

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

The changing profiles  
of homeless people:  
Homelessness in the Written Press:  
a Discourse Analysis

***Henk Meert,  
Pedro Cabrera, Ivan Christensen, Inger Koch-Nielsen,  
Roland Maas and Elisabeth Maurel***

November 2004



**FEANTSA**

European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

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## INTRODUCTION

# Discourse analysis and the societal dimension of constructing profiles of the homeless

By HENK MEERT

This report has emerged from one of the research workgroups of the European Observatory on Homelessness, dealing with the changing profiles of the homeless in the European Union. The former report of this thematic workgroup (Meert *et al.* 2003) discussed the changing profile of the homeless population in six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Spain) from a quantitative perspective. The report raised four important issues: the need for a harmonised measurement of the homeless population across Europe (see also Edgar *et al.* 2004); the fact that the homeless population epitomises current features of social exclusion; the change in the profiles of the homeless population and the link with various macro-social processes; and finally the fact that restructuring of services for homeless people has a deep impact on the profile of the users.

### Discourse analysis

The present report analyses the profile of the homeless from a qualitative perspective. In four European countries (Denmark, France, Luxemburg and Spain) two newspapers were analysed in detail, focusing on their news coverage of homelessness within each country (thus excluding, for instance, homelessness due to natural disasters in Third World countries). In this research, which examined nearly 500 articles, techniques of discourse analysis were applied.

Discourse analysis became popular in the social sciences in the 1960s. During the 1970s, two important trends developed. The 'structural trend' focused rather narrowly on the detailed analysis of produced fragments of texts and language; while a more dynamic trend approached text and language as interacting with numerous of social and cognitive factors (Peleman 2002). Gradually, a growing awareness that dominant discourses are embedded in society has emerged. Based on the work of Foucault (e.g. 1976) dominant dis-

courses in society were more and more seen to steer thinking and actions in certain directions, confirming the existing power relations which underpin these dominant discourses. In this interpretation, discourses produce a particular regime of truth, in which knowledge and power are inseparable. From this, it follows that the concrete analysis of discourses should not only focus on the discourses per se, it should also incorporate the analysis of the broader societal context in which these discourses are produced. From this perspective, Fairclough and Wodak's definition of discourses is very instructive (1997: 258, quoted in Peleman 2002:63): *'Describing discourse - language use in speech and writing - implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it. A dialectical relationship is a two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them'*.

The most recent development within the discourse analysis is the 'critical' version. Critical Discourse Analysis has the explicit aim of unravelling patterns of domination, discrimination, power and control in language. Contrary to Foucault, who aimed to produce, in the end, a neutral knowledge by eliminating aspects of power and resistance, critical discourse analysts combine a scientific perspective with an explicit social and political one (Geldof 1995, Wodak 1995 and Peleman 2002).

In this report, articles in newspapers are analysed as concrete discourses and they are unravelled from such a broad social and political perspective. In each contribution, the authors reveal hidden agendas, latent power relations and sometimes absolutely banal political strategies which constitute the content of the articles. Being aware of the dialectical relationship between discourses and the societal context, the authors also carefully discuss the impact of these discourses on the political, social and institutional approach towards homelessness.

## Methodology

Regarding the more concrete methodology applied in this report, detailed analyses of numerous articles in two newspapers in France, Spain, Luxemburg and Denmark were undertaken. With the exception of Spain (for which 18 months of news coverage were analysed), the analysis was limited to analysing the news reported during the year 2003. In each country, a primarily right wing paper and a primarily left wing paper were selected. In total, exactly 493 articles were analysed in depth. More details are to be found in table 1.

When considering the number of assessed articles in table 1 it should be clear that these numbers do not necessarily reflect differences in interest between the different countries, nor between the different journals in a given country. As will be discussed in more detail, these numbers also may depend on the content of the search engines that were used and on the period which was covered. It is also worth mentioning that - although this would be very interesting - we did not analyse the hidden discourses behind photographs, cartoons and other visual material which may have been integrated into the news coverage of the homeless. This task was impossible to perform, as most search engines that were used did not include visual material.

## Content

In her contribution about the representations of homelessness in the French newspapers *Le Figaro* and *Libération*, Elisabeth Maurel develops two robust sections. The first section discusses the place that homelessness takes within the daily written press in France. Within this first research topic, she assesses the frequency of 181 articles, the main themes which are dealt within these articles (for instance climatic circumstances and the threat for the homeless who live on the streets) and the relative importance of the articles, measured by their length. Her second section encompasses a thorough analysis and evaluation of the content of sixteen articles (made up of at least 500 words). The broad societal context to which the articles refer is dealt with first, followed by a discussion of the designation of the homeless people in the concerned articles. Are they seen and portrayed as people without rights, as victims or - by contrast - as delinquents? The final topic of her paper links the constructed representations of the homeless in the written press, with ethical and political positions which are embedded in the concerned discourses.

**Table 1 Main characteristics of discourse analysis focusing on the homeless,**

COUNTRY	RATHER RIGHT WING / CONSERVATIVE			
	Name daily	Description	Period covered	Number of articles assessed
DENMARK	Jyllandsposten	Loyal to the Liberal Party	12 months (2003)	42
FRANCE	Le Figaro	Reputable right-wing daily	12 months (2003)	77
LUXEMBOURG	Luxemburger Wort/ La Voix du Luxembourg	Sympathetic to the Christian Party	12 months (2003)	24
SPAIN	El Mundo	Loyal to conservative party	18 months (1/1/2003 - 31/6/2004)	97
TOTAL				240

The analysis of two major Spanish newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*, covers 18 months, including the impact of the terrible terrorist attacks in Madrid (March 11th 2004) and the royal wedding which took place at the end of May 2004. In his report, Pedro Cabrera shows that the greatest amount of news about homeless people coincides with the period of 'Christmas candy, Santa Claus or the Three Kings'. Besides this somewhat cynical observation (which is also supported by the three other contributions to this volume), Cabrera assesses in detail and with great rigour the different terms which are used in reference to the homeless in both Spanish newspapers. As he stresses, expressions such as roofless (*sin techo*) and homeless (*sin hogar*) are rather new and they are introduced in the media by scientists who translated these terms from English. These terms clearly stress the social and the housing dimension, while terms as 'the indigent', 'the beggars' or 'the vagrants' stigmatise the homeless. Cabrera shows that the use of all these terms is not neutral. The same is true regarding the symbolic association of the homeless with other marginalised people, such as drug users or the unemployed. In a sharp analysis of the political dimension embedded in most of the articles, Pedro Cabrera also unravels the strategic 'use' of the homeless to serve politicians during electoral campaigns for instance.

In the case of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, visible homelessness, including people who live on the streets and in public buildings, is highly concentrated around the most important railway station in the city of Luxemburg. Roland Maas analysed almost fifty press articles which appeared in 2003, with great attention to the broader economic, social and political context in which the information in these articles is produced. He pays, for instance, specific attention to the changing functions of public spaces and buildings (directed towards more private activities) and the ways this is linked with the presence of the homeless in public space. Another sharp focus is on the strategic production of polemic discourses, stigmatising and even criminalising the homeless. One of his quotes is like a punch: "*they are mostly in packs, bawling, drinking, spewing and brawling*". Here, the homeless are no longer even considered as human beings.

The last contribution to this volume focuses on two Danish newspapers. In their contribution, *Ivan Christensen and Inger Koch-Nielsen* look for different images which are produced in the 45 articles they analysed. These profiles relate to sex, age and nationality, where the dominant picture of a homeless still seems to be that of an adult male - of Danish origin, though immigrants are also mentioned. Further, they examine in great detail different kind of problems which are according to the two newspapers associated with the homeless population in Denmark - of which mental illness is a topic. They conclude that the homeless are in general not blamed, but rather seen as victims of social exclusion in the two Danish newspapers.

applied to newspapers in four European countries				
RATHER LEFT WING / SOCIALIST				Total
Name daily	Description	Period covered	Number of articles assessed	
Information	Left-wing and intellectual	12 months (2003)	3	45
Libération	Reputable left-wing daily	12 months (2003)	104	181
Tageblatt/ Le Quotidien	Sympathetic to the Socialist Party	12 months (2003)	24	48
El País	Loyal to Socialist Party	18 months (1/1/2003 - 31/6/2004)	122	219
			253	493

## A challenging research pathway

This report, with its four specific contributions, contains a wealth of information and a richness of new insights regarding the homeless in the European Union. It is one of very few documents, which analyses mass communication media, systematically and in depth, regarding the way they currently cover and produce news about the homeless population in Europe. The choice of the thematic working group to rely on discourse analysis to assess in depth the social production of profiles, has proved to be a significant way to learn a lot of new things about the social exclusion which the homeless face.

Undoubtedly, this report has a pioneering character within the current production of academic study regarding homelessness. We hope that the concrete findings of the four national contributions may stimulate other researchers to continue this challenging research path.

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# The portrayal of homelessness in France's written press

By ELISABETH MAUREL

## [abstract]

*The press analysis given in this article seeks to shed light on a dual process: the contexts in which the media address homelessness, and the issues they imbue in the subject, and the interaction between how the homeless are portrayed versus the normative roles exhorted on them.*

*The method follows comprises two phases: identifying all the articles on homelessness in a specific year, then singling out selected articles on the main subjects for content analysis.*

## 1 Introduction

The way in which the press portrays homelessness both creates and reflects the social perceptions of this concept. The press is a good bellwether of the issues involved in this question, and the broader one of poverty, because it plays a key role in constructing the object itself and the perception of it that imbues public opinion. It is of interest therefore to look through this prism at issues like the debate on the definition and profiles of the homeless.

## 2 Homelessness in the daily press

The first phase of the research was to identify articles on homelessness.

This was done by sifting through two large-circulation national dailies, "Le Figaro," a reputable right-wing daily, and "Libération", a reputable left-wing daily, over a full recent year: 2003.

The website of both dailies was searched by keywords, the first and main one being "sans domicile fixe" (SDF - homeless).

Julien Damon's press studies have shown a steep rise in the use of the expression "SDF" since coming into use as a replacement for "clochard" (tramp) in the 1990s. This semantic development reflects a shift in the reference universe in which homelessness is situated. The word "clochard" was associated with marginal status, maladjustment, asociality. The term "SDF" is the vocabulary of exclusion and social crisis situations.

It symbolizes the extreme forms of poverty and exclusion. Querying the sites using the keyword "SDF" produced a corpus of 77 articles in "Le Figaro" and 104 articles in "Libération", making 181 articles in all.

Other keywords tried - "sans logement", "hébergement" and "errance" - added nothing of significance to the first query results.

I therefore concluded the search with the corpus yielded by the term "SDF". The references provided by the site query were:

- > date of the article;
- > title of the article;
- > author's name (but not position);
- > number of words;
- > extract from the sentence where the term appears.

The analysis at this stage remains cursory, therefore. Neither the topic category under which articles on the subject of homelessness are classed (miscellany, news, society, etc.), or the characteristics of their authors, could be analysed on this basis. What could be concluded, however, was that they were written by journalists rather than expert authors or known specialists.

Three aspects will be described:

- > the frequency with which articles are published,
- > the classification of articles by topic category,
- > the size of articles classed by topic category.

## 2.1 THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH ARTICLES ARE PUBLISHED

The corpus studied is 77 articles in the right-wing daily “Le Figaro” and 104 articles in the left-wing daily “Libération”, averaging one article every 4 or 5 days for the former, and one article every 3 or 4 days for the latter. In terms of number of articles, “Libération” devotes about a third more space to the subject than “Le Figaro”.

But this bald description is misleading. The appearance of press articles on homelessness as an issue is highly seasonal, dictated mainly by weather conditions (cold weather and winter, and to a lesser extent, summer), then by symbolic dates or political events (World Poverty Day on 17 October, political speeches, proposed legislation, etc.). The journalistic treatment of homelessness could be said to be essentially event-driven rather than responding to a consistent editorial line.

Weather plays a major, almost ritual, role. The first deaths of rough sleepers from hypothermia in November/December trigger a flood of articles each year.

Journalistic interest is also heightened at this time of year by the publication of annual government announcements - the “big freeze plan” - of a strengthening of emergency accommodation provision, and the equally recurrent arguments over the problems created by the refusal of some homeless people to attend hostels.

Then there are the compassion and solidarity campaigns produced by the Christmas and New Year festivities.

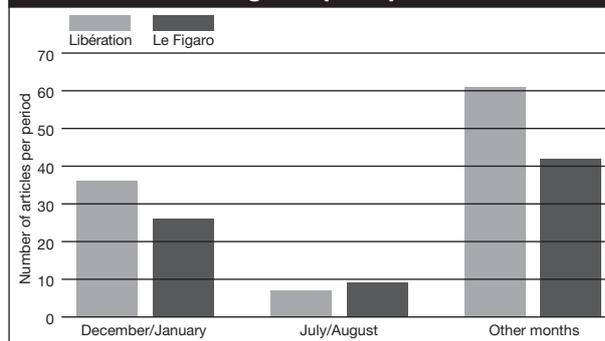
In this corpus, over a third of the articles were published in December and January.

The summer season also produces a rash of articles, but to much lesser extent: they are either articles about local council measures (banning begging and removing the homeless from holiday resorts where they are accused of harming tourism), although this kind of measure has largely tailed off in recent summers, or, as in the summer of 2003, the tragic effects of the exceptional heat wave (see Figure 1).

In this sample, weather was a factor in 42% of the articles in “Libération” and 46% of the articles in “Le Figaro”.

This has prompted voluntary group complaints about the unwelcome effects of a seasonal crisis policy governed by the thermometer and weather forecasts.

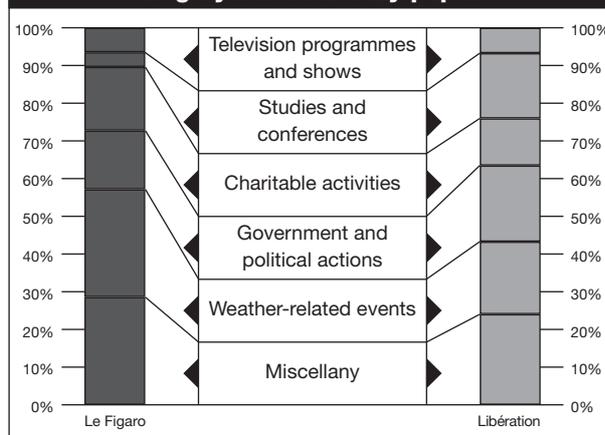
Figure 1 Month of publication of articles on homelessness in “Libération” and “Le Figaro” (2003)



## 2.2 THE CLASSIFICATION OF ARTICLES BY TOPIC CATEGORY

The articles were classed by title and the snippets of text returned into six broad categories, summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Classification of articles by topic category for each daily paper



The first two categories, each accounting for about a quarter of articles in all (and close to 30% each in “Le Figaro”) are miscellany and weather-related events. They are close in general tenor and convey a tragic image of homelessness dominated by death, extreme situations and violence.

*Miscellany* - approximately one article in four - essentially comprises reports of violence (assault, offences, murders, death) where the homeless are portrayed either as victim or perpetrator. Only “Libération” leads on other forms of non-violence-focused miscellany report (like the death of a well-known activist, the dismissal of a *hajib*-wearing social worker, a festivity organized by the homeless, etc.).

The primary image of homelessness conveyed by the press, therefore, is one coupled to violence.

*Weather-related events* (essentially cold weather) account for the second quarter of articles (30% for “Le Figaro”, only 20% for “Libération”). This was discussed earlier in relation to the frequency of publication of articles.

*Government and political actions* are the third topic category, with 18% of the articles (20% for “Libération”). These concern visits or speeches by government and opposition politicians (the Prime Minister going out with night outreach teams, the President visiting the “Samu social” mobile outreach unit, etc.), or articles dealing with legislation or other instruments directly or indirectly affecting the homeless. These range across a very wide set of areas, showing the cross-cutting aspect of homelessness: e.g., the legislation on the reform of the justice system, the urban renewal act, the homeland security act, the proposed social security reform, the anti-smoking drive, the heat wave plan, etc.

These articles reveal a high degree of political instrumentalization of homelessness in directions that bear the newspaper’s own clear ideological imprint, as will be seen.

*Reports of charitable activities* occupy more space in “Le Figaro” (17%) than in “Libération” (13%). Most of these are occasional reports of voluntary group or individual initiatives for the homeless.

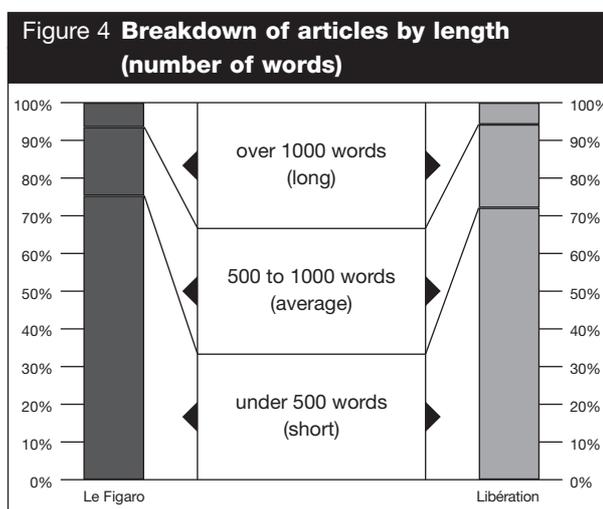
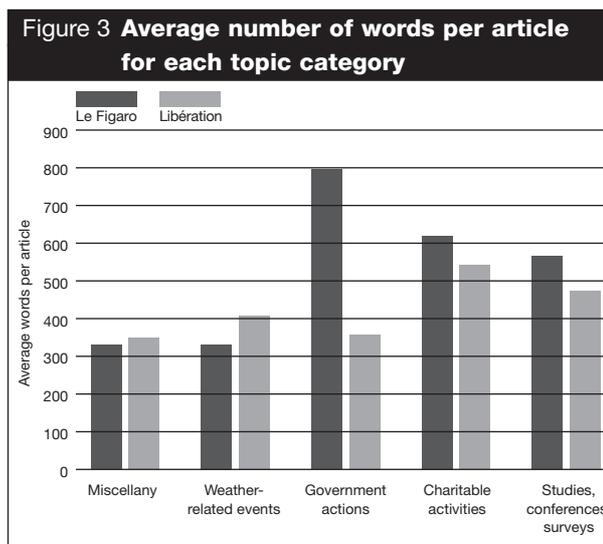
*Reports of issue-specific conferences and studies*, by contrast, are more often found in “Libération” (17%) than in “Le Figaro”, where they occupy little space (4%). So, in 2003, the follow-up on the Insee survey produced six articles in “Libération” and just one in “Le Figaro”.

*TV programmes* are the final category (7%). These are previews and reviews of programmes, documentaries, etc.

**2.3 THE SIZE OF ARTICLES  
CLASSED BY TOPIC CATEGORY**

The number of articles is an indicator that requires adjusting by the size of each article to assess the importance of the topic categories. The only available measure is the number of words per article (Figure 3 and 4).

Three-quarters of the articles in both dailies are short. Long articles - over 1 000 words - are uncommon. “Libération” publishes a few more (22%) medium-length articles (500 to 1 000 words).



The average size of the articles puts the classification of headings into perspective.

The two most frequent headings (miscellany and weather-related events) are also those with the shortest articles.

Overall, “Libération” has more but shorter articles than “Le Figaro”. But this average conceals disparities. The longer articles on substantive issues in “Libération” are found with very short event-related reports.

It is possible to conclude from these initial analyses that there is no line of editorial policy on the issue of homelessness in the written press. Articles are fairly short on average and report crisis situations, and are mainly in response to circumstances and seasonal events. The image portrayed is highly dramatized, focused almost exclusively on extreme poverty and marginalization. It paints pictures, conveys personal testimony, but almost none of the articles address the structural causes of homelessness, apart from six articles in “Libération”.

Homelessness is portrayed in two main lights: violence (suffered or perpetrated), and how it affected by the political situation.

### 3 Contents of articles and topic categories

The second phase consisted of a content analysis of a sample of articles by topic category.

Seventeen articles were selected from among the medium and long articles (excluding articles of under 500 words), taking three or four from each topic category. The selection criterion was the words expressly used in their title, as this was the only clear indication of their topic category.

Eight articles are taken from “Le Figaro”, nine from “Libération”.

The content analysis will focus on three points:

- The context of the output of information on homelessness;
- The portrayal of homeless people from the vocabulary used and the images conveyed;
- The ethical and political stances on the images portrayed.

#### 3.1 CONTEXT OF INFORMATION OUTPUT

Two preliminary findings could be made from the comprehensive analysis: information output on homelessness is essentially event-driven, and the main triggering events are court cases, weather and political opportunism.

The content analysis of the sample articles makes it possible to expand on these conclusions.

I intend first to analyse two examples that reveal differences in treatment of the same event by the two dailies.

The first example concerns articles published to mark ten years of the “Samu social”, a service set up by Paris City Council in 1993, combining a mobile nighttime outreach unit with a homeless crisis hotline.

The “Le Figaro” article (24/11/2003) describes the conditions in which the service was set up, stressing the role of voluntary groups in getting it running, the change in how it sees its activities (a shift from the destitute being unwillingly “hauled in” by the Paris police to a mobile community health service that respects street homeless people), support by politicians who were all part of the government majority, and how the service became the basic foundation of social crisis policy. The emphasis is on humanisation, professionalization, and effectiveness.

The “Libération” article takes a highly politicized approach to the same event. Not only is the tenth anniversary of the Samu social an opportunity for the President of the Republic (who was behind the service as mayor of Paris in 1993) to “restore his image” on social issues, but also enables Jacques Chirac to put clear blue water between himself and his Interior Minister and political rival Nicolas Sarkozy on assistance to the homeless: he contrasts the professional and caring activity of the Samu social with the Interior Minister’s “social cleansing ideal”, reflected in a stepping-up of police harassment on the streets.

The focus of the treatment of this subject is caring consensus for one, and restoring political capital for the other.

The second example relates to articles written in response to the big winter freezes, and compares an article from “Le Figaro” for 12 January with one from “Libération” for 10 January. Both report the same event: the deaths of four street homeless people, and the circular issued by the Paris chief of police enjoining the security services (fire brigades and police) to take forceful action by forcing unwilling homeless people into overnight shelter (if needs be, by locking them in police cells).

The article from “Le Figaro” takes a devil’s advocate role by giving reasons why the homeless may prefer to put their lives at risk by refusing to take shelter in extreme cold (lack of safety and promiscuity in emergency accommodation centres). But it stresses the “duty of assistance” to a person in need, and gives the final word to the police, and their social crisis responsibilities.

The “Libération” article expresses the concerns felt by the public about the “limits” to homeless people’s freedom of choice which leads to their own deaths, but focuses its essential argument on homeless people’s own criticisms of the seasonality of caring, and their demands to stay in their own daily surroundings instead of being shipped off to big, anonymous emergency shelters. The newspaper talks about a “right to community” (with the links created with shops and local residents) which for street homeless people is their “right to live somewhere”. The final word is left to a homeless person: “I don’t want charity, I want a job”.

“Duty of assistance” versus “right to live somewhere” - the treatment of this news item produced positions that are poles apart.

This short exercise clearly highlights the ideological and political dimension of the way homelessness is reported, whatever category the news falls into. Miscellaneous news and seasonal news items, however event-driven, are put through the mill of political analysis. Homelessness is more a political arena than a subject of analysis per se.

Two other observations lend further credence to the finding that there is always a policy aspect to the analysis of homelessness: the critical stance taken, and the type of protagonist focused on.

Many articles in both papers take a critical line on policies for the homeless. But the rhetoric is different.

“Le Figaro” offers little critical analysis of its own, mostly preferring to report “objectively” the publicly-stated criticisms of other actors.

So, for example, the criticisms of psychiatric policy made at the “conference on psychiatry” in June 2003 as being increasingly emergency-focused, with shorter stays in hospital, and “which leaves a growing number of delusional individuals on the street” and “is turning the underground into the biggest psychiatric hospital”.

“Libération’s” criticisms come more from the newspaper’s own agenda, and are offered as its own analysis. For example, it uses government decisions to increase tobacco prices as an opportunity to discuss illegal street sales of cigarettes in Marseilles. The homeless are portrayed as people mostly without rights or resources, resorting to this kind of petty crime to keep body and soul together, and the journalist takes issue with them being punished for it when large-scale illegal cigarette sales are going on elsewhere.

The homelessness issue is therefore linked to more general debates. The newspaper’s stance is overtly critical and defensive of street homeless people, as part of a strategically polemic political discourse..

The type of actors placed centre stage also differ quite substantially between the two dailies. Three types of actors appear: voluntary organizations and workers, politicians, the homeless themselves.

Grassroots voluntary workers are almost invariably portrayed in both dailies as exceptional individuals, social work heroes. But the articles offer two very different prototypes.

The “Libération” prototype is the daring, conviction-driven rebel, disruptive, taking to task, speaking out. The exemplar is the renowned oncologist, Dr. Léon Schwartzberg, who was briefly Minister of Health in 1998, and fought on all fronts (for the right to euthanasia, for decriminalization of drugs, for undocumented migrants, for the under-housed and commandeering of empty properties, etc.). Solidarity with the homeless is portrayed as anti-establishment.

“Le Figaro” also portrays a heroic figure, but more as one following a selfless vocation. Its exemplar is Mona Chasserio, the founder of a homeless women’s group, dubbed “the Madonna of the homeless”. Religious overtones abound. Her family carried out local good works, she herself gave up her job, her husband and her home in order to tend to the homeless. Her image as an “educated”, cheerful, flirtatious and attractive is contrasted with that of the homeless women she helps, described as “abused, alcoholics, loose cannons, drug addicts and zombies, damaged goods”.

The homeless themselves, whose image will be analysed in the following section, feature little as actors. I found no examples at all in “Le Figaro”. This contrasts with some articles in “Libération”, where homeless people are portrayed in situations not as welfare recipients or in housing need, but as actors capable of negotiating with the welfare services. A series of articles points out that many of these people have worked or are in work, and have personal resources with which to deal with their situation. The obstacle is society’s “don’t care, won’t care” attitude. An article from 25 May 2003 (“Bedding down on the street”) explains how the homeless manage to develop a “home” in the public space, by creating makeshift living environments that enable them to survive while preserving their autonomy and a measure of solidarity. The newspaper says that these examples call into question the relevance of public measures to tackle exclusion.

There is almost no mention of professionals (social workers, etc.) in the articles studied. They are invisible actors. Homelessness seems to be handled as a one-to-one process between voluntary worker and homeless person, in which politics impinges only briefly and opportunistically.

### 3.2 PORTRAYAL OF THE HOMELESS

I looked at the vocabulary used for indicators of how homeless people are portrayed. I identified three dominant depictions:

- the effectively rightless individual;
- the victim;
- the offender, or at least suspect.

#### > The effectively rightless

Effectively rightless groups are those that have no access to basic fundamental rights: the shelterless, homeless, evicted, undocumented (so without administrative rights), jobless, etc. Those depicted in this way need defending. The language is that of mobilization and demand.

The effectively rightless are also those who live at the margins of the law and societal norms because they have no access to rights. They are the squatters, the illicit street traders, the rejected asylum seekers, etc. The homeless are portrayed in this case as effectively rightless, forced to get by (“bobbing and weaving”, “making do”) and victims of checks and supervision.

The homeless are also shown to be effectively rightless when described by their first name, or as an “ordinary” generic category (women, people, families, etc.). This is to personalize the homeless, re-encompass them within an ordinary image without playing up their homelessness which is not of their essence. This portrayal most often goes together with a demand for them to have access to the right to be heard and to choose their lifestyle, two of the most fundamental rights which they are denied.

All these portrayals of the “effectively rightless” are more frequently found in “Libération”. But they are still the least frequent.

#### > The victim

The homeless person as victim is the most widespread image. It embraces two quite significantly different variants: the relatively non-responsible victim, and the awkward victim. The homeless are above all victims, essentially victims of life accidents, personal breakdowns, the vagaries of fate. In this context, they are rarely depicted as victims of social inequalities. The adjectives are endless, and almost always refer back to devastation, non-responsibility, non-preventability: flotsam, adrift, battered by life, crushed, vulnerable, on their uppers, worn down, helpless, emotionally disturbed,...

The image is of the suicidal outsider in need of compassion, understanding, assistance, being cared for.

But there is another side to victimization: society’s guilt-tripping. The homeless person then becomes awkward, eliciting not so much compassion as rejection and the desire to con-

ceal him. The vocabulary becomes 19th century” under-class”-speak: den of thieves, tramp, Dante’s inferno, wild animals, littering the streets, sallow-skinned, ragged, zombies, unpredictable drunks, drug addicts, raving lunatics, etc. For voluntary workers, the street becomes a Calvary, and their action becomes heroism.

#### > The offender

The homeless person is portrayed as above all potentially dangerous, violent, threatening, asocial, rebellious, or at least as capable of being all these things. This is the independent, rebellious tramp who refuses shelter in hostels. The vocabulary most often associated with this image is bottle, cop, security, zero tolerance.

An article from “Libération” reports the paradigm drawn by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy between **visible victims** (homeless, undocumented migrants) and **forgotten victims**, who are the real victims, i.e., all the fearful population, the “France of the disregarded” the “France of victims”.

This paradigm is at the root of the entire homeland security policy. The poor above all inspire fear.

There is nothing new in these mixed images of the poor. They permeate social history right from the Middle Ages (B. Gerekme’s “gallows or pity”) down to the 19th century (“labouring classes” and “under-classes”). What is most significant is that they continue to endure. And what is instructive is to be able to connect these images with ethical and political stances.

### 3.3 THE ETHICAL AND POLITICAL STANCES ON THE IMAGES PORTRAYED

Four basic ethical and political stances between which opinion oscillates can be identified in the articles: outrage and defence of rights, compassion and assistance, forced protection, policing and clampdowns. Their interactions with the portrayals described above are fairly clear-cut.

- Sixty percent of the articles expressing outrage and defence of rights are in “Libération”, but are also found in “Le Figaro” to a lesser extent. One big order of argument relates to Justice. There is condemnation of harassment of the homeless and the poor in general by the police and courts (identity checks, taking into police custody, searches, etc.) as well as the uselessness of this punitive attitude (fines handed out to people who cannot pay, etc.). There is also condemnation of lack of equality before the law and the risk of second-class justice for the poor (e.g., with guilty pleas). The right to equity in justice is what is demanded.

The other important aspect is the demand for access to fundamental rights: chiefly the right to housing, but also the right to care (especially psychiatric), action against casual hire-and-fire, defence of immigrants' rights, defence of the right of asylum.

One new aspect played up in two "Libération" articles is the clear statement of what might be called a "right to dwell" or "right to territory", wholly distinct from the right to housing.

The third aspect of this stance is, more broadly, the call for solidarity and opposing injustice. It is not just the failures of public policies that are condemned, but also the lack of active support from society, a society that only comes forward now and again in cases of tragedy. "People don't care about other people's hardships". "They think that social welfare is the government's job".

There is a clear connection in the articles between outraged attitude and call for rights, and an image of the homeless as "effectively rightless", but also in some case with the second image, that of "victim", but an active victim.

- The second stance identified is that of compassion and assistance.

This permeates most of the articles, but now includes the singular characteristics that make up the new norm of social welfare.

It is mainly about "outreach", being where homelessness is, as opposed to forced pick-ups and sheltering. Whence the great play made of new services like the "Samu social", "mobile outreach services", "mobile teams", "drop-in centres", "hotlines", etc.

The second fundamental of this doctrine is personal involvement, as opposed to bureaucratic impersonality, forging links, winning over, concern, tenderness are the terms frequently encountered (mobile teams "kneel" close to homeless people, "stroking" their hair, etc.). The terms used are those of respect, humanism, dignity, taken account of suffering.

This compassionate assistance stance, highly traditional in the treatment of poverty but to some extent now re-theorized, is entirely bound up with portrayals as "victims", whether non-responsible or active. It is not greatly referential to concepts of right or citizenship.

- The third, and most uncommon, stance is that of forced protection. It is to be seen particularly in the debate on more or less forcing the homeless into shelters in periods of extreme cold, and draws legitimacy from the principle of a "duty of assistance to a person in need". It puts most voluntary organizations in a stance of opposition to some public officials, essentially the forces of law and order (prefecture, police force).

Voluntary organizations argue against forced protection less on ethical than functional grounds: the fear of increasing the invisibility of the homeless through a backlash effect.

Forced protection is held up by the authorities as a general right for the homeless, but also as about protecting the liberty and welfare of non-homeless populations. This is very close to NIMBYism, which often leads local authorities to refuse planning permission for hostels or social housing estates.

This stance is connected to "awkward victim" and "dregs" images, if not of a suspect and potentially dangerous population. It is the modernized form of 19th century "social hygiene" arguments.

- The final stance, which in fact is more frequent than the previous one, is that of clampdown. It has come back in full force with the growing discourse on public safety. Victimization is now in the other direction - it is society that is under threat and the victim of the poor, who are returned to being the "dangerous class".

First young people, then foreigners, are especially targeted in this depiction. Their image is constantly linked to violence and anti-social behaviour. The hype is shrill. The system called for is close to that of US-style "zero tolerance".

#### **4 Conclusion**

This highly restricted analysis (one year, two dailies, in-depth analysis of seventeen articles) nevertheless shows the extent to which homelessness, which can hardly be considered marginal in the big processes at work creating insecurity on a large scale in the population, is in fact deeply permeated by all the current big social issues, and holds a key place in political discourse.

Age-old trends, barely altered in the vocabulary (pity and public policy) are still at work in this discourse, but also discernible in the issue of homelessness is a testing-out of new themes: what is a dwelling? What is the right to be heard? How should bottom-up intervention be developed? What is social responsibility? How do we achieve community togetherness? etc.

# The image of the homeless in two Madrid newspapers

By PEDRO JOSÉ CABRERA CABRERA

## [abstract]

*The article analyses the image of the homeless people portrayed in two of the main newspapers published in Spain (El País and El Mundo) The analysis is based on an exhaustive search of the 219 news items published between January 2003 and June of 2004, using the electronic version of both newspapers. This research shows the irregular recurrence of the topic through the year, the different use of terms chosen by journalists to approach the problem, the symbolic association with other topics and with marginal groups (e.g. the mad, the unemployed, drunks, drug addicts, foreigners and criminals), the close connections to the electoral agenda, and the strong link present in the media to questions of civic insecurity and the “zero tolerance” policy.*

## 1 Introduction and context

This analysis of content has been developed using the news from two of the main newspapers published in Spain: *El País* and *El Mundo*. In contrast to the other contributions in this volume, we did not limit ourselves to the news which had occurred in 2003. Indeed, in the Spanish case, several events that took place during the first half of 2004, have made it advisable to prolong the search period until the summer of 2004. The news about social matters is often conditioned by political and electoral agendas, and therefore, in light of the general elections that were held in the middle of March 2004, it was advisable to prolong the search to cover at least until the month of April. It was also useful to encompass the March period, as some articles appeared in the newspapers linking a homeless person to the terrible terrorist attack on March 11th preceding the elections. Also of relevance was an event on May 22nd, 2004 when the first royal wedding since the wedding of Alfonso XIII 98 years ago was celebrated. Everything that happened at this time turned out to have repercussions on the homeless in the Madrid streets.

## 2 Methodology

It has been necessary to subscribe to the on-line edition of both newspapers in order to carry out the search, and to use the search engines of the published news files that both newspapers provide to their subscribers. This means that the level of exhaustivity that these tools are able to reach conditions the search. However, we do not have any other more efficient tool. Likewise, the results from these search engines are unequal; in the html format of the news provided by *El País* they include graphic elements (photographs, diagrams, etc.) but not in *El Mundo*, so an important informative aspect hasn't been analysed.

*El País* as well as *El Mundo* are newspapers of national scope, but both have their head office in Madrid. This means that even though both have regional editions, most of the news related to the homeless that we have found is located or concentrated in Madrid. In fact, in most cases the news is published in the “Local” pages.

The formal position adopted by both newspapers to their readers is that they represent independent mass media, framed within what is known as serious or quality press. However, it is possible to identify each one with certain political positions: thus it would not be excessive to identify *El País* with the position defended by the Socialist Party (PSOE), whereas *El Mundo* comes closer to the position of the Popular Party (PP).

We have carried out an exhaustive search in both newspapers of the news that appeared between January 1st 2003 and June 2004. To search them we have used the following terms: “sin hogar”(homeless), “sin techo” (roofless), “mendigo” (beggar), “indigente” (indigent), and the most generic term “pobres” (poor), with the aim of being as exhaustive as possible.

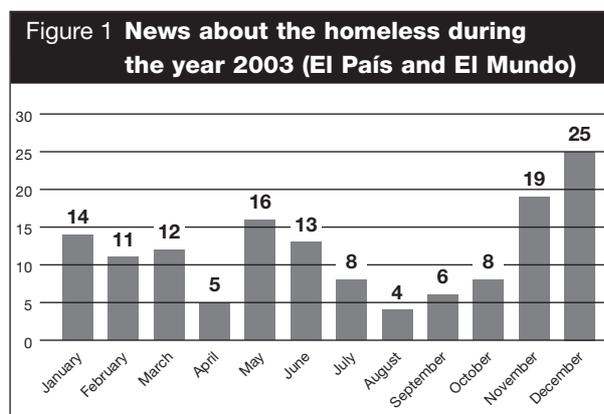
For these terms, the search provided thousands of journalistic references, whose summaries we had to read one by one. Once the news not directly related to our research theme had been eliminated, we selected a total of 219 news items, 122 from *El País* and 97 from *El Mundo*. One cannot conclude from this distribution that the theme has greater importance in one newspaper than in the other, because, as we have said previously, there is a possibility that our results have been conditioned by the unequal capacity of the search tools provided on the web sites of these two mass media. Articles of very different types and lengths are dealt with, but they have in common the special feature of referring directly to the matters related to homelessness.

Finally, each of these 219 news items was exported to a word processing program and prepared for analysis by professional software designed to carry out content analysis. This task was extremely tedious because it was necessary to cleanse each one of the items of extraneous elements (banners, etc.) until they were reduced to pure text. We used the QSR-Nvivo program for our analysis, which allowed us to carry out very fast and highly efficient searches in addition to a rigorous and comprehensive statistical treatment of the selected contents.

### 3 Regular recurrence

Few of the other social topics that appear in the press fluctuate according to the season as greatly as homelessness. Generally, winter months register a great number of news items related to homelessness. In the winter, low temperatures make life in the streets especially difficult. There are occasional cases of death by freezing. The approach of the Christmas holidays brings, together with the first advertisements for champagne, the launch of the so-called “campaign against cold” in big cities. To sum up, these circumstances make the question of homelessness a Christmas and winter topic, similar to Christmas candy, Santa Claus or the Three Kings.

A year may not be enough time to establish a general tendency in a conclusive way, but even with this limitation, if we watch the publishing rhythm of articles about homelessness in 2003 in both newspapers, it is obvious that the months of November and December are the ones which mark the peak of most impact, followed by the cold months of January-February-March, and from then on a decline begins which is only interrupted by isolated events (see figure 1). At the beginning of summer it is true that there is a slight upturn. In May and June, this occurred as a consequence of some isolated news stories which dealt with a certain tragic death; the start of a new “campaign against heat;” the spread of information from a study; and the coincidence with one of the most publicised events of this period: the celebration of an international championship of street-soccer in Austria, in which a team from Madrid took part. In any case, during the months of November-December-January, 41% of all news items were published.



#### 4 Terms

During the last few years an important debate has taken place among the people involved in the care of the homeless concerning the most appropriate expression to use with reference to their users/clients. Remember that during the 80's, the expression "transient" (transeunte in Spanish) was the most commonly used term because it seemed that it had a less pejorative connotation than vagrant, beggar or indigent, which were other terms being used. As the term "transeunte" in Spanish refers to a wandering, nomadic and rootless life, going from one shelter to another, use of this term when describing behaviour which could be understood as characteristic of homelessness or in order to define the problem, meant that other kinds of allusions of a personal nature were avoided. However, since the end of the 90's, the influence of the first University research about the problem (Vega1995; Muñoz 1996; Cabrera 1998), is noticeable. These researchers frequently used the translation into Spanish of the English term "homeless" ("sin hogar" in Spanish), with all the semantic and content associations that it involved, because when mentioning the situation and not the nature or the behaviour of people, the limitations of certain stereotyped points of view that had been held on the matter until then became evident. The stereotype had been linked exclusively to the dynamics generated around shelters and their clients: male, alone, rootless, with alcohol and/or mental health problems, etc. But, on the contrary, the expression "sin hogar" ("homeless") forced people to consider the matter as a problem closely linked to problems of access to housing and, therefore, as something that required including the other people affected, groups and collectives in various circumstances (minors and non-institutionalised young people, battered women and one-parent families without a home, immigrants and foreigners without accommodation, etc.).

Between the expression "transient" and the expression "homeless" there is a third expression: "roofless", although it is a lot closer to the latter. To a large extent, it has been included in the Spanish language coming from the literal translation of the French expression "sans-abri" and nowadays coexists with "homeless" and has a more or less similar use. Nevertheless, over the last few years, some of us are suggesting restricting its use to designate the people who are literally living in the open, which implies a limitation of its use to make it agree with the English term "roofless," whereas we would use "sin hogar" for the more generic situation designated as "homeless."

Currently, from what we find in the news analysed, the terminological debate among professionals does not affect the language of the mass media. If we consider the use of the different expres-

sions in the two newspapers, there doesn't seem to be any important difference between the terms. "Sin hogar" (homeless) and "sin techo" (roofless) are widely used in both newspapers.

**Table 1 % of articles in which the following expressions appear**

Expression	El País	El Mundo
"personas sin hogar" (homeless people)	36	35
"personas sin techo" (roofless people)	8	10
sin hogar (homeless)	45	40
sin techo (roofless)	39	46
Indigentes (indigents)	49	51
Mendigos (beggars)	18	19
Transeúntes (transients)	10	18
Vagabundo (vagrant)	2	5

The term "transient" is rarely used even though its use is important due to its pejorative connotational effect, clearly anchored in obsolete views of the problem (*"Two indigents were hurt last Friday night while sleeping due to a fire in the abandoned house where they lived, (...) The transients were hurt, but their condition is not serious, as health sources have stated"* (El País, 3/15/2003).

Due to its negative connotations "indigent" is often used by journalists to "disgrace" the image of a current politician, or it is used among politicians of different parties to show the weaknesses and mistakes of the rival policy, as in the following text: *"The Employment and Citizen Services town councillor, Ana Botella, yesterday asked the big town councils of the region to open shelters for the homeless, since only Aranjuez and Colmenar Viejo (cities in the Madrid region) have them. The town councillor thinks that the lack of shelters in other municipalities produces a "calling effect" on the capital. The main municipalities reply that "they hardly have any indigents," so, for the town councils of the big cities of the south, ruled by the left-wing, the matter of "indigence" is something that only takes place in the territory ruled by the Popular Party (right-wing), and in this way, the expression "homeless" (personas sin hogar) used by Ana Botella (town councillor in charge of the Social Services in the Madrid Town Council and wife of the former president, José M<sup>a</sup> Aznar) is contrasted to the term "indigents" in the mouths of her opponents.*

The word "indigent" is repeated in the most gruesome articles, as a way of provoking morbid fascination in whoever reads it, and thus, we have: *"An indigent arrested for killing*

another one in a fight in Benidorm (on the East coast)”; *“Three indigents perish due to a fire and two hikers die in Peñalara”*; *“Yesterday the Police rescued six indigents who were trapped by fire while they were sleeping in an abandoned municipal car lot in Mislata”*. Sometimes, the gruesome news is accompanied by other added circumstances which make it twice as morbid and disturbing, such as in this brief note from a news agency where to the victim’s condition as an indigent who had been raped, a reference to the ethnic condition of the aggressor, a foreigner, is added, and to be more specific it gives his name, Mostafá: *“The provincial court of Madrid has sentenced Mostafá B., a 40 year old Moroccan who in 2002 raped an indigent, to eight years imprisonment”* (El Mundo, March 23 2004).

The stigma the poor carry is not only obtained through the outrageous use of certain nouns to designate these homeless people, but a similar effect is also obtained by joining them to other characters also found in the urban landscape of any big city. It is common to find lists of character types which include the poor among a plethora of groups and collectives which, if they have anything in common, it is only their condition as being socially stigmatised: *“Beggars, cardsharps, tourists, pickpockets, cops, storekeepers, illegal street vendors, demonstrators, junk mail distributors, male prostitutes, tent evangelists, guards and those who guard the guards”*; *“...the homeless, old people and defenceless children...”*.

The word “beggar” is used in a more or less abusive way to refer to the homeless, and is used systematically in all news references to police interventions, such as: *“the Town Council will place fences in all the streets in order to eradicate beggars from the area, to stop prostitution and to improve health conditions”*; *“The Popular Party candidate is asking for severe measures against beggars and street prostitutes”*; *“Garzón frees the Algerian beggar who was arrested on Monday in San Sebastián. The judge thinks that Alí Amrous, arrested on Monday by the Erzaintza (Basque police), doesn’t have any connection with the terrorist attacks (of March 11th).”* It is easy to see that the association of begging, not as an illegal or punishable practice, but rather as a non-legitimate or at least uncomfortable activity, makes people in similar situations and those involved in street clean-ups link the homeless -changed into “beggars”-, with people such as prostitutes, cardsharps, hooligans and other urban “subspecies”. *“Video surveillance expels beggars, young people who are drinking and skaters from the streets.”*

## 5 Symbolic association with other marginalised people

In the collective mind, the homeless are invariably discredited and symbolically dismissed because they are linked to other problems which carry a strong stigma, such as mental illness, laziness at work, drug addiction, alcoholism, illegal immigration and delinquency. All these derogatory connections are often confirmed and amplified because of the language used in the mass media. In this way, thematically searching among our selected news items, we find a very high proportion of these subjects in the information that speaks about the homeless (cf. following chart).

Table 2 Symbolic association of the homeless with other marginalized people	
<i>(number of articles checked is 219)</i>	
Foreigners	79
Drugs	49
Alcohol	33
Mental health	23
Unemployment	16

The massive association of homelessness with references to immigration/foreigners is amazing, considering that the latter is quite recent among us in Spain. However, the thing is that nowadays most extreme poverty speaks another language, has different culinary habits, has no papers allowing him/her to legally work and wanders around in the streets, or from one shelter to another, looking for a way to survive. As the president of Caritas Spain, Nuria Gispert, states in an interview: *“We look after the last of the last. And the last are now the immigrants.”*

It is common to show the enormous percentage that foreigners represent when describing social services; some texts mention 80%; others 75% or 70%, but it almost never goes below 50%. However, the usual tone is not so neutral and descriptive and, for example, the reference to immigrants is used as an element of discredit, as in the following article, which speaks of the urban space where the homeless wander as a place *“where you can be pick-pocketed, where beggars sleep, where male prostitutes are found and where immigrants stay.”*

Sometimes the journalist helps as well to spread the homeless Spaniard’s complaints: *“To get a bed in a shelter, you have to compete with 30 Bolivians, 30 Ecuadorians and another 30 Spaniards”* and only exceptionally do news items appear showing the problems and added difficulties that being a foreigner in an illegal situation add to being roofless.



## 6 Politics

But perhaps, of all the negative associations with which the Spanish mass media has linked the language of homelessness and immigration, the one with the most wicked effects is that caused as a consequence of Romanian gipsy clans in many Spanish cities, who systematically practice begging and which have made it possible to bring back attitudes of rejection and negative views about poverty that we thought had disappeared long ago.

To further distort the view of the problem in the press, the connection between the homeless and the drug world emerges from the most marginalized and despised sub-group of drug addicts, the people who wander around the shanty towns called Las Barranquillas and La Quinta in Madrid, living outdoors at the mercy of the weather while scheming a way to get another dose. According to the words of an NGO president, they are in a *“third world situation” “with hundreds of sick drug addicts wandering around sleeping in shanties and tents”* living somewhere between the vein-pocking room, the wait to get a needle and the chance to get something to shoot up. The most derelict drug addicts have joined the ever present alcoholics, with or without treatment, and the mentally ill, when identifying and visualising the image of a homeless person. This is the case of “XX”: *“two decades in the streets just about surviving in the roundabout of Quevedo (in north-central Madrid), sick, dirty and with a severe problem of alcoholism”*. In the case of the mentally ill we find a great number of articles that reflect the launch in 2003 of the first street group to give psychiatric aid in the open air in Madrid. The newness of having a doctor in psychiatry among its members turned out to be a great attraction for the press, which time and again reflected that *“a little light had been thrown with the creation, in June 2003, of a mental care mobile group made up of a psychiatrist, two nurses and an educator”* and whose aim was *“to get the indigents who have mental problems to start treatment and get better living conditions”*. In any case, the old, stereotyped image of the homeless is described time and again in journalistic speech as linked to mental loss more than to social and structural problems. Press articles don’t do anything but confirm, repeat and amplify what is already known or thought to be known about the problem.

On a different level, a great number of the articles that appear in the newspapers deal with the setting in motion of some new service, the introduction of new ideas or the launch of the campaign against cold (the winter campaign to take the homeless to shelters); up to 40 news items make reference to these events and, logically, they have a lot to do with the work done by of the press offices of the social services departments, in charge of getting every little item, or big news, published: *“this year the anti-drug agency will open accommodations for homeless drug addicts who are undergoing methadone treatment”*; *“Barcelona will have a hostel for 300 ‘homeless’”*; *“Botella (the Town Councillor of Madrid) opens up a centre for indigents in La Casa de Campo (a park in the west of Madrid) and closes the underground station used as a shelter,”* etc. The height of this advertising is reached when newspapers print not some new action but instead give publicity to a series of good intentions for the future: *“The Town Council will build a new Shelter for the homeless”*, or *“The Town Council will create a forum to study the roofless”* as *El País* made public in December 2003, an initiative that by the middle of October still wasn’t underway.

Even though the political authorities of the municipality are important and try to get publicity for their actions, there are also others, like NGOs which try to capture mass media space to make themselves visible to public opinion and to launch their criticism of those in power while trying to claim and establish their prominence in the matter: *“The Saint Egidio community reveals that there are 2000 roofless in Barcelona”*; *“Around 100 indigents with psychiatric problems struggle to survive out in the open, according to NGOs”*; among these NGOs, Caritas may be one of the most active and have easier access to written mass media, either to denounce the situation or to publicise their actions. In up to 22 articles a reference to Caritas appeared, whereas 17 mentioned the Brothers of Saint John of God, 10 the RAIS, 5 the FACIAM, and 3 Feantsa.



## 7 Danger, for whom?

Politics appear time and again in the written press using the poor and the excluded as an opportunity or excuse to try to gain space or a headline in the mass media. Politicians appear again and again to say what is being done, what they plan to do or what may be done. In this vanity show, the elections are without doubt the high point when those who are going to be candidates or those who have just won the elections appear in shelters and services for the homeless. When elections come, they try to show social sensitivity, proximity and human warmth to the voters. There doesn't seem to be much difference between political groups. For instance, in the case of a Socialist candidate, a newspaper article appeared in which one could read that *"the candidate for the post of mayor from the Socialist Party went incognito with the volunteers of 'Solidarios' to get acquainted with the situation of scores of indigent people who live in the streets."* However, in spite of going incognito and as it was stated in the press, *"She didn't want to be photographed. She didn't want the press there. She didn't want her team around,"* what a coincidence!, the journalist was there and under his attentive eye and agile pen the candidate for mayor *"kept on giving out coffee, broth and food until well past midnight."*

This election activity among the poorest, not to obtain their vote, but to correct, consolidate or change some aspects of the citizens' opinion of politicians, is sometimes presented by journalists as a kind of descent into hell marked with epic elements: *"Yesterday Ana Botella had one of her most difficult tests as a candidate: the visit to the Saint Isidro shelter, one of the toughest areas in Madrid in 2003"* with which they help to reinforce the stereotype of distance, separation, danger and security once more regarding the most excluded.

This brief analysis of contents would be incomplete without mentioning the matter of security in relation to homelessness. Regrettably, over these last few years there has been a current of opinion which has arisen and is trying to highlight the danger, risk and conflict which would threaten good, upright citizens as a consequence of the existence of excluded homeless people in the middle of the richest societies. To worsen the situation even more, there are sometimes small-minded politicians, with even smaller amounts of information, who ask for urgent measures to stop the deterioration of security in the streets, calling for zero tolerance and police actions against the poor: *"The PP candidate (to the Catalan regional government) asks for severe measures against street beggars and prostitutes"*, and further it is explained that *"immigrants in illegal situations, street prostitutes, beggars and hardened criminals will be the crux of the fight for security in the streets if they [the PP] are elected"*. They portray this mixture of poor and excluded people to colour the image of poverty, identifying it with criminality. This same aim appears once again in the article which showed the intention of the socialist town council of Barcelona to place *"fences in the access streets (to a well known market in Barcelona) in order to eradicate the beggars from that area, to stop prostitution and to improve health conditions"*. The homeless, prostitutes and other shady people are again the focus of the press and politicians and end up being set aside, marginalized and doubly excluded for security, police or health reasons. Surveillance cameras, separation fences, policemen, "anti-beggar benches" with an arm in the middle so they cannot lie down or sleep on them - everything is permissible in order to clean up the streets, because the risk seems to come from the most poor: *"a total of 187 under-aged children of Romanian nationality were arrested in Madrid during the first six months of the year for illegal sales at crossroads and traffic lights, for begging in these same places, for cleaning windscreens or for stealing from stopped cars."* Nothing is said about the obligation of tutelage and defence of the violated rights of these minors; the reference to the danger they entail and the confirmation that they have been "arrested" is enough.



## 8 Conclusion

However, if we analyse the news appearing in the same newspapers objectively, it is confirmed that security problems relating to homelessness are, in general, restricted to problems that affect the homeless themselves. Even though they are given less media importance and less fanfare than the security operation prior to the prince's wedding, the truth is that newspapers regularly report a continuous trickle of news items where the victims of violent events are usually found to be excluded, homeless people. We have found up to 35 articles where tragic events take place; in 31 of them the homeless turn out to be the victims, whereas only in 4 were they the attackers, and even in these few cases the victim was usually also a homeless person. These facts are far from being isolated cases, because, as it was stated at another time in the *El Mundo* newspaper, gathering together information from a report published in 2004 by the Movement against Intolerance: *"more than 4,000 aggressions are committed in Spain each year by neo-Nazi and fascist groups, especially on immigrants, indigents, homosexuals, prostitutes and youths who look different (hippies, the long-haired, etc.)"*. However, the most terrible case of those that the newspapers reported during the analysed period was without doubt the case where a group of "well-to-do" young people were arrested in Barcelona *"accused of humiliating beggars and recording it on video"* just to have fun.

The written press contains a huge quantity of information about homelessness. The information often shows the stereotypes and prejudices that emerge from and return to society, apart from showing a haste and urgency with which the articles are probably edited, and of which in some sense the journalists themselves end up being the victims when trying to honestly carry out their work. It is very difficult to find information which strays from the stereotype, or that reorganises the data so as to present it in a serious, rigorous way. Usually shocking images predominate where the most startling and crude things are sought out, and where the journalists are taken up in the passion of searching for, or making up, an exoticism that attracts the eye of the reader and that allows them to establish themselves as veteran and observant journalists. Nevertheless, it is also clear, after a brief analysis, that the press is very useful in drafting a statement of everything that happens and carrying out a daily tracking of our society. The fact is, that far beyond the aims specific to the people who take part and have obvious interests in the dramatic life of the homeless, an objective analysis of the written texts, the vocabulary used, the themes and sub-themes that adorn the information about homelessness, done with the appropriate software to make it objective and to bring out the hidden structural relationships present in the language, immediately highlights the existence of latent guidelines, regularities and models that affect the form as well as the content of the information reported in newspapers. It is an easily confirmed fact that poverty is used subsidiarily before elections or at certain times of the year such as Christmas, and that there is a certain tendency to turn exclusion into an opportunity to write literature. But it is also true that the plentiful appearance of this subject in the newspapers is a good way to point out that our society has not completely lost its sensitivity, its conscience, or its respect for the dignity of its poorest members.

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# The profile of the homeless in the Luxembourg press

By ROLAND MAAS

## [abstract]

*This report presents the findings of an analysis of the image of the homeless as reflected in a section of the Luxembourg press in 2003. An analysis of 48 articles published in Luxembourg's two main newspapers shows that both dailies, and their French versions, differ neither in their explanation of the causes of homelessness nor in the way they portray the plight of the homeless. The report is based on an analysis of the different issues addressed by the newspapers in connection with homelessness. It shows that the image of homeless people varies with the events to which the articles refer. There are various explanations for this. Firstly, changes in Luxembourg's changing social and economic context have led to radical changes in the composition of the homeless population. This has varied the mix in the homeless community and increased the visibility of the homeless in the urban space. Then, the changing and more nebulous profile of the homeless has enabled journalists to adapt the image of the homeless to the context of their reporting.*

## 1 Introduction

Recent annual reports of voluntary organizations dealing with the homeless have reported a rise in the number of homeless people in the City of Luxembourg. It is a situation that has been variously commented and reported on in the Luxembourg press in recent years.

This report for the research working group on the changing profiles of the homeless for the FEANTSA Observatory analyses the image of the homeless as conveyed by a section of the written press in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg in 2003.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 THE NEWSPAPERS SELECTED

As in many other spheres, Luxembourg's size is reflected in its press landscape, i.e., a limited range. Most Luxembourg newspapers have sympathies to one political party or other, but, by and large, the national press set-up is heavily dominated by the "**Luxemburger Wort**", which has Christian Party sympathies, and the "**Tageblatt**", which has Socialist Party leanings. Both newspapers are published in German and French, with slightly more content in German.

To address the country's social and economic realities, both newspapers publish a slimline version in French, essentially directed at French-speaking frontier workers and the French-speaking foreign nationals that live in Luxembourg. This is therefore justification for also including articles published in the French versions: "La Voix du Luxembourg" for the French version of the "Luxemburger Wort" and "Le Quotidien" for the "Tageblatt".

The plan, therefore, is to draw comparisons between Luxembourg's two big dailies (and their French versions).

## 2.2 HOW THE ARTICLES WERE SELECTED

An Internet search yielded no satisfactory result for the Tageblatt, returning only a repeated error message, while the Luxemburger Wort website has no keyword search facility. Another research method was therefore chosen: The Luxembourg government's press digest is available on the Internet and offers searches by keyword, newspaper and date. I was therefore able to search by the following keywords:

### > keywords in French

(period: 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2003:)

- sans-abri
- sdf

### > keywords in German

(period: 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2003:)

- obdachlos
- Obdachlosigkeit

To supplement the number of articles, the list of articles retrieved from the government's press digest site was compared with those archived in the CEPS/INSTEAD resources centre.

This yielded 48 articles on the homeless in the four newspapers cited. The method of selection lays no claim to completeness, and the fact that there are an equal number of articles per newspaper (24 each) is pure chance.

## 3 Context and situation of the homeless in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg

The organization of Luxembourg society is going through major changes in social and economic, demographic and urban terms. Unemployment, nearly non-existent even a few years ago, is rising. For the first time ever, the job market is mainly occupied by frontier workers and foreign nationals living in Luxembourg. Luxembourg, with its highly-developed financial sector, offers a high standard of living to those who were able to take part in the recent economic growth. This has created the risk of a widening social divide between those who were able to take part in growth and those who for one reason or another found themselves experiencing social exclusion.

As regards homelessness, there are no reliable statistics on the trend in the numbers of homeless other than the surveys done for FEANTSA, the most recent of which (a general count) dates from 1996. Voluntary organizations working with the homeless report that the numbers of homeless are rising, and include a growing number of women and young people prone to drug abuse.

That said, the only night shelter for the homeless is in Bonnevoie, a district of the City of Luxembourg near the railway station, along with other services for drug addicts and the homeless. An emergency shelter for drug addicts was recently opened (December 2003). This district therefore attracts large numbers of homeless people from other towns in Luxembourg, which creates problems for local residents and railway station users.

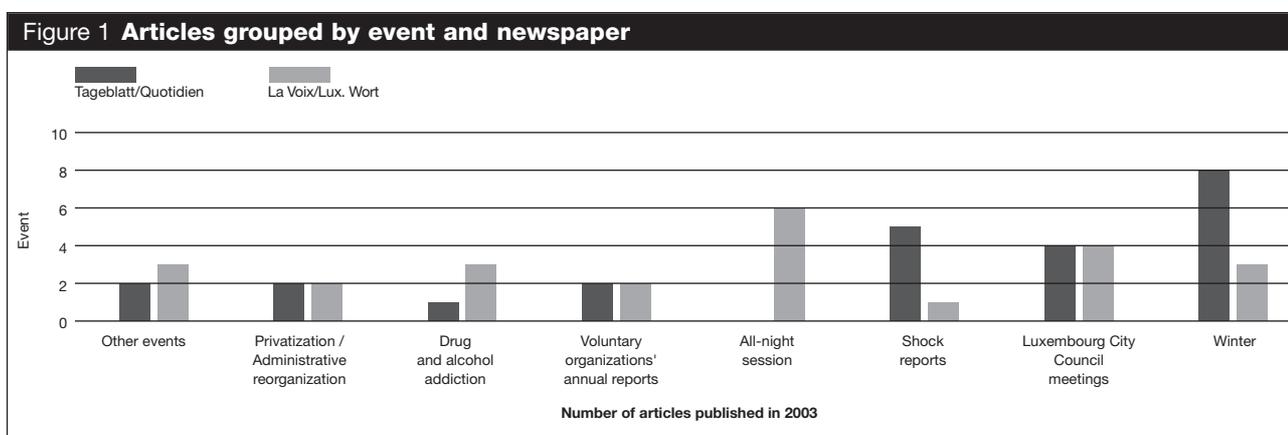
Other developments observed: a generalized crackdown in the name of law and order is taking shape. Squats are being shut down, private security guards are now a common sight in superstores and other pressure points in the town. The growing population size in a fairly compact country with a high standard of living means that a process of gentrification is starting to take its toll. Rents and property prices are high, and beyond the reach of the homeless and low-income groups.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 THE EVENTS DESCRIBED IN THE ARTICLES

To get an initial idea of how the homeless are dealt with in the media, the articles were classed by theme (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1 Articles grouped by events reported				
Event	Number	Remarks	Tageblatt/Quotidien	La Voix/Lux. Wort
Winter campaign / makeshift shelter / cold	11	Articles on supplying provisional accommodation in winter (9), or articles about Christmas (1) or the big freeze (1).	8	3
Luxembourg City Council meeting	8	Luxembourg City Council because services and shelters are in the Bonnevoie district and the area around the railway station is greatly affected by the problem of homelessness.	4	4
Shock reports / polemic discourse / elections / visibility	6	This comprises articles dealing with homelessness as such from a critical and political stance.	5	1
All-night session on homelessness	6	Abbé Pierre was the “surprise guest” at an awareness-building evening and showing of the film “SDF go home”.	0	6
Voluntary organizations’ annual reports		Publication of voluntary organizations’ annual reports	2	2
Drug / alcohol addiction	4	On drug and alcohol addiction	1	3
Privatization / administrative reorganization	4	Two articles on the planned liberalization of Luxembourg’s railways	2	2
Other events	5	European Social Fund / Handing over a cheque to a voluntary organization / Gender relations / Plight of young people / New year intake	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>



**4.2 WHAT INTERPRETATION TO PUT ON THIS INITIAL SUBJECT ANALYSIS?**

The articles were collated and some were discarded for lack of relevance. Seven categories were finally selected (Table 2):

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Tageblatt/ Quotidien</b>	<b>La Voix/ Lux. Wort</b>
The winter campaign	8	3
City Council meetings	4	3
Polemic discourse / shock reports	5	1
The all-night session on homelessness	0	6
Drug and alcohol addiction	1	3
Market liberalization	1	1
Gender relations and prison reform	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>

**The winter campaign**

There were eleven published articles, eight in the “centre left” newspapers and three in the “centre right” newspapers. After the squats were shut down, existing provision proved insufficient to meet the needs of homeless people. The Grand Ducal Pavilion made available by Luxembourg railways (CFL) rapidly became over-crowded, forcing the overflow to be rehoused in larger makeshift emergency provision created out of adapted transport containers. This winter campaign was first run during winter 2002-2003, and repeated in winter 2003-2004. 10 of the 11 articles refer to these 2 campaigns.

It was the “systematic shutting-down of squats by the police for safety reasons” that forced the need to find a solution to replace the “spaces” closed so as to prevent people dying of cold in Luxembourg.

The articles repeatedly give assurances that the council is looking after public safety, that the homeless and drug addicts are supervised by community workers during the day and that a private security firm keeps watch on the facilities at night. Two articles also mention the rules that must be observed by anyone wanting to stay there.

Here, the media simply report the authorities’ message that they have the situation of the homeless in hand, and that those concerned by the problem are not simply doing nothing but working together to resolve the problem. The “cooperation” tested out in the first winter campaign (winter 2002-2003) proved extremely valuable in carrying out subsequent winter campaigns. This essentially was the basic message put across by the media.

In social welfare terms, to borrow from Julien Damon, there can be said to be a retargeting of policy action which results in an institutionalization of action plans and fosters the development of a “toolkit” to get to grips with poverty<sup>(1)</sup>.

But policy action also has to address other concerns, as is well-illustrated by the “Tageblatt” article of 20 December 2003 (2nd winter campaign): solutions more tailored to the needs of the homeless and drug addicts could attract “homelessness tourists” if rumours spread of the capital city’s opportunities for first class overnight stays. The councils of surrounding localities were called on to create similar provision, as were nearby municipalities in neighbouring countries, for fear of hordes of incomers luxuriating (schadlos halten) in the newly-created facilities, which would be one consequence of the opening-up of Europe’s borders. But the authorities firmly said that no one would be turned away!

The media do not just report the “official line” at press conferences. Julien Damon analyses what journalists do as follows: “They take part in stating and defining the boundaries of a social issue as it appears on the political agenda. They act as filters for shaping and changing the political agenda”<sup>(2)</sup>.

The photographs accompanying the reports further reflect the “public safety” aspect. Almost all the articles play up drug-taking among the homeless users of this emergency shelter provision, while the photographs show either officials touring the site, the facilities themselves, or workers putting the final touches to the premises.

**Council meetings**

The seven articles reporting Luxembourg City Council meetings - four in “Tageblatt” and three in “Luxemburger Wort” - show that the discussions were mainly concerned with the council’s budgets, and that the problems of the homeless were glossed over. City councillors want provision to be decentralized and become more specialized. The articles mainly reported councillors’ speeches and other issues addressed at meetings.

<sup>(1)</sup> Julien Damon, “La question des SDF”, Ed. PUF, Paris, 2002.

<sup>(2)</sup> Julien Damon, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

### Polemic discourse and shock reports

Six articles were found for this category, five from "Tageblatt" and "Le Quotidien", and one for the "centre right" newspapers "La Voix" and "Luxemburger Wort". While the research methodology lays no claim to completeness, this difference in the number of articles on homelessness can be explained by the political party landscape in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg in 2003. Up to June 2004, Luxembourg was governed by a "centre right"-liberal party coalition, and it is possible that the press sympathetic to the then-opposition "centre left" party sought to play up the situation. Two articles refer directly to the 2003 government.

Others play on public safety and fear to stir up public and government opinion.

For "Luxemburger Wort" and "La Voix", only one article could be found in this category: an open letter to the Prime Minister ahead of Christmas calling for the living conditions of the poor, and support for charitable work and compassion to be put on the political agenda. This, therefore, is a newspaper professing "Christian" values, publishing an exhortation to moral values and charity at this time of year.

The public safety issue will be analysed first through the prism of an article published in "Le Quotidien" for 12 June 2003, p.3: "City Council loses plot". The article was published in the "Local government / area planning and management" section.

The author inveighs against both real crime (drugs and the sex trade) and Luxembourg City Council policy which "*grants privilege to fill up the coffers of a municipality from which they earn their living*". It contrast the highly profitable mobility of workers (authorized) and the annoying "mobility" (transience) of the homeless (put up with). It uses devaluing and stigmatizing language.

*"The homeless gather in three places, around the town centre, around the railway station and around the Bonnevoie services which take them in at night. Their appearance and behaviour are unpleasant. They are mostly in packs, bawling, drinking, spewing and brawling"*.

He inveighs against drugs and the sex trade - which the authorities are not tackling - as sources of crime and poverty, but the homeless are not even considered as human beings, but reduced to something in "packs", which leaves free rein to the reader's imagination.

The other articles published in "Tageblatt" entitled "Nur Hilfllosigkeit?" (Any ideas?) and "Vor allem hilflos?" (Helpless?) play up the government's failure to address the challenge of globalization. The author uses the stereotype of the "tramp" to emphasize that yesterday's ideas are no good to help "today's" homeless.

The authors consider the increased visibility of the homeless. Again, to borrow Julien Damon's analysis<sup>(3)</sup>, the public space can be said to have become more porous as a result of decriminalization and an opening-up of public spaces in past years. The content of the articles is adjusted to a new social reality: that of a change in the way urban and social space are managed, as a previously "invisible", or at least tolerated, population becomes a problem. This increased visibility is one consequence of the changes under way in the social and economic organization of Luxembourg society. For example, the rise in young homeless reported by voluntary organizations may be a sign that this subgroup is finding it increasingly hard to integrate into Luxembourg society, and that the mechanisms of economic and/or social integration which have hitherto helped create the social cement of the country are no longer appropriate to the lifestyles of some young people.

The public space has become the only space that the homeless have, and so it is obviously used, not to say owned, as a space for existing and assisting. It has become a "resource" space. The individuals concerned necessarily leave their imprint on it, and their "exposed lifestyle" affords them no opportunity for concealing their physical condition, which is often undermined by the circumstances of their existence.

The authors play up the fear of a "horde" of homeless threatening public safety in this urban space, even if they ultimately hold "society" and "politicians" to account.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Julien Damon, *op. cit.*

### The all-night session on homelessness

Abbé Pierre was the “surprise” guest at the “all-night session on homelessness” organized in the Bonnevoie rotunda where Roman Biver’s film “SDF go home” was previewed, followed by a round table attended by the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, various ministers (Minister for Culture, Minister for the Family and Minister of Health), MPs and many representatives from civil society. The round table was followed by an “all-night session”.

No report of this event was found in “Tageblatt” or “Le Quotidien”, while “Luxemburger Wort” and “La Voix” published six articles, four of them in “La Voix”<sup>(4)</sup>.

Newspaper coverage played up the “all-night session on homelessness’s” aim to stir up public and government opinion with large photos, double-page spreads and the event “exclusive”. The reports illustrate different aspects of the event: an introduction to and interview with Abbé Pierre, comment on social exclusion, poverty and the “homeless” in Luxembourg, explanations of the situation and changes under way in the profile of the homeless by front-line workers.

The press reported the event as a “happening”. “La Voix du Luxembourg” of 26 September headlines its page 22 report, for example: “Special all-night session on homelessness” above an article headlined “The sweet fragrance of fellowship” describing the evening as a *“lesson in the human touch: misery immortalized in immensely beautiful and immensely moving black and white photographs exhibited inside the rotunda, as a reminder of the reality of a punishing daily life”*. Most of the articles mix the pressing problem of homelessness with the presentation of Abbé Pierre and the event itself. The event certainly helped awaken a more acute awareness of the problems of the homeless in Luxembourg, and it is not overstating the case to talk of an attempt by front-line workers to “leverage good works”, using support from the spectacle-hungry media to achieve it.

<sup>(4)</sup> This high number in the French version of “Luxemburger Wort” is attributable to the wide awareness of Abbé Pierre’s work among the French-speaking public.

### Drug and alcohol addiction

This category contains four articles: three from “Luxemburger Wort” on drug and alcohol addiction, and one from “Le Quotidien”.

The “Luxemburger Wort” articles mention homelessness only in the specific context of action against drug addiction, or in comments on a report on problem drinking generally, pointing out the falsity of the stereotyped image of the homeless as alcoholics, that 90% of alcoholics are invisible, and that anyone can end up with a drink problem.

The final article, by contrast, that in “Le Quotidien”, is a “shock report” article of the type described earlier. Its headline *“No getting away from the addicts at the station”*, and the subhead: *“The railway station is still the gathering point for dropouts of all kinds. A final shelter for a growing number of drug addicts and homeless”*, tries to put a public spotlight on two things: the failings in public safety at the railway station, and the lack of public assistance for those enduring extreme hardship.

So, the author uses the growing number of “basket-cases and drop-outs” as the basis for noting the existence of, “permanent patrols by too few security guards in a bid to avoid the worst”.

A bigger police presence is what is needed, therefore.

### Market liberalization

Although only two articles fall into this category, there is a valid point in examining what they say.

The Tageblatt article traces the timeline of a token strike against European plans to liberalize the public transport “market”. The report on the strike opens with a description of the inside of Luxembourg central railway station at three in the morning: *“... to the right of the ticket offices, two homeless people are sleeping on a bench, with a Great Dane dozing quietly in front of them (...). Opposite them, half a dozen young people slumped half-asleep on another bench”*.

After this short scene-setting piece, the article launches off into a description of the strike.

What is interesting about this is its emphasis on the peacefulness of the homeless people described. Even the Great Dane seems not to inspire apprehension in the observers. This compares with other more targeted descriptions of homelessness in and around the railway station which often play up aggression and lack of public safety. The inference is that the context of the report and the event is what creates the image of the homeless! This peaceful image is in stark

contrast with that of “spending all day raving on public benches” or “*Their appearance and behaviour are unpleasant. They are mostly in packs, bawling, drinking, spewing and brawling*”, or again, “*too few security guards*” (see above).

The second article reports a press conference by the Luxembourg railworkers Christian trade union after the summer break in September 2003 to take issue with the European liberalization policy pursued by the Luxembourg railways. The liberalization policy is criticized in general terms, and to illustrate the consequences of liberalization, the union officials argue that social policy should not just be about pensions and sickness funds, but should also do more about the evil of drugs and “*devastating homelessness*” (Obdachlosigkeit grassierende).

Homelessness is used here to criticize a liberalization policy pursued by Luxembourg railways and to point up where social protection is going wrong in that connection. Homelessness is portrayed as an “uncontrollable disease” through the use of the word “grassierende”.

#### Gender relations and prison reform

The final analysis is of two articles: one on domestic violence, the other on the reform of Givenich semi-open prison.

- Gender relations

This article - “Krieg des Geschlechter” (sex wars) - takes domestic violence as its theme, moving from the conventional image of the battered woman and Luxembourg’s overflowing women’s refuges to focus on the problem of battered **men**: “*How many of these men suddenly thrown out onto the street only answered back, how many other men have lost the courage to stand up for themselves because what may be one-sided legislation still needs clarifying?*”

The author finally inveighs against the fact that the EU programme against violence can find 20 million euros for the next four years to combat violence against women, but not men, and refers to a declaration on human rights violations centred mainly on violence against women.

The author argues that what Luxembourg needs is not “a battle of the sexes” but a “united front”.

Ultimately, this is a warning against the perverse effects of legislation focused on violence against women. The “sex wars” headline purports to be “neutral”, but on closer examination, the published figures for women’s refuges are self-explanatory. The author can only speculate on the number of “battered men” who no longer dare stand up for themselves or who, since the new legislation came in, find themselves homeless.

- Reform of Givenich semi-open prison

This article reports on the modernization of Givenich semi-open prison. As a general rule, the prison doors will remain open during the day when the prisoners are out at the different workplaces: the prison workshops, woodlands, private firms, or employment schemes for some. Only at nighttime will the prisoners be locked in.

The subheading “A wide range of customers” precedes a description of a practice of a highly significant symbolic importance for the collective image of homelessness in Luxembourg: by law, people can now ask to be “locked up”. “*Some people actually ask to be locked up! These are often socially disadvantaged, roofless “human beings”<sup>(5)</sup>, who are at the end of their tether, some of whom have been turned away by the welfare services. Some come to Givenich out of self-protection against offences they might possibly commit. But even these “guests” have to follow the prison rules. Rule 333 of the rules of 24 March 1989 provides that “homeless people” and “vagrants” can be admitted*”.

The public policy issue is directly raised here - the law equates homeless people with potential offenders. It would be no exaggeration even to talk of self-stigmatization by those who make use of this possibility as the only way to avoid starvation or death by hypothermia. The journalist offers this as an interesting sidelight but does not engage with a critical examination of the practice.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Original German: “Menschen” - Author’s comment. French: “êtres humains” - Tr.

## 5 Conclusion

Although not exhaustive, the press articles collected on homelessness nevertheless illustrates the main trends in the image of homelessness presented in a section of the Luxembourg press.

The basic premise was that selecting newspapers of opposing political hues should also produce opposing discourses on homelessness. But it was found that the two newspapers mixed the causes of homelessness (at individual or structural level) and the categories used to describe the homeless community.

The selected articles were therefore analysed on a subject category basis.

The first step in the approach was to reconstitute the changing pattern of homelessness in Luxembourg in recent years and the measures taken by front-line workers to address it. From this, it was possible to show how the image of the homeless conveyed by the newspapers is closely tied to the event reported, and that the composition of the homeless population has changed in recent years. From the standpoint of Julien Damon's analyses, the process observed can be explained by the recomposition of the homeless population, which means that social welfare action must be re-targeted to "*address the singular problems which are fluid and not exactly of the same kind as the social risks covered collectively by the social security. In a word, the rationale of targeting has changed from delimitable social welfare categories to the more nebulous body of excluded groups*"<sup>(6)</sup>. It is this "nebulous body" of excluded groups that is "new" and - until Luxembourg social welfare provision adjusts to the new social realities - has increased visibility in the City of Luxembourg's more porous urban space.

What is more, it is precisely **this "nebulous body of excluded groups" which the media can zero in on and which leaves them an infinitely variable scope** in their portrayal of homelessness.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Damon J. (2002), "*La question SDF*", Paris, Editions PUF.

# Images of homelessness in two Danish daily newspapers

By INGER KOCH-NIELSEN & IVAN CHRISTENSEN

## [abstract]

*Based upon a search of two Danish papers the picture of the homeless population and of homelessness is described. Women and young people don't figure often in contrast to men, often pictured as addicts or psychiatric patients. Homelessness as such is not seen as a problem for the social order, rather as a consequence of poverty and exclusion.*

## 1 Aim and theory

*The aim of this article is to present images of homelessness in the Danish press represented by two daily papers.*

Theoretically the article is inspired and oriented by "critical discourse analysis" developed by Norman Fairclough in a number of publications (for example see Fairclough, 1992 & 1995). Discourse - by Fairclough - is use of language as a social practice and the central aim of critical discourse analysis is to analyse the language and its involvement in contemporary society.

Texts are apprehended and understood not only ideationally as representing facts in the world but also as contributing to the construction of the social world and what we consider as "facts" within it. By focusing on the interpersonal functioning of language and the linguistic constitution of subjects and identities, critical discourse analysis falls under the heading of social constructivism and especially is to be considered critical towards approaches which try - implicitly or explicitly - to naturalize human beings by assuming a kind of inner core with special authentic characteristics. In general it can be said to include a very high sensitivity towards the historical in our conceptualisation and categorization.

What is done by discourse analysis is to reveal and lay bare the hegemonic configuration of discourses about a given subject. In the present circumstances this means that we are pointing out the hegemonic understanding of images of homelessness in two Danish newspapers and thereby we make it possible to show how other possible understandings and conceptualisations are excluded (see Fairclough, 1995: 2).

## 2 Methodology and data

We chose to study:

- > All kinds of articles from two daily papers;
- > to be found on the internet;
- > representing different general views on society;
- > in 2003;
- > when searching under "hjemløshed" and "hjemløse" - i.e. homelessness and homeless;
- > in Denmark.

We selected two daily national newspapers - one with the image of a rather right-wing paper - "Jyllandsposten" - and the other an intellectual left-wing paper - "Information". Both newspapers have a web-archive containing older articles accessible by a search-engine.

Jyllandsposten is a politically and economically independent newspaper published nationwide. Traditionally - first time published in 1871 - it was most popular in Jutland<sup>(1)</sup> and Funen and could be considered as representing the standpoints of the farmers. In the last 10 years a special section covering only Copenhagen and the capital-region has been published, and this has contributed to its status today as the biggest morning-newspaper in Denmark having a circulation of about 180.000 daily. Politically it has been critical of the left and it has always been considered loyal towards the Liberal (agrarian) party.

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<sup>(1)</sup> "Jylland" is Jutland in Danish (and "Posten" is mail/post).

Today the sympathy towards the farmers plays a lesser role than traditionally and the trend seems to be that Jyllandsposten is turning more and more social-liberal, though with a stress on liberal values. The change should be related to the fact that Jyllandsposten now pays greater attention to socio-political issues, especially in the capital-region. Also the new role of the Liberal party -promoting more social values - seems to play a part in this shift of political outlook, which has been combined with a special editorial focus upon international issues.

The paper "Information" started-up as an illegal news agency - located in Copenhagen - for the resistance movement during the Second World War. When the war finished, the publishing of a daily paper began. Information is politically independent and understands itself as a critical, intellectual newspaper. The readers of Information are persons with long-cycle higher education and the daily circulation is about 21.000 - concentrated in the capital-region. Information only publishes few articles of a factual character - the idea is that their readers get this from other media, including the Internet - and the ambition is to write in-depth critical enlightened articles. Even though Information does not represent any party-political interests, probably nobody would disagree that Information is to be considered at the political left - but more critically than dogmatically.

Our search of articles related to homelessness was done by searching all articles from 2003 containing the words "hjemløse" and "hjemløshed" in the electronic archives available for the two papers. We came across 42 articles from Jyllandsposten and only 3 from Information. The types of articles from Jyllandsposten differed: most of them were feature articles, but we also found focus-articles, a few editorials and letters to the editor, as well as one column. The three articles from Information were two commentaries on TV-programmes and one feature-article. The length of the articles varied from 15 lines to 3 pages, that would be about 125 lines.

We looked for the profiles of the homeless in the different articles, relating to age, gender, citizenships/ethnicity and also looked for the image of homelessness that the article presents on the dimension of social order-social care.

### 3 Images of homelessness

#### 3.1 GENDER - WOMEN

Generally, women are not part of the overall image of homelessness in the two papers. Only three articles portray women as a distinct group among the homeless and all three are from Jyllandsposten.

The first is about a young woman from Greenland, who is interviewed. She came to Denmark when she was 17, because she had no family left in Greenland. Her Danish boyfriend then took her to Denmark promising to look after her, which he didn't. He started to beat her and she took up drinking. At last she left the boyfriend and thus became homeless, as she could not stay with friends because of her alcohol problem. So this woman is pictured as a poor soul, with a sad family background, from Greenland and somehow lured to travel to Denmark under false pretences. Here she takes to drinking which is in accordance with the popular picture of Greenlanders in Copenhagen.

The other article is about prostitution and the living conditions of prostitutes. They are portrayed as narcotics, as Greenlanders and as imported Eastern-European women. They are victims of severe and lethal violence, of repeated rapes even by gangs, of a crime network. They are not blamed.

In the third article women are mentioned in opposition to men: there has for some years existed a so-called "syringe-bus" with the task of giving out free and new syringes to narcotics in the streets of Copenhagen. This task has now been taken over by one of the hostels "Maendenes hjem" (The men's home). In that connection the question is asked whether the many female drug addicts would like to come there for free syringes. The question is answered in the affirmative as many women come there already.

Summing up: in two of the articles women exposed to homelessness are pictured as *victims* - basically of the male society. They are not blamed for their way of life - no moral disgust is shown.

#### 3.2 YOUNGSTERS

Youth homelessness doesn't receive much attention - in just two articles the youth issue is stressed - in the one about the young Greenlandish woman mentioned above and in another about schizophrenic patients.

Young people will more frequently appear under the heading of "boligløs"/houseless, certainly every August and September when the universities and high schools start, and the new students move into the big cities, Copenhagen and Aarhus. Then there will be many features and all kind of discussion about their problems in finding a proper residence. This general problem will be considered a general housing problem, not a homelessness problem.

### 3.3 IMMIGRANTS AND FOREIGNERS

The theme of immigrants is found in 4 articles in Jyllandsposten - while Greenlanders are mentioned in 2. (Greenlanders are Danish citizens, but don't always speak good Danish). The situation of Greenlanders in Denmark was last year the theme of a report from the Ministry of Social Affairs, where there was a specific focus on the homeless among the Greenlanders in Denmark. In the report it was concluded that it was necessary to initiate a focused effort regarding housing, language and culture to encourage and advance the integration of socially deprived Greenlanders in Denmark. The report does not, however, seem to have provoked the articles.

The Greenlanders in the two articles are primarily portrayed as alcoholics. While the young woman from Greenland was a portrait of a victim, the brief article about Julius Hansen is a little more ambivalent. He lives in the street - according to his explanation because he must be close to his friends and their drinking environment. He had been placed in one of the shelters or perhaps a supported accommodation related to a shelter - that is not clear. But he chose to leave it to join his friends. *"I was bored and lonely. So I thought: I'd rather be homeless than lonely"*. The sentence reflects the perception of homelessness as only street homelessness.

The four articles where the focus is on foreigners have different angles. Two are about the increasing amount of immigrants in the Copenhagen hostels. The background for the increase is found in exclusion mechanisms in the housing and labour market in Danish society. Another explanatory factor is found in the lack of ability in the Danish language, but also in women divorcing their husbands, because they won't stand the traditional treatment any longer. Shame is also a factor for male immigrants seeking a place in the hostels. The homelessness of immigrants can thus be said to be portrayed in the same way as homelessness in general: exclusion from the major structures, breaks up and educational inefficiencies in the individual where shame plays a bigger role. All these factors are simply more severe in

the case of immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants are seen as causing a problem in the hostels as the staff are not equipped to cope with their problems and their language needs.

*"I fear that we have created a base for a new underclass eschewed in relation to immigrants and refugees"* (the chairman of the Council for the Exposed Groups, Preben Brandt).

One article is about the eastern European prostitutes mentioned above. They are most often not able to return to where they come from, due to the money they have to pay to their pimps.

One article deals with the Swedes - drug addicts and psychiatric patients - who come to Copenhagen where they are robbed, attacked and live without a proper social network. So they are forced into prostitution and drug pushing. The blame is laid on the shoulders of Swedish society, where severe cuts in the psychiatric system is said to have contributed to the influx of Swedes in the homelessness environment. Back in the fifties, Swedes were a dominant group of non-Danes in the hostels and shelters - together with Finns, and there is a popular general picture of Swedes coming from the puritan Sweden to drink in Denmark. Furthermore most Danes probably enjoy the notion that the Swedish welfare system doesn't function, because the Swedes are perceived of as boasting of the superiorities of their own system compared to others. So this is an article that manages to bring many popular prejudices together.

To sum up: homelessness for those groups also is related to societal factors, and thus the individuals are not to be blamed themselves. To some extent the foreign background is assumed to play a role: the Swedish psychiatric system, language difficulties, the role of the family - and also the inadequacies in the Danish system, which is seeking to cater for them.

### 3.4 DOMINANT PROFILE

What then is the dominant profile of the homeless in the articles that we have searched?

They are men - and they are first of all addicts (14 articles) and psychiatric patients (9 articles), often both characteristics are mentioned in the same article (6). As psychiatric patients their age might be mentioned when talking about the situation of young schizophrenics, but homelessness is nowhere portrayed as a youth problem - it is a problem of psychiatric patients, and, among those, young schizophrenics. Addiction and psychotic diseases are more dominant factors in the picture of homelessness than are age, gender and ethnic background.

## 4 What is homelessness?

There exists no official definition of homelessness in Denmark. A kind of operational definition might be found in the Social Service Act §94 where the users of hostels and shelters are described:

*“...as persons with special social problems, who are without - or are unable to live in - their own apartment, and who are in need of a place to stay and of offers of activating support, care and subsequent assistance.”*

This definition does not relate precisely to the different categories the Feantsa definition includes (that is rooflessness; houselessness; inadequate housing and insecure housing - see annexe 1 to this report).

In the articles that we searched, rooflessness was the background in 7 articles and houselessness - understood as users of hostels - in 6 articles. There is a tendency to describe the roofless as sympathetic people, vagrants, people who have chosen to sleep rough or as participants in a homeless-football game at the city hall square of Copenhagen. An example of this positive picture is the story about a handful of men with dogs and sleeping bags who by night would squat the deck of a theatre boat in the centre of Copenhagen. The owners of the theatre found that this group behaved very well, the deck was cleared every morning, and during the night the group seemed to function as a kind of club. This picture of a resourceful group is underlined by a quotation from a municipal social worker: *“They have chosen the life on the road and seldom accept offers of shelter from the municipality”*.

But others are regarded as outcasts - as for instance the Swedes who are not eligible for social assistance in Denmark, but whose return ticket will be paid for by an outreach team, and the users of the assistance up till now offered from a “nurse-bus”, which is a bus that goes around in the streets of the inner city offering basic medical assistance to the street homeless.

One article (from Information) takes another standpoint. Here a radio feature program is described and criticised. The radio feature apparently portrayed two street homeless as interesting exotics who, in spite of their hard life, have found a kind of security and comfort; one due to a guardian angel! In contrast, the article relates those individual stories to two recently published reports on poverty, and focuses on the general factors that are said to lead to poverty: unemployment and the so-called introductory support that new refugees will receive when arriving in Denmark.

The category of houselessness appears only implicit, when the article is about users of different services. No other of the Feantsa categories appears when searching under homelessness: neither inadequate nor insecure housing. According to a population survey this portrayal is in accordance with the perception of the general public and probably also that of the politicians. Homeless people are those that either sleep rough or who live - for periods perhaps - in the institutions for the homeless. It is also worth noting that none of the articles are about crisis centres for women - only a special refuge for prostitutes turned up in the search. Probably this again reflects the weight of social problems in the Danish concept of homelessness and the close attachment to psychiatric problems and drugs.

## 5 What kind of problem?

*How are homeless people and homelessness perceived? Is it at all considered as a problem of relevance to society and if yes - what kind of problem? Are homelessness and the homeless seen as a threat to society? Are they seen as in need of services? Or could they even be seen as individuals with some kind of resources?*

### 5.1 PUBLIC ORDER AND NIMBY

The topic of public order is the theme in eight of the 45 articles, but the theme is treated in different ways. We have included articles about NIMBY into the category, but in most of the cases the NIMBY-stories are told with a bit of reluctance, stressing that there should be room also for the homeless people.

At the general level then, the NIMBY effect is described in an article about the gentrification of the old working class area in the inner city of Copenhagen “Vesterbro”. The gentrification is giving the housing prices a significant push upward which again affects the composition of the population. But not only is there no room anymore for “ordinary” people. Some of the original population would claim, that *“the old tolerance of the quarter is disappearing. Door-phones are being installed and the yards inside the blocks are turned into closures. At the same time there is an effort to get certain people off the streets”*.

Another article is about the problems that the neighbours of the House for the Homeless claim to experience: stabbing in the street, pushing and fighting are events that affect the neighbours, who claim that they don’t dare to walk the streets

alone, not to mention to send the child down to the shop. The manager of the house acknowledges the problems and explains them by the fact that the three groups of homeless: the alcoholics, the drug addicts and the mentally ill don't understand, and can't stand, each other.

More articles tell a complicated story about a possible NIMBY effect: two fairly new cottages meant for the homeless as a shelter are about to be removed as part of a renewal process, according to the responsible department in the municipality of Copenhagen (with a neo-liberal head), this is because neighbours have complained about the location of those cottages. But apparently no neighbour complaints exist - and this again causes a moral protest from the socialist department head responsible for social affairs. Apparently there is no NIMBY here.

Another case worth noting is the subject of several articles. It is about people taking/stealing food from garbage containers of the big supermarkets - food that the supermarkets have thrown out due to it being out-dated. For some, this is a question of public order - for others a question of poverty. The supermarkets see a need to destroy the food, as they don't dare to take the risk of anybody getting food poisoning from their food, in which case they of course risk a compensation claim. A representative from the city council wants an investigation to find out if those people seek food, because they have spent their money (cash benefit, social pension) on drugs or alcohol - in which case she would be in favour of handing out food instead of cash. So one could say that the article raises the question of whether the described phenomenon is a question of public order or of extreme poverty.

Other articles are more of a snapshot about drinking and shouting beggars and about the kind of group squatting the theatre boat mentioned above.

Public order, as seen from the point of the homeless, is the subject of a well-written and sarcastic letter to the editor from a homeless person who has been fined several times for breaking the public order through an effort to distribute meat in the street from a pram. As he hasn't paid his fine, he has been to jail several times. And that is then when he tells about the luxurious life he has had, paid for by the state, because he hasn't paid a fine of approx. 50 €.

Thus, public order as a serious problem connected to homelessness is not a big issue.

## 5.2 NEED FOR SERVICES

Sixteen articles deal with the need for services of different kinds or just describe different offers - but then as good initiatives. The need for these services or for their quality is never questioned. Services that are described are, among others, a special and free dentist service in the House for the Homeless. The Danish Red Cross took the initiative and the dentists are volunteers. Another new kind of service is called a care home where the elderly and ill addicts get a supported flat and where the use of alcohol and drugs is not prohibited. The new service from the hostel "Mændenes hjem" (the men's home) handing out free and new syringes can also be categorized here.

## 5.3 POSITIVE PICTURES ABOUT THE HOMELESS - "HUMAN BEINGS"

Another picture is reflected in six articles. Here the homeless appear as individuals, active people who are able to do something - they are not portrayed as clients or victims: "*The road is my home. This is where I feel well. Why then call me homeless?*" He also thinks that people in general are positive: "*If we just don't complain all the time, people will treat us kindly. We just have to be more open to others.*"

Also the manager of "Mændenes hjem" talks about the homeless as human beings with many different life-stories, that makes one to respect them "*because they have been through so much that it is unbelievable that they are still standing. They are humans without a face. And you don't need to talk about some unimportant stuff to get to know them. It puts your own life in perspective*".

## 5.4 SUMMING UP

It can be said that the overall picture of the homeless persons isn't a picture of dangerous or threatening people, and where it is - as for example in the article about the neighbours of the House for the Homeless who do not dare to send their kids down to the kiosk - it is urgently stressed that we are talking of the most deprived alcoholics and drug addicts among the homeless population. We can't document it very well, but it seems nevertheless that if there is a question of crime, the persons involved will not so much be called homeless, as drug addicts. Homelessness in itself is not seen as threatening.

It might be said that homelessness is most often (or at least in a greater number of articles) considered in a perspective of exclusion and poverty, rather than as an issue of public order. This can be said to be the case in 13 of the articles. Of those, three are of an imprecise nature and discuss the modern way of life, where families are only pursuing their own career, and where family breaks-up are leaving a lot of lonely people that nobody really cares for. They are all written at Christmas with the aim - we suppose - of awakening the public conscience. But loneliness is also portrayed in the report from a shelter with many immigrants. And experts will support this general picture. In other cases the growing problem of poverty, - that the Council for the socially excluded has argued for - is seen as an explanation of, for instance, people looking for food in the garbage container, also what is called "ordinary people". In some of the articles the critic will come from the political left, and the neo-liberal government is blamed. Another kind of exclusion is exclusion from the housing market due to gentrification and lack of ordinary housing in Copenhagen.

## 6 Conclusion

Thus, the picture of homelessness in the two papers is still that of the traditional homeless - men who are addicts of different kinds, but also of mentally ill. The women and the young don't figure much, but the immigrants are starting to show. Among the operational categories of Feantsa only rooflessness and houselessness plays any role, while victims of domestic violence don't figure here at all. The homeless are not generally portrayed as dangerous - but more as in need of care and services. They are not blamed, but seen as victims of either their own background or of a general process of exclusion. It should be noted, however, that there doesn't seem to be any editorial line in relation to homelessness - the coverage stems more from events such as Christmas or the threat of cuts in services.

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# Conclusions: reproduction and adjustment of representations

By HENK MEERT

Understanding homelessness by reconstructing profiles of homeless people is one of the key interests of the European Observatory on Homelessness. The yearly update of statistics on homelessness, linked to a manageable, operating definition, is a very valuable exercise that the Observatory sets up each year. However, profiles and representations of social groups do not only consist of quantitative data, they also have a clear qualitative dimension and are socially constructed. Hence, it is valuable to look for the social relations and processes that constitute these profiles and representations. To respond to this challenging idea, in this report news coverage by 8 European newspapers was analysed in detail regarding their contributions focusing on homelessness. This volume presents the condensed reports which were examined in four Western European countries (for access to the full papers, see also [www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org)). In sum, these national reports raise 6 central conclusions.

A first and very brief conclusion concerns the **large-scale interest of the written press** regarding homelessness. Hence, the analysis of newspapers may be a fruitful exercise to better understand the position of the homeless in society, their corresponding profiles and representations, and the interrelation between homelessness as a social phenomena and the wider societal context. Appropriate research methodologies are needed. Discourse analysis, aiming to unravel the societal context and relations behind the bulk of information, proved to be an excellent technique.

Secondly, all national analyses make the observation that the appearance of press articles on homelessness as an issue is highly seasonal, dictated mainly by weather conditions (cold weather and winter, and to a lesser extent, summer), then by symbolic dates or political events. To cite Elisabeth Maurel's paper on France: "the journalistic treatment of homelessness could be said to be essentially event-driven rather than responding to a consistent editorial line".

Thirdly, the different analyses have shown that the **representations** in the newspapers are mostly supporting the dramatic and also polemic aspects of homelessness. Constructed representations of the homeless are highly dramatised, mostly focused on dead-end misery and huge marginality. These representations include portraits and witnesses, while structural causes explaining homelessness are seldom discussed. The analysis of Pedro Cabrera, applied to *El País* and *El Mundo*, also shows that these dramatised representations are strengthened by symbolic associations of the homeless with specific marginal social groups, such as drunks and drug users. Moreover, this dramatic component is continuously reproduced by the careful selection of **specific terms**. 'Indigents' is the most commonly used term to refer to the homeless in both Spanish newspapers. While the use of the term 'homeless' would at least suggest the broader societal context and should specifically stress a problematic access to decent housing, the term 'indigent' is more narrow and stresses the individual rather than the structural dimension of the problem.

A fourth conclusion relates to the **different kind of actors** who are allowed to 'take the floor' in these articles. Analyses of the French newspapers show that grassroots voluntary workers are almost invariably portrayed in both dailies as exceptional individuals, social work heroes, while the homeless themselves feature little as actors. Also, there is almost no mention of professionals (social workers, etc.) in the articles studied. They are invisible actors. However, as Cabrera illustrates in Spain, for instance, politicians appear time and again in the written press using the poor and the excluded as an opportunity, or excuse, to gain space or a headline in the mass media.

Another intriguing aspect concerns **the designation of the homeless**. When reading the four national reports, it becomes clear that journalists use different 'labels', including most frequently the 'people without rights', 'victims' and 'delinquents'. The analysis of the Danish newspapers shows that homeless people are predominantly described as victims. Ivan Christensen and Inger Koch-Nielsen write from that perspective to suggest that *"the homeless are not generally pictured as dangerous - but more as some in need of care and services. They are not blamed, but seen as victims for either their own background or a general process of exclusion."* Further, the French report stressed that the seemingly entangled use of different designations hides ethical and political attitudes which are deeply embedded in the greater part of the articles. The clampdown stance, for example has come back in full force with the growing discourse on public safety. Victimization is now in the other direction

A sixth and final conclusion, closely linked to the previous one, points to the aspect of **public order**. This aspect is discussed in the different national reports. In the case of Luxembourg, Roland Maas has rightly expressed how the greater part of the articles he analysed have adjusted to a new social reality: *"that of a change in the way urban and social space are managed, as a previously "invisible", or at least tolerated, population becomes a problem"*. Given the specific location of the homeless within the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (in the vicinity of the main railway station of Luxembourg City), it is not surprising that 'public order' is one of the topics to be discussed in the national Luxembourg press. Moreover, specific initiatives and debates, such as the privatisation of the railway infrastructure, also contribute to the content and the tenor of articles. This finding contrasts with the Danish case, where the homeless are rarely linked to problems of public order and where the visibility in public space is much lower.

In sum, an overwhelming majority of the articles confirms and reproduces the dominant profiles and representations of the homeless. They consist mainly in dramatised and individual components. When new aspects are introduced or existing representations are adjusted, the articles anticipate or go along with new societal trends and power relations, for instance the changing appropriation of public space in our cities. Very seldom do journalists discuss the structural factors causing homelessness. The most extreme representation of the homeless is the one which puts them together on the same shelf with - to quote once again Cabrera's observation - Christmas candy, Santa Claus or the Three Kings. Consequently, social scientists who combine scientific engagement with social engagement have still a lot of challenging work to do!

## APPENDIX

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- The changing role of the state
- The changing profiles of homeless people
- The changing role of service provision

*The changing profiles of homeless people: Homelessness in the Written Press: a Discourse Analysis* is based on five articles produced by the National Correspondents of the European Observatory on Homelessness. The full articles can be downloaded from FEANTSA's website [www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org)

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