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## Editorial

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The purpose of this edited collection is twofold. First, to provide an opportunity to reflect on the research output of the European Observatory over the past 20 years; second, to pay tribute to our colleagues Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty for their immense contribution to the Observatory over the past decade.

The European Observatory on Homelessness was established in 1991 and since then has published some 36 trans-national reports on dimensions of homelessness in Europe. Since 2007, the Observatory has focused on producing an annual themed European Journal of Homelessness<sup>1</sup> and organizing an annual research conference. The various transnational reports and journal editions have covered topics from homeless youth, to immigration and homelessness through to developing a conceptual framework for collating data on homeless people in Europe. When reviewing the scale and range of research topics covered by the Observatory over the past 20 years, the current co-coordinators of the Observatory became increasingly conscious that it would be opportune to reflect on the existing research output<sup>2</sup>, by providing a state of the art review of the key domains of homelessness covered by the Observatory. This reflection would also identify gaps in the research and form a solid basis for future research in the domains under review.

In 1998/9, Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty took on the role of co-coordinators of the Observatory.<sup>3</sup> The already considerable output of the Observatory accelerated from this period onwards. From their appointment as coordinators in 1999, Bill and Joe edited 5 books, each of which provided comprehensive trans-national analysis of Services for Homeless People; Support and Housing in Europe; Women and Homelessness in Europe; Access to Housing and Immigration and Homelessness in Europe. With Henk Meert, they produced a series of reports on homelessness and the changing role of the state in Europe; the changing profiles of homeless people and the changing role of service provision for homeless people in Europe. Reviews of homelessness research and policies were also produced alongside the first

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<sup>1</sup> From 2011, the Journal will be produced twice a year.

<sup>2</sup> A full list of publications from the Observatory can be found at <http://eohw.horus.be/code/EN/pg.asp?Page=1111>

<sup>3</sup> They were ably assisted by Amy Mina-Coull for the first three years of their co-ordinating role and then by the late lamented Henk Meert, who died suddenly in 2006. For a tribute to Henk, see Doherty, J. and Edgar, B. (2008) *In my Caravan, I feel like Superman: Essays in Honour of Henk Meert, 1963-2006*. Brussels: Feantsa.

detailed accounts of how differing member states defined and measured homelessness. The reviews of statistics on homelessness led to the development of the conceptual model of defining and measuring homelessness known as ETHOS, which is increasingly being adopted in EU member states and as far away as New Zealand.

The contributors to this book are either past or present members of the Observatory or have had a close working relationship with the Observatory. They are therefore not only experts in the area of homelessness they are contributing on, but worked in collaboration with Bill and Joe at various levels.

In the first chapter, Volker Busch-Geertsema, who joined the Observatory in 1995 and is currently the co-ordinator of the Observatory outlines the very substantial progress that has been made at EU level on defining homelessness. Chapter 2, written by Isobel Anderson, who represented the UK on the Observatory for many years, adopts a dynamic, process approach to reviewing the evidence base on the effectiveness of services that support pathways out of homelessness. In chapter 3, Eoin O'Sullivan who joined the Observatory in 1992, sets out how we might conceptualise the shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for particular marginalised populations and how these boundaries shape the extent and nature of homelessness. Increasing attention has been given to aspects of housing exclusion in housing research over the past decade and in chapter 4, Nora Teller, one of the newer members of the Observatory, outlines recent research that suggest that it is the interplay of welfare, housing and labour markets that decisively impacts on housing exclusion, and it does so in varying ways in different European countries. Suzanne Fitzpatrick (another former UK representative on the Observatory), and Beth Watts, argue in chapter 5, that while rights-based approaches are intuitively appealing, promising radical solutions to complex issues of housing need and social exclusion, we need to draw out questions about what precisely we mean by rights-based approaches, and query whether rights-based approaches deliver the things we expect them to in practice?

Chapter 6, by Lars Benjaminsen, a long-standing member of the Observatory, and Evelyn Dyb who represented Norway on the Observatory, reviews research literature on national homelessness strategies which have emerged in the advanced welfare regimes of northern and western Europe and in a few countries in southern and eastern Europe. Migrant homelessness has become increasingly visible in some parts of the EU in recent years and in chapter 7, Nicholas Pleace, one of the editors of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, highlights recent data on people sleeping rough. These data show that economic migrants from the Central and Eastern EU are living on the streets and in emergency shelters in increasing numbers in the Western EU. In chapter 8, Isabel Baptista, who joined the Observatory in 2000, outlines the relative paucity of European research on women's homelessness. The chapter provides a critical review of the research undertaken since 2001,

focusing on the continuities and consistencies found regarding the previous findings and exploring the developments brought about by the new research produced. In 1998, research by the European Observatory on Homelessness suggested that youth homelessness may be considered as a faltered or interrupted transition to adulthood and in chapter 9, Deborah Quilgars, a member of the editorial team of the European Journal of Homelessness, reviews the progress that has been made in understanding youth homelessness in the last twelve years. It finds that frameworks of analysis have developed further, particularly through a focus on pathways into homelessness, although more attention is still required on how structural factors affect young people's housing chances across Europe.

In the final two chapters of the book, we asked a service provider and one of the most experienced researchers on homelessness in Europe to provide their reflections on the state of research into homelessness in Europe. We invited Andre Gachet, a member of the Executive Council and vice president of Feantsa, to give the perspective of a service practitioner on the use and importance of research on homelessness. The chapter observes that while researchers and practitioners do not necessarily use the same vocabulary, research allows us to take a more complex approach to economic or institutional factors, which the diverse mix of "homeless" people militates against addressing in general terms. In the context of the oft-times chaotic nature of service provision, the chapter concludes that research provides a solid look at the inequalities and structural barriers that dominate progress in social inclusion. In chapter 11, Antonio Tosi, who was a member of the Observatory from the beginning in 1991 until 2007, reflects on 20 years of research on homelessness and the various strands that have influenced our understanding of homelessness. Antonio provides a challenging and provocative overview of research on homelessness and argues that the theoretical potential of capabilities theory can offer much to understanding homelessness, but it still waits to be appreciated and systematically exploited in research on homelessness.

We trust that this volume serves our objectives of (1) providing a robust base to assess future research priorities on homelessness in Europe, and (2) as a tribute to Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty who helped ensure that a rigorous and policy relevant research culture was fostered within the Observatory. Researchers, service practitioners and policy makers in Europe and indeed further afield, concerned with how best to understand and measure homelessness, and the means by which to address the fundamental exclusion that is homelessness, have all benefited enormously from the personal and academic qualities that Bill and Joe brought to their work with the Observatory. Those of us who worked with, or interacted with Bill and Joe over the last decade or so, found their collegiality and friendship an enriching experience and hope that the resonance and robustness of their research will be reflected in the policy choices that are made in local, national and transnational domains.