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

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› **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 2008² (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 housing³ 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 card⁴. 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 Tyrili⁵ 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 amongst 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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