
Editorial

The impact of the global financial crisis on the extent and experience of homelessness was the broad theme of the 9th annual research conference of the European Observatory on Homelessness, held in Warsaw on the 19th of September 2014. A selection of the papers presented are included in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness* (EJH), and collectively they provide a sense of the challenges facing policy makers, service providers and most importantly the consequences for those experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion. This edition of the EJH also includes papers not presented at the conference following a recommendation from the International Advisory Committee that this edition of the journal should not be restricted to those papers addressing the theme of the annual conference.

Elsinga, in a paper based on her keynote presentation to the conference, highlights the on-going affordability issues for those on low-incomes in accessing market-based rental dwellings and the access issues facing those attempting to secure socialized housing when outputs of new units have declined. The solution in many countries is to promote the private rented sector as an alternative to home-ownership (which cannot be a housing option for all sections of the population) and socialized public housing, but Elsinga provides us with an important historical lesson, when she reminds us that a key rationale for the development of large-scale social housing was the failure of market to provide affordable good quality housing. Moving from the global to the local, Gosme and Anderson show how different cities across the European Union are responding to challenges noted by Elsinga. In scrutinizing how the process of peer review of city-level homelessness models contribute to the diffusion of evidence based policies, they show how this comparative process can identify and expose policy strengths and gaps that can then be addressed. Katisko, in a case study of Helsinki, provides evidence of the challenges facing service providers and policy makers in responding to newly emergent needs, in this case, young people with an immigrant background, that is having parents who were born in a country other than Finland. While not utilising homeless services, the paper draws attention to the precarious housing situation of these young people and the adverse consequences of not having secure accommodation in terms of their ability to participate in the labour market and education.

The costs of homelessness, being the public expenditure on homeless services and the adverse impact of housing exclusion on individuals, in particular the former, are a key concern of public authorities, particularly in those member states where external demands for retrenchment of public expenditure is evident. Demaerschalk and Lescrauwaet in a case study of Flanders contribute to the growing literature examining the limited returns achieved from the considerable expenditure on homelessness services. Acknowledging the complexity of measuring such social and human returns, they nonetheless suggest that the existing model of service provision in Flanders is both expensive and inefficient in ensuring the rapid exit of persons from homelessness.

The provision of services to homeless people in many ways reflects how policy makers and service providers think of homeless people. If they are conceptualised as excluded from housing markets as a consequence of affordability and other forms of structural exclusion, or conceptualised as having a range of pathologies largely of their own making, the response will be very different. In practice, such extreme positions are relatively rare, but as Caeiro and Gonçalves argue in their paper, the media play an important role in how the public understand homelessness. In a case study of Portugal, they argue that homeless people are utilised as 'accessories' by other actors promoting certain values and personality inspired services, but within an overall ideological framework that promotes assisting homeless people through individual acts of charity. They also note how homelessness is represented in media as 'rough sleeping' with emotive pictures of parts of bodies in public spaces. A further image utilised by the media is of homeless beggars, but this often linked with 'foreignness' and when so linked, rather than an object of charity, the 'foreign' beggar is now the object of suspicion, requiring banishment. De Coulon, Colombo Wiget and Reynaud explore how begging, particularly by Roma, was constructed as either populist, humanist or legalistic political discourse in Geneva, and despite key differences in approach, what united all three discourses was that they reinforced the 'beggar' as an alien in Geneva and therefore 'othered.'

Providing an objective and accepted measurement of the extent of homelessness has proven problematic in many member states. Wygnańska, in her contribution, outlines the process of negotiation with a range of actors in Poland in devising a methodology for counting homelessness that met the concerns of these actors. The concerns included data protection and data sharing, client confidentiality among others, concerns that are regularly voiced in other member states, but Wygnańska demonstrates that they are resolvable to the broad satisfaction of all actors. Measuring the extent of homelessness is a precursor to devising appropriate responses to ending homelessness and Raitakari and Juhila provide a comprehensive audit and classification of the literature published to-date on

Housing First. Housing First, although not implemented in practice in the majority of members states, has been rigorously tested, and Raitakari and Juhila cite in excess of 200 scientific articles, the majority of which stress the success of Housing First in ending homelessness, in contrast to the weak outcomes for transitional and shelter based services which promote housing readiness. This 'state of the art' review provides a classification of the literature and a guide to the key issues, and therefore an invaluable guide for practionners and policy makers.

As ever, the editorial committee hope that our diverse audience find the papers in this edition of the European Journal of Homelessness stimulating, and wish to thank our contributors, reviewers, international advisory committee and consultative committee for their input.