucial role in the field of HHE and they will all be mobilised to tackle bottlenecks and achieve the broader EU target to promote social inclusion in particular through the reduction of poverty. If the platform succeeds in making advances towards a better horizontal policy coordination and improved governance engaging all key stakeholders, the developments described in this paper and the legacy of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will be likely to have lasting and concrete effects.

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# Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

Jordi Bosch Meda

Independent Researcher, Barcelona

**Abstract**_ *This paper explores homelessness (defined using the ETHOS model as living rough and houselessness) among migrant groups in Spain. There is growing evidence that migrants (defined in Spain as 'foreign nationals') are increasingly strongly represented in the homeless population of Spain. Experience of homelessness also appears to be particularly acute among recent migrants and to be becoming less common among more established migrant groups. However, while there is some evidence that migrants become less at risk of homelessness as they establish themselves in Spanish society, some migrant groups appear to face a situation of sustained housing exclusion. Some limitations in the available evidence base are also discussed.*

**Keywords**_ *Homelessness ; rooflessness ; rough sleepers ; housing exclusion ; housing discrimination ; migrants*

## Introduction

This paper analyses evidence that migrants in Spain are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. It draws on the existing literature, the 2001 census, the annual population data of the Spanish national statistical institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE) and the surveys of homeless people conducted by INE in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2008.

The paper first sets the context for the discussion by very briefly describing immigration patterns in Spain. Second, it summarises the evidence on the causes of homelessness among migrant people. Third, it looks in detail at the experience of homelessness among recent migrants. Fourth, it considers some possible effects of the current economic crisis on migrants. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

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## Immigration Patterns in Spain

Economic migration into Spain has grown dramatically in recent decades. In 1995 the total 'migrant' population[1] (defined as 'foreign nationals' in Spain) was some 500,000 people. By 2010 the migrant population had reached 5.7 million people.[2] The total migrant population increased from some 1.4 per cent of the Spanish population to 12.2 per cent during the period 1996 to 2010. Much of that growth is quite recent; migrants accounted for just 2.3 per cent of the Spanish population in 2000. Spain currently has one of the highest immigration rates in the world, about eight times greater than that of France, and one of the largest migrant populations in the European Union (Actis et al., 2008). Recent immigration into Spain is broadly comparable to some of the mass migrations of the last two centuries (Aranda, 2006).

Recent immigrants to Spain have been predominantly citizens of other EU member states (41 per cent), followed by Latin American people (27 per cent) and then people from Africa (18 per cent). Other groups are less numerous (INE, 2010).

According to the most recent data available (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010) it can be estimated[3] that some 8 per cent of the migrant population may be undocumented (i.e. not legally resident in Spain). This undocumented group appears to be largely Latin American in composition (around 60 per cent of undocumented migrants), with a significant minority of Africans (around 11 per cent) and a wide range of other nationalities also being present in smaller numbers. The situation of these undocumented migrants prevents them from accessing conventional labour and housing markets, with the consequent risk of exclusion (Martínez and Fernández, 2006).

1 Some migrants are affluent retirees from developed countries such as Germany or the United Kingdom, who arrive in Spain with the resources to buy or build housing that they will own outright, however, they represent less than 10 per cent of all migrants in Spain.

2 INE: www.ine.es/welcoing.htm.

3 The most recent records of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010) show that 4,791,232 foreign nationals had a certificate of registration or residence permit at 31 December 2009. As Domingo and Recaño (2005) note, we can get an initial estimate of the scope of clandestine immigration in Spain by comparing these figures with the register and subtracting the number of EU nationals who cannot be in a clandestine situation.

## Causes of Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

For the purposes of this paper, homelessness is defined using the ETHOS typology developed by FEANTSA.[4] According to this definition, homeless people are those who are 'roofless' or 'houseless'. ETHOS defines people who are roofless as including people living rough in public or external spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters. The roofless group also includes people who are in emergency accommodation such as homeless shelters. Houseless people include those in hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation, women's shelter accommodation and temporary accommodation for immigrants as well as people who are about to leave institutional care without any settled housing being available to them.

Recent migrant populations can often be at a heightened risk of social and economic exclusion. Access to education and health care services in Spain, even for undocumented recent migrants, is possible, which is not the case in some other EU member states (Chauvin et al., 2009). However, difficulties centred around language, unfamiliarity with welfare systems, job application procedures and other barriers to the labour market, including qualifications not being recognised and racist attitudes among employers, can be issues for recent migrants in Spain. Exclusion from labour markets is, as elsewhere in the EU, associated with housing exclusion and experience of poor housing conditions. Discrimination from landlords, overcrowding and insecurity of tenure are widespread among recent migrants (Martínez and Fernández, 2006; Bosch, 2008; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Bosch and Gibaja, 2005; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004; FRA, 2009; CILP, 2007; RAXEN and EUMC, 2005; Edgar et al., 2004).

Migrants can face structural barriers to securing affordable and suitable housing. As is the case in many member states, general problems in the supply of affordable and adequate housing exist in Spain. Spain lacks a significant social-rented sector,[5] which some research has suggested can particularly disadvantage recent migrants seeking affordable and adequate housing (Czischke, 2007). The Spanish private-rented sector, representing about 10 to 15 per cent of the whole stock, is also relatively small. Furthermore, the shortage of affordable owner-occupied housing progressively worsened with the sharp increase of housing prices between 1998 and 2007. In this period house prices rose by 158 per cent (at a rate of over 17 per cent per year on average).

4 See www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?page=484.

5 Without reliable updated data it can be estimated that the social-rented sector represents around one per cent of the housing stock (Ghekiere, 2009; Czischke and Pittini, 2007).

Alongside these shortages, there is also some evidence of discrimination against migrant groups in the rental market (SOS Racisme-Catalunya, 2009; SOS Racismo, 2008a and 2008b; Arjona and Checa, 2007; Páez, 2006; Colectivo IOE, 2006 and 2003; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004; SODEPAU and FAVB, 2003; UAB, 2002; Projecte Xenofilia, 1997). One study into discrimination by landlords against ethnic minorities (Colectivo IOE, 2003) reported that 55 per cent of respondents experienced prejudice. Difficulties in accessing suitable and affordable housing can also be coupled with cultural and linguistic remoteness, lack of social and family networks and difficulties in accessing the labour market (Cabrera, 2001; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002; Sabater and Sagarra, 2004; Subirats, 2004).

However, some research on migrants in Spain suggests that homelessness disproportionately affects recent migrants. Rooflessness, use of informal arrangements, squatting and use of homeless shelters is relatively widespread among new migrants (Colectivo IOE, 2006). As time passes, migrant people in Spain appear to experience homelessness at decreasing rates. Some research suggests this is because they build up a range of informal supports; become more familiar with Spanish society, including learning the local language(s); start to access the labour market; and, eventually, secure housing for themselves (Labrador and Merino, 2002; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Bosch and Gibaja, 2005).

The question of where migrants tend to be housed as they become established in Spanish society is worth brief consideration. High rates of housing exclusion are common among many migrant groups (Bosch, 2008; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004). As is common throughout the EU, some migrant and ethnic minority groups are concentrated in specific urban areas within Spain. There are concerns that these spatial concentrations of ethnic and cultural minorities are often in areas characterised by high rates of worklessness and social and housing exclusion. Housing in these areas is often in poor repair, overcrowded and unsuitable in other respects (Martínez Veiga, 1999; Cabrera and Mira, 2000; Subirats, 2004; Checa, 2004; Arjona and Checa, 2007; García, 2008).

## Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

### *Migrant people living rough*

In 2005 the INE conducted a major interview-based survey of homeless people, known as the 'EPSH-Personas' survey, which drew on recent US and French surveys for its methodology (Burt, 2001 ; Join-Lambert, 2009). The EPSH-Personas only covered municipalities with over 20,000 residents. As the survey mainly took place in the more densely populated municipalities and did not cover a significant part of rural Spain, the data do not provide national-level statistics.

The EPSH-Personas survey of homeless people counted 21,900 individuals who were houseless or roofless, of whom 8,212 (37.5 per cent) were living rough[6] (INE, 2005). Just over half of the group of people living rough were migrants (54 per cent).

Data from surveys of people living rough in some major Spanish cities show a similar trend (see Table 1). A survey in Barcelona on one night in March 2008 reported that 62 per cent of people living rough were migrants (i.e. foreign nationals). The largest groups of people living rough were Romanians (16.3 per cent of the total), Moroccans (8.9 per cent) and Poles (5.2 per cent) (Cabrera et al., 2008b).

In Madrid, a count carried out on one night in December 2006 reported that 55 per cent of people living rough were migrants. A further count in 2007 also reported that 55 per cent of people living rough were migrants, while the count on one night in February 2008 reported that 53 per cent of people living rough in Madrid were migrants. This 2008 count showed that Romanians were the largest group among migrant people living rough (32.2 per cent), followed by Poles (10.5 per cent), Moroccans (7.7 per cent) and Portuguese (7.7 per cent) (Cabrera et al., 2008a).

The Barcelona and Madrid counts of people living rough found that 9.7 per cent and 13.8 per cent respectively of people living rough reported that being an 'undocumented' migrant was one of the reasons why they were homeless (Cabrera et al., 2008a and 2008b).

The smaller city of Lleida conducted a count on one night in April 2008 and found that three-quarters of a (fairly small) number of people living rough were migrants (Cabrera et al., 2008b). This survey and other research (Leal and Mayeur, 1998 ; Martínez Veiga, 1999 ; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002 ; Defensor del Pueblo Andaluz, 2001a, 2001b and 2006 ; Checa and Fernández, 2003 ; Arjona and Checa, 2007) suggest that high representations of migrants among people living rough may not be confined to the major cities, but may also be found in smaller towns, particularly those in agricultural areas.

6 Defined by INE as sleeping rough or sleeping in abandoned cars, basements, corridors, staircases (i.e. without any form of accommodation).

**Table 1: People living rough according to the s-nights in Barcelona, Madrid and Lleida. Proportion of migrants[a] among people living rough and ratio of rough sleepers per 10,000 inhabitants**

| | City population | | Rough sleepers | | Ratio rough sleepers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| City and date of count | Total inhabitants[b] | % of migrants[a] | Total | % of migrants[a] | per 10,000 inhabitants |
| Madrid 12 December 2006 | 3,132,463 | 14.98 (469,352) | 621 | 55 | 1.98 |
| Madrid 26 February 2008 | 3,213,271 | 16.8 (539,624) | 651 | 53 | 2.02 |
| Barcelona 12 March 2008 | 1,615,908 | 16.9 (273,175) | 634 | 62 | 3.92 |
| Lleida 28 April 2008 | 131,731 | 18.3 (24,016) | 70 | 75 | 5.31 |

Source: Cabrera et al., 2008a and 2008b, and INE.

[a] Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

[b] Population closest to the date of the count (www.ine.es).

As Table 1 illustrates, the proportion of migrant people among people living rough ranges from 53 to 75 per cent and it appears that the higher the proportion of migrant people in a city's population, the higher the proportion of migrants among people living rough. The rate of rough sleepers ranges from 2 to 5 people per 10,000 inhabitants. However, it is worth bearing in mind that counts of people living rough suffer from a number of methodological limitations and have to be treated with caution. There is international evidence that they tend to under-represent the actual scale of living rough, while differences in methodology can make any comparison between counts problematic (Burt, 2001).

A survey carried out by Colectivo IOE (2006) looked at the experiences of 909 economic migrants. This survey suggested that, among new migrants, experience of living rough tended to be higher. Among migrants who had lived in Spain for less than one year, 4 per cent reported living rough. Experience of living rough dropped to 1.5 per cent among migrants who had been living in Spain for two to five years and to 1 per cent among those who been living in Spain for five years or longer.

### *Migrant people using homelessness services*

INE has conducted three major surveys of the Spanish homeless network (EPSH-Centros), which took place in 2003, 2006 and 2008 (INE, 2004, 2007 and 2008). This network comprises centres that offer services such as accommodation, meals and training to homeless people. The surveys focused on the activities and characteristics of homelessness services, including looking at the homeless people who used them. The surveys have indicated marked increases in the representation of migrants among people using homelessness services (see Table 2).

Between 1975 and 1994 migrants typically represented approximately 5 per cent of people using Spain's homeless network. In the mid-1990s this figure began to rise and then it increased very sharply from 2002. In 2008 INE reported that almost 63 per cent of the homeless people receiving services were migrants (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Number of places and proportion of migrants[a] in the homeless network, Spain, 1975–2008**

| Years | 1975 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 2000 | 2002 | 2003 | 2006 | 2008 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total daily accommodation places in the network | – | – | – | – | – | 11,316 | 12,139 | 13,033 | 13,650 |
| % of migrants[a] among the population attended to | 5 | 5 | 10.1 | 8 | 13–24[b] | 41 | 58.2 | 47.2 | 62.7 |

Sources: DIS, 1975; Rico et al., 1994; Lucas et al., 1995; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002 (for 1996, 2000 and 2002); INE survey on homeless people (EPSH-Centros) (for 2003, 2006 and 2008).

[a] Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

[b] Estimated.

### *Overall representation of migrants in the general homeless population*

The 2005 EPSH-Personas survey, while limited in its coverage to municipalities with over 20,000 inhabitants, does give some broad indication of the overall extent to which migrant people are represented in the living rough and houseless populations of Spain. The 2005 survey showed a clear predominance of people from Africa (43.6 per cent of all migrants), followed by EU nationals (20.8 per cent), the rest of Europe (16.7 per cent) and North and South America (14 per cent). Moroccans (16 per cent of all migrants), Romanians (9 per cent) and Algerians (7.5 per cent) were the nationalities that were most strongly represented (see Table 2). Collectively, citizens of Romania, Bulgaria and Poland represented 16 per cent of the migrant homeless population covered by the EPSH-Personas survey (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Migrants[a] in the homeless population, Spain, 2005**

| | People | % |
|---|---|---|
| Total | | |
| Spanish | 11,341 | 51.8 |
| Migrants[a] | 10,559 | 48.2 |
| **Migrants[a] by region of origin** | | |
| Africa | 4,604 | 43.6 |
| European Union | 2,194 | 20.8 |
| Other continental Europe | 1,765 | 16.7 |
| America (North and South) | 1,478 | 14.0 |
| Asia and other territories | 519 | 4.9 |
| **Nationality of migrants[a]** | | |
| Moroccan | 1,689 | 16.0 |
| Romanian | 951 | 9.0 |
| Algerian | 795 | 7.5 |
| Portuguese | 673 | 6.4 |
| Malian | 604 | 5.7 |
| Bolivian | 487 | 4.6 |
| Bulgarian | 409 | 3.9 |
| Polish | 330 | 3.1 |

Source: INE (EPSH-Personas), 2005.

[a] Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

The EPSH-Personas survey also reported that recent migrants appeared to be quite strongly represented among homeless people in Spain. Among migrants who were homeless, 41 per cent had been living in Spain for less than one year, compared with 19 per cent who had been living in Spain for more than five years. These findings are similar to those of the other research projects on homelessness and on the experience of economic migrants in Spain already referred to.

According to the EPSH-Personas survey, rates of employment among migrant homeless people were very low. Only 15 per cent of migrant homeless people reported being employed, which was a marginally higher rate than the level of employment among homeless Spanish people (9 per cent). Furthermore, the survey indicates that homeless migrants hardly receive any type of welfare payment such as unemployment benefit, invalidity benefit, retirement pension or any other kind of benefit. Just 3 per cent of homeless migrants received a welfare payment compared with 32 per cent of Spanish homeless people.

The EPSH-Personas survey also suggests that, on average, migrant experience of homelessness is more recent. Around 50 per cent of homeless migrants had been without housing for less than one year, whereas the proportion of Spanish homeless people in the same situation was only 30 per cent.

Although health services are open to migrants, including those who are undocumented, the EPSH-Personas survey reported that half of migrant homeless people did not have a health care card, which meant exclusion from the health care system. The extent to which this might mean that the significant numbers of migrant homeless people who lack health care cards are also otherwise undocumented cannot be established from the survey.

Some increases in undocumented migrants among homeless service users have been reported in La Rioja (Gobierno de La Rioja, 2004).

## Outlook for the Future

After a decade of economic growth, the Spanish economy started to decline in 2007. Since then the rate of unemployment has risen to 20 per cent in Spain, and exceeds 30 per cent among migrants (Pajares, 2010). In this context, the number of migrants arriving in Spain between 2009 and 2010 has been the lowest in the last decade and there is now an expectation that the migrant population will stabilise at 13 to 14 per cent of the total population.

Migrants can lack the financial resources and access to the labour market that would enable them to pay a mortgage or rent. There is a concern that this problem may increase due to high unemployment rates among migrants. According to Pajares (2010), overcrowding to reduce costs, use of the poorest housing stock on the same basis, the temporary return of part of a family (or those workless members) to the country of origin or an individual or household leaving Spain may all be strategies that migrants pursue in response to problems in affording housing. Another outcome may be migration to other European countries less affected by the economic crisis.

## Conclusions

There is a need for some caution in interpreting the research and statistical data from Spain. Some data are restricted to individual provinces or major cities and there are limitations to the 2005 EPSH-Personas survey as noted above. Although the available evidence base is not sufficiently strong to be conclusive, it does indicate a consistent pattern. Migrant experience of homelessness in Spain, specifically homelessness among recently arrived foreign nationals, appears to be relatively high and migrants appear to represent a rapidly increasing proportion of all homeless people. According to the most recent night counts carried out in some

Spanish cities, the proportion of migrants among people living rough ranges from 50 to 75 per cent. Likewise, some 63 per cent of all people attending the homeless network are migrants.

Indications that the heightened risk of homelessness may to some extent be time limited for migrant groups raise some interesting questions. Being more speculative, this might hint that migrant homelessness may be more closely linked to relative position in the housing and employment markets than it is to individual characteristics as, once migrant people become more firmly established in Spain, they appear to be at steadily reducing risk of experiencing homelessness.

By comparison with Spanish homeless people, a slightly higher proportion of homeless migrants are employed. However, people who are homeless migrants rarely receive any kind of welfare benefit.

The potential impact of wider economic events on levels of migrant homelessness is difficult to determine. In 2006 Spain was one of the main destination countries for economic migrants, both in the EU and globally. It could be argued that the extent of the current economic depression across the EU and within Spain will reduce the incentive to migrate as it becomes more and more difficult to find work. For migrants who are already in Spain, however, the risk of unemployment and associated lack of resources to pay for housing is greater than that for Spanish-born people and thus overcrowding rates, subletting and homelessness are expected to rise among migrants. In this context, migration rates into Spain may fall compared with other EU countries with better employment prospects.

Further research on the impact of the economic crisis upon migrant homelessness is needed to determine, for example, the magnitude of the problem, living conditions, ways of social integration of homeless undocumented migrants, the capacity of homeless networks to meet needs, the magnitude and characteristics of transnational migrations of homeless migrant people within the EU and current housing strategies adopted by migrant people to reduce costs. However, to a great extent, this research can only be carried out if and when the data on homelessness becomes more robust and addresses its current limitations.

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# The Process of Homelessness: An Event History Analysis of Lengths of Stay in Groningen Shelter Accommodation

Henk Fernee[1], Frans Oldersma and Roel Popping

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research / SCP
Department of Research and Statistics, municipality of Groningen
University of Groningen

**Abstract_** *This study explores the process of shelter exits for homeless individuals and for different shelter types in the public shelter system in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. Individualised administrative data from the Groningen Homelessness Monitor (2003–2006) are used for estimating a Weibull hazard rate regression model. Results show that the different shelter types fit adequately with their policy purposes: lengths of stay in emergency shelter accommodation appear to be shorter than in supportive housing accommodation and clients tend to remain longest in guest houses. The results also indicate that the use of day shelters, as well as demographic variables such as age, gender and nationality, are associated with a differentiated likelihood of continuing homelessness. The results of this study in the Dutch context are compared with research on the process of homelessness in the United States, and finally the implications of these findings and future directions for research on the process of homelessness are discussed.*

**Keywords_** *Process of homelessness; shelter accommodation; the Netherlands*

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## Introduction

Dutch housing policy is based on a concept of universal access to affordable housing; in general one should be able to find and maintain one's own housing (Wolf, 2002). If needed, residents are assisted by governmental organisations, private charity programmes or family and friends, but this is not always the case and some persons must resort to living in public service shelters and on the streets. As a result, almost every major city in the Netherlands has its own homeless population and its own homeless shelters.

Research on homelessness over recent decades has focused mainly on the causes thereof; few studies have examined the conditions that affect patterns of continuation in, and exit from, homelessness. Furthermore, most research on the process of homelessness has been done in the United States (Wong, 1997). The main conclusion of these research studies is that being homeless is not a static state, but a dynamic process in which people tend to experience multiple episodes of homelessness (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; Piliavin et al., 1996).

The Dutch welfare system differs greatly from that of the United States. For example, the US welfare system is based on liberal principles and the belief that people should take care of themselves (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and homeless people in the US tend to receive more support from private than from public organisations. The Dutch welfare system contains elements of a social democracy and a conservative society where some state support is not uncommon; homeless persons therefore receive organised help from the Dutch government and there is access to public services and health assistance regardless of social class.

Consequently, research on homelessness conducted in the US might not be completely applicable to the Dutch situation; the differences in social and economic conditions between the two countries mean that US research can give us only minimal understanding of the dynamics of homelessness in the Netherlands. However, relatively little research has been conducted on the dynamic aspects of homelessness in the Netherlands (Greshof, 1997). It is therefore interesting to examine the process of homelessness in the Dutch context.

The single-way survey is a commonly used method in homelessness research. Such surveys generally collect quantitative data on the numbers of homeless people and their characteristics at one moment in time (Culhane et al., 1994), but they do not provide insights into the mechanisms that affect the duration of homelessness.

Longitudinal research can overcome this difficulty and its use is preferable for obtaining a better understanding of the dynamics of homelessness. For instance, several cross-sectional studies have been conducted that rely on retrospective self-reports to measure the duration of a person's period of homelessness

(Piliavin et al., 1993). The disadvantage of these studies is that people tend to overstate the length and continuity of the time they are homeless. Furthermore, the length of a current period of homelessness cannot be determined if persons are still homeless at the end of the observed period (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998). An appropriate way to overcome these shortcomings is by using administrative data on public shelter utilisation.

Such data are available from all public shelter accommodation in the province of Groningen in the Netherlands. The province has 580,000 inhabitants, approximately 185,000 of whom live in the capital city, Groningen. Most homeless accommodation is located in the city of Groningen. The state administration aims to locate and register all homeless persons in this particular city. A database tracks the individual use of Groningen's twelve shelters on a daily basis, providing a direct measure of shelter utilisation. Data provided by the shelter registry system are integrated with data from the local government administration of the city of Groningen to obtain more information on shelter users. Using this data it is possible to give a description of the patterns of shelter utilisation in Groningen and to identify the implications of exit patterns, as well as the factors that influence the continuation of homelessness in the Netherlands.

## Background

Although there is little theoretically guided research on homelessness, some ideas on the factors influencing the duration of homelessness have been put forward (Fitzpatrick and Christian, 2006). One such factor is institutional disaffection, 'which refers to the weakening of an individual's bonds to conventional society' (Piliavin et al., 1996). Another emphasises the role of a person's capacity to control their own situation (Hoogenboezem, 2003). A third regards the length of time that someone has been homeless; after a long period of homelessness the situation can become a structural one in which a person loses the ambition to modify it. People assimilate to street culture and adopt the information values, associations and lifestyle preferences that support and give meaning to life on the streets (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

Various US studies show that the age, gender and nationality of homeless persons are relevant predictors of the duration of homelessness (Allgood et al., 1997; Allgood and Warren, 2003; Caton et al., 2005; Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; Piliavin et al., 1996; Wong et al., 1997; for a review, see Wong, 1997). The following conclusions can be drawn from this research: men tend to have longer episodes of homelessness than women; older age is related to longer episodes of homelessness; and Black and Hispanic persons tend to experience longer durations of homelessness than White persons. As these findings refer to the North American situation, the current study explores whether comparable findings can be demonstrated in the Netherlands.

### *Groningen shelter system*

The Groningen Homelessness Monitor is implemented by the Department of Research and Statistics of the municipality of Groningen. Information is gathered from all shelter facilities in the province of Groningen for its use. The Groningen shelter system for the homeless consists of three types of shelter, each with its own target group and policies for shelter use (Beukeveld et al., 2004):

- Three emergency shelters. These are intended to provide for short periods of accommodation and people must re-register every day. Polstra (1998) argues that emergency shelters represent the start of a person's homeless career.
- Four supportive housing units. Some of these are aimed particularly at younger residents. To enter this type of shelter people undergo a mandatory admittance interview. The duration of stay depends on the length of time people need in order to find their own house or to move to other accommodation.
- Five guest houses for long-term purposes. People can stay there for an indefinite period of time and are given minimal support by social workers. To enter this type of shelter people also do a mandatory admittance interview.

The distinctions between these three types of shelter accommodation can indicate which stage of their homeless careers people are at. Theoretically, clients progress from emergency shelters to supportive housing and, ultimately, to their own accommodation (Bassuk and Geller, 2006). Therefore every type of shelter has its own policies for helping the homeless. Emergency shelters are for people who need direct help and who would otherwise have to sleep on the streets. Homeless persons in supportive housing are expected to find their own home, whereas guest houses are a more permanent solution for those that have been homeless for a longer time. Besides these night shelters, there are other shelters to which persons can go for daytime activities; their purpose is to give people a place to stay during the day and they are open to everybody.

## Hypotheses

This study will explore whether the policies of the shelter system in the city of Groningen are reflected in the episode lengths at each type of shelter. Such a correlation would mean that persons in emergency shelters will experience the shortest episodes of homelessness, followed by the users of supportive housing accommodation. The longest episodes would be observed for persons in guest houses. This is the first hypothesis.

Based on the results of prior research from the US, the study will test the following hypotheses:

- Men have longer episodes of homelessness than women.
- Older persons have longer episodes of homelessness than persons of a younger age because younger people are still motivated to find their own accommodation (van Doorn, 2002).
- Non-Dutch users have longer episodes of homelessness than native Dutch users.
- Besides the use of night shelters, persons who also go to a day shelter are likely to have longer episodes of homelessness than persons not using this accommodation for daily activities.

The use of the day shelter is the only variable that provides more information about the behaviour of persons staying at night shelters as it indicates that persons have no place to go during the day. Furthermore, persons using the day shelter may be more familiar with the Groningen shelter system and as a result may be better assimilated to the street culture (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

Finally, it will be examined whether these four factors influencing the duration of homelessness differ according to the kind of shelter at which a person resides.

## Methods

### *Data*

Administrative data from the Groningen Homelessness Monitor were used to examine the process of homelessness in the Dutch context. On 1 January 2004 the Department for Research and Statistics of the municipality of Groningen started a computerised registry system for the users of all twelve shelters in Groningen (Beukeveld et al., 2004). The data include each person's registration number with the administration of the local government of the city of Groningen and through this information about the shelter user's nationality is available. Nationality is unknown for persons not registered as an inhabitant in the city of Groningen.

This study covers the period from 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2006. The records of 2,063 people are used. During this time 2,939 shelter stays were recorded. The data include basic demographic characteristics, including gender, age and nationality. The database also tracked entries into and exits from the shelter system by recording dates of admission, discharge and subsequent re-admission, as well as the shelter type used by clients and whether people also applied to a day shelter.

### *Analysis*

Descriptive statistics are used to characterise the study sample. Survival analyses give the distribution of lengths of shelter stay. The hazard functions for all exits are presented, as well as for the three specific forms of shelter accommodation. A hazard function determines any change in the likelihood of a person experiencing an exit during an interval of time, given the fact that a person was at risk of an exit at the beginning of the interval.

Entry to a shelter is defined as the first time a person is observed in the registry system. An exit is defined as leaving the shelter for a continuous period of thirty days or longer. This definition avoids counting those who exited the shelter for a few days and then returned. The shelter stays that occurred within thirty days of one another are therefore collapsed into one episode of homelessness. The thirty-day exit criterion has been commonly employed by other researchers on homelessness (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; Metraux and Culhane, 1999; Piliavin et al., 1996; Wong et al., 1997).

A Weibull hazard with gamma frailty model is employed for all shelter users to estimate the effects as well to test the first hypothesis. Also, models for the three different types of shelter are engaged to test differences in effects on the duration of shelter stays. The hazard rate for the Weibull distribution (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004) is given by the following:

$$h(t) = \lambda p(\lambda t)p\text{-}1[S(t)]\theta \qquad t > 0, \lambda > 0, p > 0,$$

In this equation $\lambda$ is a positive scale parameter, p is known as the shape parameter, t is for time spent in the shelter and S is the survival function with the variance of frailty $\theta$. When $p > 1$, the Weibull hazard rate is monotonically increasing with time; when $p < 1$, the hazard rate is monotonically decreasing with time; when $p = 1$, the hazard is flat, taking a constant value $\lambda$.

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table 1 presents descriptive demographic and shelter utilisation results for the overall shelter stays and the three types of shelter. The total number of all shelter stays is 2,939 for 2,063 persons. Most episodes, 2,413 (82 per cent), of homeless stays take place in emergency shelters, while for supportive housing and guest houses 219 (8 per cent) and 307 (10 per cent) shelter stays are recorded respectively. The median stay for persons in guest houses (415 days) is more than ten times as long as the median stay for persons in emergency shelters (29 days), which gives an initial indication of confirmation of the first hypothesis. This finding can be explained by the shelters' policy differences; for the emergency shelter, persons must re-register daily, while persons can stay for an indefinite period of time in guest houses.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics by shelter type**

| | All shelter users | Emergency shelters | Supportive housing accommodation | Guest houses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| N[a] | 2,939 | 2,413 | 219 | 307 |
| Median length of stay | 39 days | 29 days | 188 days | 415 days |
| Prior shelter stay | 29.8% | 32.4% | 11.9% | 22.5% |
| Exit of homelessness | 88.7% | 92.6% | 78.5% | 65.5% |
| Using day shelter | 33.2% | 35.1% | 21.9% | 26.1% |
| Median age[b] | 32 years | 32 years | 25 years | 36 years |
| Gender[c] | | | | |
| Man | 75.4% | 73.5% | 84.5% | 84.0% |
| Woman | 23.7% | 25.9% | 15.5% | 13.0% |
| Nationality | | | | |
| Dutch | 52.1% | 50.5% | 66.7% | 54.1% |
| Non-Dutch | 20.3% | 19.1% | 30.6% | 22.8% |
| Unknown | 27.6% | 30.4% | 2.7% | 23.1% |

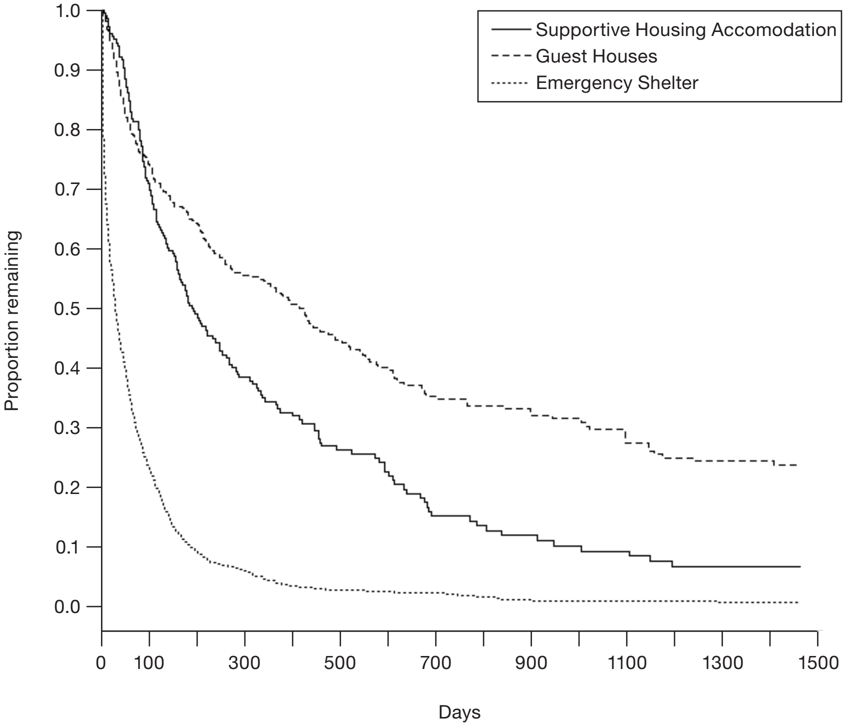
[a] Total number of stays, the total number of persons covered in the Groningen shelter administration is 2,063.

[b] Age varied between 0 and 78 years and was calculated on the first day of each person's entry.

[c] Unknown for twenty-five stays (0.9 per cent).

These policy differences are also reflected in exit rates of homelessness; while more than 90 per cent of episodes in emergency shelters had been completed by the end of the observed period, only about 65 per cent of homeless episodes in guest houses had come to an end. Figure 1 shows the survival curves for episode lengths at each type of shelter. This figure gives a further indication of how the three types of shelter accommodation, through their policy aims, differ in the average time persons stay in a certain type of shelter. It again shows that within a month more than 50 per cent of the emergency shelter population had already left the shelter, whereas for the other two types almost no one had left their accommodation in this first month. Overall, Figure 1 shows that each type of accommodation has its own exit pattern and must consequently be interpreted separately.

**Figure 1: Survival curves for types of shelter**




The total rate for multiple shelter episodes is about 30 per cent, as only around 10 per cent of supportive housing shelters have multiple stays. One-third of the total number of episodes are combined with the use of a day shelter; whereas for episodes in supportive housing accommodation and guest houses, one-fifth and one-quarter respectively are combined with use of a day shelter. This can be explained by the fact that those in supportive housing and guest houses have a more complete programme of social support.

Also worth noting in Table 1 are the demographic differences among users of the three shelter types. The total median age is 32 years ; this was also the median age of emergency shelter users, whereas in supportive housing the median age is seven years younger and for guest house users it was four years older. This finding can also be explained by different shelter policies and other underlying characteristics of the users. Some supportive housing accommodation is only for younger people (Beukeveld and Vosselman, 2007), recognising that younger persons are still motivated to rehabilitate and find their own accommodation (van Doorn, 2002), and they therefore have a higher presence in this type of accommodation. Guest houses are the end destination in the homeless career of many people (Polstra, 1998), particularly older persons with a long history of homelessness.

The highest number of shelter stays was attributable to men, and only around one-quarter of stays related to women. A mere 13 per cent of shelter stays in guest houses involved females, which indicates significant gender differentiation in using the different types of public shelter accommodation.

Finally, looking at the nationality of shelter users it is notable that one-quarter of stays involve persons of unknown nationality. This is due to the fact that a person's nationality is only identified if he or she is registered in the local administration of the city of Groningen. For all three types of shelter accommodation the proportion of non-Dutch persons (around 20 per cent) is more or less comparable to the total number of non-Dutch persons in the city of Groningen (Bureau Statistiek en Onderzoek, 2005). However, the number of non-Dutch persons in supportive housing accommodation (around 30 per cent) suggests the total number of non-Dutch users may be somewhat higher than indicated, the real percentage being hidden by the high percentage of persons with unknown nationality in the data.

### *Frailty Weibull models*

Table 2 contains the maximum-likelihood estimates of the parameters of the survival function for the observed spells of homelessness and the absolute value of their associated asymptotic t-statistics, using the Weibull with gamma frailty specification. A positive coefficient indicates that an increase in the value of the associated variable increases the conditional mean length of a homeless spell. In the first column of Table 2 a model is shown for the entire shelter population, where type of shelter is included as a covariate to see if there are significant differences between types of shelter. In the other three columns a model is given for each type of shelter, and the models are controlled for multiple stays of homelessness.

**Table 2: Parameter estimates for Weibull model with gamma frailty of shelter spell durations for types of shelter[a]**

| | All shelter users | Emergency shelters | Supportive housing accommodation | Guest houses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 5.73[d] (36.81) | 3.87[d] (25.50) | 4.90[d] (16.50) | 5.04[d] (9.51) |
| Age | 0.01[d] (2.90) | 0.00 (0.95) | 0.05[d] (5.01) | 0.03[d] (3.27) |
| Gender 0 = male | -0.32[d] (-3.77) | -0.35[d] (-3.87) | -0.42[b] (-1.80) | 0.37 (1.12) |
| Nationality | | | | |
| Dutch | – | – | – | – |
| Non-Dutch | -0.20[c] (-2.21) | -0.10 (-0.97) | -0.23 (-1.25) | -0.74[d] (-2.83) |
| Unknown | -0.11 (-1.19) | -0.10 (-1.03) | -1.14[d] (-3.07) | 0.14 (0.45) |
| Using day shelter 0 = not using | 0.69[d] (8.45) | 0.74[d] (8.27) | 0.41[c] (1.97) | 0.39 (1.54) |
| Type of shelter | | | | |
| Supportive | – | – | – | – |
| Emergency | -2.03[d] (-17.60) | – | – | – |
| Guest houses | 0.65[d] (3.99) | – | – | – |
| N | 2908 | 2393 | 218 | 297 |
| Log-likelihood | -13812.3 | -11163.1 | -1152.1 | -1448.3 |

[a] Absolute values of asymptotic t-statistics are in parentheses.

[b] p<0.1.

[c] =p<0.05.

[d] =p<0.01.

In the overall model, emergency shelter is negative and statistically significant compared with supportive housing accommodation, while the covariate guest houses is positive and statistically significant compared with supportive housing accommodation. These results confirm what was observed in Table 1 and Figure 1. The first hypothesis is confirmed: persons in emergency shelters have significantly shorter stays than persons in supportive housing accommodation and persons in guest houses have the longest stays. Because of the large differences in the policies of the three shelter types, and indications of difference in user characteristics, the overall model is separated by three models of shelter type.

Age is significant and positively related to the duration of homelessness for the overall model, meaning that the duration of sheltered homelessness increases with age. This relation is not found for the emergency shelter model, meaning that age has no significant effect on the duration of homelessness for this type of shelter. It also indicates that the positive effect on the duration of homelessness for age in the overall model is probably the result of the users of supportive housing accommodation and guest houses, with a significant, positive relationship between age and duration. Therefore, the second hypothesis on supportive housing accommodation and guest houses can be confirmed: persons of an older age experience longer episodes of homelessness than younger persons.

The gender coefficient is negative and statistically significant for the overall model, implying that female residents stay at shelters for shorter lengths of time on average. This finding holds only for emergency shelters, but there is also an indication that the same effect holds for supportive housing accommodation although it is not strongly significant. An interesting result is the positive, but not significant, finding for females in guest houses: although not significant, it indicates that females stay longer in guest houses than males. The third hypothesis only holds for emergency shelters where men have longer episodes of homelessness than women.

The variable nationality must be interpreted with care, due to the fact that nationality is unknown for almost 30 per cent of residents. For the overall model, non-Dutch nationality is negative and statistically significant compared with homelessness episodes of native Dutch individuals, indicating that non-Dutch users stay for short lengths of time at shelters. However, these findings do not hold for emergency shelters and supportive housing accommodation, and it is thus only in guest houses that non-Dutch shelter users experience significantly shorter spells of homelessness than Dutch shelter users. Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is rejected, and in fact a contrary result is found for guest houses: non-Dutch users have shorter episodes of homelessness than Dutch users.

There is no statistically significant effect found for residents of unknown nationality in the overall model. Unknown nationality means that a person is not registered with the local administration of the city of Groningen, a requirement for entering supportive housing accommodation, and it is only for supportive housing accommodation that a negative, statistically significant relationship is found, implying shorter stays for persons with unknown nationality. However, this group only contains six stays and this finding probably means that the shorter stay is the result of persons not being able to register themselves during their short homeless episode.

The final hypothesis is tested by analysing the use of day shelters in relation to the use of night shelters. Use of a day shelter is positive and statistically significant for the overall model, which implies that persons who also apply to use a day shelter have longer stays than those who do not. The positive relationship is found for all shelter types, but while it is significant for emergency shelters and supportive housing accommodation, it is not significant in the case of guest house residents.

As emergency shelters are only for night use, their users must look after themselves during the day. This confirms the last hypothesis: persons that go to a day shelter have longer episodes of homelessness than those who do not. It is plausible that users of day shelters are more familiar with the social support system of the city of Groningen, are better assimilated to the street culture and have difficulties structuring a life of their own.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored exit patterns of individual cases of homelessness using the administrative data of the Groningen shelter system. It is the first study in the Netherlands to use this kind of data to describe the underlying patterns of shelter discharge and provides a good basis for further research on the process of homelessness.

The policy aims of each type of shelter are indeed reflected in the episode lengths for each. Thus, emergency shelters offer support for a shorter period of time than supportive housing accommodation. While this pattern results from the assignment of subgroups of the homeless population to particular shelters, episode lengths also reflect the objectives of the shelters. For instance, after a short period of staying in an emergency shelter people are referred to another service if further assistance is needed. In contrast, supportive housing accommodation offers support for a transitional period within which persons are assisted to find independent housing. Thus, a mixture of both reflection and selection results in the episode lengths that correspond to the types of shelter.

Demographic variables are important predictors of when a person will exit a shelter. As in prior research (Allgood and Warren, 2003; Christensen and Vinther, 2005; Culhane and Kuhn, 1998), periods of homelessness were found to be longer for men than for women. However, this finding is only significant for users of emergency shelters, indicating that women tend to use an emergency shelter as a more temporary solution than men do. It is interesting to consider why this might be so. Is it because the culture and/or policy of the shelter is not attractive to women or are women better able to move to other residencies? Further research is needed to explore this finding.

The finding that older homeless individuals remain homeless for longer periods is in line with prior research (Allgood and Warren, 2003; Christensen and Vinther, 2005; Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; Piliavin et al., 1993; Piliavin et al., 1996). In the current study, longer periods of shelter use by older homeless persons was found for only the supportive housing accommodation and guest houses, suggesting that younger homeless individuals are more equipped to find their own accommodation if they receive professional support. Moreover, guest houses seem to represent a more permanent solution for older persons than for younger people, which might indicate that older persons are less motivated or are not capable of changing their situation of homelessness.

It is surprising that non-Dutch people appear to stay for a shorter time in guest houses than Dutch people. This finding contradicts the results of Culhane and Kuhn (1998), who found that non-White clients stay homeless for longer than White clients and submit that this difference may be caused by the social and economic barriers historically associated with race. In the Netherlands these barriers seem to be less problematic, as no correlation is found between nationality and lengths of stay in emergency shelters or the supportive housing accommodation. It is noteworthy, however, that non-Dutch individuals stay for shorter lengths of time in guest houses. More research is needed to further clarify this finding.

The current research also indicates that those who visit day shelters use emergency shelters and supportive housing accommodation for longer periods of time. It would appear that the use of day shelters in addition to night shelters may be an indication of familiarity with the shelter system and of assimilation to street culture.

The study used administrative data from shelters in the province of Groningen, the main purpose of which is to identify who uses the public shelter system. The type of in-depth information that may provide insight into the causes of homelessness or why any of the study's subjects became homeless is not collected. Neither was it possible to determine where people found accommodation after exiting the shelter system or between two episodes of shelter use. Furthermore, there is no available data on the physical and behavioural health of those using the system. Further research should attempt to assemble more information on the patterns of exit. This information can be integrated with other data from the local government administration.

This explorative study has found that the process of shelter exit is associated with demographic variables and with the use of day shelters for different shelter types in the Groningen system. It is difficult to say whether these patterns also apply to other Dutch cities, as each municipality organises its own system of shelters with different policies for entering and staying at the shelter accommodation. Nevertheless, it gives an idea of patterns of homelessness in the Dutch context and may be useful from a policy perspective in helping the homeless to find stable accommodation.

The influence of certain demographic characteristics on shelter use is interesting and several questions remain concerning, for example, whether women or non-Dutch nationals do not fit within the organisation, whether they have a different experience of homelessness or whether they have perhaps suffered discrimination. These issues should be examined further and may assist the authorities to organise the shelters in such a way that these groups can be supported adequately.

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# Understanding Extreme Poverty in the European Union

Jonathan Bradshaw and Emese Mayhew

Professor of Social Policy, University of York and Research Fellow, University of York

**Abstract_** *The European Union headline measure of poverty is the at-risk-of-poverty measure derived from the percentage of the population in households with incomes less than 60 per cent of the median. This measure has been incorporated into the EU 2020 poverty and social exclusion target. In this paper some criticisms are made of this approach, in particular that it under-estimates poverty in the newer member states. Some possible additional, less relative, more extreme measures of poverty were reviewed for a project commissioned by the EU. Two approaches, one based on deprivation and the other based on low income and deprivation were found to have merit. The results are explored using the secondary analysis of EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2008. However, some groups in extreme poverty are still likely to be excluded from SILC, including homeless people.*

**Keywords_** *Poverty ; deprivation ; housing ; indicators ; social inclusion*

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## Background

Since the Lisbon European Council in 2000 the European Union has been committed to the fight against poverty and social exclusion using the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). A key element of the OMC is a set of indicators, agreed upon jointly by the European Commission and all EU member states, to measure progress towards the agreed EU social inclusion objectives. These include:

- At-risk-of-poverty rates at different thresholds (40, 50, 60 and 70 per cent of the national median equivalised household income).
- An at-risk-of-poverty gap (how far households are below the poverty threshold).
- An at-risk-of-poverty rate 'anchored' at a point in time.
- A persistent at-risk-of-poverty rate.
- A material deprivation indicator. In 2009, the Social Protection Committee (SPC) adopted a set of indicators and context information on housing and material deprivation.

The situation changed recently when the European Council agreed on an EU target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. Three poverty thresholds are being prioritised here:

- At-risk-of-poverty: the population living in households with equivalent income less than 60 per cent of the median (80 million in the EU).
- Material deprivation: the population living in households lacking four or more of nine indicators, i.e. cannot afford: to pay rent or utility bills; to keep home adequately warm; to pay unexpected expenses; to eat meat, fish or equivalent every second day; a week's holiday away from home once a year; a car; a washing machine; a colour television; a telephone (40 million in the EU).
- People living in jobless households: no one working or work intensity of household is below 0.2 (40 million in the EU).

Although both the above sets of indicators include material deprivation measures, the relative income poverty measure remains at the heart of poverty measurements in the new EU target. In addition, this poverty measure is also dominant in national-level poverty analysis.

For its first semester report for 2010, the EU Network of Experts on Social Inclusion undertook a survey of what poverty thresholds were being used by national governments in the EU (Bradshaw et al., forthcoming). It was found that the threshold most commonly used was the household equivalent income less than 60 per cent of median before housing costs. The most commonly mentioned lower poverty threshold was a lower relative income poverty threshold: 40 or 50 per cent of the median equivalent threshold.

Based on research commissioned by the EU, this paper critically examines the relative income measurement of poverty and explores the potential for the development of less relative, more extreme measures of poverty. After detailing the potential limitations of a relative income measure, the paper reviews existing methods of measuring absolute poverty, before considering new measurements of poverty that could be used at the EU level and that include robust measures of both income and deprivation.

## Problems with the Relative Income Measure

There are a number of reasons to be anxious about an over-reliance on a poverty threshold based on relative income. Some of these relate to use of the threshold in any context and some relate to use of the measure in international comparisons.

The limitations of a relative income measure in any context include:

- It is hard for non-experts to understand what is meant by 'x per cent of the population live in households with disposable income less than 60 per cent of the national median equivalised household income'. It does not resonate with persuasive power or credibility.
- Income is only an indirect indicator of living standards.
- It is probably not as good an indicator of command over resources as expenditure, not least because it does not take account of capacity to borrow, dissaving, gifts and the value of home production.
- The 60 per cent of the median (and any other) income threshold is arbitrary. It is not related to any understanding of need but is merely a line drawn on the income distribution.
- The equivalence scale[1] adopted – the modified OECD scale – has no basis in science (and has been abandoned by the OECD[2]).

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*1* Adjusts income to household needs.

*2* The OECD now uses the square root of the number of people in the household (as well as a threshold of 50 per cent of the median), see OECD (2008).

The limitations of a relative income measure in a comparative context include:

- The EU publishes estimates of the monetary value of the poverty threshold in Purchasing Power Parity standards (PPPs). This reveals that we are not comparing like with like when we compare poverty rates between countries using this threshold. So, for example, the relative poverty threshold in 2008 for a couple with two children was €9,770 PPPs per year in Estonia whereas in the United Kingdom it was €24,380. The at-risk-of-poverty rate in both countries was 19 per cent. Yet, the poor in Estonia, even taking into account differences in purchasing power, were living at much lower levels.
- In many of the countries, including many using the 60 per cent of the median as their poverty threshold, the cash value of the threshold is very low. The threshold for a couple with two children in 2008 in purchasing power parity terms was €1.71 in Romania and €2.22 in Bulgaria per person per day.
- In contrast, the 60 per cent of median threshold in many of the EU-15 is perhaps too high. In the richer EU countries many people identified as poor on the 60 per cent of median threshold are not deprived of any items in the EU index (see below) and do not say they have difficulty making ends meet.

## Defining and Measuring Absolute Poverty

The discourse on poverty is very confusing. We tend to mix up concepts and measures and use different words to describe the same thing and the same words to describe different things. In the EU this is complicated by translating words that have one meaning in English into words with completely different meanings in other languages. Thus, for example, the notion of 'extreme poverty', which has not been used in English academic discourse, has been used by the European Commission as the title of the research project on which this paper is based because the notion of 'absolute poverty' does not translate very well into other EU languages. Absolute poverty is the concept most commonly contrasted with relative poverty, although, as we shall argue, there are serious problems with it.

There are some internationally approved understandings of absolute poverty. For example, in 1995 the World Summit for Social Development (the Copenhagen Summit) stated: 'Absolute poverty is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but access to services' (United Nations, 1995, Annex II, para. 19). Although these kinds of definitions give the social scientist some guidance and authority, they have two drawbacks. First, they seem to have rather limited relevance to European countries. Second, they do not help when it comes to operationalisation and measurement.

### *Limitations of income-based measures of physical necessities*

Notions of absolute poverty tend to emphasise physical necessities. Absolute poverty is perhaps most commonly associated with the work of Seebohm Rowntree (2000), who, in his first survey of poverty in York in 1898, used a measure of primary poverty based on the 'minimum necessities of life for mere physical efficiency'. In the post-war period this quasi-scientific quality of Rowntree's poverty line was criticised, most effectively by Peter Townsend (1954 and 1962), who did more than anyone to reconceptualise poverty as relative.

There are at least four poverty measures presently in operation that emphasise physical necessities:

- *The World Bank:* The World Bank is the only international body still giving official credence to an absolute poverty threshold. Its one dollar a day poverty line was established for the 1990 World Development Report based on background research by Ravallion et al. (2008). It became the basis of the first Millennium Development Goal: to abolish one dollar per day poverty by 2015. Far from being an absolute poverty threshold in a scientific sense, it was a marketing tool, a heuristic device, to provide an acceptable focus for world efforts to tackle poverty.
- *The US poverty standard:* Another interpretation of absolute poverty is a poverty threshold that does not change as living standards change. The EU publishes an at-risk-of-poverty rate anchored at a point in time, which is updated to a new point in time every five years or so. The US poverty standard also uses a point in time but has been anchored for a very long time – since the 1960s it has been increased only with price inflation. The US poverty standard may have had a rationale based on need when it was first developed in the 1960s, but its value has really eroded as time has passed. It is now only an income threshold and we ought to be able to find an income threshold that has a better basis in science.
- *Lower relative income thresholds:* One obvious alternative to the 60 per cent of median threshold is to take a lower relative threshold to measure more extreme poverty. In the survey of poverty thresholds being used by EU governments, the most commonly mentioned lower poverty threshold was a lower relative income poverty threshold: 40 or 50 per cent of the median equivalent income. Countries employing these lower thresholds as their lower national thresholds include Croatia, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Spain and the UK. There are really three objections to lower relative thresholds as thresholds of extreme poverty in the EU. First, there is evidence that income

is less reliable as you move down the distribution. Second, in many of the EU-10 and current/potential candidate countries the 60 per cent threshold is already very low. Third, a lower relative poverty threshold does not get over the objections made about the 60 per cent of median at-risk-of-poverty threshold. It remains relative and not necessarily extreme.

- *Social assistance:* In the survey of poverty thresholds used in the EU, we found seven countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland and Portugal) with their main national poverty thresholds linked in some way to their minimum income/social assistance scheme or to other benefits or reimbursements. Another five countries use social assistance or minimum income standards as the basis for a lower poverty threshold (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Slovakia and Sweden). However, we sense that this approach may be losing its authority. There is no reason why minimum income thresholds should be fixed at the level of poverty, they could be higher or lower. Also, if these thresholds are increased (or reduced) in real terms, then it has an immediate impact on the numbers counted as poor, meaning that these indicators can easily be manipulated, which violates a key criterion to be met by robust social indicators.

## Considering Alternative Measures of Poverty

### *Persistent poverty*

Some argue that severe poverty would only have a real social meaning if it was persistent. Some researchers have indeed defined extreme poverty as severe and persistent poverty (Adelman et al., 2003) and the UK uses a persistent poverty measure in it official portfolio. The OECD (2008) has also compared persistent poverty for a selection of countries. The EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is able to generate a persistent poverty measure at least over a four-year period, but first we need to decide on what threshold is extreme and then observe how persistent it is.

### *Deprivation measures*

Deprivation indicators were first introduced into poverty measurement by Peter Townsend (1979) in order to operationalise his relative concept of poverty and to broaden the range of resources taken into account. He drew up a list of items and activities that he believed no one should go without and then asked respondents in his survey whether they lacked them. Townsend counted as poor those lacking three or more items.

Guio (2009) explored the deprivation indicators in SILC 2005. She distinguished between three sets of indicators. First, she identified a set of five indicators of economic strain where the household could not afford:

- To face unexpected expenses.
- A one-week annual holiday away from home.
- To pay for arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments).
- A meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day.
- To keep the home adequately warm.

Second, a set of four indicators of durables was identified where the household could not afford (if it wanted to):

- To have a washing machine.
- To have a colour television.
- To have a telephone.
- To have a personal car.

Third, a set of five housing indicators was identified (the sixth was adopted in 2008) where the dwelling suffers from:

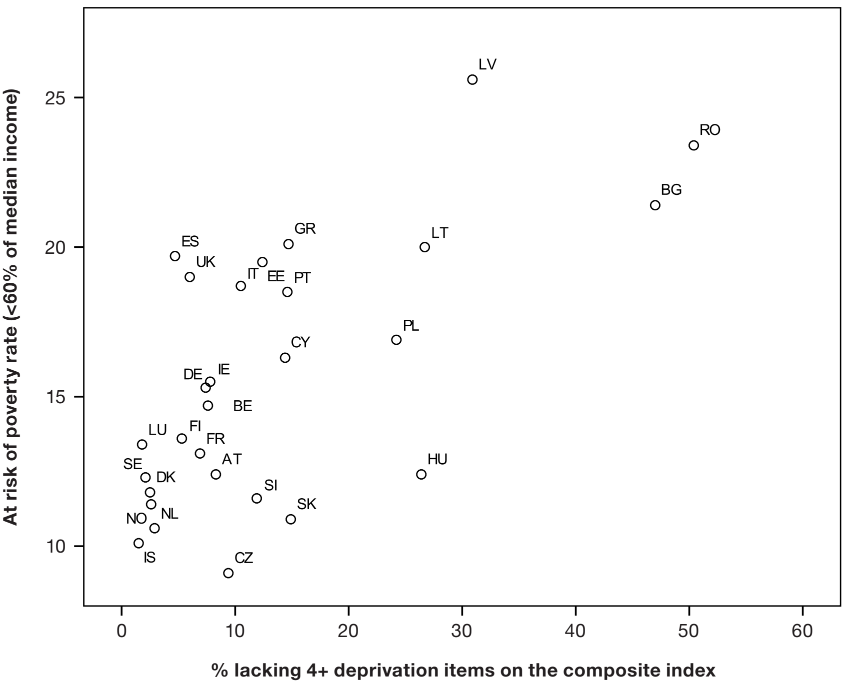
- Leaking roof/damp walls/floors/foundations or rot in the window frames.
- Accommodation that is too dark.
- No bath or shower.
- No indoor flushing toilet for sole use of the household.
- Lack of space (defined as an insufficient number of rooms for the number of persons).
- Spending more than 40 per cent of income net of housing costs on housing.

Having undertaken exploratory analysis, Guio concluded that the economic strain and durable indicators could be treated as a single deprivation index, but the housing indicators should be excluded because they co-varied less with the other domain variables. Her index has since become the standard one used in comparative analysis of the EU SILC, the EU social inclusion indicators include the proportion lacking three or more items and the new 2020 target includes those lacking four or more items.

We decided to revisit some of Guio's analysis using 2008 SILC data, which includes extra countries and the additional housing indicator. We found that including six housing indicators improved the index. We also found that 'accommodation too dark', 'spending more than 40 per cent of income on housing' and 'overcrowded' did not contribute to the overall scale and when they were dropped the index improved further. We decided that there are reasons for including the extra three housing indicators in a study designed to explore measures of extreme poverty. We will call this the 'composite index'.

Figure 1 compares the at-risk-of-poverty rate (under 60 per cent median income) with this deprivation poverty rate for the EU. Deprivation gives a completely different distribution of poverty in the EU : the range of poverty rates is much attenuated with Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia in the middle of the distribution and Bulgaria and Romania outliers with much the highest rates of extreme poverty. For example, whilst the UK and Romania have similar at-risk-of-poverty rates (just below and just above 20 per cent of households having under 60 per cent median income), they are very different on deprivation levels (less than 10 per cent of households lacking four or more necessities in the UK compared with 50 per cent of households in Romania). Among the EU-10, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia are much more similar to the EU-15.

**Figure 1: Under 60 per cent median income poverty rate 2007 by percentage of people in households lacking four or more necessities composite index. SILC, 2008**



In the 2009 SILC survey there was a special once-off module on deprivation, which included 14 household questions, 19 children's questions and 7 individual questions. The data will not be available for analysis until 2011 but they could well contribute to a new deprivation index that could be included in SILC in subsequent years – probably from 2013 onwards.

### *Budget standards*

One way to establish an income poverty threshold that has more basis in science and is less arbitrary than the at-risk-of-poverty measure is to use budget standards. Countries that have income or expenditure thresholds derived from research based on budget standards include Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and the UK. A number of these countries have adopted the 'consensual' budget standards methodology developed by researchers in the UK (Bradshaw et al., 2008), although more usually the budgets standards are based on either normative or behavioural (expenditure-based) estimates of needs. One advantage of budget standards is that they are not arbitrary: they are designed to derive a basket of goods that represents a given living standard. We employ a budget standards income threshold in the next section.

## Bringing Measures of Income and Deprivation Together

Income- or expenditure-based approaches to measuring poverty have been dominant in most EU countries and internationally, and for practical reasons much of the empirical research on poverty has used one measure at a time. This is partly because early surveys using deprivation indicators tended not to include income questions. However, the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey began to collect data on a selection of deprivation indicators, as well as income. In Ireland, this data was used to explore the overlap between deprivation and income, and the Irish government adopted an 'overlaps measure' as one of its official poverty measures. It was called 'consistent poverty', although not (in our opinion) very accurately, as it was entirely cross-sectional. The third poverty and social exclusion survey in Britain was used to explore overlaps between income, deprivation, subjective poverty and benefit receipt (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003). Others began to use the ECHP income and deprivation measures together (Heikkila et al., 2006). Curiously, since SILC developed, there have been rather few examples of overlaps analysis (but see Whelan and Maître, 2009 and 2010, and Fusco et al., 2010). However, a number of countries have followed the Irish example and are using an overlaps measure in their official poverty measurement.

There are a number of reasons for employing income and deprivation measures at the same time, some of which are to do with the weaknesses of income measures:

- As already argued, the 60 per cent of median equivalent income threshold does not resonate with non-specialists.
- Income data collected in surveys (though not the Nordic registers) is more or less unreliable, understated, hidden, forgotten. There are particular problems for the self-employed, casual, informal economy and such like workers.
- In SILC, income is the previous year and the deprivation data is more up to date.
- It is an indirect measure of poverty:
    - The SILC income poverty threshold is before housing costs, but what a household can purchase is likely to be determined by income after housing costs.
    - A household may have a low income but large wealth, and therefore, purchasing power.
    - A household may have had a low income last year, but now be richer as a result of taking up employment.
    - A household may have had a high income last year, but is now poorer as a result of retirement, unemployment or even the death of a family member.

With all these disadvantages of income measures, why not just rely on deprivation? Why reintroduce income? Here are some reasons:

- Data collected on deprivation may of course also be unreliable.
    - Deprivation may not be enforced: it may be a lifestyle choice by someone who is perfectly capable of purchasing the item. In some surveys (though not SILC) this is dealt with by counting only items that are lacked because the respondent cannot afford them. Some households may say they lack assets because they cannot afford them, but in reality it is because they do not want them – they are not a high priority in their budget.
    - Deprivation items may be possessed but broken.
- It might also be argued that we need to have income data for policy purposes. Policy cannot generally intervene at the level of deprivation, but it can and does intervene by providing income.

When we use a threshold that defines a household as income poor **and** deprived we are much more certain that we are getting a reliable indication. Also, although it will depend on the thresholds used, there are reasons to suppose that we are getting at core poverty, a more secure degree of poverty than those based on a single dimension.

A decision needs to be made about which overlaps threshold to use: which income threshold and which deprivation threshold? Fusco et al. (2010) explored the overlaps between relative income poverty and deprivation. However, we do not think that it makes sense to mix relative income thresholds with absolute deprivation thresholds, as they have done (and the EU 2020 target does) – at least when the focus is on extreme poverty. As we have seen, the at-risk-of-poverty thresholds are also too low for some of the poorer countries. After some exploration we have chosen the overlaps between the Netherlands' budget standard (NIBUD budget standard) and lacking four or more items on our composite index. We present the results in the conclusion, after a consideration of the role of SILC below.

## The Problems with SILC: The Need to Address Homelessness

The EU project on which this paper is based was about producing measures of extreme poverty. For that reason the analysis focused on deriving comparable measures that can be used across EU countries. In this we have been very reliant on SILC. However, it needs to be recognised that people in the most extreme poverty may not be living in households – the sampling base for EU SILC, they may be homeless and living rough; they may be living in institutions, prisons, hospitals or hostels; they may be refugees living in camps; or they may be Roma and other groups who are mobile or unregistered and left out of surveys. There may be extremely deprived, possibly ethnic minority, groups within a country that, although included in sample surveys like SILC, are so rare as to be neglected.

There are partial solutions to this problem. First, Eurostat needs to ensure that the sampling frame for SILC is as comprehensive as it can possibly be. There is no reason why the institutional population should not be included, and it is quite possible to over-sample extremely poor minorities.

Beyond that, there needs to be alternative approaches to gathering data on extreme poverty. Homelessness is an example of an area where the EU has made a special effort quite recently to improve data collection at national level (Stephens et al., 2010; Edgar, 2009). Unfortunately there is still no data on homelessness that is comparable across EU member states, even on the narrowest definitions. The comparative possibilities offered by the 2011 census seem likely to be very limited with respect to homelessness.

One potential way forward at a relatively low cost would be to incorporate a short suite of questions on homelessness into SILC to gain comparative data on past experience of homelessness. There are already two questions in SILC 2009 on moving in the next six months and reasons for moving but they are not entirely satisfactory. There may also be a need for special targeted surveys. For example, Ringold et al. (2005) produced an excellent World Bank report on Roma in Eastern Europe combining a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods.

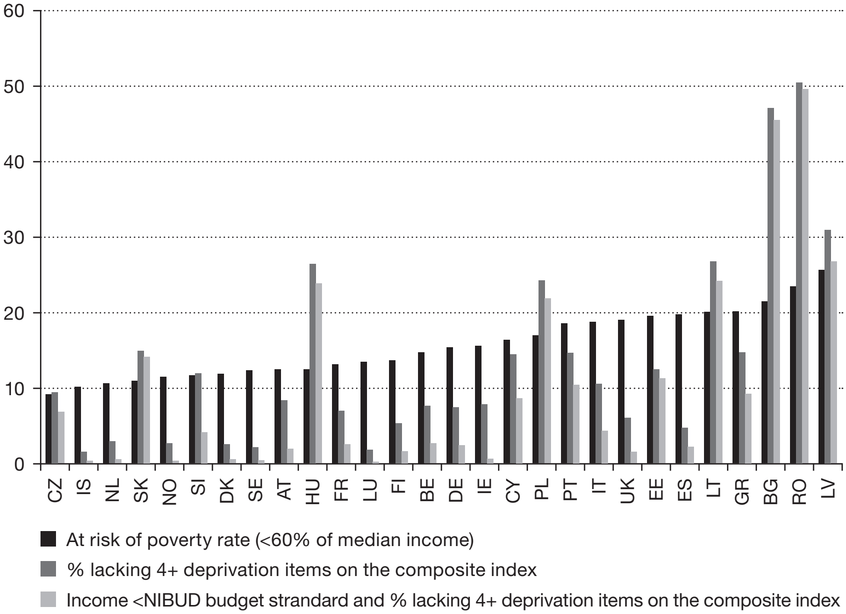
## Conclusion: New Measures of Extreme Poverty

The objective of this project was to suggest some measures of extreme poverty for the EU countries. We explored a variety of approaches to setting extreme poverty thresholds. In the end any method is a matter of judgment. We sought to find a threshold that is not relative to a country but that represents the reality of the differences in living standards in the EU countries and that can be used to identify extremely poor households in all countries.

We reviewed and rejected a number of possible methods, including: World Bank and US approaches to absolute poverty; lower relative thresholds; and thresholds based on social assistance/minimum income schemes. In the end we recommend that the EU considers two measures. One based on deprivation indicators alone, and the other based on the overlap between deprivation indicators and living on an income below a budget standard threshold.

Figure 2 shows that the extreme poverty rates obtained using these thresholds are higher than the at-risk-of-poverty rates in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, but, interestingly, not in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia and among the EU-10+2. The extreme poverty rates are lower than the at-risk-of-poverty rates in all the EU-15 countries. However, there are households who are extremely poor in all EU countries.

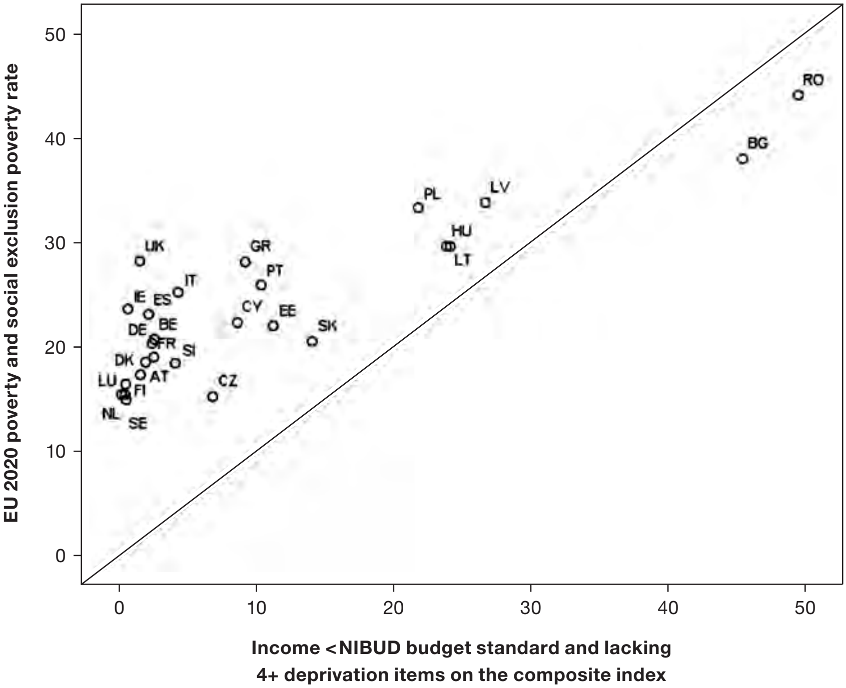
**Figure 2: Comparison of at-risk-of-poverty rate and two extreme poverty thresholds. Countries ranked by at-risk-of-poverty rate. SILC, 2008**




In the preceding analysis, we tended to focus on the impact of the poverty threshold on poverty rates. But changing the poverty threshold has inevitable consequences for the composition of the poor. However, we found it very difficult to make generalisations about how our extreme poverty measures would change the composition of the poor. It varied from country to country. Households in extreme poverty are generally more likely than the at-risk-of-poverty group to be single parents, tenants, low educated and with bad health, and to have low work intensity. But this was not the case for all countries.

While this project was being finalised, the EU developed the 2020 target for people at risk of poverty and/or materially deprived and/or living in jobless households (see earlier). Figure 3 shows how the poverty rates derived from that threshold compare with our proposed overlaps extreme poverty threshold. The EU at-risk-of-poverty or exclusion rate is lower than the extreme poverty rate only in Romania and Bulgaria. This is because the new EU target is still heavily influenced by the relative at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Thus, for example, the extreme poverty rate for the UK is only 1.5 per cent but the EU 2020 target poverty rate is 28.3 per cent, not least because it includes all 19 per cent of households under the 60 per cent of median at-risk-of-poverty threshold. In contrast, 49.5 per cent of households in Romania are below the extreme poverty threshold but only 44.2 per cent are below the EU 2020 target threshold.

**Figure 3: EU 2020 target compared with the overlaps extreme poverty rate. SILC, 2008**




An extreme poverty threshold of the kind we propose for the EU inevitably has political consequences. It will focus more attention than at present on disparities within the EU. If the intention of the EU is to eradicate social exclusion by 2020, or some date thereafter, there are challenges for all countries, but perhaps the greatest challenge is to raise the living standards of the poor in the poorer countries. The EU already approaches its responsibilities for regional economic and social cohesion using an EU-wide indicator (GDP per capita for the EU-27) and perhaps it is time for the social inclusion strategy to add at least one such non-relative indicator to its own portfolio.

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# Think Pieces

## Part C

# Poverty, Homelessness and Freedom: An Approach from the Capabilities Theory

Guillem Fernàndez Evangelista

Associació ProHabitatge, Autonomous University of Barcelona – IGOP

**Abstract_** *This paper makes a conceptual effort to apply Amartya Sen's 'capabilities theory' to the study of homelessness. This involves understanding the concept of social exclusion as a constituent part of poverty that incidentally highlights the relational roots of poverty. The paper first provides definitions of 'home', 'homeless people' and 'homelessness' in terms of capabilities, in order to show that in many cases government policies are assessed according to the budget allocated to the area, or the amount of specific assets offered, rather than according to the entitlements of people and the capabilities they generate. At this point the methodological approach of Enric Tello's 'well-being space' is proposed to help identify the origin of dysfunctions in people's capabilities. It also allows us to see the main steps in the complex mediation that ties together the capacitating social resources and the active and autonomous construction of well-being.*

**Keywords_** *Poverty; capabilities; freedom; homeless; well-being space*

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## Approaches to Ending Homelessness

At European level, FEANTSA (2005), in the context of the European Strategy for Social Inclusion, tried to synthesise and channel a variety of approaches in the fight against homelessness based on the reports of the national action plans for social inclusion. These approaches were:

- Evidence-based approach
- Comprehensive approach
- Multidimensional approach
- Rights-based approach
- Participatory approach
- Statutory approach
- Sustainable approach
- Needs-based approach
- Pragmatic approach
- Bottom-up approach.

The intention was not to create a definitive proposal whose policies had to be applied to all European countries. Rather, the idea was that these approaches could be adapted to the national context according to each country's priorities and requirements and to the profile and needs of its homeless population, thus becoming an instrument to facilitate discussion on the development of relevant policies. In this regard, it is proposed that Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to the study of homelessness can offer an integrating framework for the different approaches currently existing in Europe, and provide new mechanisms for assessing homeless policies, since the adoption of Sen's approach involves a rethinking of capabilities in the relationship between poverty, social exclusion and homelessness.

## Poverty as Lack of Freedom

The economist Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in 1998 for his contribution to the welfare economy, is a required reference when it comes to analysing poverty, due to his contributions in the area of conceptualising and measuring human development, amongst other things. Sen (2000) defines poverty as 'a capability deprivation (that is poverty seen as the lack of the capability to live a minimally decent life)', thus going beyond the traditional concept of poverty as only a lack of income or commodities. In this regard the most important aspect of well-being is not what one has, but what one can achieve with what one has.

Sen focuses on the potential of individuals to achieve and expand on their capabilities. Poverty should therefore be viewed not only as an absence of income, but as an obstacle to the exercise of an individual's capabilities. The fundamental concepts in Sen's theory are thus capability and functioning. Capability refers to a person's ability to achieve something and the effective opportunities an individual possesses with regard to the type of life that that individual can lead. Functioning represents an individual's actions and 'states'; the things that a person can be or do in life such as eating well or participating in the community (Sen, 1999, p.75).

> A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead. (Sen, 1987, p.36)

This definition of poverty is based on the Aristotelian notion that an impoverished life is a life where one is not free to carry out the important activities one has reason to choose (Sen, 2000). In other words, poverty can be understood as a lack of freedom, as freedom allows people to increase the capabilities that enable them to live life the way they want to live it. In this sense freedom is an end, but Sen stresses the importance of understanding freedom also as a means.

In *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen considers that freedom, as a means of achieving development, branches out into different instrumental freedoms that are reciprocally related to each other. He distinguishes five different types of freedom: economic opportunities, political freedoms, social facilities, transparency guarantees and protective security. Each of these rights and opportunities helps to advance the general capability of a person. While there is broad consensus that economic opportunities are decisive for development, the other freedoms have not received enough recognition. For example, when Sen refers to 'protective security', he says that this 'is needed to provide a social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery, and in some cases even starvation and death' (p.40); however, as recently as the winter of 2009 we saw cold weather cause more than two hundred deaths among homeless people across Europe.

Sen analyses the causes of poverty and considers policies for overcoming poverty from the point of view of freedom. The freedom of a person is understood as the ability to choose between different lifestyles, and development can mean being capable of doing more things rather than buying more things, such that those who suffer from poverty suffer a restriction of freedom.

Sen also denies that the ownership of, or access to, commodities is the sole criterion for defining living standards. The ability to transform 'commodities' into 'functionings' varies, but each person has different initial endowments, defined as the initial set of possessions or properties that a person or family has (i.e. workforce, land, tools, commodities, money). This leads to the concept of entitlement (Sen, 1982), particularly in the study of famine, which tells us that rules of access are the set of commodities a person can potentially have in a society if the individual uses all the rights and opportunities available to him or her. There may be plentiful availability of food in a society without this necessarily implying any entitlement to it, which can lead to famine. This concept is perfectly applicable to the residential context, in that there may be a high volume of housing yet a large number of people sleeping on the streets. Living in a society with a social structure that offers entitlement to social resources (e.g. unemployment benefits, education, health care, social services) gives people a greater number of satisfiers than living in a society that does not offer such entitlements.

As noted by Max-Neef (1993), it is important to differentiate between needs and satisfiers. Needs are the same in all periods or contexts; what changes over time and from one culture to another is the way or the means used to satisfy these needs (satisfiers). In this regard it becomes clear that simply owning commodities or satisfiers cannot be a real indicator of well-being, since these represent only the means by which well-being can be achieved. Between the commodities and what can be achieved with them (the end result) will be found a multitude of personal and social factors that differ greatly from one person to another (Salcedo, 2008). This explains how and why some of those at risk become homeless while others do not. Therefore material means are not the only important thing; the promotion of a person's capabilities, functionings and entitlements also plays a key role.

In the context of homelessness, we can say that this is not a problem that can be solved simply by offering housing or increasing the number of beds in shelters. Instead it is necessary to adopt an integrated approach to the multiple problems that can lead to a person ending up on the street, including mental problems, drug addiction, alcoholism, traumatic losses or administrative difficulties such as a lack of documentation. A comprehensive approach must also include the development of people's capabilities.

This reflection is important because it leads us to perform the same reflective exercise (but in different terms) as FEANTSA in its proposed European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) based on the concept of 'home'.

## Homelessness and Capabilities

The ETHOS classification seeks to provide a framework for mutual debate on the understanding and measurement of homelessness in European countries by providing a single language with which to collect data objectively and for policy-setting purposes. ETHOS uses four major categories: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing. According to Doherty (2005), these categories are built on the conceptual definition of 'home', which encompasses three areas or domains: [1] the physical area, the social area and the legal area. If the three dimensions are satisfied, then a dwelling (or space) can be considered a 'home'. However, the absence, to a greater or lesser degree, of satisfaction in any of the three areas gives rise to one of the categories mentioned above, and it is from this point of view that thirteen operational categories are used to categorise different residential situations.

### *But what is a home in terms of capabilities?*

From the viewpoint of capabilities, the concept of 'home' would be understood individually as comprising what each person 'inhabiting' the space contributes to it, as well as what the living space contributes to each person. In this sense the concept of a 'home' has different implications than the concept of a 'house'. Housing is a satisfier, and therefore there are entitlements or rules of access to housing.

Housing meets our need for shelter because it protects us from, for example, inclement weather. But at the same time it enables us to increase our capabilities by allowing us to rest; offering us somewhere to store our belongings and to clean ourselves; providing a space for personal and social relations, a space to foment creativity, a point of reference, a workplace or leisure space; and, as a symbol of belonging to a community, enabling our political participation. Housing therefore gives us the ability to achieve the functionings or states of well-being that we can understand as a 'home'.

This opens a rather interesting discussion on how to assess the capability-building strategies that can be offered by residential resources such as shelters. Can a shelter become a home? Is increasing the number of beds in emergency centres the best policy in achieving a situation where people can build their capabilities in the process of achieving a home?

When governments choose to create a network of emergency shelters in the traditional format of bunk-beds in communal spaces, gyms or sports pavilions, the conditions necessary to achieve a 'home' as a capacitating space are hardly being offered. A different approach would be to adopt a model for the eradication of homelessness

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1 www.feantsa.org/files/transnational_reports/EN_Stats_2005.pdf.

that offers housing along with services that are adapted to the problems identified among the affected population, and based on their intensity. In the United States, the development of the 'Housing First' model points in this direction.

> Housing First is an approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from other strategies is that there is an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing… A Housing First approach rests on the belief that helping people access and sustain permanent, affordable housing should be the central goal of our work with people experiencing homelessness. By providing housing assistance, case management and supportive services responsive to individual or family needs (time-limited or long-term) after an individual or family is housed, communities can significantly reduce the time people experience homelessness and prevent further episodes of homelessness… Housing First is an approach used for both homeless families and individuals and for people who are chronically homeless. Program models vary depending on the client population, availability of affordable rental housing and/or housing subsidies and services that can be provided. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006)

The model seeks to provide housing that enables the individual's capabilities to be developed (and in some cases rebuilt) by means of services adapted to the person's needs in achieving a 'home', and thereby developing the groundwork for a policy to eradicate homelessness. As noted by McNaughton (2010, p.37), 'The Housing First approach illustrates the possibilities of policy and practice fitting within a capabilities informed approach.'

This reciprocity between what we contribute and what it contributes to us, or the state of individuals created by satisfiers, is called 'midfare' by G. A. Cohen (Olsaretti, 2005). Commodities give people capabilities that each individual may or may not choose to use; they contribute to the performance of valuable activities and the achievement of desirable states, and they can produce other desirable states directly, without the beneficiaries exercising any capability whatsoever. In other words, what commodities give to people is not the same as what people can do with them, or what they actually do with them (Ortiz, 2004). In this regard 'housing' can be understood as a 'midfare'. Even so, Sen interprets midfare as part of functionings (Nussbaum and Sen, 1998, pp.17–18).

From a residential perspective, shelter is a basic and universal need. The series of entitlements that determine rules of access to the satisfier (the house or dwelling), along with a person's capabilities and ability to achieve effective opportunities will allow the individual to achieve a state of well-being that he or she can call 'home'. Failing this, different states of 'unwell-being' or homelessness can arise.

### *When does a home not exist in terms of capabilities?*

People can find themselves in different homeless situations when obstacles to achieving the functionings that provide well-being (home) exist. For instance, very low initial endowments; problems with the rules of access to satisfiers; lack of satisfiers in terms of quantity (and/or lack of adequate satisfiers in terms of quality); lack of capabilities; lack of freedom.

From this perspective, homelessness is a process that can include situations in which the capabilities of an individual are affected by different issues. For example, the lack of adequate satisfiers (e.g. an inordinately small rental market or low levels of social housing) reduces the availability of choice and consequently the freedom to achieve a home. It affirms, for example, that roofless people are not free in terms of capabilities and their choice is based on the scarce opportunities available to them, if any.

Figure 1 illustrates the idea that people can achieve satisfiers, or that satisfiers are available to them (such as a dwelling or the opportunity to sleep in a shelter) based on their own endowments, how entitlements are structured in a specific social system (e.g. more or less a welfare state) and how they are used. The result is that a person can build a home or become homeless depending on his chances of living a decent life.

**Figure 1: Home and capabilities**

| Endowments | Entitlements | Satisfiers | Capabilities | Functionings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legacies | Purchasing power<br>Housing rights<br>Non Discrimination | Housing<br>Social Housing<br>Shelters | Keeping Housing in adequate condition | Home<br>Homeless |

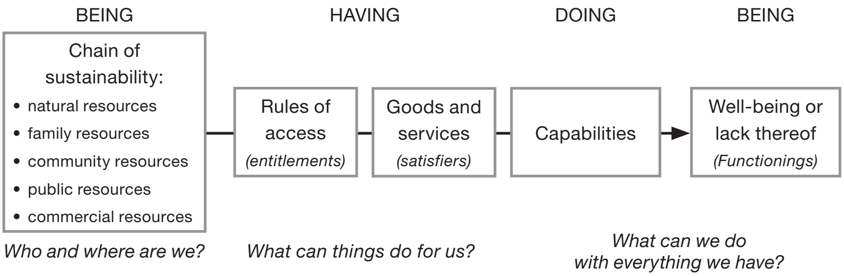
Source: Based on Schuldt, 1997.

## The Well-Being Space and Homelessness

Sen's capabilities theory has been criticised as being individualistic in nature, limiting the scope of the theory. In other words, functionings and capabilities are based on individuals, not on social states, and therefore do not convey (or disperse) the power relationships that form part of the social structure and dynamic (Cejudo, 2007).

The validity of this criticism is debatable, however, and a methodological approach could be used to analyse where capabilities and entitlements can be affected. People's full capabilities can be lost at any time throughout their life as a result of different personal circumstances or for a reason related to the rules of access to satisfiers. For this reason we will take into account the methodological approach proposed by the economic and environmental historian Enric Tello (2005) involving the 'Cadena de Sosteniment de Necessitats Humanes' (CSNH or human needs sustainability chain).

**Figure 2: The well-being space**




Source: Tello, 2005.

The CSNH, which is also based on Sen's analysis, outlines the main steps in the complex mediation between capability-building social resources and the active and autonomous construction of well-being resulting in what is known as the 'well-being space' (Figure 2). The CSNH describes, in ascending order, five different but interrelated levels: natural systems, families, communities, states and markets. The first three levels are essential in meeting the most basic needs in any society, and the last two mainly characterise industrial societies. The choice of ascending order is thus no coincidence, as the market economy cannot function if it is not sustained by natural systems, family and community networks, public services and state infrastructures (Tello, 2005).

Natural systems, the source of sustenance for all forms of life, obviously form the base. The basic needs of the human species are not limited to food; humans also need a habitat and they need to maintain ecosystems and certain environmental conditions (e.g. temperature, rainfall, air composition) (Martinez and Roca Jusmet, 2001), which can generate situations of homelessness if they become extreme. It is estimated that between 1980 and 2002, in addition to the many casualties, 144.5 million people became homeless as a result of climate-related catastrophes. Bangladesh, China, Laos, Sudan, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Nigeria, Argentina and even the United States with Hurricane Katrina, are examples of countries where climate-related catastrophes have left thousands of people homeless (Lamba, 2008).

The second level is made up of cohabitation units; groups of people who regularly live under the same roof and who may have ties to each other based on kinship, affinity or friendship. It is at this level that human beings develop their identity, self-esteem and language, which prepares them (or not) for socialisation into a community.

The community is the third tier, and it is the level that will determine the process of social identity or sense of belonging, as well as the existence or non-existence of mutual support networks. Functionally it is characterised by the influence that it can have on people, by the emotional connections and shared history it engenders, and at the same by its determination of the way in which one enters or exits public goods and services as well as markets, which are located in the fourth and fifth tiers, respectively.

People can thus be seen to meet (or not) their needs for shelter and protection through interconnected and interdependent networks based on each of the tiers that make up the human needs sustainability chain. From a residential perspective, the market then becomes the 'dominant residential supply mechanism', understood as the set of mechanisms a society uses to provide housing (Cortés, 2005) that can be accessed (or not) by its inhabitants based on economic capability, understood as an entitlement. The state is responsible for putting in place the policies necessary to reduce difficulties of market access or to correct market imbalances, and is consequently responsible for offering satisfiers and services.

The community and cohabitation units offer residential alternatives and strategies where shelter and protection are not guaranteed by the last two tiers. Therefore, residential segregation and discrimination affect the community depending on how public services and market entry and exit are determined. In other words, they affect the entitlements and satisfiers of the well-being space, which suggests that residential segregation, being associated with violence and mistrust, deteriorates community life and the capability for collective action (Rodríguez and Arriagada, 2004).

In terms of the family, the house not only provides shelter and allows for the home to be configured, but also relates to the care of the people that share it, along with their self-esteem, communication, identity, participation and, in effect, their fulfilment as people. This point of view is evident in feminist thinking that places human life and living standards at the core of existence as based on 'life experience'. This is fundamental in that, coinciding with Sen's and Nussbaum's reasoning, the home can thus build itself and 'true freedom is that which is exercised within its own limits' (Bosch et al., 2005). The home becomes a space in which the practices of freedom are defined and constructed. For their part, the natural systems provide us with shelter, land, water, electricity, gas and food, but, as we have seen, they can also become a threat.

Hence, we can speak of a residential needs sustainability chain formed by a series of environmental, social and economic networks that determine capabilities and functionings (and therefore the achievement of well-being or 'unwell-being') translating into the home. Consequently, homelessness can be defined as a process that depends on the degree to which the capability of human expression is blocked in different links of the chain: lack of buying power to express one's residential needs in the housing market; lack of citizens' (human) rights to express the shortage in the public sphere; lack of preventive public mechanisms; and in some cases the inability or non-existence of community and family networks to sustain their members. The roofless are more exposed to natural risk (or violence) and they can die from the cold or heat.

At this point it is interesting to note the definition adopted by FEANTSA of a homeless person, since it can implicitly be deduced that it refers to capabilities:

> Any person who cannot access or maintain adequate housing, adapted to his personal situation, which is permanent and provides a stable framework for cohabitation, whether due to experiencing personal or social difficulties in leading an autonomous life. (Avramov, 1995)

An autonomous person could be a person who has assured himself or herself of what Nussbaum (2000) proposed as the basic capabilities that must be assured to each person by virtue of their human dignity. Among these basic capabilities, having adequate shelter is included under bodily health.

It is also important to stress the dynamism of a methodological approach based on capabilities, which enables an understanding of homeless situations where the social resource structure is totally deficient and in situations where individual capabilities are affected and thus generate homelessness. Consequently, one of the main features of the well-being space is the ability to interconnect structural dynamics (macro level) with personal and everyday processes (micro level), as well as what Avramov (1999) considers to be an intermediate step (meso level) through which the essential factors operate, and which tells us which population subgroups are at greatest risk of experiencing homelessness. The well-being space includes the novel feature of contemplating the role of the natural environment (basic level) in the analysis of homelessness, as it can affect, for example, the forms of homelessness depending on the climate and the migratory movements of the roofless around Europe.

The well-being space also offers a framework for studying the causes of homelessness that is similar to the proposal made by Edgar and Meert (2005) based on structural, institutional, relational and personal causes.

## Poverty and Social Exclusion in Terms of Capabilities

Homelessness is increasingly viewed as a dimension and expression of social exclusion rather than a situation of poverty (Edgar et al., 2001). Social exclusion is defined as a structural, dynamic, multifactor and multidimensional phenomenon (Gomà and Subirats, 2005). From this perspective, homelessness is a process characterised by the accumulation of problems related to poverty, the breakdown of the family and of social networks and/or social isolation and the separation of individuals. As a result, it is neither a group characteristic nor a static condition. Homelessness can be described as a continuum of exclusion from adequate shelter.

If we break with the conventional definition of poverty as a purely economic dimension and adopt Sen's capabilities approach to explain it, the main value of the social exclusion concept does not lie in its novelty, but rather in the fact that it highlights the relational roots of deprivation, understood as a failing of capabilities (Sen, 2000). The term 'social exclusion' expresses the failure of people and of groups to 'form part of community life' as the basic functioning of a 'decent life'. In other words, social exclusion represents a particular form of the deprivation of capabilities, specifically relational capabilities.

## Conclusion

Understanding poverty as a lack of capabilities makes it possible to study homelessness from a perspective other than that of social exclusion. This paper has striven to apply Sen's capabilities approach by proposing the well-being space as a methodological approach that helps to identify where the capabilities and entitlements of people, and consequently their well-being and freedom, are affected.

Homeless people can suffer different degrees of the lack of freedom in terms of capabilities, and government policy should focus on increasing opportunities by offering capability-generating residential public services. The success of such services should be determined by measuring their effect on the freedom of individuals rather than their usefulness. In other words, at the basis of a policy seeking to eradicate homelessness should be a focus on providing housing in which the individual's capabilities can be developed (and in some cases rebuilt) based on services that are adapted to the person's needs in achieving a 'home'. These policies should assess the effect on the individual's freedom space, and not their usefulness. In this regard the experience of the US 'Housing First' approach is a model that should be taken into account.

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# Routes out of Poverty and Isolation for Older Homeless People : Possible Models from Poland and the UK

Catherine Boswell

Senior Lecturer in Housing Studies, University of Wales Institute Cardiff

**Abstract_** *Policies in many EU countries have sought to address the link between worklessness, reliance on state benefits and the attendant poverty that they inevitably bring. However, the focus has tended to be on the acquisition of skills and education amongst younger people. Older ex-homeless people are rarely regarded as contenders in the employment market and it has been argued that resources aimed at improving their employability are unlikely to provide a sufficient return. Routes out of homelessness are frequently identified as requiring shifts in lifestyles and networks. In the UK, for example, there is often a focus on managing addictive behaviours. Success is commonly measured through the achievement of independence, however, isolation can frequently prove to be a problem when former social networks have to be abandoned. Some models indicate that it is possible to be successful in working with older previously homeless people via employment and community reintegration, offering a route out of poverty and dependence whilst alleviating the problem of isolation. This paper looks at two organisations, one in Poland and one in the UK, both of which work with homeless people who are or who have been roofless. It is argued that the language and ideology framing the work of an organisation will have a strong influence on the model of provision and that a holistic approach with community and meaningful activity at its centre may be the way forward for some homeless people.*

**Keywords_** *Solidarity ; community ; work ; poverty*

## Introduction

The diverse political contexts in which the UK and Poland developed during the second half of the twentieth century inevitably meant that government and public responses to homelessness took different forms. In the UK, there was a rapid expansion of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector from the 1970s onwards, this being a largely uninterrupted period of economic growth and political stability. In Poland, after significant social upheaval post-1989, there have been more recent opportunities for NGOs to develop services that benefit homeless people, often with considerable support from the European Union.

This paper is concerned primarily with issues relating to people without children accompanying them; principally because in the UK the legislation and consequently the help available is significantly different for people with dependent children. Single homeless people receive a much more limited service: although there is an entitlement to housing if they can be shown to be 'vulnerable', this is not always a straightforward process. Consequently, the NGO or voluntary sector in the UK has tended to concentrate its efforts on 'non-priority' homeless people.

Independent housing has come to be seen as the solution to homelessness for the majority of people and has come to dominate both policy and strategies. However, this may not be the aspiration or ideal solution for everybody and enabling a diversity of models to be explored and developed is important in recognising the different needs of people, some of whom may be less equipped to manage independence than others. This paper seeks to explore the way that the framing of responses and solutions to homelessness are influenced by the ideology and ethos of the organisation developing those services. Two paradigms – closely linked, but with core differences – will be explored and their effect on models of services for homeless people examined.

Two organisations, Barka Foundation and Emmaus, are compared, the former is Polish and the latter is international and has projects in the UK, to consider the ideology which underpins them, why they are distinctive and why they might have something particular to offer older homeless people. There is little published research about either organisation, with the exception of three evaluation reports commissioned by Emmaus, so this paper could be said to be a start point in an explorative debate.

## Solidarity versus Inclusion

Social solidarity or cohesion has come to mean the bond that exists between members of society underpinned by a level of interdependence and a collective series of norms and values. This model may have been prevalent in Eastern Europe under the communist system with its state-dominated economies, however, solidarity was dealt a serious blow in the years of upheaval following the breakdown of the totalitarian regimes. Hulse and Stone (2007) express some disquiet about making use of this framework to denote shared values, in part because it can be difficult to apply in a multicultural society and could marginalise ideas such as social justice and human rights. Their analysis focused on liberal welfare regimes, and Chan et al. (2006) suggest that social cohesion sits uneasily within these systems as it does not address issues such as diversity and is best situated in a more traditional society.

Barry (2002) argues that recent public policy in the UK has been relatively consistent in undermining solidarity, which he says was evident in at least a diluted form until the 1970s. He attributes the decline in solidarity to the promotion of competition for resources amongst public services such as health and education, coupled with increased privatisation and widening disparities in income. A 2001 report for the UK Home Office, following unrest in some northern English cities, found high levels of local social cohesion as evidenced by common cultural backgrounds and understanding, but little or no connection with other communities or the wider society (Independent Review Team, 2001). Solidarity or social cohesion could therefore be viewed as a bottom-up rather than a top-down occurrence. Forrest and Kearns (2001) see cohesion as a micro-level phenomenon that enables people to manage their day-to-day lives effectively; this is ‘neighbourhood as community’, which is typified by friendships and everyday casual acquaintances.

In a European context, the model of social exclusion has been developed as a means of identifying those factors that represent a threat to social cohesion. It is differentiated from poverty in being characterised by a decline in levels of civic participation, in access to the normal goods and facilities within society and in solidarity (Silver and Miller, 2002). Although originating in France, it has since evolved its own peculiarly Anglo-Saxon liberal interpretation, which is far more individualist and which, as Silver (1994) discusses, leads to social differentiation and specialisation. In the French model, the contract between the citizen and the state means that there are obligations on both sides; whereas the Anglo-Saxon, or possibly more appropriately the Anglo-American, idea of social exclusion has a much weaker notion of such a reciprocal underpinning. Since the 1990s the UK has adopted the model of social exclusion to both conceptualise and address problems within society. This liberal interpretation enables a multidimensional approach to be taken whereby problems may have complex multilayered causes, and where individuals may be excluded within one sphere of society but not in another. Much of Continental Europe, however, has conceived of social exclusion as a lack or deficiency of solidarity. Here, solidarity is seen as the bond between the individual and society, and the converse of solidarity results in the Durkheimian notion of anomie threatening social cohesion. Citizenship, within the solidarity paradigm, includes the notion of work as a form of service or obligation to the wider community (Byrne, 2005). There is an intrinsic morality contained within the solidarity model, stemming from a combination of Catholicism and fraternity, and hence it sits comfortably in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, where the two traditions (religion and the egalitarian state) converge.

Birkholzer (2009) hypothesises that a social-solidarity-based economy will frame a particular type of response to social upheaval, such as that experienced in Poland. He puts forward a model for the social conditions that lead to the emergence of a new social-solidarity-based movement (p.3):

Economic self-help in the tradition of the co-operative and mutual assistance movement

Charitable help 'for others' in the tradition of the welfare organisations

Philanthropy in the tradition of donations and foundations

Voluntary community action and volunteering in the tradition of civic or civil society associations

These features are present to a greater or lesser degree in the models adopted by the two organisations that are the subject of this paper. How these different approaches of exclusion and solidarity have informed responses to homelessness will be explored. Although it might be assumed that social solidarity would be the model that informs homelessness provision in Poland, and the social exclusion paradigm would shape provision in the UK, it appears that this is not always the case and the ethos of the individual NGO can be the deciding influence.

## Why Housing Is Not Always Enough

Ewa Les, in her 2003 research review for FEANTSA, notes that about 80 per cent of homeless Polish people are men, the majority being older, divorced, from rural areas and having problems with alcohol dependency. This group has had particular difficulty in adjusting to the breakdown of the communist state and often lacks the skills necessary for the new socio-economic conditions.

Loneliness, low self-esteem and lack of meaningful activity is a theme that runs through much of the applied research (Bowpitt and Harding, 2009; Broadway, 2008; Crane and Warnes, 2002; Crisis, 2006; McNaughton, 2005; Smith et al., 2007).

Busch-Geertsema (2005, p.206) concludes that 're-housing usually does not make homeless poor people healthy, wealthy and wise', and Willcock's 2004 report for Help the Aged found that loneliness was a significant factor for some older people in potentially precipitating a return to a homeless lifestyle. Bowpitt and Harding observe that 'It's easy to revert back to old ways and old friends because you feel lonely' (2009, p.6).

The research evidence suggests that issues of loneliness and low self-esteem are significant factors affecting the quality of life of many people who are either homeless or have been rehoused. In common with the general population, most people would like employment (which is fairly critical to raising people's self-esteem) and meaningful relationships with other people. However, the ordinary routes into employment can be very difficult for formerly homeless people to utilise, and a combination of a low skills base and often a low stress threshold can make it hard to gain and maintain work.

Secure, stable and often independent housing is extremely important to many people, but it is no guarantee of an improved quality of life and can at times lead to isolation, poverty and loneliness; all factors that may result in individuals eventually abandoning tenancies. This finding poses the question as to whether there are other models that might be relevant for some homeless people and that may tackle some of these issues that are barriers to a better quality of life.

## What Is Distinctive about Barka and Emmaus?

Both of the organisations discussed here offer a model of community living and working. Barka has its origins in the era following the 1989 Solidarity revolution when many of the rural communities experienced their own upheaval (Kurczewski and Kurczewska, 2001). People who were previously employed by the state, for example in agriculture, lost their livelihoods but had few of the skills needed to adapt to post-communist Poland. Literacy levels amongst older people were often poor and unemployment rates were high, so the need was to offer people training in new skills and alternative types of employment. By 2003 there were twenty rural communities where formerly homeless people lived and worked, each with around twenty-five members.

Emmaus is an international organisation in existence for more than fifty years. It originated in France in the post-World War II period and subsequently spread to thirty-nine countries. The first UK community was established in 1992 and there are nineteen such communities in 2010.

The two organisations have distinct similarities in their ethos yet operate in very different strategic and policy contexts. Both place an emphasis on social inclusion through work and offer accommodation to homeless people, many of whom have experienced problems with alcohol dependency. The majority of those who choose to join their communities are older white men with experience of prolonged homelessness, often coupled with alcohol addiction.

Although Emmaus is an organisation that has a strong presence in many countries, particularly throughout Europe, in the UK it sits somewhat outside the mainstream of provision for homeless people. The Emmaus website[1] is interesting and includes statements such as 'giving homeless people a bed and a reason to get out of it' and 'a secular solidarity movement that has been tackling the causes of exclusion since 1971'. Such declarations are central to its approach: the first signifies the connection that Emmaus makes between housing and work, and the second the ethos of 'solidarity' within which it operates. These two key areas of community and the centrality of work make Emmaus particularly distinctive and its model differs from other organisations providing services for homeless people in the UK.

The ethos and funding that has evolved in the UK is based on the assumption that supported housing provision for homeless people will be temporary and that independent housing is the ultimate aim to be achieved through a process of acquiring 'life skills' and eventually being resettled into the wider community. Although undoubtedly this is a model that for many people holds good, it could be argued that it is predicated on the somewhat simplistic assumption that 'one size fits all' and in the process may restrict choice for individuals. This is particularly true since the inception of the Supporting People programme in the UK, which assumes that most people will move on to more independent accommodation after a maximum period of two years.

If people are either not ready to take that level of responsibility or for whatever reason do not wish to, there is little in the way of alternatives. Although there is an increasing emphasis on training and employment, much of this has been geared towards younger people and the focus for older people is more on a meaningful use of time rather than employment. So there are many excellent supported housing models throughout the UK providing educational opportunities or linking people to

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1 www.emmaus.org.uk.

facilities available in the wider community, but there is little evidence that housing-related homelessness organisations have become involved in the direct provision of employment opportunities on any significant scale.

There are fundamental differences between the approaches taken by Barka and Emmaus and those adopted by the majority of providers. Whereas the trend over the last twenty years or more has been towards an increasing professionalisation of the homelessness sector, both Barka and Emmaus are rooted in the philosophy of community, where the boundaries between ‘staff’ and ‘resident’ are blurred.

Barka has ‘leaders’, most of whom have been homeless and initially arrived as ordinary members of the community. Barka’s philosophy is that only people who have experienced disruption and exclusion (for whatever reason) can legitimately persuade others to change their lifestyle, so the opportunity is available for people to take on this role and provide guidance and an example to others. Emmaus does not take this idealistic stance and, whilst people who have been companions (as the community members are known) may become leaders (and there are number of examples of this happening), it is not assumed that there is an intrinsic value in having experienced homelessness or addiction.

The people who make use of the two organisations can be subdivided into those who form the ‘core’ and who have elected to stay within the community long term if not permanently, and those who stay for a short period and who may or may not return. Emmaus identifies a third group who choose to move between the different Emmaus communities, finding it difficult to put down roots for any length of time, but liking the ethos and atmosphere.

The rural communities run by the Barka Foundation each have around twenty to twenty-five people and most people share bedrooms and other facilities. The ethos is that of inclusiveness and mutual support, and fundamental to the philosophy is the table at which people sit together to eat. The centrality of the shared mealtime is also the pattern of life in Emmaus communities. It is somewhat reminiscent of the aphorism that ‘the family that eats together stays together’. Those who come to live and work in the Barka communities are regarded as members of the ‘family’. Bornstein (2004, p.203) quotes one resident as saying, ‘We are all people with problems… [the] biggest miracle is that we sit at one table and talk with each other… at the end of the day I feel needed’.

Crucially, both organisations operate a ‘dry’ policy and people approaching either organisation for help may be offered detoxification as necessary, with support and follow-up assistance.

Randall and Brown's 2002 evaluation of Emmaus provides some valuable information on views of both the staff and the companions. For those people who find that the model of being an Emmaus companion suits them, it can be an empowering experience. It is a basic principle of living there that everybody is expected to work to the best of their ability and that they are paid a small wage from the community funds rather than claiming benefits. However, there is a compromise in that to make many of the communities financially viable, housing benefit is commonly used to help supplement the income stream.

As noted earlier, people who are or have been homeless for any length of time are significantly disadvantaged in the employment market, not only in terms of entrance into employment but also in their ability to sustain work for an extensive period. Emmaus takes the two concepts of community and work and links them together in an alternative model.

Types of employment will vary between the different communities, but most commonly it tends to revolve around the recycling and rehabilitation of furniture and other goods. Sale of these for a modest amount provides an income stream that is also an opportunity for people to gain skills and as the work is full time, it provides a clear structure to people's days. Table 1 shows the views of the companions involved in Randall and Brown's study about different aspects of Emmaus' policies. It is worth noting the high percentage of people who valued the 'work not benefits' policy and the different aspects of community life that were also important.

**Table 1: Views of the companions involved in Randall and Brown's study**

| Policy/Rule | No. who like the policy (Base 45) | % who like the policy |
|---|---|---|
| **Work not benefits** | 41 | 91 |
| **No drugs** | 41 | 91 |
| **Unlimited stay** | 40 | 89 |
| **Local community involvement** | 34 | 75 |
| **Family atmosphere** | 33 | 73 |
| **Shared meals** | 33 | 73 |
| **Responsibility for business** | 33 | 73 |
| **No alcohol** | 33 | 73 |
| **Non-judgmental** | 31 | 69 |
| **No one is turned away** | 28 | 62 |
| **No questions** | 28 | 62 |

Source: Randall and Brown, 2002, p.24.

There are some strong similarities between the Emmaus model and the model that has evolved in communities run by the Barka Foundation. Barka also offers the opportunity of a permanent home in a community that proffers companionship and employment. The organisation aims to be self-sufficient but has been heavily reliant on EU funding via the EQUAL programme, which supports the development of social enterprises aimed at marginalised groups (Wygnanska, 2008). In rural areas, where many people had previously worked on the land, agriculture continues to play a large part in the work of the community members. Barka has helped individuals to develop their skills and is trying to establish markets for organically raised livestock. A difficulty is that there is a very limited market in Poland for such premium-priced products and the worldwide economic downturn that started to be felt in 2008 has restricted foreign markets.

Another parallel between the two organisations is the way in which they reach out to the wider community. Barka aims to develop social enterprise models that provide employment for people living within its communities and in the surrounding area. For example, a care agency that offers a service to elderly people in their own homes, provides work for people that live within one of the Barka communities as well as people from the local villages. The aim is to provide employment and a limited income for a small number of people, but, crucially, participants take responsibility for the business and thus gain meaningful work and the enhanced self-esteem of running their own enterprise.

Involvement in the local community can manifest itself in a number of different ways such as a decision to donate money to a particular local cause or involvement through volunteering. For example, the Bristol Emmaus community chose to prepare and serve a Christmas meal in their community dining room for local elderly people. This offers a paradigm of some of the most disadvantaged people in our society reaching out to others. This connection to the wider community, which is a fundamental part of the Emmaus philosophy, enables both normalisation and integration, but also puts people who often can be regarded as having nothing to offer society in the position of being able to ‘give something back’.

As noted earlier, for both organisations the concept of the community is epitomised by the dining table, around which everybody will share a meal. This activity not only represents the idea of family and community but also provides a democratic opportunity for people to share ideas and contribute to day-to-day decision making. Goldstein et al. (2008) argue that part of the success of organisations such as Barka is due to the ‘social connectivity’ that community living engenders, which creates an atmosphere of inclusiveness (closely aligned to the concept of social solidarity) that has a positive impact on the employment or social enterprise part of their work.

## Conclusions

The definition of poverty needs to include the notion of poverty as a lifestyle epitomised by isolation and exclusion from many aspects of society. Combating poverty, in this paradigm, means offering the opportunity to engage in meaningful activity and in the life of the community.

Tomlinson et al. (2008) explore a model for measuring poverty, identifying it, like social exclusion, as a multidimensional concept in which income is found to be only weakly associated with poverty. Many of the indicators discussed in their work have common ground with social exclusion, including civic participation and social isolation; the latter, as highlighted earlier, making people vulnerable and more likely to remain within the cycle of homelessness. This paper has sought to highlight the importance of these other contributory factors to demonstrate that poverty is a complex idea that cannot be addressed through income measures alone and, critically, solutions need to be sustainable over long periods of time. Gaining independent housing may appear to indicate that a person is moving away from the poverty of homelessness, but if the tenancy is not sustained or social networks do not exist, then the individual is very vulnerable to a return to his or her previous lifestyle.

Isolation and loneliness have been identified as important factors that can lead to tenancy breakdown, and are arguably more difficult to address than any other facet of social exclusion. The communities developed by Barka and Emmaus offer a solution for some sectors of the homeless population. They are in many respects low-stress environments as responsibility for bills and much of the day-to-day minutiae of life become a shared and hence a lesser burden. People are accepted largely without being 'judged' and are with a group of people who have had similar life experiences. A community model appears to result in an enriched quality of life for its members, the converse being loneliness, which could be viewed as a poverty of meaningful relationships.

There are many initiatives aimed at creating employment opportunities for homeless people through social enterprise, a model that has proven to be successful; but there is little evidence of a holistic approach being taken to the multifaceted needs of people who have been homeless for lengthy periods of time. Older long-term homeless people are intrinsically disadvantaged in the open labour market, yet many may well have skills and abilities that could be utilised. The more 'protected' nature of social enterprise, although needing to at least financially break even, can offer a more flexible and accommodating environment that enables people to progress at a gentler pace than is commonly available in a mainstream setting.

Although the financial resources available to Barka may be more limited, (and the social enterprise model needs to be developed further if it is to be sustainable), it has certain advantages that Emmaus in the UK lacks. The increasingly scrutinised and regulated sector in the UK appears to have resulted in less flexibility and reduced opportunities for innovation. The Supporting People funding regime is tied into an expectation of particular outputs, and most pertinently the assumption that people will move on to some form of independent accommodation. Emmaus has to justify an approach that has a stable core of community members who are long-term residents. Such a proscriptive framework is not in place in Poland and Barka has largely found support from the *gminas* (local municipalities) though this does not necessarily translate into financial support.

Perhaps inevitably this type of community and social enterprise approach can only work with an ethos of abstinence from alcohol or drug misuse. It requires people to adopt a daily structure and a willingness to engage in work that would be difficult if they were continuing to lead a chaotic lifestyle. But abstinence is not for everybody and it is apparent that some people leave Emmaus or Barka because they find that they cannot or do not want to comply with this requirement.

Barry (2002, p.23) makes reference to social solidarity as being ‘a sense of fellow feeling that extends beyond people with whom one is in personal contact’. The concept of solidarity is embedded in the premise that all people are a part of society and their community and as such they have a responsibility to contribute to that community. Civic participation is often identified in the literature as engagement in the community and the strong emphasis on participation within the wider community is core to the beliefs of both Barka and Emmaus. By making work central to the daily functioning of the community, both organisations offer a structure that provides meaningful activity and enhanced self-esteem within a supportive environment.

The paradigm of ‘social exclusion’ is based on the premise that some people, and groups of people, including those who are homeless, stand outside and apart from society. Programmes aimed at inclusion or insertion into society tend to be complicated because the different facets of exclusion are disaggregated, with strategies and policies often focusing on specific aspects of inclusion. Although there is an increasing emphasis on tailored approaches and multipronged interventions, multi-agency working is by its nature time-consuming and complex. If the social exclusion model prevails, the individual is, initially at least, a recipient of services; whereas in the solidarity model, the individual is expected to be a more active participant and has a responsibility to contribute to society through work and community engagement and not to be a passive receiver of benefits or services. The impact of this is that self-esteem is raised and, as has been demonstrated, raising people’s self-esteem is a critical element in the move away from homelessness.

Earlier reference was made to the problem that the idea of social cohesion or solidarity appears to have limited value in a multicultural or diverse society (Hulse and Stone, 2007). It would seem possible that this might be why the model explored here has a particular significance for a specific sector of the homeless population – older white men, who exhibit a strong degree of homogeneity – and does not appeal to the broader spectrum of homeless people such as women, young people or those from minority ethnic groups. But although there are implications about the wider applicability of the model explored here, there is a need to acknowledge how a model based on solidarity can have resonance for some homogenous groups in our societies, whose needs are not necessarily well met by 'conventional' services.

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# The Future of Assistance for Homeless People in Germany – Reorientation and Renewal

Thomas Specht

Chief Executive Officer, BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V.- BAG W

**Abstract_** *The German Welfare State has undergone comprehensive reforms, especially in the field of integration of unemployed welfare recipients. This article highlights the negative consequences of these reforms on service provison for homeless people. It argues that together with the appearance of new forms of poverty, the structure of homelessness has changed. The system of service provision for this target group must change accordingly, which requires more prevention, more co-operation between private and public bodies and finally a new vision of what social inclusion/integration into social life means in a radically restructured society.*

**Keywords_** *German welfare state reform, service provison for homeless people, prevention.*

## Introduction

The welfare state in Germany is in need of reform, but the form that this is to take must be negotiated anew because, I argue, social consensus is crumbling. It is necessary for those providing services to homeless people to clarify what their principles are if they are to take part in debates on the future of the welfare state, and indeed to determine their own future. The social change of recent decades has radically altered the system of service provision for homeless people. It has presented enormous challenges on every front to social workers and the specialised policy and social policy of private and public bodies. Given the scope of change, what is needed is not simply further systematic adjustment of service provision for homeless people, but a groundbreaking new direction that will tackle these challenges.

In this paper I shall first consider some of the social developments that I argue are critically linked to the assistance of homeless people, and I will outline fundamental steps for the new positioning of service provision for homeless people. I will then highlight some of the main points for an organisational and conceptual realignment of this service provision, and in conclusion I will consider the particular significance of participation in that process. Although this paper focuses primarily on Germany, in principle it has a wider applicability.

## The Change to the Activating Welfare State

The greatest challenge to existing service provision in Germany is undoubtedly the ongoing reconstruction of the welfare state through labour market reforms. The key question is whether the foundation of the labour market reforms – the separation of the legal context of SGB (Social Security Code) II from that of SGB XII through a new definition of earning capacity – made and still makes sense in terms of social and labour market policy. The management of access to the labour market through assessed earning capacity is a radical departure from the traditional management of access through employability in the labour market. The decisive difference between these concepts is that in the former, earning capacity is estimated based on an individual's physical potential to earn a living, whereas in the latter, employability ultimately ignores this potential and manages access to the labour market exclusively in terms of whether there is a suitable job offer. The idea is that every individual, without exception, has the right to work and capitalise fully on his or her earning capacity; naturally this includes homeless people and all those with particular social difficulties, in the same way as the rights to housing and health can be considered inalienable human rights. A legislative approach based on the activation of all people capable of working is thus also in line with the Charter of Human Rights.

It would be naive to assume, however, that the activating social welfare system was created to promote acceptance of a human right to work. Those advocating it saw it rather as a way of linking the entitlement to social assistance with a proven readiness to work to a greater degree than before, in the hope that the need for welfare assistance would thereby be continuously diminished. Herein lies the core paradox of the activating welfare state. The state's economy is such that these jobs are not readily available, and professional training and job application courses are offered on a substantial scale instead, creating some kind of fitness centre for the labour market.

It is time to develop an alternative approach to employment prospects based on human rights. Those providing services to homeless people need to get involved in this process, as more than two-thirds of their clients are of working age and entitled to employment support on the labour market. In the activating welfare state, a new realignment of services for homeless people means:

- Assistance for homeless people must be given higher priority in labour market policy, as well as in employment and qualification aids, than before. Integration into the labour market is not possible without qualifications (from literacy skills to general social competencies for gaining further academic and vocational qualifications).
- Providers of services to homeless people know from bitter experience that work must not be offered in lieu of alms, or that welfare must never have to be 'earned', as this creates a situation where employment assistance rapidly degenerates into being forced to work. Service providers must therefore call on legislators to rebalance the correlation between support and demands, with a particular focus on the rigid sanctions for those aged under twenty-five.
- Assistance for homeless people should not focus solely on realising legal claims to SGB II, but also on tackling and helping to overcome the social injustices enshrined therein: insufficient wages; the social relegation of persons insured for many years below the poverty threshold, by law; and the socially sanctioned implementation of a low-pay sector categorised by the €1 job (a publicly subsidised job regulated by public law that pays around €1 per hour in addition to the subsistence benefit). It is a matter not only of demanding application of the law for all, but also of calling for social justice.

## Social Change: New Forms of Division in Society

The scope and the face of poverty in Germany have changed dramatically in recent decades. Germany is not alone on this front: an OECD (2008) report on income distribution and poverty shows that:

- Both income inequality and the poverty headcount (based on a 50 per cent median income threshold) have risen over the past two decades. The increase is fairly widespread, affecting two-thirds of all OECD countries, and averaging around 2 points for the Gini coefficient and 1.5 points for the poverty headcount.
- The rise in inequality is generally due to rich households having done particularly well in comparison with middle-class families and those at the bottom of the income distribution.
- Income poverty among the elderly has continued to fall, while poverty among young adults and families with children has increased.

We are moving from a two-thirds society (i.e. where two-thirds of society are relatively well protected) to a one-third society in which one-third is well-to-do with increasing well-being or wealth, another third is gradually descending into situations of social insecurity, and the final third is already in a precarious position or experiencing poverty.

Traditional processes of social disintegration throughout Europe are joining forces with new processes of social exclusion to restructure traditional social inequality through new forms of poverty, with long-lasting effect. According to Castel (2009) the processes dividing society, as well as their form, can be characterised by three zones: the integration zone, the precarity zone, and the exclusion zone. Typical representations of the degree of social integration and social inclusion can be observed in all three zones.

- The **integration zone**, or that of the Establishment, shows a high degree of social integration, and thus of recourse to social resources and relations, as well as a high degree of networking and social inclusion (i.e. access to existing resources such as work, education, health care, politics etc.); in short, prosperity. Here, in the middle of society, there is nonetheless a fear of possible decline into the precarity zone, a 'feeling of precarity'.
- In the **precarity zone**, characterised in particular by precarious or unstable employment relationships, there is little opportunity to access social resources, for instance among single mothers or elderly people living alone, which creates a danger of social exclusion. The precarity zone lies between prosperity and poverty, constituting an intermediate realm made up of diverse situations.

The **exclusion zone** is essentially associated with ongoing uncertainty of employment; the so-called normal employment relationship has simply ceased to exist here. The situation is characterised by under-employment, unemployment or long-term unemployment, and the degree of both social integration and social inclusion is accordingly low. This area is marked by exclusion and poverty, albeit to different degrees.

Service providers for homeless people need to reposition themselves according to these social situations.

Homelessness service providers are increasingly confronted with a new clientele comprising impoverished middle-class women, migrants, elderly people in need of care and young adults who have experienced long-term exclusion and have been affected by the new precarity processes. Although not yet homeless, they all face dire social difficulties. As part of the welfare state apparatus, homelessness service providers afford social protection for impoverished people in residential quarters; more than 30,000 people are currently advised and cared for in homes. Their task has never been, nor is it likely to be in the future, to reduce the concept of dealing with homelessness to the procurement of housing, whether naively or cost-consciously, but to find an integrated, comprehensive way to combat the twenty-first-century manifestations of poverty.

## Demographic Change, Housing Markets and the Change in the Poverty of Housing

The Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. (BAG W) [National Federation of Service Providers for the Homeless] has for years observed a nationwide decline in the number of homeless people.[1] The BAG W has estimated that between 1999 and 2008 the number of homeless people dropped by about 60 per cent. As this estimate includes homeless migrants of German origin from Eastern Europe, the extreme drop of nearly 100 per cent in immigration levels (about 100,000 people) has a disproportionate effect on the overall drop in the number of homeless people. If these figures are considered without the repatriated population, there is still a drop of 50 per cent (or 220,000 people) between 1998 and 2006. However, at 27 per cent (about 50,000 people), the drop within the subgroup of homeless people living alone is less than half that of households composed of several people (65 per cent).

1 See www.bagw.de and BAG W, 2009 a.

The drop in the number of homeless migrant people can be explained by the drastic restrictions of access introduced by immigration legislation, which has contributed in particular to a fall in demand for reasonably priced living space in larger dwellings. But how can the fall in homelessness more generally be explained, considering current increases in unemployment and poverty levels? The overall number of homeless people in a country does not depend directly on levels of poverty and employment, but first and foremost on the housing market.

The falling levels of homelessness are attributable to a combination of developments in the housing market and demographic factors. There is a surplus of larger dwellings in many regions and it has therefore become easier for families who lose their homes to find new housing, while at the same time it has become more difficult to lose one's home, at least on a permanent basis. In addition, there is a long-term, downward demographic trend in the residential population, which has led to a drop in the number of households with three or more members seeking housing. However, the number of households with one or two members will continue to increase, reaching about 2 million households by 2020, which will generate demand accordingly (Statistisches Bundesamt [Federal Statistical Office], 2007).

Overall, the enhanced efforts of the municipalities nationwide, and the prevention of homelessness through specific housing provision programmes, have clearly had a positive effect, especially for families, as have the high social integration benefits of services for homeless people, especially for people living alone. Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008) have shown similar preventive effects in the United Kingdom, which has also experienced a decrease in the number of homeless people and in the level of poverty.

The decline in homelessness has not been as great for the largest group of homeless people, those living alone, which, at approximately 130,000 people in 2008, clearly exceeds family homelessness at 90,000 people. This difference is explained by insufficient prevention efforts in this area, a tighter market situation for small dwellings and the more extreme poverty of the clientele. The increase in poverty in Germany therefore concerns the other groups in need of housing: initially at least, those who face unsuitable living conditions and those who are threatened with losing their home. BAG W's statistics for 2008 show some 30,000 clients still living in poverty or, in the language of SGB XII, experiencing dire social difficulties and being cared for in homes.

Owing to a lack of official homelessness statistics, the number of people threatened with immediate loss of their home can be estimated only very roughly. In 2009 there were some 3.5 million needy households under SGB II, comprising approximately 6.7 million people; it is estimated that about 1.5 per cent of these (approximately 50,000 households and 100,000 persons) may be threatened with immediate loss of their home. In the absence of reliable statistics, the real numbers at risk remain unknown, but this estimate makes it clear that there is a potentially sizable risk. No plausible overall numbers of people living in unacceptable conditions can be provided at this time, though the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP-Monitor1, 2007) says that 20.6 per cent of main tenants in private households consider their housing expenditure to be 'too high'.

The structural changes in housing needs mean that providers of services to homeless people must adjust to the following developments:

- It is expected that the numbers of acutely homeless people will continue to drop or will at least stabilise in the coming years, whereas the number of people who are threatened with losing their home, or are living in unacceptable conditions combined with growing poverty, will increase. Consequently, the number of people who may have housing, but who live in dire social difficulties, might rise.
- The number of clients may drop, stabilise or increase depending on the nature and type of assistance offered, in particular by ambulatory services for homeless people, because it is not only people without housing who are in need of help, but also those who are threatened with losing their home, and the new poor who are living under uncertain housing conditions.

## From Assistance for the Homeless to Assistance for People in Need of Housing or Faced with Social Difficulties: Realignment of the Fields of Action

The need for comprehensive reform of the way that services for homeless people are currently organised was clearly addressed in the BAG W policy statement published in 2001 (BAG W, 2001). The aforementioned social changes have made this need even keener. A key to the reform of service provision for homeless people lies in the expansion of the concept of housing exclusion, a topic that has featured in the specialised discussions in the field over the last decade (Forschungsverbund Wohnungslosigkeit und Hilfen in Wohnungsnotfällen, 2005; Specht-Kittler, 2004). It is now understood that an organisational restructuring of service provision for homeless people must include a coordinated system of assistance for people in need of housing and people living in poverty and being confronted with social difficulties. The inclusion of the notions of housing exclusion and social difficulties clarify that future services must be organised to address poverty and housing exclusion.

Against this background, the traditional services for those in need of housing will experience a permanent shift in the relative importance of their primary tasks:

- The importance of assistance for the acute homeless will be (quantitatively) reduced.
- The importance of prevention will grow.
- The need for area based social work will increase as the divisions in society widen.

The system must respond to these changes and the main points for realignment should be:

- The reorganisation of the welfare state and the growth of poverty have rendered obsolete the traditional distribution of labour between municipalities providing assistance for the homeless and private, non-profit providers of support. Public and private sector organisations need to cooperate and work together to ensure that those homeless persons in municipal accommodation have the same access to assistance as other people faced with social difficulties. This also applies to the prevention of homelessness and to neighbourhood management.
- The systematic enlargement of existing methods of assistance for homeless people (families, couples or individuals) with services based on prevention (i.e. the systematic foundation of specialised departments with structural interconnection that can offer assistance to homeless people). In view of the increased poverty being experienced in Germany, we cannot afford to wait until social difficulties have become so severe as to result in homelessness.
- Assistance for homeless people must be realigned socially to include those who are living in unacceptable housing conditions. The increasing numbers of impoverished people whose poverty and social difficulties remain hidden have the same entitlement to assistance as homeless people when confronted with social difficulties.
- The growing fragmentation of responsibilities of public authorities, brought about by the labour market reforms, must be checked decisively by means of a legally binding division of assistance. To this end every proposal to reorganise the cooperation of employment agencies must be measured on a large or on a small scale (see BAG W, 2009 b, c).

## Realignment of the Forms of Organisation and Management of the Assistance System

The needs-based realignment of the assistance system in three areas of action – removal of homelessness, prevention and integration – requires a number of additional measures for its overall management.

Coordinating assistance essentially entails striking a new balance between those responsible for social administration or social services and those responsible for employment administration to optimise social integration as a whole and not only integration in the labour market. Assistance pursuant to SGB II is geared only to dealing with one social problem (i.e. exclusion from the labour market), while SGB XII, involving assistance in special social situations, represents a more integrated and comprehensive approach.

The central challenge in such a realignment is achieving lasting, coordinated and comprehensive cooperation between all public and private bodies at the state, regional and municipal levels in the planning, financing and provision of services. A new balance must be struck in the relationship between those tasks that fall under the jurisdiction of the state (i.e. that can only be carried out by public authorities) and general social tasks that can also be carried out by non-governmental organisations. For example assisting the homeless in terms of providing temporary accommodation is an obligation, but it does not require that provision be carried out directly by the state, and such assistance can be much better organised by housing companies and private bodies in cooperation with providers of social services.

Those providing assistance to the homeless must also insist on their active participation in the specialised area of prevention. Prevention can be advanced through the active development of new types of service, such as:

- Outreach crisis assistance to prevent the imminent loss of housing by persons living alone.
- Economic consulting and support to stabilise families threatened with the loss of their home.
- Stabilisation of the social area in a neighbourhood through outreach welfare work in the street.

The assistance system can only achieve lasting effects by modifying anachronistic forms of financing that are no longer suitable for the necessary forms of service provision. In principle, this entails reducing the red tape of financial management and making the system more flexible. Specifically, financing by means of project budgets should replace financing by legal form; an initial step could involve the authorisation of mixed financing schemes combining ambulatory, partially stationary and stationary legal forms under a project budget.

In addition, area-based budgets should be introduced, at least in pilot projects, as has been done in certain areas of assistance for young people. In principle, this entails giving those responsible for assistance a budget for housing exclusion relief services within a predefined geographical area. With this budget, the provider(s) will provide all the assistance required in the particular area as outlined in the goals, standards and indicators of the service contract. A specialised, detailed discussion is needed to gauge any potentially negative effects, such as capping and dissociation from the demands of the recipients. This kind of realignment can only succeed if it receives competent support in the form of integrated and institutionalised social planning from NGOs, municipalities and federal states.

## Main Points for the Conceptual Realignment of Social Work, Social Service Policy and Social Policy for the Homeless

It is insufficient to renew only the organisational approaches to service provision for homeless people, the conceptual bases must also be renewed. Social inclusion is primarily a complementary and antithetical notion to social exclusion as a process and as a result. Ensuring social inclusion means organising access to such major social areas as the economy, politics, the mass media and health care, and in such a way as to grant people access to the Internet, medical care, participation in the political process, education and qualifications, and so on. Facilitating social inclusion means first making the structures of the social subsystem more flexible so as to open them up, instead of 'adapting' the individual to the structures already in place. Such participation should be institutionally guaranteed, where necessary, through legal regulations for social inclusion, the most obvious examples being the removal of obstacles to the mobility of physically disabled persons.

Social integration refers to participation in the neighbourhood, associations, friendships, partnerships, families or occupational networks. Social disintegration should not be equated with a commensurate individualisation of personal life. In a society where collective identities such as nationality, ethnic origin, the family, sex and so on are being continuously redefined, securing and restoring social integration is no simple and certainly no clear task. A guiding principle of social integration would be a suitable balance between group membership and individual self-fulfilment to enable reliance on social support networks in times of crisis. Social integration, however, also requires a willingness to get involved and solidarity on the part of more integrated people for the sake of those who are less integrated in society.

Successful social integration involves individual motivation, stability, having the initiative to deal with emergencies; it is the ability to help oneself combined with the capacity to use support networks.

The provision of assistance for people living in poverty and in need of housing must strike a new balance in the conflicting relationship between the goal of social inclusion and social integration and at the same time be conceptually adjusted to new target groups.

Due to the new forms of long-term social exclusion and poverty, a new balance is needed between independent, self-organised care, network cooperative assistance and the entitlement to benefit from the regulation systems. We must gear this new adjustment equally to people from a migrant background, the long-term unemployed, young adults without sufficient education, women, mental patients and addicts – as well as to homeless people, people threatened with losing their home and people living in unacceptable conditions.

The focus should continue to be on tackling poverty and the housing shortage.

As part of social services, social work projects involve work on social inclusion and integration. Social services policy can be seen as the creation of the organisational, administrative, personal and financial preconditions for specific social work in this area. Social policy can be seen as the creation of the legal, organisational and financial policy preconditions for social inclusion and integration. The relationship between social services and social policy can be determined so that social policy creates the framework for an appropriate social services policy.

More than ever before, the chances for social work depend on social policy preconditions at the municipal, state, federal and now also the European levels. It is important that future assistance for those in need of housing creates better conditions for social integration and inclusion work on the basis of housing, health care, social and labour market policy as social solidarity with the excluded is under threat and will be even more difficult to achieve in the future. Heavier involvement in social policy is therefore a vital precondition for the professional organisation of assistance and social services for people living in poverty and in need of housing.

## Conclusion

The realignment that has been outlined here cannot be developed and implemented without real participation. Employees in social services and institutions should use their experience and get involved to help shape the process of change ; this applies equally to residents. Participation is the key word for the future. Without new and genuinely democratic forms of participation in social work, the renewal of service provision for homeless people will fail. It is also a matter of redefining civic commitment as democratic participation in the task of social integration. As part of this, professionals should put greater trust in citizens who volunteer to help and should call on their help.

The words 'dialogue', 'understanding', 'participation' etc. do not appear in many texts of specialised periodicals on the optimisation of what is known as 'process management' in public social administration or social services. Unfortunately, under the auspices of the new public management, the introduction of new code systems has been confused with modern decentralised management. This is no coincidence, as such protagonists want to implement a top-down management system. This type of exercise of power is not new in itself, but what is new is an attempt at a consistent rationalisation of the organisational processes of social organisations in the interest of managerial efficiency. The way of the future is not a total managerial rationalisation of social work for homeless people. Nor will a solution be found through the dismantling of assistance for homeless people into its component parts, whereby the poverty of housing can then be administered under the cover of specialised assistance for addicts or the disabled, or of psychiatry. In view of the major challenges highlighted in this paper, the future of services for homeless people lies in creating a new unity in diversity in assistance for people living in poverty and in need of housing, based on human rights with lively democratic participation from those involved, employees and citizens.

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# The Significance of Exclusionary Discourse and Measures: The Example of Hungary[1]

Bálint Misetics

The City is for All[2], Budapest

**Abstract_** *This think piece demonstrates how the dehumanising discourse that seeks to legitimise the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people impedes adequate social policy answers to the problem of homelessness. After an account of recent efforts to exclude homeless people from public spaces in Hungary through police sweeps, exclusionary adaptation of public furniture and anti-begging ordinances, it will argue that criminalising and punitive responses to homelessness and a lack of adequate social policy are not independent of each other. Whereas adequate social policies could greatly reduce the problems to which criminalisation is a misguided answer, the lack of such policies contributes to a strengthening of the penal state. Punitive measures gain legitimacy from a discourse that dehumanises homeless people, excludes them from the moral community and blames them for their homelessness. Such discourse further impedes the understanding of homelessness as a structural problem and the development of a sense of community, both of which are prerequisites for the egalitarian reforms necessary to put an end to homelessness.*

**Keywords_** *Exclusion; homelessness; public space; punitive responses; Hungary.*

1 This paper is a slightly revised version of an earlier article published in Hungarian (Nincsen számodra hely: a hajléktalan emberek kirekesztéséről, *Café Bábel* 59, pp.83–90). An updated version of it was presented at the European Research Conference of FEANTSA in Budapest on the 17th of September, 2010 (the author is grateful for Mariann Dósa for her help in the revision of the article).

2 The City is for All is a grass-roots activist group in which homeless, formerly homeless and non-homeless people work together for social justice and housing rights. The author is a founding member of this organisation.

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## Introduction

This paper looks at the recently introduced criminalising and exclusionary measures directed at homeless people[3] in Hungary, and uses them and their accompanying discourse to demonstrate the interrelationship between criminalising and exclusionary responses to homelessness and a lack of adequate social policy. It contributes to the discourse of this journal on the spatial aspects of exclusion faced by homeless people (see Tosi, 2007; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2008; Huey, 2009). The following will demonstrate the non-applicability to Hungary of Tosi's conclusion that in Europe the 'homeless are not the main focus of measures to control urban space, and are infrequently the explicit target' and that migrants 'perform in some ways, in the control of public space, a role similar to that which is played by the figure of the homeless in the discourse in the USA' (2007, pp.234 and 231). Unlike most Western European countries, large non-European immigrant groups are not present in Hungary and homeless people do have a dominant place in discourse on the control of urban public space (though not in the more general discourse on public safety, which is mostly concerned with Roma people).

I begin by discussing how homelessness has been characterised as an 'urban nuisance', how specific initiatives have sought to exclude homeless people from public spaces and how begging has been criminalised in parts of Hungary, before moving on to consider the significance of these exclusionary measures. The discussion is based on my analysis of these particular responses to homelessness in Hungary.[4] Although my focus here is on disciplinary measures, these are not the only, or even the dominant, policy responses to homelessness in Hungary, where, for example, there is a system of shelters and day centres and an active non-governmental organisation sector.

3 By 'homeless' I refer predominantly to people sleeping rough or those staying in shelters at night and in public spaces during the day. Such homeless people are the main targets of the described exclusionary measures and the protagonists of the accompanying discourse. However, the discourse often confuses this most visible of homeless groups with homeless people in general, such that the negative attitudes developed towards the former affect the latter as well.

4 This involves participant observation of grass-roots activities and reviews of media sources of information (newspapers, online resources etc.) as well as academic texts on the subject.

## The Homeless Person as an Urban Nuisance

'I live close to Petőfi Bridge, and if I go out to smoke to my balcony, I see a pleasant[5] lady who settled at the entrance of the post office. She lives twenty meters from my bedroom' reads one response to the article 'Homeless are being expelled from 15 spaces in Újbuda' (the eleventh district of Budapest) at one of Hungary's most popular online news portals.

'I have to ask: am I living in socialism or capitalism? As far as I know the defense of the individual and of private property are two core components of this system. The value of my flat decreases, I go to the shop only by a roundabout route, sometimes it makes my stomach turn, do I have any rights at all?' Confronted with street homelessness, the commentator is offended not because he lives in a society in which there are people who are forced to live on the street, but because of the inconvenience this fact causes him as he looks down from the balcony of his flat or goes shopping. He is concerned not about the rights of homeless people, but about the rights of those who see them. Both the article's topic (the mayor's plan to address the 'homeless problem' by designating fifteen 'homeless-free zones'[6] and the quoted comment indicate the degree of social exclusion that homeless people face in Hungary.

This exclusion is further reflected in, for example, the words of a police captain in Budapest who remarked to me that 'we don't let homeless into that square'. He acknowledged the illegality of this, but excused himself by referring to public pressure. This sense of exclusion was also evident in the disdainful smiles of the police officers I called in a subway station because a security guard was beating a homeless person with his truncheon. Or when the arriving ambulance workers exclaimed that 'ordinary people might die now' as (because of me) they now had to deal with 'this', a homeless person, instead.

Do we look at poor people as equally worthy members of our society who deserve our solidarity and some kind of social minimum response, or do we blame them for their situation and accept that they and their children should get worse housing, worse schools, worse health care and live shorter, more miserable lives than us? In the case of homeless people, it is often not even the issue of equal worth that is raised, but whether we consider them human at all.

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5 Here, 'pleasant' is used ironically to express his disgust at the situation.

6 These zones were announced by the mayor in repeated statements and led to increased surveillance of these places by the authorities. However, the zones are not a defined policy (there is no policy document or ordinances to enforce them) and the number of zones has varied in subsequent statements made by the mayor.

Raising this question is sacrilegious. Yet it needs to be raised, as many reactions to homelessness seem to indicate that politicians who initiate exclusionary measures (and local residents who support these) see homeless people living on the streets not as humans, but as some kind of urban nuisance similar to graffiti, stray dogs, potholes or illegal bill posting. Something, an eyesore for the more wealthy, that impedes the "normal" use of public spaces and spoils the landscape.

The exclusionary discourse on homeless people is exemplified by an interview with a popular right wing mayoral candidate who takes pride in his efforts to clean up Budapest: 'I managed to get rid of illegal advertisements, clean graffiti, we passed a strict ordinance on dogs, we took action against illegal littering, we expelled homeless people, without much public attention' (Munkácsy and Varga, 2006).[7] The mayor of the eleventh district, a member of the 'socialist' party, has made similar statements: 'we will start a complex police action, taking firm action against the disruptive homeless, begging, illegal vending and illegal litter' (V. K., 2009). Even though (in this statement) the mayor did not generalise to include all homeless people but spoke about the 'disruptive homeless', the context in which homelessness is raised is nonetheless telling: it seems that homeless people who live on the streets are a nuisance, which – just like illegal litter – need to be removed from public spaces.

The treatment of homeless people as illegal litter is not confined to the discourse, but is illustrated in the practical attempt of one local authority in Budapest in February 2005 to remove the shanties of fifteen homeless people with a bulldozer and a dozen workers, as if they were actually illegal litter. The attempt was prevented by a living chain of human rights activists, mobilised by a conscientious social worker.

In this perspective, homelessness is not an issue of distribution, nor is it an anomaly of the welfare system or the housing market; it is an issue of aesthetics and order. The homeless person is no longer a member of the community who needs that community's protection, but is a danger from which the community needs to be protected.

7 Since then the quoted politician has been elected as the mayor of Buapest.

## Exclusionary Public Spaces

This dehumanising attitude is reflected in the iron armrests that are installed on public benches in Budapest with the intention of driving away homeless people. Two inner district mayors took pride in publicly announcing their exclusionary intentions. Public benches that are deliberately made unsuitable for lying down on by means of iron armrests or in other ways are obvious examples of measures that are intended not to fight homelessness, but to fight homeless people.

Most of us do not stop to think about how many of the little details in our urban environment are influenced by this exclusionary purpose: this is why some public benches were changed to single-person public chairs; this explains the design of the seats at bus stops; this is why there are otherwise futile little iron parts between seats at subway stops and in front of the new building of Corvinus University. In the late 1990s one rationale for the introduction of the 'subway police' was to keep homeless people out of subway stations, just as it is a publicly announced goal in the designing of the underpasses for the new subway line that they should not contain any space that homeless people could occupy (Török and Udvarhelyi, 2005, p.70).

The newly installed anti-homeless iron armrests led to much criticism and protest. The deputy parliamentary commissioner for civil rights declared the method inhumane and stated that 'the residents need to tolerate this much inconvenience' (i.e. the inconvenience caused by the presence of homeless people).[8] In response to the complaints of a grass-roots housing activist, the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Civil Rights published an official report on this issue, which declared 'every administrative measure that responds to homelessness as an aesthetic issue of the cityscape' as unacceptable and 'any measure that would further worsen the circumstances of homeless people' as unconstitutional (OBH, 2006, p.8).

The armrests successfully endured the protest of human rights activists, journalists and the ombudsman. However, a small group of activists, formed with the sole purpose of removing these instruments and other symbols of exclusion, succeeded in detaching many of them. They were later exhibited as a sculpture of a person lying down at a sleep-out demonstration.

8 Even though public pressure is frequently evoked to legitimise the installation of iron armrests and other measures aimed at the spatial segregation of homeless people, the only available representative study on this topic (Studio Metropolitana – Double Decker, 2005) proved that the majority of respondents did not agree with the installation of the armrests.

## Criminalisation of Begging

Begging and homelessness are frequently connected and confused by those who argue for the criminalisation of begging. In their discourse the figure of the beggar represents the 'disruptive' homeless person, falsely suggesting that most homeless people beg. In fact, homelessness and begging are two different phenomena in Hungary: homeless people more frequently work than beg (Gurály, 2009), with the proportion of those who beg being less than one-third even among street homeless people (Győri, 2008), whereas approximately half of those who beg are homeless (Mezei, 1999). Still, as the quoted pro-criminalisation arguments will show, anti-begging ordinances are, to a considerable extent, also intended to exclude homeless people from certain public spaces.

One example of the confusion of homelessness with begging (and indeed tuberculosis) is the statement of a local authority representative of Szeged (a major city in southern Hungary) arguing for the prohibition of all forms of begging in the downtown area (as quoted in Nagy, 2005):

> The situation in Szeged has started to become intolerable: people often stop me on the street complaining that they are being woken up by the outside life in front of their house. Others eat there, sleep there, relieve themselves there, which is unacceptable for several reasons. It is also a health issue. For example, there are serious implications if somebody sits on a bench downtown on which somebody with TB previously sat.

The way in which the same representative reacted when asked in a television interview, 'Why can't beggars be left alone?' is also telling. 'Because those people who would like to see their town pretty and clean have rights too,' she answered.

The mayor of the fifth district of Budapest announced the elimination of 'homeless islands' (spaces occupied by homeless people) and of street begging at the same time, which further demonstrates the blending of begging and homelessness. His statement that the local authority would ensure there was a 'legal basis for pushing out the homeless and beggars' (NOL, 2007) from the district underscores this point. In light of such comments, the frequently made argument that the criminalisation of homelessness is not directed against certain people, but against certain activities, is hardly believable.

According to the current national legislation, begging with children or in a 'harassing way' is prohibited; the latter is broadly defined to include anyone 'who addresses pedestrians or people in public with the purpose of asking for money, or who goes begging house to house, flat to flat'. This regulation in itself would allow action to be taken on begging that involves harassment, no further criminalisation is necessary. In fact, according to the quoted regulation, any form of begging other than silent begging – no matter how polite – is illegal. Yet several local authorities still found it necessary to further criminalise non-harassing forms of begging, at least in the inner area of their territory, and attempts have been made to do so in the capital as well.

Any form of begging is prohibited in certain areas of Kaposvár, Szeged, Eger, Nagykanizsa, Pécs and Debrecen. In the thirteenth district of Budapest, an ordinance passed in 2006 by the local authority prohibits begging in the whole district between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. Its definition of begging (similar to the ordinances of Eger, Szeged and Pécs) includes 'implied conduct', which is especially worrisome with respect to police harassment of homeless people. As an open letter from the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network warns, 'The open violation of human rights is reasonably presumed, because these by-laws allow for poorly dressed people to be sent away from public spaces, making their humiliation total.' The difficult issue of legal certainty in relation to identifying 'implied conduct' is one of the constitutional counter-arguments put forward in the joint constitutional court petition of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and the Shelter Foundation.

## The Significance of Exclusionary Measures

As geographer Don Mitchell (2003, pp.208–9) writes, 'there is something exceedingly perverse in the above discussion, something easily lost as the details of specific cases are outlined—namely that homeless people and their advocates are driven, in the current urban context, to argue for the right to sleep in public, to lie on sidewalks, to beg on the streets, or to shit in alleys'. These are, indeed, 'pretty mean' rights.

The struggle against the segregation of homeless people, iron armrests and the accompanying discourse might sometimes appear fruitless (or even counter-productive)[9], as the real aim is not to defend but to eliminate rough sleeping. This is true in as much as the final goal is indeed the elimination of homelessness: not because street homelessness is bad for some of the *residents*, but because it is bad for those who *cannot reside anywhere* and are thus forced to sleep on a bench. The real solution is not to make rough sleeping unviable, but to make it unnecessary.

Of course, nothing in this argument is intended to suggest that the inconvenience of being confronted with homelessness is not real. On the contrary, seeing homeless people is distressing. Some people might be distressed because of their negative

9 On the critique of this argument, see the 'Redistribution, Recognition, and the Sovereign Ban' chapter of Feldman (2004), who shows how economic, cultural and political injustices intervene in the case of homelessness and argues that the struggles for legal recognition and for redistribution might go well together.

attitudes toward homeless people, but, to quote the US Supreme Court, 'mere public intolerance or animosity cannot constitutionally justify the deprivation of a person's physical liberty'.[10] Other people's distress might be caused by empathy with the person who is living on the streets. In this case, it should be obvious that the only appropriate method to relieve or prevent this is to relieve or prevent the first-order suffering to which it is a response (Waldron, 2000) by ensuring that no one needs to sleep rough.

For now, however, this is not the case and some of our fellow human beings are living on the streets. They are harassed frequently, even without the existence of specific exclusionary measures, but such measures could make harassment more frequent, as well as making it appear legitimate and legal. The protection of their security and dignity is an important goal in itself, worthy of the support of any person of good will, but there is a further reason why spatial exclusion and the moral exclusion by which it is legitimised is of crucial importance: punitive measures and the lack of adequate social policy responses are not unrelated.

First, as French sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2001 and 2009) argues, social deregulation and punitive over-regulation go hand in hand, as the state relies increasingly on the police and penal institutions to contain the disorders produced by shrinking social protection. The consequence of the 'minimal state' ideology is not the lessening or weakening of the state, but a fundamental shift in its functions that entails the reversal of a centuries-long process: civilisation. 'It threatens primarily the civilizing and welfare functions which promoted relatively peaceful and relatively integrated national coexistence. The deterioration of the situation that follows may legitimate the strengthening of the [state's earlier] policing functions' (Ferge, 2000, p.183; see also Ferge, 1999a and 1999b).

This means, in the case of homelessness, that exclusionary and punitive measures would be less necessary if it was not the case, that there is simply no social housing policy in most of the Hungarian settlements (KSH, 2006), if the public housing stock was bigger and housing allowances were larger, if there were proper social policies in place to prevent forced evictions and homelessness after divorce, if homeless hostels and overnight shelters were not partially filled 'from above' (i.e. with people

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[10] The court decision in *O'Connor v Donaldson* 422 US 563 (1975), which ruled that non-dangerous mental patients cannot be involuntarily confined in mental hospitals, is quoted by Simon (1992) to demonstrate that while in the 1950s courts approved the enforcement of loitering laws 'to protect the decent citizens of the community from contact with those sordid individuals who infest [public spaces] such as the dirty, disheveled, besotted character whose states is but a step short of intoxication or vagrancy' (quoted at p.659), today 'such expressions of official hostility to the homeless may not be given judicial sanction'.

loosing their homes instead of rough sleepers) (Bényei et al., 2000) and if available shelters did not constrain the liberty and privacy of residents to the present extent – in short, if fewer people were forced to live on the streets.

Wacquant's hint (2009) that 'the growing interest in and increased means devoted to law enforcement also come in handy to compensate the deficit in legitimacy suffered by political leaders' is also relevant in this case: homelessness in an affluent society invites a potential legitimation crisis (Marcuse, 1988) that does not allow politicians to ignore the problem entirely. Inaction is therefore not an option and blaming the homeless people and announcing police sweeps is more convenient than acknowledging the failure of social policies.

But exclusionary measures and the lack of proper social policies are linked in another way as well. As Hungarian cultural anthropologists Ágnes Török and Tessza Udvarhelyi (2005) submit with regard to the 'underpass-cleaning rites' of the Hungarian authorities: in the rhetoric that attempts to legitimise the spatial exclusion of homeless people, the notions of 'public' and 'society' become restricted along with the scope of legitimate users of public spaces, and homeless people are excluded from these ideally universal categories, parallel to their exclusion from public spaces.

The moral and territorial exclusion is intertwined here, and the 'abandonment of the universalistic vision of the welfare states is accompanied by the idea of a privileged community' (Tosi, 1996, p.101). Instead of looking at homelessness as a problem of the community, it is seen as a threat from the outside. In this way, homelessness becomes a problem that occurs not within the public but a 'threat that appears from elsewhere' (Kawash, 1998, pp.330–1).

It is true that the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people can 'create a veil of ignorance that is the reverse of the one developed by moral philosopher John Rawls' (Kohn, 2004, p.140). 'Rather than imagining that we do not know our individual characteristics and life situation in order to develop principles of justice, this veil of ignorance ensures that we make political decisions without ever having to think about how they might affect differently situated persons.' (ibid.)

But what is important here is not only how exclusionary measures aim to make homelessness *disappear*, but also how the related discourse makes homeless people *appear*. This dehumanising discourse does at least as much long-term harm by redefining homelessness as an issue of aesthetics and order as the execution of related exclusionary measures would by harassing, humiliating and segregating homeless people, and by hiding the problem. As Tosi (2007, p.229) notes, 'control of public spaces indicates a profound change in the social construction of homelessness, which can have serious consequences on policies. Framing homelessness in terms of public order and nuisance subtracts the question of homelessness from social policies.'

If we learn to see homeless people not as human beings but as an inconvenience, if the 'homeless problem' becomes not 'a problem of the economy or the society that produces homelessness; instead, it is viewed as the problem that the homeless create for the economy and the society in which they live' (Kawash, 1998, p.330), then our answers to homelessness will not be to create social and economic changes or to guarantee fundamental rights for everyone, but to conceal the visible signs of homelessness.

This relationship demonstrates, why, among other things, it is of crucial importance to fight against measures that aim to exclude and segregate homeless people, and against the dehumanising discourse that legitimises them. Such measures gain legitimacy from the dehumanisation and moral exclusion of homeless people, which makes empathy, as well as a sense of community and responsibility – the very preconditions of egalitarian reforms necessary to eliminate homelessness, impossible to develop.

We will devise different policies depending on whether we are concerned about the suffering of homeless people or the inconvenience that their homelessness causes others. In this way egalitarian social policies (along with the solidarity on which they are based) and exclusionary measures (along with the immunity to suffering in which they are rooted) are mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, an important component of the exclusionary rhetoric on homelessness is the assumption that social policies are adequate and generous and that homeless people will have somewhere else to go when they are expelled from public spaces. People are homeless precisely because they do not have a home or private property where they can freely exist. In an imagined society in which all space is private, homeless people could not legally exist. Consequently, where there is no adequate homeless assistance system, excluding homeless people from public spaces would mean the prohibition of their existence, as everyone needs to be somewhere (Waldron, 1991). No one would argue in favour of this; even the proponents of segregation are not so cynical as to suggest the mere removal of homeless people from one place to another as a solution to homelessness. On the contrary, there are frequent references to the availability of shelters in their rhetoric.

Thus, it is assumed that there is an adequate homeless assistance system in place to help people off the streets. Consequently, if there are still people sleeping rough, then it is not the lack of adequate alternatives, but the homeless people themselves that are to blame. That must mean that they are different from us (we, who need decent housing), some kind of strange creatures that for some unclear reason prefer to remain outside in the cold and dirt.

The very idea that shelters are the obvious alternatives to rough sleeping implies that 'homeless people are not fit for regular housing' and thus might reinforce 'prevailing popular ideas that homeless people are of a different, inferior kind – "not like us"' (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007, p.79). These sentiments contribute to the emotional and spatial distancing of homeless people, while the discourse emphasising the individual responsibilities of homeless people is silent about the systematic causes of homelessness. This could be termed a 'manipulative silence' (Huckin, 2002) that diverts attention from necessary social reforms.[11]

As Mitchell (2003, pp.179–80) writes, measures of exclusion and segregation are possible:

> … only in the absence of an understanding that homelessness has extrapersonal structural determinants. Or, more accurately, troublesome homelessness is seen to reside in those who refuse the numerous social services offered to them to help them negotiate the conditions that make them homeless. Whether homelessness is structurally produced or not, this logic goes, people remain homeless by choice.

The interconnection of the assumed causes of homelessness and its criminalisation is also demonstrated by the related case law of the United States: the courts have upheld anti-homeless statutes based on assumptions of the 'voluntary' nature of homelessness, while recognition of its 'involuntary' nature (for structural reasons or health issues) led to similar statutes being overturned (Daniels, 1997).[12]

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11 Accordingly, Tosi (2007, p.229) argues that the framing of homelessness 'in terms of public order and nuisance, takes it out of the area of "positive" policies and this new approach reflects an individualist/social pathology perspective which seeks to make homeless people responsible and even guilty for their own situation'.

12 Although litigation based on the 'involuntary' nature of homelessness seems to have been successful, Daniels argues that it is ultimately ineffective in achieving meaningful solutions to the problems of homeless individuals: successful cases established only negative rights (the courts did not impose affirmative duties on governments to address the needs of homeless people), which can easily be overturned 'by offering homeless people even the most minimal of alternatives, such as "beds" in emergency shelters, or even a "shelter's floor"' (p.729). For a critique of the related case law and 'the legal construction of homelessness as bare life', see Fieldman, 2004. For a critique of the voluntary–involuntary dichotomy in the case of homelessness, see Wagner, 1993 and 1997.

The spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people will obviously not house people, but exclusionary measures are ineffective even with respect to their own purpose of making homelessness invisible. As long as social policies are unable to provide adequate support to everyone and some of us remain homeless, there will be people who are compelled to live in public spaces. The incidence of rough sleeping will not be reduced by one local authority chasing homeless people to another local authority area or by certain towns pushing homeless people out of their downtown areas; rough sleeping will only disappear when there is no need for anyone to live on the streets.

Likewise, public sanitation could and should be improved by the installation of free, 24-hour public lavatories and by extending the opening hours of day centres (which are mostly open only on weekdays); not by the harassment of homeless people.

'I think that it was a very good idea to install those arm rests. Public benches are not for homeless people to sleep on,' writes a contributor to an Internet forum for social workers. Indeed they are not, 'but homeless people are not to be fought against with armrests either', answered sociologist Zoltán Gurály. Once we realise this, there will be no need for armrests at all.

## Afterword

In October 2009 a group of activists held a special 'opening' ceremony for a symbolic public housing flat in one of the busiest squares in Budapest. The protest was organised by the grass-roots activist group The City is for All, in which homeless, formerly homeless and non-homeless people work together for social justice and housing rights.

Surrounded by cameras, the alter ego of the mayor of the eleventh district (a homeless activist in an elegant suit) ceremoniously cut the opening ribbon and gave the keys of the symbolic apartment to a homeless couple. The new inhabitants of the apartment (which was a carpet, a bed and a few other items of furniture on the square) were said to be the last homeless people in the district as everyone else had already been housed in the newly established public housing system.

The purpose of the performance was to raise awareness of the lack of public housing and to parody the mayor of the eleventh district, who had announced a 'zero tolerance' approach on homelessness and the designation of 'homeless-free zones' from which homeless people would be excluded. The pseudo-mayor in the play talked about his 'zero tolerance' policy, which involved the local authority's determination to provide adequate housing to every homeless citizen. Is that not the only reasonable understanding of a 'zero tolerance' policy on homelessness?

After the ceremony, another activist in the group, himself sleeping rough, read out the group's open letter to the mayor: 'You cannot treat us as if we were not humans, citizens of the Republic of Hungary, members of the community. You cannot treat us as if we were garbage.' The letter strongly criticised the plan to establish fifteen homeless-free zones and argued for increased public housing, a ban on forced evictions and the declaration of housing as a human right.

Following this event, which was covered by several online and printed newspapers as well as radio and television programmes, the mayor did not bring up publicly his 'solution' to the 'homelessness problem' again. A few years earlier, the mayor of the fifth district had similarly abandoned his idea of 'stepping up against the homeless' and eliminating the 'homeless islands' which are 'hotbeds of crime', after he was strongly criticised in the evening news and after a group of activists (both homeless and housed) protested in the boardroom against his proposals, wielding banners that made such statements as 'the public space belongs to everyone', 'homeless = human', 'open society', and one which quoted the Hungarian Constitution on the unalienable right to dignity.

Mobilisation can make a difference in exposing the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of such proposals. Politicians might be persuaded to drop their exclusionary rhetoric if it seems that they have more to lose than to gain. It is up to us to make clear that it is housing and not police sweeps that we need.

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# Debates

## Part D

# Improving the Democratic Quality of EU Policy Making : What Role for the Participation of People Experiencing Homelessness ?

Silke Paasche

Policy Officer, FEANTSA

**Abstract**_ *A lively debate emerged recently amongst FEANTSA members and other stakeholders about the role that people experiencing homelessness should (or should not) play in designing, implementing and evaluating homelessness strategies and policies at local, national and European levels. This think piece discusses the political participation of people experiencing homelessness in European policy-making processes from the perspective of deliberative democracy theory. With reference to the criteria for an ideal speech situation as developed by Jürgen Habermas, it examines the validity of some of the key arguments that are usually put forward against the political participation of homeless people at European level. It then looks at some practical barriers regarding the possible establishment of a European network of homeless people and compares these with the obstacles faced by other European organisations, such as FEANTSA. It concludes that from the perspective of deliberative democracy, there is little scope to oppose the political participation or mobilisation of homeless people at European level without implicitly questioning one's own legitimacy to participate in the political discourse. While homeless people would indeed face greater challenges in developing a European organisation than service-provider organisations, these obstacles are neither fundamentally different nor insurmountable.*

**Keywords**_ *Homelessness ; participation ; user organisation ; European Union policy making ; deliberative democracy ; Habermas ; social inclusion*

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## Introduction

The fight against homelessness has gained visibility on the European agenda in recent years. In the *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, for example, the European Commission (2010) calls on all member states to develop integrated national homelessness strategies and increase efforts to improve the quality of service provision for homeless people. In this context, a lively and rather controversial debate emerged amongst FEANTSA members and other stakeholders about the role people experiencing homelessness themselves should (or should not) play in designing, implementing and evaluating homelessness strategies and policies at local, national and European level (e.g. Allen, 2009; Anker, 2009; Paasche, 2009; Svejstrup Laurberg, 2009).

On the one hand there is an increasing understanding that the active involvement of homeless people within homelessness services as well as decision-making processes affecting these services at local level must be an essential part of any effective homelessness strategies (Allen, 2009; Paasche, 2009). Organisations working with homeless people are interested in tools to develop participatory practices further in their services, including the setting up of local service-user groups and service-user councils. FEANTSA responded to this increasing request for information by setting up a European participation working group that regularly produces information and practical tools for FEANTSA members. In addition, FEANTSA dedicated its annual theme 2009 to the issue of participation and homelessness and organised a European conference entitled 'Sharing the power – Working together: Participation as a tool to solve homelessness' (Paasche, 2009).

On the other hand there is sometimes a strong reluctance to promote the direct participation of people experiencing homelessness in broader policy debates at national and European levels. This scepticism also prevails with regard to the possible establishment of a European network of people experiencing homelessness that would complement the work of FEANTSA, the European network of homelessness service providers.

The concerns put forward around the involvement of service users in the political work at EU level or the setting up of a European network of homeless people are usually based on experiences at national and local level. Many attempts to increase the political involvement of people experiencing homelessness have been perceived as problematic (Allen, 2009) or merely tokenistic exercises. It would be wrong to neglect these experiences and the real challenges involved in creating opportunities for meaningful participation. However, there is a risk that by overemphasising the obstacles, the opportunities offered by the stronger involvement of homeless people in the fight against homelessness at European level are being neglected.

More importantly, an approach focusing on the barriers to participation risks sidelining general principles in relation to citizens' rights and values linked to democratic decision-making processes. If these democratic principles are not promoted and valued by FEANTSA and its member organisations, there is a risk of undermining the legitimacy of civil society organisations in general, including FEANTSA's own legitimacy to take part in decision-making processes at EU level.

I will argue from the perspective of democratic theory that the difference between the political mobilisation of homeless people and the political organisation of other interests groups, such as FEANTSA, is only a relative difference. But within this framework it is difficult to oppose the existence or development of such political participation or of a European network.

## Theoretical Background: Deliberative Democracy at EU level

The main argument in this paper is inspired by theories of democracy, and more specifically by the concept of deliberative democracy and its application to the analysis of political processes at European level. Deliberative democracy was inter alia conceptualised by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. In contrast to traditional political theory that emphasises the importance of voting in democratic decision-making processes, deliberative democracy highlights the need for a free and public deliberation in order to legitimise decisions.

According to Habermas, the aim is to create a communicative space that is undistorted by any kind of asymmetrical power relations and that allows its participants to identify the 'best' (i.e. 'rational') solution. A collective decision therefore is democratic, not because it is founded on the simple aggregation of interests, but because it is the result of a free exchange of arguments from and to those governed by the decision or their representatives. Habermas (1990, p.89) defined a number of rules in order to have an ideal speech situation.

1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.

2a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.

2b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.

2c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.

3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1) and (2).

Habermas's concept of an ideal speech situation as the foundation for democratic decision making has been criticised for various reasons. First, it has been criticised for assuming the possibility of a 'quasi-objective' (intersubjectively comprehensible) understanding of what is 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', that can be defined independently from the personal interests and situation of the people participating in the deliberation. Second, Habermas gave little guidance on possible ways to create spaces for an ideal speech situation and to make deliberative democracy work in practice. Nevertheless, Habermas's thinking and the concept of deliberative democracy in general gave a new impetus for the analysis of democracy and decision-making processes.

## Deliberative Democracy in Practice: Measuring the Democratic Quality of EU Policy-Making Processes

The concept of deliberative democracy has been fruitful for the analysis of EU policy making. Decisions at European level are taken within the unique architecture of a supranational entity that differs to a certain extent from traditional democratic processes at national level. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC), for instance, is a unique policy-making method in areas where there is no or only limited legal competence at EU level, such as social inclusion and social protection.

The OMC is an intergovernmental process in which the European Parliament only plays a consultative role. Its main aim is to coordinate rather than harmonise policies based on commonly defined objectives, mutual learning and regular monitoring. It was always presented as an attempt to tackle the democratic deficit of EU policy making through involving a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations. Due to this unique set-up, the OMC has become an interesting 'test case' for research on deliberative-democratic modes of governance (De la Porte and Nanz, 2004). The OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion is the main policy framework for the issue of homelessness at European level.

The following analysis is therefore based on the assumption that the principles of deliberative democracy are a valid normative framework in order to conceptualise democratic decision-making processes at EU level. With reference to the criteria for an ideal speech situation as developed by Habermas, I will first discuss the validity of some of the arguments that are usually put forward against the participation of homeless people at European level. I will then look at the more 'practical' barriers that are usually presented regarding the possible establishment of a European network and compare these with the barriers faced by other representative organisations at European level, such as FEANTSA.

## Principal Considerations regarding the Participation of Homeless People at European Level

### *'Political participation at European level is not relevant for people experiencing homelessness'*

Some people have expressed their scepticism about the relevance for homeless people of being involved in policy making at European level. And indeed, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, it would be possible to argue against homeless people's right to participate in decision-making processes at EU level if European policies had no impact whatsoever on them. In this case, homeless people would not be regarded as legitimate participants in the discourse as the collective decisions taken would not apply to them.

Given the work that FEANTSA has done over the last twenty years to demonstrate the direct and indirect impact of EU policies on homelessness and service provision for homeless people, it would be difficult to argue that EU policies do not matter (e.g. Spinnewijn, 2009; Frazer, 2009; FEANTSA, 2006). Questioning the legitimacy of political participation of homeless people on these grounds would also mean questioning the legitimacy of FEANTSA, an EU network that specifically deals with homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level.

But even if EU policies had no impact on homelessness, the fact that homeless people are living on the territory of the EU means they are governed by EU legislation in many areas of their lives. The argument of irrelevance of EU policies cannot therefore be used to disqualify homeless people from political participation.

### *'Homeless people risk saying things that are not true'*

It is also argued that homeless people might not have all the necessary information or may not understand the complexity of an issue and therefore may say things that have proved to be wrong, for example through research. This argument is highly problematic from the point of view of deliberative democracy as it questions the ability of homeless people to make a rational contribution to the debate and undermines their status as 'subjects with the competence to speak and act' (Habermas, 1990, p.89). The idea of a deliberation is not that a person is allowed to say only things that are already accepted as the truth. On the contrary, the basis for the deliberation is the very exchange of arguments. In practice this would mean that any argument that could be challenged by integrating additional information or arguments should be challenged.

Questioning the ability of homeless people to participate in a political discussion also seems problematic given the fact that there is abundant evidence of homeless people being denied their citizenship rights. It is therefore likely that homeless people would make claims regarding their citizenship rights and access to resources, including information resources, the very content of their political participation.

### *'Being homeless should not constitute the basis for a person's political participation'*

Some people are also very sceptical about the use of the highly stigmatising attribute 'homeless' as a basis for the political participation of a person as it risks making homelessness, i.e. something that should be combated, an integral part of a person's identity (see also Allen, 2009, p.295).

If people experiencing homelessness have the same rights to take part in political processes and form groups as any other citizen group in Europe, this right is obviously not an obligation. And, as for any citizen, it does not necessarily mean that the basis for their participation must be based on their experience of homelessness. They might equally decide to use other forms of political participation and engage in other groups such as political parties. Nevertheless, if homeless people have an interest to be more involved in political processes at EU level as 'homeless people', this at least needs to be tolerated by the other participants in the discourse.

As the third of Habermas's principles states, 'everyone has the right to express his attitudes, desires and needs' (Habermas, 1990, p.89). In practice this means that a participant in the discourse might not approve of the fact that somebody else is politically active as a 'homeless person'. Such a participant also has the right to confront the homeless person with his or her arguments and engage in a debate about it. But it is not possible for the participant to deny homeless people's right to use the attribute 'homeless' as the basis for their political participation without possibly raising questions regarding his or her own 'legitimate' basis for participation in the deliberation.

### *'Involving homeless people will make the decision making more complicated'*

According to Habermas's criteria for the ideal speech situation as the basis for an effective decision, adding a relevant stakeholder (i.e. somebody governed by the decisions taken) to the debate will only increase the democratic quality of the outcome. The risk that adding another stakeholder to the debate might make the decision-making process more complicated or potentially ineffective could also be interpreted as an indicator for the relevance of the participation. If everybody agrees, then the additional stakeholder will only help to reconfirm the dominant position. And if the participation of a more diverse group of stakeholders creates conflict and disagreement, it is likely that the decision taken beforehand was of poor quality and would probably be ineffective in practice as the people governed by the decision did not have ownership of it.

## Creating a European Representative Organisation for Homeless People or Homeless Service Providers – a Fundamental Difference?

Besides the theoretical considerations regarding the political participation of homeless people discussed above, it is necessary to examine some of the more practical obstacles that are regularly brought forward in the debates around homeless people's involvement at European level. The obstacles mainly concern the possibility of setting up a European network of homeless people. The idea for such a network recently emerged at a meeting of around forty service users on the occasion of FEANTSA's European Conference in Copenhagen (Bay-Petersen, 2009). The participants at the meeting were quite enthusiastic about the possibility of having such a network and requested further support from the already existing network of service providers, FEANTSA.

Although FEANTSA has expressed its political support for such a network, there was also a lot of scepticism about the feasibility of such a project. It cannot be denied that homeless people would need to overcome several real challenges before setting up a more formal structure at European level. I will argue, however, that these barriers, despite being possibly greater, are not specific to the political organisation of homeless people but were and continue to be challenges for already existing European networks, including FEANTSA.

### *'The network would not be representative of all homeless people'*

Given the diversity of profiles of people that experience a period of homelessness during their lives, it would be very difficult for any homelessness network to represent all possible situations and aspects of homelessness in one organisation. It is in particular challenging to represent the groups that are usually the most vulnerable and the least represented through already existing structures, such as rough sleepers or people with serious mental health and addiction issues (Anker, 2009, p.278). Moreover, due to the transient nature of homelessness, it is a real challenge to ensure a level of continuity and stability in the membership of any homelessness network and to work with former homeless people without losing 'authenticity' (Allen, 2009, p.293; Anker, 2009, p.282).

However, there is no predefined basis for measuring the 'representative quality' or 'authenticity' of European networks for homeless people. As there is currently no network at European level that specifically purports to represent homeless people, the setting up of such a network will be a first step, irrespective of its relative representativeness. Also, FEANTSA did not start off as the organisation that it is today with more than 100 members in thirty European countries. And if we take the group of service users that were present at the conference in Copenhagen as the basis for such a potential network, one could argue that they do represent a variety of homelessness situations, including both former and current service users, from at least ten different countries.

Just as FEANTSA defined its membership criteria and mission statement, it would be up to the potential European network of homeless people to define its own aims and objectives and to balance the relationship and democratic control within the organisation between present service users, former service users and/or professional staff with no experience of homelessness (see also Svejstrup Laurberg, 2009).

The debate on representativeness is also linked to arguments about the membership of the organisation and claims that such a European network would be a premature development.

### *'Setting up a European network is premature as it requires the existence of national umbrella organisations'*

There is the argument that the establishment of a European network would make sense only if there were already national and regional umbrella organisations in place. This is currently not the case for homeless people. A likely scenario would therefore be that the European network of homeless people would also accept local organisations of service users or even individual members. This will really only be a problem for the organisation if the number of members becomes so high that it will not be possible to manage the network in an effective way. Otherwise there are examples of other European networks that have individuals as members (e.g. Mental Health Europe) or at least a large numbers of local organisations (e.g. EASPD – European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities).

The question of membership will also depend on the type of organisation the network would like to be. Is it 'just' a network that sees its main roles as to facilitate transnational exchanges between its members and to offer input to EU policies as 'a voice of homeless people' or will it claim to be a representative for 'the homeless population in Europe'.

Either way the challenge of representativeness and of determining the form of membership are not specific to an organisation of homeless people but will be an ongoing debate in most or even all EU networks. What is more, possible solutions can be imagined, including the idea of phasing out individual members or local member organisations once more representative organisations have been created at regional or even national level, not least with the help of the European network.

### *‘Homeless people lack the necessary resources’*

The lack of resources in its widest sense is obviously one of the biggest challenges for homeless people seeking to organise themselves (Allen, 2009, pp.291–2) and possibly to establish a representative organisation at European level.

For many homeless people, a home is their most obvious need and they will want to have this need met before they even consider becoming politically active. However, the conference in Copenhagen demonstrated that despite their difficult living situation, it was possible for some – though certainly not all – homeless people to come to Copenhagen and take part in the debates at European level. A possible way to overcome this barrier used at national level is again to work with a number of former homeless people who are often quite motivated to stay involved and to help other people who are still experiencing homelessness (Anker, 2009, p.282).

It is also not true to say that homeless people have no resources. For example, the existence of an informal network based on an email distribution list constitutes a resource for some homeless people. Another resource is FEANTSA and in particular the participation working group that decided to support the informal network of service users by facilitating the communication and coordination of this network and looking for possible funding resources. With the help of these limited resources, it is possible to imagine securing the necessary funding for a further meeting of the people involved in the first meeting of homeless service users in Copenhagen.

### *‘Once homelessness has been ended, there will be no need for service user organisations’*

While important steps have been taken in a number of countries to work towards ending homelessness, no country has yet managed to put this into practice. What is more, participation, including user organisations, can be an important tool in ending homelessness. Participation helps making policies more effective as they will be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of homeless people. Contributing their specific expertise to policy making will also empower homeless people and may prevent their relapse into homelessness.

And ending homelessness does not mean that there are literally no homeless people anymore. It will mean that the focus will change to preventing homelessness in the first place and on supporting people in housing rather than in hostels and shelters. This change will require significant adjustments not only for user organisations but for those providing services for homeless people. Both will still have a role to play, although it is likely to be different from their present role.

## Conclusions

From a purely theoretic point of view, there is little scope to oppose the political participation or mobilisation of homeless people at European level. This does not mean that the participation in policy processes at European level will necessarily be a priority for the majority of homeless people or that everybody has to welcome the fact that homeless people are organised as 'homeless people' at European level and not participating through other formations, such as political parties. However, there is a risk that by voicing objections in principle to the political participation of homeless people at European level, a person will implicitly put into question his or her own legitimacy and that of many other stakeholders working in the area of homelessness, including service providers for homeless people.

Homeless people must overcome a number of more 'practical' barriers to be able to participate in decision-making processes at EU level or to set up a European representative organisation. These barriers might also be greater than those faced by other European networks. For example, it will take longer to organise homeless people than to organise homeless service providers and it will require more resources than were needed to set up FEANTSA. And while it is already difficult for the staff of FEANTSA to draw the right balance between understanding the reality of homeless service provision and EU lobbying, drawing this balance between the reality 'on the streets' and abstract European policy processes might be even more challenging for the potential staff of a European network of homeless people.

It is clear that all of these barriers are neither insurmountable nor specific to the political organisation of homeless people. People do have resources, including networks, enthusiasm and the ability to find creative solutions.

A network of homeless people may challenge some of the dominant discourses at European level and the ways in which European institutions consult with 'relevant' stakeholders and collect 'evidence and expertise'. A possible rethinking of the way the institutions consult and cooperate with non-governmental organisations is not necessarily bad news for FEANTSA and there might indeed be an opportunity to work together with homeless people on issues of common concern. In this respect FEANTSA as well as other well-established European networks (e.g. the European Anti Poverty Network) might realise that sharing a bit of their power will actually benefit service users and service providers alike.

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# The Existence of Communities of Homeless Persons in the Process of Vocational and Social Reintegration : Controversial Issues

Maciej Dębski[1]

University of Gdańsk

**Abstract_** *The ideas presented in this paper are a critical response to the paper entitled 'Routes out of Poverty and Isolation for Older Homeless People : Possible Models from Poland and the UK', which describes the experiences of the Barka and Emmaus organisations in providing self-help services to the homeless. Focusing on the Barka communities in Poland, this response questions whether they are suitable for all homeless persons, regardless of age, causes of homelessness or current life situation. It argues that such communities do not help individuals to gain independence and integrate with society ; on the contrary, they sometimes create an addiction to assistance and to the community of the homeless. The author suggests that the existence of such self-help communities is justified only for those individuals who have no chance of exiting homelessness. The paper also considers questions connected with the ghettoisation of public space and social solidarity.*

**Keywords_** *Homelessness ; community ; solidarity ; exiting homelessness ; addiction to help*

1 Translated by Monika Spanialska.

## Introduction

Homelessness is a widespread problem in Poland. Current estimates of the number of homeless people in Poland range from 30,000 to 60,000.[2] According to the latest survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (20010), the number of places to sleep for the homeless in 2009 amounted to 22,529 in 625 facilities. This number also includes people staying in uninhabitable places such as allotments, garden houses, railway stations, hospitals and other non-institutional sites. The question of homelessness being so widespread can also be considered from the point of view of the finances allocated to solve the problem: according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2010), the financial outlays for combating homelessness in 2009 amounted to 105.5 million PLN (€26.3m), not including the money received as '1% of tax'[3] (around 2 million PLN or €500,000) and funds from the European Union to carry out projects aimed at combating homelessness (5.5 million PLN or €1.3m).

Any district where homeless persons are registered is generally responsible for combating the problem of homelessness in Poland. Help provided to homeless persons is mostly emergency in character and is limited to providing shelter, food and clothing to those who need it (under the Social Assistance Act 2004). One of the flaws of the homeless support system in Poland is the fact that not much attention is given to people who want to get out of homelessness (integration) or to those at risk of homelessness (preventive and protective measures).[4] Looking at the available forms of support for homeless people in Poland, we see that the model of linear support (continuum of care) based on the activity of facilities for homeless persons (heat distribution centres, night shelters, day shelters or supported flats) clearly dominates. Given the difficult housing situation in Poland, the housing first model, based on giving a homeless person a flat, is barely used.

As well as the different facilities designed for homeless people and run by non-governmental organisations and social assistance centres, there are institutions that follow the self-help model of supporting homeless persons, namely specific homeless communities run by such organisations as Wspólnota Chleb Życia (seven

2 See www.bezdomnosc.edu.pl/content/category/4/34/54/.

3 An instrument that allows an individual to exempt one per cent of his or her income from tax and donate it to a chosen public benefit organisation. As much as 380 million PLN (around €100m) was donated through this scheme in Poland in 2009.

4 Other flaws of the homeless assistance programme include: long periods of time spent in homeless facilities, addiction to assistance, lack of a support system for social assistance specialists, charity model of providing help, lack of adequate infrastructure for the homeless (Dębski, 2010a).

houses for homeless persons)[5], Wspólnota Emmaus (two communities in Kraków and Nowy Sącz) and those organised in and around the Barka Foundation. The self-help assistance system is based on the idea that homeless people are helped by other homeless people and thus create a community united by the same social problem: homelessness.

The following remarks offer a commentary on the paper entitled 'Routes out of Poverty and Isolation for Older Homeless People: Possible Models from Poland and the UK' in which Catherine Boswell presents the experiences of two institutions supporting homeless people in the vocational and social reintegration process in Poland (Barka Foundation) and in the United Kingdom (Emmaus). The following text points to the controversies surrounding the issue of specialist communities for homeless people and questions their usefulness in the final process of exiting homelessness. Indeed, it contends that such communities often hinder homeless people from gaining independence.

## Older Homeless People: The Context

Despite the lack of national research on homelessness in Poland, it is possible to identify three main issues associated with the problem: length of time spent without a home, the relatively old age of the homeless population and the poor condition of homeless people's physical and/or mental health. Obviously these issues are interrelated: the older the person and the longer he or she is homeless, the worse the subjective and objective evaluation of mental and physical health.

According to the results of the panel research conducted between 2001 and 2009 by the Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness, the average age of a homeless person in 2009 was 50 years and is predicted to rise to 53 years by 2013 (Dębski, 2010b). The average length of time for which a person had been homeless was 7.6 years in 2009 and in 2013 it will probably reach 9 years (long-term homelessness) (Dębski, 2010b). As for the question of health, 46 per cent of homeless persons in Pomeranian province have a disability certificate (in 2013 the proportion is expected to reach 51 per cent) and a subjective feeling of one's health condition reaches three points on a five-point scale and decreases the longer the person is homeless (Dębski, 2010b). Furthermore, around 11 per cent of homeless people were trying to obtain a disability certificate at the time the research was conducted. The data collected by the Pomeranian Forum in 2009 among 2,620 adults has been confirmed by other research conducted in different regions of Poland (CBOS, 2005; Śledzianowski, 2006; Przewoźnik, 2009; Masłowski and Sosnowski, 2009).

5 See www.chlebzycia.org.pl/.

Poor health, disability, old age and the length of time spent without a home influence a person's ability to become independent. Although the majority of homeless people have little chance of exiting homelessness, especially with the housing problem in Poland, 15 per cent of homeless persons point to the fact that proper medical care or rehabilitation would help them get out of homelessness (Dębski, 2010b). The above-mentioned problems also affect the course of homelessness and, to be more precise, the vocational activity of homeless people. Poor health is the main factor behind the inactivity of the homeless population in the labour market; this opinion was held by 44 per cent of unemployed homeless persons living in Pomeranian province (Dębski, 2010b). A similar situation exists throughout Poland.

Clearly, in certain contexts, it is therefore more important to provide conditions in which a homeless person is able to live and die with dignity rather than to focus on the process of getting out of homelessness. Broadly speaking, more specialist facilities should be provided for older homeless people who struggle with homelessness.

## Barka Communities as the Response to the Pressing Needs of the Older Homeless Population

The Barka Foundation for Mutual Help, which has its head office in Poznań, is one of the largest non-governmental organisations in Poland dealing with people experiencing homelessness. According to the information provided on its website, Barka runs several key projects including a social economy centre, a social integration centre and social housing.[6] Barka's activities are based on the network of organisations sharing a common vision and mission. Its objective is to provide support and represent the member NGOs acting for social and vocational integration, particularly in instances concerning the development of civic and mutual aid organisations. The activities undertaken by Barka are an interesting and proper contribution in the field of homelessness, as confirmed by the number of awards the organisation has received since 1989 when the first Barka community was established in Władysławowo.

The Barka Foundation currently consists of eleven communities, each giving shelter to twenty[7] inhabitants. There are other similar communities in Poland that follow the example of Barka but are run by separate NGOs (e.g. four communities in Cieszyn). In 2004 twenty-four Barka and other NGO communities established the Association of Organizations and Foundations of Barka Cooperation Network. Barka also runs two self-help hostels giving shelter to 150 people altogether. For convenience, all previously mentioned communities (included in Barka structures

6 See http://barka.org.pl/taxonomy/term/32.

7 The community in Chudobczyce is an exception with seventy inhabitants.

or managed by other organisations) will be referred to as 'Barka communities' in this text. Such an approach is justified as the activity of all these communities is based on the experiences of one organisation.

For Barka, activity based on the community of people experiencing homelessness is crucial. According to its programme principles, the communities gather people who have experienced a crisis situation (e.g. eviction, single parenting or a stay in a children's home, mental hospital or prison) regardless of their age or sex.[8] The community project is based on the idea of accepting people who are either socially excluded or experiencing a crisis situation resulting in their inability to live independently. Generally we may say that Barka communities are open to every homeless person regardless of, for example, sex, religion, cause of homelessness or marital status. There is one exception, however, people under the age of 18 years cannot join a Barka community unless they do so together with their parent(s).

The causes of these crises and the degree of reversibility may vary, but the common denominator is lack of housing and income. They include desocialisation, negative social stigma following release from prison or connected with prostitution, marginal position on the open labour market and unemployment, the necessity to look after children in difficult conditions (no job or place to live), and mental disabilities perhaps resulting from traumatic experiences in childhood or adolescence or a family conflict. While all Barka community programme participants are homeless and isolated they differ in terms of their potential to rebuild their self-reliance and their life in forms that are socially accepted. The group consists of people for whom state assistance (e.g. temporary accommodation, a social flat or a job) would be enough to prevent a life crisis as well as people who can no longer fully integrate with society or regain independence (perhaps due to their age, habits, lack of readiness to act, length of time spent in homelessness or poor health condition). For people in the latter group, a Barka community that will help them to build family-like relationships is likely to prove beneficial.

## Communities of Homeless People: For Whom? For Ever?

Boswell's paper refers only to the situation of older and disabled people. If Barka communities were only for such groups there would be no problem. However, the Barka community model is also offered to other homeless people who are younger, able-bodied, have a good chance of changing their situation and are not eager to live in such communities. Anna Łojewska (2006) claims, based on personal experience, that creating community ghettos of excluded and marginalised people may pose a threat for those who wish to rebuild their autonomy and rejoin mainstream

8 See http://barka.org.pl/node/120.

society, and that people who are excluded from society will not be saved. It is difficult to disagree with this viewpoint. Łojewska also adds that Barka communities, by creating workplaces, can become springboards for those wanting to pursue a career. However, I suggest that such communities very often lack the necessary competence and cannot replace the involvement of the state in this area.

According to Przymeński (2006), it is difficult to define the proportion of long-term and short-term homeless members in Barka communities, yet the fact that they include those who would be able to regain independence if provided with sufficient help (short-term homelessness) is indisputable. However, homeless people cannot obtain such help in the current aid system, which exists with no obligatory standards and no guarantees. They are therefore unable to choose such a strategy to work towards their social 'reintegration'. This is the core of the problem. Casual participants find themselves living in small rural communities, distant from varied labour markets, and working for the homeless community (and not for their own benefit), which moves them away from rather than bringing them closer to achieving independence.

The homeless population is a very diverse social category and each homeless person has different challenges, opportunities and aspirations. It is crucial to provide homeless people with individually tailored programmes to achieve social integration, programmes that give them the opportunity to choose their life path. The infrastructure and the aid system must be put in place to permit such a situation.

The time the participants spend in Barka communities may be used productively to solve problems of addiction (in cooperation with the foundation specialists and partner centres) and to learn how to exist in a group and in the local environment. Nevertheless, it seems that these places of 'enrootment'[9] very often turn out to be permanent placements for the inhabitants, who even have the opportunity to be promoted in the community structure. It is an opportunity for those who, according to the organisers, most fully identify with the idea and present leadership, training and office skills (Przymeński, 2006). It is common practice for the Barka communities to register their participants (if other community members agree) for one year in the place of residence with the possibility of extending this registration after twelve months. In practice this means that many homeless people will stay in the community indefinitely and therefore become permanently homeless. The problem of staying in the community indefinitely needs to be discussed further in the context of a serious flaw in the Polish aid system, namely the addiction to help (Dębski, 2010a).

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9 See http://barka.org.pl/node/120.

## Social Solidarity Concentrated around a Charismatic Leader: The Problem of Ghettoisation

Boswell emphasises the importance of social solidarity, which motivates the development of homeless communities. Along with social bonds, cohesion, coherence and social integration, solidarity refers to the fundamental social issue, namely the question of forces connecting people or the 'essence of human life'. It is worth adding here that this high-sounding notion of 'social solidarity' may have a negative source. It is not about the feeling of love or common interest but about the need for help in a situation where life may be in danger. When under threat, we tend to search for help and support, to look for people who will help us oppose somebody or something that we are unable to deal with alone. This need, the pillar of solidarity, is ethically neutral. The bond in question is powerful but transitory, it diminishes with the threats that invoked it and when common goals are achieved. The most prominent example of Polish solidarity in response to a threat and social humiliation was the trade union (NSZZ) *Solidarność*.

The social solidarity present in Barka communities should also be considered from the prism of shared benefit. As such, it is sometimes referred to as the rational bond. It is based on the individual calculation of the benefits of being a member of a particular group. Liberal theoreticians tend to believe this kind of calculation predominates in all communities and that no selfless activity for the common good is therefore possible (Olson, 1994). Critics of this view point to the fact that there are many communities where activities to achieve a common goal are possible and are practised. The dispute is probably the result of a different understanding of a community and its forms but the fact remains that human relationships based on the individual calculation of profit tend to become more and more popular. Some critics go so far as to call them economic social relations. The solidarity in such communities is extremely calculated. The communities' stability is also limited and constantly under threat because individual interests prevail, resulting in the lack of mutual trust among members.

According to Łojewska (2006), a Barka community leader has the key role in the functioning of each community and gives the final shape to its activities. This function is usually held by a person who has experienced homelessness and has been a community member for a long period of time. A situation in which a community is managed by one person (despite the assurance that decisions are made collectively) creates an opportunity for a charismatic leader to manipulate and influence individual community members. Łojewska, who used to be a member of a Barka community, emphasises the difficulties of being an individual in terms of your thoughts and perceptions of reality in such conditions. Here we may sense a slight comparison to a religious sect that exerts full control over its members. Raising such issues may be considered inconvenient but charismatic leadership is an important element in Barka communities.

The question of homeless communities may also be considered from the prism of ghettoisation. In this context it needs to be pointed out that the close-knit Barka communities exist in a defined area. It is difficult to consider the question of gaining independence in a situation where the community does not facilitate contacts with the rest of the 'housed' society. The social and vocational (re)integration of homeless people has been described as an organised process with a wide range of influence on the recipients covering six key aspects of life: psychology, professional life, health care, social welfare activity, housing and social activity (Dębska-Cenian, 2008). Only the combination and equal development of all these elements may (but does not always) guarantee the success of homeless people in rejoining a properly functioning society. In Barka communities it seems that housing and social activities are conducted solely within a situation of homelessness. This problem has been identified by both Przymeński (2006) and Łojewska (2006), who claim that people experiencing homelessness should live and work among the 'housed' community and have access to the same workplaces as everyone else.

It is common practice in Poland to isolate communities of homeless people in remote places distant from urban areas, thus it is no wonder that the majority of Barka communities are situated on rural sites. A difficult housing situation in Poland (with only a small number of social and community flats accessible to homeless people) forces district authorities to search for areas outside city borders in order to create temporary or social housing estates for homeless people. This does not contribute to the eradication of the problem of street homelessness. On the contrary, it becomes another stage of exclusion for those who have already been excluded from society. Staying outside urban areas results in limited access to the labour market and high commuting costs to and from work. Although the location of Barka communities in rural areas may justify the development of 'community' workplaces, service points, kindergartens, schools and other facilities, this infrastructure is, in my opinion, another element of addiction to help provision and does not contribute to changing the life situation of homeless people.

## Conclusion

The views presented here are critical towards the idea that self-help communities of homeless people may have a good chance of gaining independence. I believe that Barka communities are worthwhile for the support they offer to those who stand no chance of getting out of homelessness in Poland (e.g. older or disabled people). Diagnosis (including a psychological diagnosis) is very often neglected in the process of community formation but is of crucial importance. The process of accepting new members is another element to consider when creating such communities (currently it is the community leader and other members who make this decision). I fully agree with Przymeński (2006), who sees the necessity of introducing external control over such communities, their programmes, targets and results as well as market facilitation of service provision for people experiencing social exclusion, and for the homeless population in particular. Public administrators with responsibility for carrying out homelessness prevention activities and providing assistance to homeless people should develop a legally binding structure within which public tasks may be entrusted to public benefit organisations or create their own budget entities if they would be more efficient.

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# Residential Communities for Homeless People : How 'Inclusive', How 'Empowering' ? A Response to 'Routes Out of Poverty and Isolation for Older Homeless People : Possible Models from Poland and the UK'

Sarah Johnsen

Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh

## Introduction

In her paper entitled 'Routes Out of Poverty and Isolation for Older Homeless People: Possible Models from Poland and the UK', Catherine Boswell argues that residential communities with a focus on work and meaningful occupation may offer a solution to the poverty and loneliness experienced by many older homeless people. Her review of the models employed by the Barka Foundation in Poland and Emmaus in the United Kingdom highlights a number of themes running through current debates about service provision for homeless people in the UK and elsewhere. What follows are brief reflections on some of these issues from a UK-based homelessness researcher.

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## Long-Term Solutions to Homelessness and Social Isolation?

As Boswell notes, responses to homelessness in the UK, as in most other developed countries, are generally founded on the assumption that independent self-contained housing should be the ultimate endpoint or 'goal' in journeys out of homelessness. This independent housing is normally obtained through periods spent in temporary or transitional accommodation, where residents develop life skills and address any other issues they are facing before being given their own tenancy. A wealth of literature highlights a number of problems with this 'linear' approach and there is a growing consensus amongst academics and practitioners alike that such provision is often poorly equipped to meet the needs of some groups (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010).

Previous research suggests that a number of homeless people find hostels and other forms of transitional housing frightening and/or stigmatising places, especially if they are coming face to face with people involved in street culture, drug misuse and associated criminality for the first time (May et al., 2006). Similarly, a substantial body of evidence indicates that many homeless people, particularly those with complex support needs such as severe mental health or substance misuse problems, are often unable or unwilling to comply with the demands of linear models and do not exhibit the 'housing readiness' required for allocation of an independent tenancy (Kertesz et al., 2006; Sahlin, 2005). Frequent moves from one setting to another and the progressive 'tapering off' of support as service users progress towards independent living can also be highly disruptive and unsettling (Shelter, 2008).

Boswell's paper highlights an additional problem with predominant models of provision for homeless people: the social isolation commonly experienced by formerly homeless people who have been rehoused. The 'poverty of relationship' she speaks of is widely acknowledged as a key contributor to tenancy breakdown and repeat homelessness (Busch-Geertsema, 2005). It is an issue of growing concern to homelessness practitioners in the UK, many of whom are attempting to devise innovative ways to strengthen clients' social support networks and help them develop a sense of 'meaning' or 'purpose' (Lemos, 2006; The Salvation Army, 2010). These factors are increasingly viewed as pivotal in helping some individuals overcome problems such as addiction.

On the issue of isolation, however, we should be wary of assuming that all homeless people have very poor or non-existent social support networks. Toro (2007) argues that, contrary to common stereotypes, most homeless people, including single adults, are actually in regular contact with their family. These relationships may be seriously jeopardised by issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, but one should not presume that family members will be unwilling to re-establish relations if and when such problems are addressed, or indeed that they do not continue to support family members throughout periods of severe addiction, for example. There is certainly credibility in the argument that vulnerable individuals benefit from withdrawal from social networks that have a negative influence on their well-being (former drug-using peers are an obvious example). One should not, however, presume that the creation of 'new' social support networks is necessarily the most appropriate intervention, as assisting people to rebuild relationships with estranged family and friends may arguably present a more 'natural' counter to isolation.

Another theme highlighted in Boswell's paper that echoes ongoing debates relates to the long-term economic prospects of rehoused 'single' (non-statutory) homeless people, especially those with ongoing support needs. A number of academics have pointed out that even after being provided with long-term settled accommodation, many have little realistic prospect of (re)gaining economic independence. As Busch-Geertsema (2005, p.221) notes, 'relative integration' and 'relative autonomy' may be all that is realistically achievable for those who in all likelihood will remain excluded from 'normal' employment in the labour market and continue to struggle with restricted resources, not least because of health problems, addiction or advanced age. Boswell notes that employment prospects for older homeless people are especially limited, given that training programmes for homeless people tend to target those at the younger end of the age spectrum. The standard process of resettlement and reintegration into mainstream society can thus, as Boswell notes, leave formerly homeless people 'impoverished' socially and financially.

On the face of it, it seems that residential communities of the types operated by Emmaus and Barka have the potential to avoid some of the pitfalls of mainstream provision for homeless people. They offer long-term housing options that are not subject to limitations on length of stay. This characteristic can lend valuable stability at a time of personal crisis. Residential communities also offer a means of addressing the social isolation or 'poverty of relationships' described above via communal living arrangements. Moreover, by 'giving homeless people a bed and a reason to get out of it' (see Boswell, this volume) such communities also offer the potential of fostering a sense of meaning or purpose through active involvement in social enterprises.

Boswell notes that Emmaus's and Barka's departures from dominant models of support are artefacts of their ethos, with both organisations emphasising social inclusion through work, together with notions of 'solidarity' and mutual support. Previous research has shown that organisational ethos does indeed have a significant influence on the form of service provision, but that this is often interpreted differently by individual staff members and/or may be experienced in variable ways by service users (Cloke et al., 2005 and 2007; see also Johnsen with Fitzpatrick, 2009).

Interestingly, Boswell also reports that whilst Emmaus and Barka both deliberately blur boundaries between 'staff' and 'residents', the two organisations hold very different views with respect to whether personal experience of trauma accords individuals greater legitimacy in encouraging lifestyle change in others. According to Boswell, Barka believes that only those who have experienced disruption and exclusion can legitimately persuade others to change; Emmaus, in contrast, does not assume there is any intrinsic value in having experienced homelessness or addiction, for example. This issue is highly pertinent in the current context, given some UK agencies' promotion of the employment of former service users as paid support workers (Ireland, 2010) and the endorsement of this practice at central government level (CLG, 2009).

Further research is needed to clarify what, if any, influence shared biographies have on client engagement and/or willingness to change. Similarly, it would be illuminating to explore the impact of the recruitment of former service users in a professional capacity on the power dynamics amongst and between staff and service users, as these relationships have a significant influence on service user experiences (Cloke et al., 2010).

## How 'Inclusive'? How 'Empowering'?

Boswell notes that the rhetoric and philosophy of social inclusion and solidarity are central to the ethos of both Barka and Emmaus. One cannot help but wonder, however, just how inclusive such residential communities are able to be in practice, given evidence from previous research that those services which aim to be 'most' inclusive by operating open-door, 'no questions asked' policies often end up inadvertently excluding particular groups (e.g. young people, women or ethnic minorities) simply because these individuals are fearful of encountering the other clientele and cultures within (Johnsen et al., 2005). Residential communities may indeed offer a potential 'home' for individuals who are reluctant to use mainstream accommodation for homeless people, but the fact that community membership tends to consist almost exclusively of older White men (see Boswell, this volume) is in and of itself symptomatic of residential self-selection or exclusivity.

Boswell provides little detail about the communities' member recruitment procedures, but it would seem that existing members reserve the right to veto potential applicants. Significantly, community members must be willing to comply with structured timetables, abstain from drugs or alcohol, forego receipt of income-related welfare benefits and participate in work (insofar as they are physically able). Thus, the residential community model will not suit everyone and is poorly equipped to cater for those with high support needs, as Boswell acknowledges. Indeed, inclusiveness and solidarity are not readily compatible concepts. Appositely, a homeless man once told me that many homelessness projects are very good at welcoming and including service users, but ‘only if your face fits’ (i.e. when users meet eligibility criteria and are willing to comply with behavioural and lifestyle requirements).

Residential communities tend to make a great deal of the fact that they aim to be economically self-sufficient and empower members to (re)gain financial and residential independence, or, as a recent economic evaluation of an Emmaus village in the UK puts it, to ‘enable Emmaus Companions to get their life back together and move on to independent living’ (Clarke et al., 2008, p.4). However, there does not appear to have been any robust evaluation to date of the extent to which residential communities actually achieve this aim. We are left with several important, yet unanswered, questions. How many community members make planned moves from residential communities? Where do they move to? What proportion successfully sustain their new accommodation? How many obtain paid work with a salary sufficient to sustain a decent standard of living?

Furthermore, it is conceivable that membership of such a community could potentially foster dependence or at least impede an individual’s journey towards independence. What is the likelihood of community residents achieving financial autonomy, for example, when social enterprise earnings are typically reinvested in the community and individual members receive only minimal ‘pocket money’, if anything? How well placed are residential communities to cultivate the skills required for the ‘normal’ labour force where collegial relationships and work cultures are very different? Residential communities do appear to foster self-sufficiency at the organisational level, but to what extent is this translated to community members at the individual level?

There is also the further uncomfortable, yet unavoidable, question of the extent to which residential communities, located as they often are in isolated rural communities, might potentially act as ‘ghettoes’. The community integration activities described by Boswell may well mitigate this, but it is by no means clear how extensive such practices are. Is there a risk, as Debski (in this volume) asks in the accompanying response, that residential communities might serve as ‘another stage of exclusion for those who have already been excluded from… society?’ Further research is clearly needed to determine how successful residential communities are in meeting their aim of fostering independence and in mitigating social exclusion and stigma.

## Conclusion

Boswell's paper highlights the substantial potential for residential communities to combat the social isolation all too frequently experienced by homeless and formerly homeless people. I doubt I am alone in having heard many claims that they offer a valuable alternative to standard provision for some individuals. Existing evidence suggests that residential communities hold a certain appeal for a number of homeless people without high support needs, particularly older men. Advocates of such communities might, however, be wise to exercise caution before endorsing the model as an effective means of empowering homeless people and fostering their economic independence until the evidence base relating to these outcomes is more comprehensive.

In strengthening such an evidence base, further research might valuably explore the characteristics of community members – most notably the extent and nature of their support needs – as well as their reasons for choosing residential communities over mainstream provision. Specifically, where exactly on the support needs spectrum do they fall if their needs are not so great that they cannot cope with the demands and structure of community life (or that leaders/staff are ill equipped to support them), nor so low that they are unable or unwilling to live independently in 'normal' housing? Moreover, additional research should examine the extent to which residential communities foster independence versus dependence, integrate members into wider society vis-à-vis lead to ghettoisation, and/or mitigate the stigma commonly associated with homelessness.

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# Reviews

## Part E

## Julien Damon (2009)

## *Policies on Provision for Homeless People in the European Union, Report to the Minister of Housing*

http://www.logement.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/
RapportJDamonSansAbridansUnion_cle73a68a.pdf, 65pp.

The report written by Julien Damon for the French Housing Minister differs from the norm in several respects: a no-frills layout focused on carefully selected but only briefly commented upon landscape-format tables; its length, which, at 65 pages, is unusually short for such things; the decision to roadmap the subject by defining it through broad contextual factors (the measure of poverty and material deprivation, social welfare benefits and public spending, measures of personal feelings about poverty and homelessness, various European Union and even world housing indicators); a comparative approach using country studies to establish France's position in the EU and clarify what sets it apart; and finally, the broad-brush approach to provision strategies resulting in types of schemes and community recommendations. The report contains a wealth and variety of information presented almost in textbook form using figures and individual country 'pass notes'. Yet there is a feeling that big, relevant questions are asked, but not fully answered.

The arrangement is partly justified by the bigger picture. The stark truth of widespread homelessness in Europe can no longer be denied. Its appearance on policy agendas shows that it is now structural. The OMC[1] on Social Protection and Social Inclusion made homelessness and housing exclusion a priority for 2009. To mark the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Exclusion, the Belgian Presidency of the EU and the European Commission are jointly organising a consensus conference in Brussels on 9 and 10 December 2010. Its aims include harmonising the homeless count in the member states in 2011 and establishing a repository of 'good practices' for member states and stakeholders in the fight against housing exclusion. FEANTSA is co-ordinating the process and the French government, which has already organised a national consensus conference on

1 OMC: the open method of coordination used to promote cooperation between member states on issues that are not the exclusive competence of the EU.

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homelessness, is a key partner.[2] There is, therefore, not just a French but an institutional and EU ‘homelessness issue’ that, Damon explains, ‘is a complicated and politically sensitive matter of human hardship’, for which solutions must be found.

The report comprises three parts plus an introductory section. The introduction describes the context and aims and calls attention to the limits of the exercise in three caveats: the unreliable or somewhat ‘outdated’ nature of the statistics used from various EU-level surveys (ESSPROS, EU-SILC, Eurobarometer); the ‘arbitrary’ and therefore debatable nature of the variables chosen to make international comparisons; and the ambitious and therefore equally debatable nature of the recommendations made. Crucially, the report deals with ‘homeless people meaning street homeless and/or those in homeless provision. It does not address the wider issue of housing deprivation.’ Leaving aside the somewhat daunting problems raised on the relevance and compatibility of the statistics, this final limitation, while understandable where policy recommendations at EU level are to be formulated, nevertheless makes it difficult to get an overall view of the issue.

Damon first seeks to set ‘French homelessness’ in its EU context, positioning France’s homelessness problem in relation to issues such as poverty, social spending, housing, feelings about exclusion and homelessness, asylum and Roma communities. As the author says, some facts tell us nothing about homeless people: for instance, the homeownership rate, size of the social housing stock, housing consumption by household. While the tables may be used only to illustrate the diversity of Europe and France’s place within it, each implicitly introduces a suggested link with the ‘homelessness issue’. But since no linkage is made between the variables chosen and the rate of homelessness, or preferably the ten-year trend in it, for example, the reader is reduced to imagining what they might be.

The impossible task of counting the number of homeless people in Europe remains unsolved, and each table suggests an option that is only outlined here. More fundamentally, the choices made by the author strongly suggest a link between homelessness and three types of variable: policies (levels of protection, asylum requests); individual opinions and practices (how people feel and act in relation to the various forms of exclusion, relationship to housing); and geographical ‘mapping’ (the distribution of Roma in Europe or slums in the world).

The comparative measure of social protection spending, either as a share of GDP (p.7) or as a share of public expenditure (p.16), seems particularly shaky. While there is no doubt that, one way or another, the level of public spending on housing and social exclusion influences homelessness, Damon notes (expressing the view of

2 FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless): www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Consensus_Conference/Leaflets/FEA%20014-09_EN.pdf.

most European experts, see CS-HO, 2008), 'it is extremely difficult and at present totally impossible to systematically distinguish in different countries' public accounts the share of spending on provision for the homeless community'. Also, such an approach blurs the boundaries of issues in housing (versus shelter) and therefore the budgets and stakeholders in provision in both areas – which although not addressed in the report is a particularly vexed issue in France (Ballain and Maurel, 2002) – but also more generally in connection with changes in scale of tasks and responsibilities. The question of 'who pays for what' in housing and shelter is not only unresolved but still in flux for the time being, if only from the changing European definition of services of general interest. Damon does not explore these considerations in detail, meaning that the diversity of public and private players (which nevertheless appear in the short country 'pass notes'), as well as the sources and amounts of direct and indirect funding, remain largely neglected.

Part two of the report is a series of country studies on national policies. They yield much interesting and nuanced information on individual countries in a standardised format: general observations, number counts, notes (on policies). Estimates of the number of homeless people are given in most cases, but the focus is information on the players, principles and instruments of national homelessness policies. This information is then used to inform the final summary, which offers up a typology of individual situations (people) and provision strategies (policies). This analysis is layered onto existing typologies: for the homeless community, it relies on FEANTSA's ETHOS or revamped typologies (analytical model of three types of homelessness created from observations over a one month period, pp.48-49); while for policies, there is 'a rough consolidation into five groups that meet specific geographic, historical and political characteristics', distinguishing them by their respective manner of providing for homeless people. Based on a preliminary distinction between so-called 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Continental', 'Eastern European', 'Southern European' and 'Nordic' systems, the relationship between assistance and insurance, individual and universal protection and rights, local and national players, the family and the state are brought into play to explain the differences that exist in provision for homeless people in the EU. A further frame of reference is provided by a series of variables for at least possible strategic action, such as whether there is an inventory of services, a specialised public body or specific budgets. A summary table provides a final indicator by country (on a scale of 0 to 8).

Three types of country are distinguished: those with no significant investment or integrated strategy; those that have no integrated strategy but have or are allocating resources; and those with an 'integrated, explicit and solid' strategy. The identification of five dimensions (level of centralisation; resources allocated; level of service provision; scale of national debate; degree of criminalisation and coercion) shows how France stands apart, and finally informs a 'policy radar' using eleven indicators positioned on a ten-point radar map (a scale on which the values of the indicators are placed to profile each country) to ultimately enable a policy comparison to be made. Point time-series data (1999–2008) for Ireland and a German region showing homeless totals trending downwards suggest to the author that countries that take up precise means of counting also perform best.

These analyses lead on to findings and recommendations. The principles that justify these recommendations, while not always explicitly posited, appear to be of several orders. First, the idea that homelessness is primarily an act of personal agency and therefore susceptible to separate treatment. Evidence of this is afforded by a chart and table (pp.48–49) that posits an entry by the 'event' (entering the situation of homelessness) and mixes moral considerations ('irrational decision') with migration and asylum policies (refugees, 'immigrant labour'). This model is qualified by the somewhat different approach taken by INSEE statisticians in their most recent studies on the question: 'The popular image of a homeless person tends to be someone sleeping on the street or in a place not intended for human habitation. These so-called "homeless people" account for only 8% of homeless service users' (de Peretti, 2008). So, homeless people narrowly construed, Damon explains, 'include neither people who are houseless and so forced to stay in a B&B (at their own cost) or staying with someone else or in a squat. Likewise, people in particular types of shelter (temporary structures, improvised shelters, other locations) are not counted in this category.' This is anything but a residual clarification then, and establishing a continuum of situations from people in ordinary housing to 'homeless' rough sleepers could warrant a revisiting of the entire 'homelessness issue', this time including the home – as is also suggested by the author when discussing the right to housing.

The second principle comes in with the search for criteria by which to measure policy effectiveness. Damon argues that progress can be made through good governance of the issue: hard targets, rationalisation of the accommodation supply, supply-side reforms and training for actors in the supply chain to adjust to public service standards and standardised practices, raising the profile of and improving communication on European practices, including a specific part on homeless people in the national reports on social protection and social inclusion.

The terms of the debate that could be engaged based on Damon's report are becoming better documented, not least thanks to work on the changing faces of welfare and protection, on changes under way in the scope of housing and shelter policies, and on changes that have enabled a better assessment of exposure to risks (including loss of one's own home) and unequal positions. They show, among other things, that the general interest and national (and European) solidarity are anything but in tune. Revision of the principles, means and scales of public policies complicates this issue to a particular degree. Going back to the French case to tie the 'homelessness issue' up with its extension to the 'housing issue' (Kamoun, 2005):

> Today, while much else – especially in social welfare – is being decentralised, housing remains a national government responsibility. Granted, it can farm out the financing of housing provision to local authority service, joint venture statutory bodies or departmental authorities. It can also transfer the departmental/regional chief executive's discretionary social housing quota to the municipal authority; but it still in theory retains overall control. The housing solidarity system itself is decentralised: the housing solidarity funds have been transferred to the departments. At the same time, the government has established a highly centralised system for financing urban policy (with the ANRU – national urban renewal agency) and a likewise centralised five-year statutory public investment programme to boost social housing construction (government programme framework act for social cohesion). But who will pay for the new construction push? The 1% housing loan mechanism will obviously be put to work. The State will also contribute. But the main funding will come from the social housing bodies and local authorities. The situation no doubt flies in the face of history. Social housing plays and will inevitably play in the years ahead an increasingly social role and will likely be increasingly less well-funded by national solidarity.

I have quoted this lengthy passage as aptly illustrating the difficulty of separating the issues while reflecting the urge that exists to open up the homelessness issue at European level.

The issue of homelessness, therefore, has not gone away but has acquired a European scale. For anthropologist Daniel Terrolle, this situation is a 'fudge' in a very particular sense. He argues that a very small proportion of homeless people get back into the market economy; a slightly larger number of others manage to fit into a sheltered environment. But the vast majority are left to their fate and 'return feet first'. So, 'what is disturbing is less the number of homeless people who die,' he argues, than the fact of concealing them. 'The deaths of homeless people cast a pall over the functioning of the reintegration market. They are discounted to maintain the illusion that it works,' Terrolle concludes (Bissuel, 2010).

Arguably, the simple conclusion is that the success of policies to reduce homelessness is fundamentally governed by: a policy sphere that is in the process of reorganisation between public and private sectors and local and national levels; a labour market whose global restructuring is just beginning to produce contradictory and rather negative effects; and state policies where – not least through migration, asylum and inclusion policies – a measure of leeway exists. National societies, too, contain wide regional and local differences, and some 'natural' or 'community' regulators are visible and might be in politicians' interests to observe and preserve. Without an assessment of the respective capabilities of these various aspects, the let-downs that followed the consensus conference organised by France in 2009[3] could well be repeated.

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***Claire Lévy-Vroelant***
*Professor of Sociology,*
*Paris 8 University, France*

3 See, for example, the proposals made by Martin Hirsch, former High Commissioner for Active Solidarity against Poverty and former President of Emmaüs France.

## Tova Höjdestrand (2009)

# *Needed by Nobody. Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia*

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 256 pp. £14.50 (€16.68)

Tova Höjdestrand, a Swedish anthropologist, presents her PhD research in book format and opens up the world of Russian rough sleepers in St Petersburg for the English-language reader. She has worked extensively in post-Soviet Russia with various marginalised groups but *Needed by Nobody* is an ethnographic account of homeless men and women living and spending their days around railway stations and night shelters in Russia's second largest city.

Although the main fieldwork was carried out in 1999, Höjdestrand was already familiar with the city having volunteered earlier in one of the soup kitchens and visited other organisations, and she returned to the site on a couple of occasions up until 2003. She met with about one hundred people on a more or less regular basis and knew 'something valuable' about some two hundred persons. Of course with some she developed closer relationships, including her main guide from the Moscow station, and we are introduced by name to about two dozen of her informants, whose stories appear throughout the book.

Svetlana Stephenson (2006) has already written about Russian homelessness with 'displacement' and 'waste' being at the core of her book about Moscow's *bomzhi.* However, *Needed by Nobody* is written in a different way: whereas Stephenson used in-depth interviews and covert observation, Höjdestrand challenges what she observed hanging out at the railway station with the way her informants talk about their daily lives.

Höjdestrand admits that fieldwork dilemmas could fill a separate volume. Throughout the book she generally keeps behind the scenes, thus avoiding the 'heroism of the author' (Geertz, 1988). She describes the incoherence of her field sites, problems of getting individual interviews and how questions not relating to an immediate context met with 'a mountain of silence towering up before her'. Höjdestrand managed to address some vital questions without forcing the mainstream methodology on her informants. She was not quick to call people her 'friends' and successfully juggled the roles in which the informants cast her, the 'Swedish *korrespondent'*, both distancing herself from and engaging in their lives.

The major research issue explored by the author is the theme of ‘not neededness’. The key question that emerged from the way Russian homeless people tended to speak about themselves concerned how people manipulate and negotiate their position to retain ‘humanness’. *Nikomu ne nuzhen* (needed by nobody) and *chelovek* (human) are words that are both recurrently used by homeless people themselves as well as persistent themes of the book.

The six main chapters cover a range of perspectives on homelessness. Höjdestrand begins with structural transition, or the chaos, *bardak*, of the falling Soviet empire (Chapter 1), then analyses the world of economics (Chapter 2), the urban landscape (Chapter 3), the informal social networks and families of homeless people (Chapter 4) and relationships among the homeless people (Chapter 5). The book closes with a chapter on degradation and death (Chapter 6).

As in other countries, in Russia a ‘homeless person’ (*bomzh*) has both a statutory meaning as well as a very emotionally loaded popular meaning. A (street) homeless person is associated with physical degradation and alcoholism, but also with deterioration of morality, laziness and an unwillingness to work; he or she is a figure that arouses a mixture of disgust and compassion. Legally *bomzh* (which is an acronym for *bez opredelennogo mesta zhitel’stva*, ‘without a specific place of residence’) is a person lacking compulsory registration at an address (*propiska*). However, in the first chapter, Höjdestrand departs from this legal definition and extensively presents and explains the consequences of the Soviet *propiska* system.

In Soviet times, lacking such a registration was in itself a criminal offence. The state’s inflated surveillance system resulted in specific geographical segregation restricting registration in some major cities and made *bomzhi* illegal aliens in their own country. Also crucial to the understanding of *propiska* is its connection to the prison system. Persons released from prisons were, and remain, one of the populations most likely to become homeless. Along with persons hospitalised for more than six months, ex-prisoners were (without exception until 1995) not only deprived of the right to their dwelling and *propiska*, but also could be required to settle at least 100 kilometres away from their home city. The systems of *detdomy* (orphanages) and *maloletki* (youth prisons), together with the criminalisation of vagrancy and ‘parasitism’ further contributed to a vicious cycle of homelessness among certain underprivileged groups. The registration system also had far-reaching implications for migrant workers who were not able to legalise their stay in major cities and who were often housed in substandard *obshchezhitia* (dormitories).

As well as the *propiska* system this first chapter names other ‘structural causes’ of homelessness. First, the real estate market, in its infancy in the 1990s, did not have established regulations, being built on trust rather than formal contracts. This meant that a lot of people were cheated and lost their registration – and subsequently their homes. Second, there was and is a lack of low-cost or municipal housing, which, along with privatisation of the infamous *kommunalki* (collective dwellings), greatly diminishes the possibility of obtaining cheap accommodation.

The second chapter looks at the world of labour and economy among St Petersburg's 'street regulars'. In public opinion, homelessness is associated with individual laziness. An important distinction is thus made by the street regulars themselves between those who work and those who do not, the former being able to distance themselves from the 'typical *bomzhi*' who are presumed not to want to work and who live *na khaliavu* (at the expense of others). Höjdestrand claims that homeless people 'deal with objects and tasks that others do not want' and therefore uses the term 'refuse economy', vitally distinguishing this from an 'illegal economy', since in Russia the economy as a whole is 'much too infused by officially unsanctioned activities'. However, the 'refuse economy' by definition consists of informal practices. The chapter focuses on small-scale 'shady' or 'off the books' activities that street regulars engage in such as stealing, scavenging, odd jobs, prostitution and/or begging.

Street regulars also depend on charity to a certain extent. Shelters and soup kitchens were scarce in St Petersburg in the 1990s, and those that existed were overcrowded, inadequately resourced and plagued with allegedly dishonest staff. But Höjdestrand depicts how soup kitchens were much more than just places to get food. They were gathering places that enabled the street regulars to keep up social networks, exchange information and/or swap items. Apart from constantly looking for 'real jobs', where they were especially vulnerable to exploitation, rough sleepers in St Petersburg engaged in other strategies, and Höjdestrand describes in detail the development of 'self invented micro-entrepreneurship'. The most profitable opportunities, she writes, were at Moscow railway station, which provided plenty of opportunities to collect deposit bottles and other valuable discarded items, and allowed for self-created jobs such as keeping the tables around grocery kiosks clean. These activities largely depended on good relations with the kiosk proprietor. The rationale here was that the homeless person was relieving someone else, for instance *provodnik* (car caretaker), from tedious tasks such as cleaning railroad wagons. Other jobs included washing cars at traffic lights, loading and unloading trucks and running errands for local store owners, all for small monetary or in-kind payments.

For most station regulars, not all of them homeless, alcohol was both a means and an end of the 'refuse economy'. It involved both work opportunities (collecting bottles, cleaning tables) and also spending and socialising practices such as panhandling from, or sharing drinks with, drunken travellers. Höjdestrand not only describes the cheap alcohol substitutes that the *bomzhi* use, but also illustrates how communal drinking creates relationships that imply brotherhood, unity and community – the crucial informal networking that homeless people depend on. Alcohol also transforms ‘potentially threatening outsiders into perfectly enjoyable human beings’, helps fight boredom and is a prerequisite for hope.

One final aspect of ‘refuse economics’ links this theme to the third chapter on urban space. Höjdestrand points out that slack regulations in the urban space created a wide range of different income strategies; street regulars used the ‘refuse space’, which, unlike ‘prime space’ with formal or informal control, provided possibilities for informal or illicit use.

With regard to urban space, Höjdestrand offers a more dynamic description. In Soviet times, although vagrancy was criminalised, there was plenty of refuse space that persons on the margins of society could utilise for their own purposes. Capitalism, however, allows for less and less refuse space. As a result, ‘undesired’ people are being physically removed from prime space. The same process has been observed in cities worldwide, but what is especially interesting about St Petersburg is that the process is being called ‘europeisation’; the Russian equivalent of gentrification. It was only in the follow-up to her main fieldwork that Höjdestrand saw the actual changes to the Moscow station. The building and its surroundings have been cleaned and renovated. The waiting hall, where one could spend time, including at night, for a symbolic price, had been closed for renovation and the price considerably increased. The transformation has also altered commercial space such as the characteristic kiosks, which have disappeared taking with them the most obvious self-invented micro-entrepreneurship opportunities that some of Höjdestrand’s informants relied upon.

‘Refuse space’ included the indoor sleeping places that her informants used, such as attics, unused back stairwells (or the top landings of stairwells), basements, broom cupboards (the storage room of a *dvornik*, street cleaner) and the station’s washrooms. Finding and using such spaces also relied on good relations.

The next two chapters focus on relationships. Höjdestrand points out an important division in the lives of Eastern Europeans: the split between the private and public spheres. The private safety net consisting of *svoi*, one’s family and friends, was crucial to survival during the Soviet times. However, the respondents in this study overwhelmingly lacked close family and friends, with family members either dead or unable to help. Apart from some networks that were literally in the process of disappearing, the capacity of ones’ family and friends to provide help has also diminished in the post-Soviet situation. In the popular stereotype, however, it was the *bomzhi* who failed to keep up their relationships with friends and relatives, usually by not fulfilling mutual obligations. Those who migrated or served a sentence had a very small network to begin with, and convicts and former *detdomy* inmates constitute a large portion of the author's informants. Finally, domestic conflicts, especially in the case of poverty and crammed living situations, emerged frequently as part of their life stories.

The fifth chapter describes relationships among the homeless people. Höjdestrand argues that this social world was 'as shallow, unreliable and callous as it was generous, caring and inclusive'. 'Makeshiftness' and the unpredictability of arrangements made most relationships, whether it was sharing a sleeping place or a bottle, short-lived. Friendships were not really possible among *bomzhi*, who were as likely to steal from each other as support each other in need. Relationships with impoverished *domashnie* (persons who had accommodation) were often based on balanced reciprocity, where a place to sleep was exchanged for cash or more frequently for food or drink. Exchanges among station regulars on the other hand could be described as constituting general reciprocity. Sharing occurred without any apparent expectation of an immediate counter-gift; such helpfulness was a source of pride. Höjdestrand further explains that in a world of involuntary coexistence (at the station) this mutual help was a way to make relationships tolerable, and transgression of the mutual helpfulness norm meant breaking the relationship altogether.

Chapter 6 comes back to the central question of the book. Here, the theme of retaining humanness is looked at in its most excruciating form: the body and ultimately the end of life. Maintaining one's appearance is an arduous task for rough sleepers, yet caring for personal hygiene shows one's capacity to withstand the destructive impact of homelessness. *Opustit'sia* (letting oneself go) means giving up, passivity and losing self-respect and humanness. Men and women alike lose some battles; their teeth may rot and their faces may be bloated by their alcohol consumption, tuberculosis or lice, but as long as they keep fighting to retain their health they remain human. Adapting to homelessness therefore means not accepting everything that street life brings, but balancing circumstances with self-respect. Looking decent was especially difficult for Höjdestrand's female informants, who wanted to look feminine. Yet gender was not really an issue among street regulars as the fact of their homelessness annihilated almost all individual differences. Höjdestrand ends this chapter with a powerful image; looking at photographs of unidentified *bomzhi* bodies in the police archive, the total anonymity of death struck her: 'This is the face of homelessness to me'.

In writing about distrust, theft and alcohol binges, Höjdestrand faces the danger of reproducing common stereotypes. As Mitchell Duneier warns, 'one should not rely too greatly on ethnography for an enlightened image' (1992, p.142). *Needed by Nobody* does not shatter stereotypes of street homeless people, but neither is Höjdestrand quick to generalise or judge. She is not trying to prove anything when she writes about the humanness of the *bomzhi*, and she is not seeking to convince the reader that they are human. Rather, she is looking for explanations of a world that consists of many different elements and of generic stories being told over and over again; a world where stealing is the companion of generosity, and where the truth is sometimes of no value at all. In her candid treatment of bodily matters she is as straightforward as Patrick Declerck's *Les Naufrages*.

No policy questions or recommendations are addressed in the book and in this sense *Needed by Nobody* is an example of 'classical' ethnography. Unfortunately, however, there is a lapse of ten years between the main fieldwork and this publication, and it remains a pity that this longer time frame was not used to provide a more thoroughly updated picture of the situation. The world of Moscow station in St Petersburg as described in the book is long gone, but questions remain unanswered. What happened to those people whose livelihood depended on the refuse space around and within the station? In the epilogue of the concluding chapter Höjdestrand writes that she has lost track of most of people she worked with in 1999, and we are left with a couple of follow-up stories. But what about other homeless people in today's St Petersburg?

The description of the *propiska* legal framework in the first chapter is particularly confusing as it is often not clear which era the author is referring to; *propiska* was abolished in post-Soviet Russia but there is still a registration system (unofficially also called *propiska*) and not indicating a place of residence in one's internal passport is considered an administrative offence. It is the Soviet system that Höjdestrand outlines in the first chapter, such that the legal situation during the fieldwork and afterwards is a little unclear; for instance writing about former convicts, she says that 'most formal ordinances' concerning the criminalisation of vagrancy 'were abolished' during her fieldwork.

Höjdestrand mentions only briefly that the more recent attempts to prevent homelessness are mostly due to economical capital rather than administrative obedience. In privatised communal dwellings where registration according to sanitary norms does not apply, *propiska* became a commodity and internal migration (and immigration from neighbouring countries) largely takes place outside the registration system. On the other hand some constraints of the former system remain, for instance in the private rental market landlords are likely not to register tenants, not only because this allows them to avoid taxation, but also because they fear that they may otherwise never be able to evict the tenant. The introduction of this 'structural' and legal framework makes the reader immediately wonder how the *propiska* system functions now. Has the real estate market in Russia grown to be more reliable? How did the privatisation of housing stock and housing policy in Russia evolve? What effect did it have on homelessness?

*Needed by Nobody* is a well-written text; the language is vivid, but at the same time detailed and precise. Höjdestrand neatly balances the use of Russian words in the English text, a daunting task. The book is careful not to enforce English translations that obscure actual meaning, and the author retains the uniqueness of the language used by her informants.

I read *Needed by Nobody* as a book on homelessness as well as on a time of transition and on the condition of Russian society as a whole. After all, Höjdestrand shows how the station regulars shared the economic, social and discursive space with the rest of society, how they engaged in the same survival strategies, depended on good relations and were as likely as anyone else to be disoriented and confused by the new order.

The world of Höjdestrand's informants was one of unpredictability, mistrust and constant 'makeshiftness', as she calls it. Just like the literal waste they were dealing with (making a living out of discarded objects in rejected spaces, performing unwanted tasks), they were being cast out of society and were referred to as 'human waste', 'leftovers', and 'dirt'. They were obliged to negotiate their 'neededness', social belonging and pertinence to the human race. *Bomzhi* used different criteria to assess their 'humanness'. Their criteria were not based on social background or on skills that were of little use in their situation, on good health, which they lacked, or on feminine or masculine performance, but on something almost out of grasp, a sense that Höjdestrand has captured admirably in the book.

This 'humanness' was encapsulated, in my opinion, in a unique combination of perseverance and resignation in the way that *bomzhi* treated 'this life' and talked about themselves. The Russian soul, *dusha,* appears several times in the book and in people's stories along with the concepts of 'humanness' and 'neededness'. It is the depth of the concept of *dusha* – which embraces the metaphysical part of existence referred to by *bomzhi* when talking about 'this life' – that enabled them to prove their 'humanness' and 'belonging'. Russian *dusha* is 'a concept widely shared by Americans and Western Europeans' (Pesmen, 2000, p.4) and this ethnography is therefore about 'humanness' on a global level, and not only that of Russian rough sleepers.

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***Magdalena Mostowska***

*Guest Researcher, Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, Oslo, Norway*

József Hegedüs, Orsolya Eszenyi, Nóra Teller (2009)

## *Housing Needs in Hungary*

Budapest: Metropolitan Research Institute (MRI), 55pp. Available from MRI on request.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit international agency aimed at improving housing conditions across the globe for those in greatest need. It is sponsored by charitable donations but appears to have support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its lending projects and has a number of protocols with the United Nations social care programmes. Habitat commissioned the leading Hungarian housing research body, Budapest-based Metropolitan Research Institute (MRI), to mount a wide-ranging study of housing conditions and problems in Hungary. MRI's detailed report describes and sums up what it sees as the country's key housing problems.

The report is divided into four parts. Part One, entitled the 'Nature of housing problems', describes some features of the Hungarian housing market, the distribution and size of the social housing sector and a number of issues related to the legal and institutional context. Part Two uses EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) to describe housing conditions, access to basic facilities and aspects of the external environment. Part Three explores the situation of young families and households living in marginal communities in some detail. Part Four provides an overview of current housing policy programmes. The unspoken sub-text at the heart of this study concerns whether there has been an improvement in Hungarian housing in the two decades since the collapse of communism.

The report presents a huge amount of data and figures on various aspects of Hungarian housing. Essentially, this is a factual report and reflects the nature of the work as a commissioned empirical study. However, this format also raises a number of difficulties for the reader. First, the document lacks historical context. It is apparent to this reader that Hungary's historical legacy remains very prominent in the contemporary story and, especially for newcomers to this country or to post-communism in general, it was necessary to include more background information and perhaps rather more about the country as a whole. Reference to the United Nations charter and protocols on housing need and adequacy did not provide

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sufficient background information for the reader. Without this wider context we are faced with fifty pages of figures and a lot of hard work to understand what has been going on in Hungarian society (housing) and where it is at in 2010.

It is not really possible, for example, to read the narrative on housing subsidies without knowing the legacy from the communist period – which is still very apparent because the best housing and the best of the new state-built flats in the 1970s and 1980s with central locations were allocated to favoured party members and the 'new' middle class and it was only in the final phase of state building in the mid-1980s that allocation became more socially diverse. State rental flats were rapidly privatised in the early 1990s putting high-value equity in the pockets of the political classes but leaving many of the peripheral high-rise estates in a dreadful condition with no local authority services, almost no social housing and a practically non-functioning private rental sector. Hungary became a 'super-owner-occupied' society (92 per cent of households are owner occupiers). A very large amount of equity has thus 'transitioned' from the 'old system' to the new, conferring a continuing advantage, at least in the housing market. One wonders therefore whether we are in fact talking about 'continuity' rather than 'transition', with many of the same people living in the same valuable flats.

The large quantity of small, low-amenity flats built between the 1960s and the 1980s also continue to be a major factor despite construction of a new wave of larger properties in the 1990s. There is still a structural problem in the housing market with an excess supply of these flats and insufficient 'up-market' property. The middle classes have continued to benefit the most from this situation (as they did under the communist system when they creamed off a high proportion of the housing subsidies) indirectly and directly through mortgage subsidies.

A second key problem with the study, also reflecting its empirical nature, is that it is not sufficiently grounded conceptually. It has no comparative resonance and is ethnocentric in construction. It does not connect to the debates about, for example, asset-based welfare systems and yet, as a super owner-occupied country, Hungary might well be a social laboratory of the low-tax/low-spend welfare state. How should we think about post-communist states two decades on from the so-called 'transition to the market'? What role does housing have in the wider pattern of society? These meso-level questions hover very tantalisingly above this report, but it is left very much to the reader to infer answers. Rather like a cryptic crossword puzzle we are given subtle hints, Hungarian data measured in billions and billions of forint-denominated[1] subsidies and projects and hundreds of thousands of households, a variety of social groups with or without access to affordable housing and social policies that are difficult for outsiders to understand.

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1 One Hungarian forint equals €0.0035 (July 2010).

Unfortunately, the analysis is also inconsistent in places. For example, the data on affordability appears to indicate improvement over the last decade but if the ‘average household’ can only afford to borrow 50 to 60 per cent of the median house price (‘assuming a 20% down-payment’) then there is a major affordability dilemma. Where does the deposit come from? How is the difference between 50 to 60 per cent loan-to-value with a 20 per cent deposit covered? Other ‘affordability’ information is scattered across the study; later on we discover from the EU-SILC data that over one-third of households have trouble paying their mortgages and, in a different place, that households spend on average 28 per cent of income on housing (including utility costs).

Another example of where we need context is in the section entitled ‘An overview of current housing policy programs’, where we are introduced to the idea of housing subsidies. We are told that there are (were?) mortgage interest subsidies that ‘brought results in the housing sector’. Somehow this translated into housing construction exceeding a ‘40 thousand threshold’ (what threshold?) with outstanding mortgages growing from 200 billion HUF in 2000 to 2,000 billion HUF in 2005. But then the subsidy system was cut back and later abolished due to the fiscal crisis. We then learn that about half the outstanding mortgage debt is held in non-HUF accounts with no subsidy. But what does it all mean? Finally, we are told that the middle classes are the main beneficiaries of the subsidy system and lower income groups are not really helped. Readers would have benefited from a much more developed commentary on these issues. It would also have been useful for references to external data and studies – apart from the UN Charter and EU-SILC data there are no references to non-Hungarian sources. This is perhaps due to most sources being Hungarian data but it is unusual for a study of this type not to be referenced in the text, although there is a long list of Hungarian sources at the end.

It would have been really useful if the study had gone further in answering key questions such as, given the focus on a post-communist state, whether the situation has changed over two decades and if so by how much? What are the implications of becoming a super-owner-occupied society with almost no social housing? How does Hungary’s situation differ from other small EU states? We cannot just see ‘housing’ in isolation from the rest of society let alone the wider ‘welfare state’. For example, we read the following paragraph concerning elderly low-income families:

> The current Hungarian health and social welfare system is not prepared to deal with the problems which can appear in aging households, such as job losses or illness. In many cases, the family’s social net cannot counterbalance such problems either, and the only solution that enables the financing of care is the use of the housing equity of people affected.

These sentences contain some important insights but there is no reference to the Kemeny/Castles debate on this issue.[2] Is there a trade-off between home owning and retirement income/pensions in Hungary as Kemeny argues is likely in home-owning societies? Are we then dealing with a low-tax/low-spend welfare state in Hungary? This seems likely and more developed theoretical grounding in the well-known comparative welfare state literature would bring much-needed insight into these key issues.

One should not criticise MRI for fulfilling their contract for Habitat. MRI has a tremendous track record of achievement and has been a leading light on the Hungarian housing and public policy scene for many years. However, it feels like a missed opportunity that the study was not able to go beyond the data to this much-needed conceptual work.

Despite the above limitations, the data does provide a picture of housing issues in Hungary in 2010. The key findings from this study are that the better-off households appear to be those who inherited state rental flats at knock-down prices after the collapse of communism. Hence the legacy of the 'old system' continues to echo down the years. Much Hungarian housing seems little changed from those days. The large Roma population continues its difficult marginal existence. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian families live in small flats or properties without modern facilities. Altogether one-third of the whole population live in flats and/or houses with either structural problems, no toilets or without normal 'comforts' (such as bathrooms). The mortgage market has stalled. Taken together we are looking at what appears to be a stagnant housing market with very poor levels of mobility. Most first-time buyers are very dependent on their families to help with deposits and other solutions centred on family strategies. Young newly formed households without family support stand little chance of living independently. Hence there are major intergenerational inequalities. The social safety net of housing allowances is very flimsy and is ineffective in helping people unable to be in the market. The problem here is that, although much better than in years gone by, a large part of the economy is still 'black' or 'grey'; this undeclared cash culture inhibits a social security system even if it could be afforded. Inequalities remain very stark and the absence of properly functioning rental sectors, either public or private, leaves a major 'housing needs' issue at the heart of the housing policy debate.

The final section 'Conclusions and recommendations' could have gone much further in bringing together these findings and analysing their impact. The authors suggest a change in the legal definition of social housing but an overall summing up of key points would also have been useful. It would have perhaps been something like this: Progress in Hungarian housing over the last two decades has been slow, and for a very large part of the population remains little changed from the communist era,

2 See *Housing and Social Theory* Special Issue, Vol. 22, No. 2.

indeed relatively speaking for quite a large proportion of Hungarian families, the situation is worse. A middle class whose housing wealth was carried forward from the 'old days' (originally allocated to it via party and state) has prospered through privatisation, although there has been some expansion of the better-off middle class since 1990 and building of new flats and houses to accommodate them. The addition of a mortgage industry is a marked change although relatively few households can afford to use it. Because of these factors Hungary has become an extraordinary, super-owner-occupied nation with an insignificant social housing sector and a small private-rented market. There continue to be masses of small, low-amenity flats in high-rise blocks with broken-down lifts, marginalised Roma communities, significant inequalities between town and country, important intergenerational inequalities and an ill-equipped social insurance system to help the most needy.

The report will be useful as a specialist source for scholars of Hungarian social policy but what can non-Hungarian readers take from this study? Without the much-needed conceptual anchorage to the wider housing and social policy literature we are left in large part to make up the bigger picture for ourselves. But we have to be careful here as we are also trapped in what could be called a 'comparative lock-out'. As non-Hungarians we are bound to be reading from the default position of our own case or perhaps the wider European situation (if we are Europeans). We are also missing any detailed evaluation of the consequences of the credit crunch (Hungary has been hit very hard by the financial crisis of the last few years because of its dependence on foreign capital to finance its economy and a very large public sector debt).

To conclude, on its own terms there is a lot of information in this report that specialist scholars can delve into, but a report about Hungary alone, especially one that is not conceptually grounded, is of limited value to the wider policy-making and academic housing studies communities. Nonetheless, the underlying issues hinted at in the report are fascinating and important to post-communist societies. Although it is difficult to tell from the report, at face value one has the strong sense that not so much has changed since the 'old days'. I think this is what our MRI colleagues are telling us: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

***Stuart Lowe***
*Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Policy*
*and Social Work, University of York*

## Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Deborah Quilgars and Nicholas Pleace (eds.) (2009)

## *Homelessness in the UK. Problems and Solutions*

Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, 190pp. £30.00

UK policies and programmes against homelessness have in many ways been exemplars for other European countries. This situation is reinforced by the fact that they shape a discourse that has a distinct impact on thinking and reflection on homelessness policies elsewhere in Europe. Most of the European homelessness research is produced in Britain, often in the form of reviews and evaluations of local, regional or national policies and programmes. The Rough Sleepers Initiative from the early 1990s as well as recent legislation and policy development, especially in Scotland, have caught worldwide attention. *Homelessness in the UK. Problems and Solutions* is therefore a welcome introduction, overview and update.

The book's editors and authors, who are established and experienced researchers, provide accounts of recent policy development and research, as well as reflections on current and future trends and risks. Several chapters present summarised results of studies that the authors themselves had designed and led. The editors have clearly kept a firm grasp on the various contributions, which are of similar length, style and structure, and repetition is avoided through cross-references to other chapters. The political, legal and research contexts are presented in a comprehensive introduction. There is even a glossary and a list of acronyms, signalling that the book addresses not only British readers, but also homelessness researchers and policy makers in other countries.

This book might be characterised as something in between a government report and a research volume. It gives accessible information on current legislation, policies and action plans and their background and motivation, and sometimes suggestions for future policy revision. The chapters are based on empirical research with some space for critical reflection. However, the conclusions are in general more policy-confirming and hopeful than would usually be the case in research literature, which may be due to the fact that available data and recent policy debates confirm an encouraging development towards both reduced homelessness and empowered homeless individuals.

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The introduction by the editors and Mark Stephens is a valuable summary of the development of homelessness as a problem, field of research, subject of debate and target of shifting policies. Already in 1977 a right to housing for ('unintentional') homeless persons in 'priority need' was established in Britain. The duty of local authorities was delimited in 1996 to cover only temporary accommodation for two years, but in 2002 it changed again to imply temporary accommodation until permanent housing (mostly social rented housing) could be arranged. Since then all local authorities must also develop strategies to combat homelessness. Recent policies in England (and elsewhere in the UK) include putting an end to the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people, but focus primarily on prevention and advice on 'housing options' and support to enable homeless people to access housing in the private sector, as well as floating support. Since devolution, however, the policies have been diverging in the four UK jurisdictions.

Besides the introduction and the conclusion, the book is in two parts. The first part includes four chapters on homelessness among three groups – families, youth and minority ethnic groups – and one chapter on street homelessness. The second part reviews the development of homelessness policies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and ends with a chapter comparing the UK policy (or policies) with those of eleven other countries. Some of the content and the conclusions of the individual chapters are presented very briefly below. This is followed by a discussion of a few points inspired by the book, namely data, policy and discourse and their interrelations.

In Chapter 2, Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Nicholas Pleace present the results of a survey of a representative sample of homeless families in England with a special focus on their support needs, experiences of interventions and the claimed causes of their homelessness. Most respondents regarded even temporary accommodation as an improvement in their living situation, despite increased financial problems, while a general conclusion is that the great majority of these families, even though they were poor, were not very vulnerable in terms of substance misuse, mental illness or as victims of violence. The authors suggest that support resources should rather target the most vulnerable families only, since many of the statutorily homeless families 'are likely to require only access to housing and some minimal, short-term practical assistance' (p.34).

Youth homelessness is the topic of a chapter by Sarah Johnsen and Deborah Quilgars. Following legislative change in 2002 'priority need' was revised to include 16 and 17 year olds, and a substantial share of young people in the UK are now accepted as statutory homeless: in 2006/7, 15 per cent of all youths (aged 16 to 24) in Scotland, while the share varied between 5 and 8 per cent in the other parts of the UK (p.54). This chapter differs from the rest of the book in that it is based upon not only statistics, but also young people's accounts of their homelessness, as well as their experiences of being homeless and of temporary accommodation and support. The authors have an optimistic view of the new emphasis on homelessness prevention and on alternatives to the social rented sector for permanent housing, which they describe as a 'significant cultural shift' (p.62).

A chapter by Carol McNaughton Nicholls and Deborah Quilgars on homelessness among migrants and minorities reviews the situation for ethnic minorities who have been settled in the UK for a very long time, new job-seeking EU migrants from the 'accession countries', refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. While some of these people have full citizen rights and asylum seekers and Eastern European citizens have limited rights, undocumented immigrants have no rights whatsoever. Nevertheless, all the studied groups appear to be overrepresented among registered homeless people and/or the 'concealed homeless'. The general conclusion of the chapter is that both marginalisation and discrimination, and to some extent special vulnerability, may explain the homelessness of minorities and the addressed kinds of migrants. The policy recommendations are limited to changes in the immigration system and improved funding to organisations that care for refugees and migrants.

Since the Rough Sleepers Initiative in the early 1990s, street homelessness is a thoroughly researched issue in the UK. The chapter by Anwen Jones and Sarah Johnsen captures the changes in policy and discourse over the past two decades. In the beginning the purpose was to 'make it unnecessary for people to sleep on the streets of London' (p.39), a goal which in 1999 was supplemented with 'reject[ing] those which sustain a street lifestyle' (p.41), partly through anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs). The initial opposition towards such harsh measures against street sleepers has since toned down among service providers, while the government approach has softened somewhat. The authors conclude that the policy focus on rough sleeping has been successful in reducing the number of people in such a situation.

Part 2 of the book presents the development of homelessness and policies to combat it in the four countries that make up the UK. Scotland is undeniably leading the development towards a stronger and wider right to (permanent) housing, with its ambition to soften the moralised category of 'intentional homeless' and to broaden the concept of 'priority need' to the extent that this qualification will expire by 2012. Isobel Anderson's chapter on Scotland also analyses the difficulties in implementing an enforceable right to permanent accommodation in local contexts, despite general external support of the vision, and concludes that it is still an open question whether the vision will be realised.

Especially in England, the new agenda for reducing homelessness stresses prevention and a 'housing option approach'. The aim is to avoid routinely putting homeless households on the waiting lists for social rented housing and instead to enable them to access private rented housing through advice and support (e.g. rent deposit guarantee schemes). 'Promoting "gatekeeping" or effective prevention?' is the subtitle of Hal Pawson's chapter. The dilemma with the new approach is that those who do find a home in the private rented sector lose their chance of being accepted as statutory homeless and eventually being assigned social housing, which may further explain the declining numbers of registered homeless people. Pawson suggests that the current policy reflects a consumerist trend that may undermine the discourse of right to housing.

The chapters on Wales (by David Clapham, Peter Mackie and John Pritchard) and Northern Ireland (by Paddy Gray and Grainia Long) have less official data to work with and fewer accomplishments to explore with regard to homelessness. The reviews of both countries' policies and trends relate extensively to England and Scotland, the policies of which are implicitly presented as moderate and progressive alternatives respectively. Wales seems to have chosen a more constrained definition of, and policy against, homelessness than England, although it has a comprehensive 'supporting people' programme, where one-third of the budget is spent on homelessness services. Northern Ireland differs from the rest of the UK in that its homelessness legislation is more recent and it is confronted by the special problem of religiously segregated social housing.

Part 2 concludes with a chapter comparing homelessness and policies to combat it in the UK with the situations in eleven other countries: the United States, Australia, Canada and eight European countries. Although differences in the quality, scope and availability of data on homelessness actually make the twelve countries incomparable, Suzanne Fitzpatrick identifies some shared characteristics (e.g. minorities and immigrants are mostly overrepresented). An interesting observation is that although the UK is the only country with an enforceable right to housing (for some homeless people), it lacks a right to temporary accommodation for households who are not in 'priority need', which is found in some of the other countries. This chapter also includes very brief introductions to the US systems of 'continuum of care' and 'housing first', 'reintegrative schemes' in Western Europe, emergency arrangements in Eastern and Central Europe and effective preventive policies in Germany.

In the book's concluding chapter, the editors claim that reduced levels of rough sleeping and 'statutory homelessness acceptances' and the more support-oriented schemes for young homeless people are areas of 'significant progress', while temporary accommodation of bad quality and that it is used for too long (especially in London's private rented sector) and the consistent overrepresentation of ethnic minorities and migrants remain problematic. The risk that prevention strategies may hinder young people from moving out of destructive parental homes – or make them move into insecure private rental housing – is highlighted, as are concerns about the current, possibly exclusionary, policy of making hostels and shelters 'places of change' and about the differences in tenure security between the social rented sector and the private one.

This is a very British book with the specific British vocabulary of homelessness, and all researchers in the field, regardless of their country's conceptual framework, must learn and be able to translate their findings into this language. Exotic expressions such as 'intentional homeless', 'non-statutory homelessness' and 'priority need', and their internal relationships, have, over time, become objectified properties of the situation, with the result that they now appear to be self-evident in legislation, policy and research in the UK. The chapters are all written with a minimum of theoretical concepts and the discourse chosen seems to be close, if not identical, to that of policy makers, politicians and street-level bureaucrats. This will probably enhance its impact on policy makers, but the level of abstraction may be too limited for theoretical advancement and for the development of alternative perspectives and deeper international comparisons.

The book contains recurring reflections on possible solutions to the homelessness problem, as well as on its plausible explanations, while acknowledging shifting strands of understanding over time. Fitzpatrick et al. write in the introduction (p.6):

> … while the sophistication of the theories that seek to explain causation have improved over time, the available data is often still insufficient to prove or disprove any particular hypotheses. The structural versus individual dichotomy is a helpful starting point in thinking about causation, but the reality is far more complex.

However, despite the heavy emphasis on specific UK legislation and comprehensive programmes for reducing (or even ending) rough sleeping, use of bed and breakfast accommodation, youth homelessness etc., and for reforming the categories of 'priority need' and 'intentional homelessness', the institutional factors explaining homelessness may be forgotten. In Fitzpatrick's comparison of the UK with other countries (Ch.10), differences tend to be explained simply by whether the welfare state is 'strong' or 'weak' overall. Still, institutional arrangements – in terms of legislation, policy models, tenure security, owners' rights, rules of eligibility and allocation systems, to name a few – are given explanatory weight in most of the book as regards development (i.e. comparisons over time). Fitzpatrick does highlight 'the statutory framework on allocations' as a guarantee against exclusion of the most vulnerable families and individuals from the housing market, but such reflections seem more random than part of a theoretical whole.

Let me give three examples of the importance of the institutional design of markets, services and rights in a country for what it is to be homeless (and what it means *not* to be homeless) and what is 'thinkable' as a solution. The traditional division between 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' poor is clearly an institution that has survived in the categorisation of 'intentionally homeless', and which may be born again in the 'places of change' policy. The specific legislation for citizens from the more recent EU member states appears to contribute to their homelessness, but is not highlighted as a cause, and hence not targeted by homelessness policies. The social rented sector seems to be the only one providing security of tenure in the UK, as tenants' rights in the private sector are constrained by the practice of short-term contracts. Although this issue is included in a discussion of future risks, it is not seen as a possible cause, nor is it seen as a policy – nor is its revision seen as a possible solution to homelessness in the UK. Put differently, policies are not only effective or not effective, they also have side effects and they tend to reproduce cultural institutions (or may themselves be institutionalised).

The UK has stronger legislation and more and different data on homelessness than other countries. Policies and data are interrelated. The legislation has a profound influence over research, not only because the government funds evaluations of legislative changes and reviews of their implementation, but also to the extent that research is based on data collected and produced by the authorities for their own purposes, using their categories and definitions and based on their decisions and priorities. In addition, new policies, action programmes and legislation are usually preceded by investigations intended to serve as a basis for planned change.

UK policies obviously provide lots of data on the scope and characteristics of the 'presented' homeless individuals, and especially the 'accepted' ones. When compared with most other countries (as Fitzpatrick rightly remarks in her international comparison) this gives researchers in the UK special access to information on homeless families. However, this is at odds with her suggestion that individual explanations are stressed especially in Sweden and the Netherlands due to those countries' more developed welfare states. An alternative account for the same difference would be to consider the different kind of data that these countries provide and, consequently, what strata of homeless people are being investigated.

Registers of individuals and families defined as 'statutorily homeless' and in 'priority need' make up a population of identifiable people who provide a basis from which homeless people may be sampled for in-depth interviews. However, this research population may be biased as it is formed and delimited by authority assessments of individual 'intentionality' and 'priority needs'. If having a child is sufficient to be accepted as in 'priority need' it is not unexpected that 'homeless families' need little support, while those who are accepted due to illness or youth will probably need more support. Another bias (which is sometimes taken into account in this book) is that the group 'presenting as homeless' may be distorted by the fact that some people may not apply for homelessness status because they anticipate that they will be rejected.

In their final chapter, the editors welcome the tendency in UK homelessness research to adopt more 'robust' quantitative research methods and data. However, as some of the authors discuss, even such data may be misleading. In her chapter on Scotland, Anderson deals with what is sometimes called the 'service-statistics paradox', namely that wider criteria and a greater service supply will result in higher numbers of accepted homeless people (and hence be less rewarding in a short-term evaluation). Conversely, Pawson displays a sceptical stance towards official data on reduced homelessness – in terms of decisions as well as acceptances – since 2003 and cites suspicions that prevention strategies have come to function as gatekeepers against applications from homeless individuals.

Similarly, preventive measures are suspected of concealing homelessness by making people remain in destructive environments, for instance when youths are persuaded to return to their parental homes, a situation that Johnsen and Quilgars warn against. The number of statutorily homeless could probably also be reduced by making social housing and temporary accommodation less attractive. Finally, the difficulties in assessing the scope of the homelessness problem through statistics on the relative number of 'presentations' and 'acceptances' as homeless alone will probably increase in a situation where local authorities are urged to prove that their strategies work through reduced numbers of homeless people.

This said, *Homelessness in the UK. Problems and Solutions* deserves many readers, both within and outside the UK. As the title suggests, it provides an up-to-date overview of various aspects of homelessness and the policy dilemmas associated with this problem. It is a tightly structured book offering plenty of information on various features of the homelessness problem and its solutions in the UK.

***Ingrid Sahlin***
*Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

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European Observatory on Homelessness

# European Journal of Homelessness

The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal will also assess the lessons for Europe which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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***Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri AISBL***

194, Chaussée de Louvain ■ 1210 Brussels ■ Belgium
Tel.: + 32 2 538 66 69 ■ Fax: + 32 2 539 41 74
research@feantsa.org ■ www.feantsaresearch.org

FEANTSA