

European Observatory on Homelessness

# European Journal of Homelessness

**Volume 9, No. 2 \_ December 2015**



## **EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF HOMELESSNESS**

### **Journal Philosophy**

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

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## Editorial

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As we enter the winter period, many cities across Europe are preparing 'cold weather strategies' to provide additional services, usually in the form of extra shelter beds, for homeless people to ensure that they are not exposed to extreme weather conditions. The provision of shelter beds, often in congregate, dormitory style accommodation is a fairly standard policy response to extreme housing exclusion, and often justified on the basis that it is a temporary and reasonably immediate response to the needs of those sleeping rough. Part of the justification for this form of provision is that many homeless people are incapable of maintaining their own accommodation, because of their addictions, mental health difficulties and other pathological traits.

This perception of homeless people, as Devereux and Schmidt present in their 'think pieces' in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, is often maintained by the presentation of homeless people in the media and in NGO fund-raising campaigns. This is particularly the case around Christmas time, and as Devereaux argues, such presentations 'circulate hackneyed well-worn understandings of homelessness which do little to challenge existing assumptions or propose long-term solutions.'

The provision of communal or congregate accommodation in 'shelters' as a response to homelessness has dominated policy responses over the past two centuries. Indeed, in the early 1930s, Edwin Sutherland and Harvey Locke coined the term 'shelterization' to describe the negative consequences of placing people in such facilities when studying shelters for homeless people in Chicago. The lessons of history are rarely heeded, and in the contributions by Löfstrand in respect of Gotenburg, Diebäcker and colleagues in relation to Vienna, Arapoglou and colleagues in relation to Athens, and Mostowska in respect of Dublin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Stockholm, the negative consequences for homeless people of having to adapt to shelter living and develop strategies to survive in such atypical living circumstances remain the case today.

These contributions add to the debate on the utility of providing shelters as the primary response to homelessness, particularly when our primary response to, for example, a disability, wither physical or mental, is not to cluster such individuals in a congregate setting, but rather to provided an individualized range of supports. Shelters had their origins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and their emergence was in parallel with the construction of a range of other institutions to manage the poor

including workhouses, prisons and a vast array of asylums and penitentiaries. The failure of these institutions to reform or rehabilitate, to desist or to deter was clearly evident by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was to take several decades before the majority of these massive mausoleums of misery gradually fell into disuse and disgrace. The papers in this edition of the EJH, highlighted above, draw our attention to the historical continuity in service provision for homeless people and the need for a vigorous debate on this type of service provision.

Alongside confirmation of the limited efficacy of providing shelters as a response to homelessness, we have increasingly robust evidence that those who experience homelessness are not just those beloved by the media and charity fundraisers; the stereotypical rough sleeper, rather homeless people are a heterogeneous population, with rough sleepers in a minority. It would seem to be an erroneous policy to cluster this heterogeneous population in congregate settings and expect this policy and practice response to aid their exiting from homelessness.

This is all the more incongruous when we have increasingly compelling evidence of what works best to ensure people exit homelessness. Kostianen, in the case of Helsinki, shows that the majority of people who exit homelessness do so without service supports. They simply require access to affordable housing and financial assistance in meeting their housing costs. While those with more complex needs will require additional supports, they firstly require housing with support. Methodologically sophisticated research clearly demonstrates the vastly superior housing retention rates when housing is made available first to homeless people, rather than after a series of interventions designed to make them ready for housing. In their contribution, Aubry and colleagues argue that not only are Housing First approaches superior to Housing Ready systems, but in addition the greater the adherence to Housing First principles, the higher the rate of success.

However, in order that Housing First principles can be adhered to, access to housing is required. Van den Broeck and Heylen in their contribution, show how vulnerable households are often discriminated against in a range of covert ways by estate agents when attempting to secure private rented accommodation. Sahlin in her analysis of homelessness policy in Sweden highlights that in the absence of a social rental strategy, with housing policy focused on market based provision, homelessness strategies will have minimal impact. Indeed, homeless strategies, absent the provision of affordable housing, are merely illusionary with no expectation that their objectives will ever be met. They may also act to confirm a popular perception that homelessness is an intractable problem, with little Government can do to end this human tragedy.

The motivations of the individuals who provide services to homeless people are varied, but many organisations are overtly faith based; in some cases this was the motivation for the historical establishment of the organisation, in others a motivation for their on-going involvement with the provision of services to homeless people and some a mixture of both. In her 'think piece' Fitzpatrick notes that, to date, those who work with homeless people or engage with public policy and research on homelessness, who are not motivated or inspired by 'faith' are relatively silent in public discussions. She argues that the secular and sacramental should be given parity of esteem in any discussion, and secondly, that a debate on 'faith' and how faith shapes homelessness service provision is both necessary and overdue.

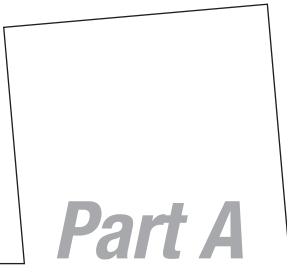
The edition of the EJH also includes two papers on a perennial issue covered by the EJH; how to measure homelessness and the extent of homelessness. Contributions from Sales on measuring homelessness in Spain, and from Smith on comparing research methodologies for counting homeless people in North America and Brussels and Denmark add further depth to this on-going discussion.

The Editorial Team of the EJH hope that you find the contributions stimulating and provocative, informative and illuminating. Next year we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Journal with an additional edition of the Journal, one where we will focus on reviewing the impact of research on homeless services from a range of different perspectives.





# Articles



*Part A*





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# The Policing of a Homeless Shelter: Private Security Patrolling the Border of Eligibility

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- › **Abstract\_** *This article investigates the work of private security officers policing a municipally owned and operated homeless shelter in a major Swedish city. In the professional rhetoric of the city's social services, temporary accommodation at the shelter was to be merely the first stepping-stone towards re-integration into mainstream society. In reality, however, it was only made use of as a last-resort solution for a residual group of city residents, leaving the official rhetoric of inclusion to clash with the actual function of the shelter. This article looks at the policing of homelessness carried out at the 'marginal space' that the shelter represented. In particular, it investigates the concrete 'border work' performed by private security officers policing the shelter territory, those housed in it and their conduct, and analyses how – through and in the course of that policing work – physical and behavioural borders were established and defended. As the results show, the private security officers' work demarcating the boundaries of eligibility in the shelter context ultimately amounted to patrolling the border of eligibility of the welfare state (its services), such that they de facto performed a significant public function.*
- › **Keywords\_** *homelessness, homeless shelters, policing, private security*

## Introduction

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Studies on the policing of homelessness have mostly focussed on the spatial exclusion of homeless people from the public space (Smith, 1996; Mitchell, 1997; Mitchell, 2003; Doherty *et al.*, 2008; Thörn, 2011) or, as it has also been termed, 'prime' spaces (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Snow and Mulcahy 2001) – neighbourhoods, recreational areas, shopping malls and other areas inhabited and/or frequented by affluent citizens. In light of the many studies on the topic and research results suggesting that the policing of homelessness varies according to the type of space involved (e.g., Yarwood, 2007), there has been a call for research on the forms of homelessness policing in *marginal* spaces, where it is the homeless persons themselves who are the inhabitants of the space (DeVerteuil *et al.*, 2009a; 2009b; Stuart, 2014). Responding to that call, this article investigates the policing of homelessness at a municipally owned and operated homeless shelter in a major Swedish city – a marginal space par excellence within the local administration's jurisdiction. In the official rhetoric of the municipality's social services, temporary accommodation at the shelter represented only the first step on the path towards the presumed re-integration of homeless persons into mainstream society. In reality, however, the shelter served as a last-resort housing solution for the municipality in its homelessness work; it functioned as a storage room or a container for those excluded from other types of homeless accommodation in the city but who were nevertheless entitled by law to at least a roof over their heads (Löfstrand, 2005; Hansen Löfstrand, 2012).

As societal institutions, shelters have a long history and they existed long before explicit policies to combat homelessness developed (Hopper, 1990; Hopper and Baumohl, 1996; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). Hopper (1990), looking at the historical function of shelters, refers to shelters as 'hybrid institutions' with a twofold function. As such, they have provided a place of temporary respite to the (temporarily) unemployed who will return to the workforce whenever possible and also functioned as a last resort solution for the 'penniless poor' who, due to mental illness, alcoholism and/or physical impairment, are deemed to be permanently out of the workforce. In both senses, shelters function as a form of poverty management – in shelters people deemed as "unneeded but potentially troublesome" are contained (Hopper and Baumohl, 1994, p.524). Shelters are used recurrently in response to homelessness (see e.g., Snow and Anderson, 1993; Hopper and Baumohl, 1994; Sahlin, 1996; Wagner, 2005; De Verteuil, 2006; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Knutagård and Nordfeldt, 2007). However, the existence of shelters has never solved the issue of homelessness (Hopper and Baumohl, 1996; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). On the contrary, the existence of shelters seems to increase the number of homeless people (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007).

A related debate about the shelter industry arose in the US during the 1980s and 1990s, with regards to New York City. Mental health professionals argued that the problem with the growing shelter system was an outcome of poor mental health policies (Gounis, 1992). The debate was launched by Jeffrey Grunberg and Paula Eagle, who depicted shelters as “hellish places” (Marcus, 2006, p.65; see also Gounis, 1992). Grunberg and Eagle (1990) used the term ‘shelterization’ to refer to the way that homeless individuals adapted to the demoralising nature of shelter living, to a homeless identity and to a shelter subculture within which crime was a pervasive aspect. The authors suggested that these negative effects could be counteracted by “onsite psychosocial rehabilitation programs” fostering “positive social networks and affiliations with social service and mental health providers” (Grunberg and Eagle, 1990, p.521). This emerging understanding of homelessness and emergency shelters also gained foothold among other professionals and was soon being referred to as a ‘syndrome’ that explained the persistence of homelessness (Gounis, 1992; Marcus, 2003). The debate also initiated research that, in a similar vein, focused on what goes on inside the shelters. Dordick (1996), for example, conducted an ethnographic study of the social dynamics of shelter life and found that shelters are social worlds, characterized by gang-like structures and hierarchies that heavily constrain the lives of shelter residents. Other researchers strongly criticised the idea of ‘shelterization’ as a psychosocial and behavioural syndrome explaining the persistence of homelessness (see e.g., Gounis, 1992; Marcus, 2003; 2006). Gounis (1992), for example, stated that:

The shelter manufactures violence, hopelessness, and all the symptoms of social pathology that the authorities attribute to the very victims of these processes as self-inflicted.... Shelterization is a state of captivity, not a disease (Gounis 1992, p.692).

In a similar fashion, Lyon-Callo (2000) sets out in detail how homelessness in a Massachusetts shelter environment is governed. He lays bare the shelter industry’s medicalised discourse of deviance, which produces homeless subjects who “willingly comply with more surveillance and reform of their bodies and selves” (Lyon-Callo, 2000, p.341), and learn to individualise the causes of homelessness. However, ethnographic studies specifically exploring the on-the-ground policing of homeless individuals inside shelters have been neglected.

To partly help fill this gap, this article uses ethnographic fieldwork to investigate the policing of homeless persons at a homeless shelter as performed by private security officers in conjunction with other on-site policing actors. Policing here is understood as a particular form of social control encompassing purposeful activities aimed at maintaining security within a given social order, which sometimes involves an array of agencies (cf. Loader, 2000; Button, 2002; Crawford, 2008).

This type of policing has long since become pluralized, with a variety of public, municipal, commercial and civil sector actors involved in the task today, frequently in partnerships (Crawford, 2008; Loftus and Skinns, 2014).

A number of actors were involved in the policing of homelessness at the shelter studied for this article: municipal social service staff, private security officers, police officers, nurses and paramedics. The private security officers working at the shelter regularly requested assistance from the police and worked in close collaboration with the municipal staff and the nurses at the site, making them an interesting subject for the study of how policing as a form of social control is performed in this context in practice and how its goals are accomplished. An inherent characteristic of policing as a social practice is the delineation and defence of the territory to be policed, and the subsequent spatial displacement that this demarcation entails, whether under public or private control (Lister *et al.*, 2008). In this study, this involved the construction and defence by private security officers of borders delineating the 'shelter territory', within which the general conduct and behaviour of shelter resident were monitored, controlled and penalized as part of the 'border work', which was carried out in co-operation with other policing actors (Rumford, 2012). Making the actual construction of borders into the object of study enables the asking of questions about what constitutes borders and who is responsible for carrying out the border work, as well as how the defence of borders is accomplished. Since the security officers working at the shelter in this study were authorized to make decisions about which of the shelter's residents should or should not be considered eligible for the services that the shelter represented and provided – and because they regularly did make such decisions in practice – their work can also be analysed more broadly in terms of patrolling the borders of eligibility of the welfare state and its services; the security officers thus performed a significant *de facto* public function in society.

## Data and Methods

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The ethnographic study reported on in this article was completed as part of a broader project investigating the delivery of policing by private security companies contracted to carry out work for public organizations and institutions. The data was collected through informal field-based interviews and 'shadowing' (Czarniawska, 2007) private security officers at a homeless shelter in one of the major cities in Sweden. The private security officers were shadowed while carrying out their normal work tasks at the shelter, which meant that I observed what their work consisted of and informally interviewed them about their views on working in private security and, specifically, at the homeless shelter in question.

A total of six private security officers, all employed by the same large multinational security company, were shadowed and informally interviewed during the fieldwork. Two of them worked twelve-hour day shifts at the shelter (from 7am to 7pm, when there was only one security officer on duty), while four worked night shifts (from 7pm to 7am, always with two security officers working in tandem). The security officers were shadowed on fifteen different occasions in 2012 for a total of 128 hours. On two occasions, the shadowing sessions lasted six hours, on two occasions they lasted twelve consecutive hours, and on the remaining occasions they lasted between seven and eleven hours. The observations made and noted during those periods of observation were collated and analysed together with the results from the field-based interviews.

Before proceeding to analyse the data obtained, however, a brief description of the specific setting of the study is in order. The section that follows therefore outlines the main features of the general approach to homelessness in Sweden, of the studied shelter itself and of the work carried out by the private security officer at the shelter. Following this, three central themes emerging from the data are presented, analysed and discussed: the delineation and defence of 'the shelter territory', the policing of homeless people (i.e., the defence of borders through the control of conduct within the territory) and the challenges of policing partnerships. Finally, the findings are discussed in terms of the complexities involved in contracting private security officers to perform public sector functions and interpreted in light of the punitive measures espoused by the shelter management and staff. The latter are discussed in relation to the ideal of the public sector 'ethos', involving values such as equity and transparency and reflecting the principles of dignity, integrity and security/safety.

## The Study Setting

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In Sweden, eligibility for (temporary) homeless accommodation has typically been made conditional, with the conduct of the homeless client determining their ability to access and stay in the accommodation assigned to them. Absolute sobriety and 'good' behaviour have become the main criteria in this respect (Löfstrand, 2005; Hansen Löfstrand, 2010; Hansen Löfstrand, 2012), with the result that some of the homeless clients who had previously been determined as eligible for housing and thus given access to special municipal housing organizations were later evicted due to rule violations, often involving alcohol and drug use. Those who have been ejected and excluded from all other parts of the special municipal housing systems may be referred to homeless shelters as a last-resort solution. Clients staying at a

shelter may arrive and remain at the shelter even when under influence, but are not allowed to consume either alcohol or drugs on the premises or in the areas immediately surrounding the shelters.

The shelter studied for this article consisted of around eighty single, sparsely furnished rooms (each with a bed, a chest of drawers and a closet, but no bathroom or cooking facilities) located over eight floors. On the first floor, there was a reception area and a special holding unit staffed by medical and psychiatric nurses, to which the security officers at the shelter took those residents judged to be too drunk and/or behaving in a disorderly fashion when entering the building; individuals from elsewhere in the city who were picked up on the streets for being overly drunk and disorderly were also taken to this unit by ambulance or police transportation. The second floor of the building consisted of a special healthcare centre for homeless people, which was accessible not only to those staying at the shelter but to all homeless people in the municipality. Floors three and four, as well as six and seven, consisted of single rooms and a shared kitchen for every two floors. The fifth floor also consisted of single rooms but it was reserved for those who only needed – or were only permitted by the city's social services – to stay at the shelter for no more than a few nights. Floor eight was reserved for shelter residents deemed capable of taking care of themselves on their own by the city's social services and the shelter staff. CCTV monitoring was installed on all floors except the ground floor where the reception desk, lobby and the holding unit were located, the second floor where the healthcare centre for homeless people was located, and the fifth floor, where monitoring people in real time was considered a far clearer violation of rights and integrity, as those staying there, as security officers and shelter staff put it, 'really could be anyone'. In the evenings after 8pm, there were no more municipal staff on duty in the shelter building, apart from two persons who worked exclusively on the fifth floor and the nurses manning the first-floor holding unit.

During the day shift, the work of the private security officers manning the shelter consisted mostly of working the first-floor reception desk and CCTV monitoring the premises and the immediate vicinity of the shelter building. Apart from providing various tangible services to shelter residents and staff (sorting and delivery of mail, issuance of key cards, delivery of personal alarm buttons, and sharing of information about shelter residents and incidents with shelter staff), their work tasks also included making decisions about, and carrying out, expulsions of unwanted people from the shelter and its adjacent area, mediating in conflicts and fights between shelter residents inside the shelter area, reporting out-of-place behaviour to staff, seeing to it that the degree of intoxication was controlled where required, and punishing excessive intoxication and disorderly behaviour of shelter residents by expelling the troublemakers from the building or the shelter area. In contrast to

these daytime work tasks handled by one officer on duty, the night shifts had two officers handling the same tasks who also patrolled all but two floors of the building as well as its immediate surroundings at regular intervals.

## **Patrolling the Border of Eligibility: Private Security Performing a Public Function**

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### *Delineating and defending the shelter territory*

The general task of the private security officers policing the social order in and around the shelter consisted of the surveillance and control of the territory, people and conduct there. The security officers and the municipal staff working at the shelter, as well as shelter residents, referred to the area under the responsibility of the security officers as 'the shelter area' or 'the shelter territory'. The work of the security officers in delineating and defending this territory involved making and justifying claims concerning the legitimate use of power, authority and, sometimes, direct force.

In practice, the work that the security officers carried out to delineate and defend this territory entailed straying, in the course of their day-to-day activities, beyond the limits of their authority and responsibilities as authorized Swedish 'våktare'.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in doing so – for instance, when making the decision to expel someone from the shelter (which, strictly speaking, was something only the municipality's social service authority was entitled to do, given that such a decision is ultimately about a citizen's right of access to welfare services) – the private security officers de facto accepted, or to at least some extent were transferred tasks and responsibilities not formally within their remit. While most expulsions they implemented were on the basis of decisions made by the municipal staff working at the shelter, they also sometimes made such decisions by themselves. In these latter cases, however, the decisions still had to be discussed with the municipal staff and validated by them retroactively, as these were essentially decisions that only public authorities could make, and they were carefully documented by the security officers. In practice, however, through their contractual relationship with the municipal social service authority, the security officers could make decisions about which shelter

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<sup>1</sup> The security officers studied for this article all worked as 'våktare', which meant that they were authorized only to use force in self-defence and carry nothing more than a baton and handcuffs on duty. Just like all private citizens in the country, however, they had the right to use violence in self-defence and to apprehend persons caught in the act of committing a crime or fleeing from the crime scene if the crime being committed was punishable with a prison term of any length. Acting on suspicion alone, however, was prohibited to them by Swedish law, and they had no obligation to intervene in criminal situations; their only legal obligation in such situations was to document what was being witnessed and report it to the police.

residents should be deemed as having forfeited their right to the shelter's services, about who ought to be judged no longer eligible for them anymore and, thus, about who should be expelled. These decisions were sometimes executed in co-operation with the shelter's municipal staff and implemented with the help of the city's emergency services (the police and paramedics).

The security officers' efforts to map out the shelter territory by establishing and then defending its boundaries (both physical and behavioural) should be viewed as an attempt to control it, through determining who should inhabit or pass through it and how those residing within it should behave and act. As observed by Lister and colleagues (Lister *et al.*, 2008, p.33), this aim to control territory, people and behaviour "applies across almost all policing agencies and not just to the public police" and implies physical displacement as a strategy. The concrete means by which the delineation and defence of the shelter territory in this study was pursued were visual surveillance and control. The shelter area was constantly surveilled from the security officers' position behind the reception desk, where there was a computer screen showing, in real time, images transmitted by several CCTV cameras placed around the shelter territory. This CCTV surveillance was legitimized by stressing the need to protect the shelter staff and prevent and manage possible violence on the premises.

Apart from enabling surveillance of the insides of the shelter building, CCTV cameras were also used to monitor certain parts of the area surrounding the shelter building: the parking lot outside the shelter entrance and an area with benches and a table, where shelter clients often gathered to sit and talk and sometimes drink alcohol, which was forbidden. A fairly high wooden fence stood behind the table and the benches, demarcating the boundary of the shelter territory by preventing CCTV monitoring of activities going on behind it. Some shelter residents, indeed, argued that the area behind the fence was not part of 'the shelter area', implying that one should not be monitored and controlled when there and that the security officers had no authority to expel anyone from that area. "The clients think that we can't see past that fence", one security officer objected, "but [through the CCTV cameras] we can see through the gaps in the planks if something seems to be going on, and then we of course intervene." To 'intervene' here implied a security officer leaving his desk, located right by nearly wall-sized windows providing an excellent view of what was going on in the shelter area *not* covered by CCTV cameras, to check out on the activities behind the fence. If the behaviour of those engaged in the activities in question was judged as being within the parameters of what was acceptable within the shelter territory, the outcome was just a moment spent in shared small talk; if, however, people were found drinking, doing drugs or engaged in other behaviour judged as unacceptable for shelter residents within its territory, they were asked to leave the area, with alcoholic beverages poured out onto the



ground and all items deemed capable of being used as a weapon confiscated. The large windows by the reception desk were tinted, which meant that, if one was unaware of the surveillance cameras, it was not immediately evident to those on the outside that they were being watched.

Technically, the territory within which the security officers could, in their formal capacity, legitimately claim authority consisted of nothing more than the shelter building itself (for which reason the entrance to the building constituted a particularly important border). However, in practice they controlled and regulated behaviour in a much greater area, including large sections of the space around the building. As one officer described it:

Officially, the entrance of the shelter building is where our boundaries lie, but the people here of course know that in practice it's more like the railroad crossing where they are. If you're on the other side of the railroad crossing, you're outside the [shelter] area. On this side, it's a bit like a small country with its own laws.

There was no clear consensus among individual security officers about what exactly constituted the boundaries of the shelter area. One security officer said that, during a nightshift, she had actually consulted the district police authority about what these were, to clarify what the precise territory was within which she and her colleagues were allowed to exercise their authority, power and control. The official response she received was that, besides the shelter building itself, it included the area outside covered by the CCTV cameras: the parking lot in front of the building as well as the courtyard, including the corner with its table and benches, but not the area behind the wooden fence, the railroad crossing beyond the parking lot, the public road or the back sides of the building, except for a small area on one side of the building where there was a garbage container used by the shelter staff. However, since the railroad crossing, as already noted, nevertheless constituted an unofficially established border, it, too, was defended, and the security officers working the nightshift were asked by the public authorities that had contracted them to include the entire area around the shelter in their patrolling, including the back side of the building. The security officers had agreed to do that, not only, as they reported, as they wanted "to be nice to the owners of the local businesses right next door, to do them a favour [by including these businesses within the scope of their nightly patrols]", but also, and primarily, to be better able to keep unwanted visitors out of the area. It was the latter that they saw as their main goal in extending their nightly patrols to all areas around the shelter building. As two of the security officers that were shadowed during some of these night-time patrols put it, this was done to keep the area free of drug dealers and, in particular, to prevent entry to the area of a character known as 'the Debt Collector' – a local underworld figure who supplied drugs to some of the shelter residents:

If we notice the Debt Collector somewhere around the building area when patrolling outside, we tell him to leave the area. That's also the message from the top... that they don't want him around, because he scares people here and they get all hysterical; so it's our task to get him out of here.

At the same time, another security officer (on another occasion) claimed that “[w]e can't expel anyone from anywhere that's not part of the shelter area”, thus indicating that the security officers did not have a legal mandate to do what they were doing. Yet, the fluidity and contested nature of the borders of the shelter territory enabled the security officers to advance claims about the scope of their legitimate powers and authority. In doing so, however, the officers were caught in a difficult position: trying to comply with their customer's (the municipality) wishes and desires without exceeding their formal, legally specified powers and authority as authorized *våktare* in the process.

### ***Policing homeless people: defending borders, controlling conduct***

The main goal of the policing activities of the security officers at the shelter was to maintain (or re-establish) security, by preventing and solving problems of undesirable conduct (cf. Kempa *et al.*, 1999). These activities essentially consisted of social sorting, meaning that clients who consented to rules and regulations – as enforced through consensual or communicative control strategies – were rewarded for their good conduct and behaviour. However, when consensual control strategies were not enough, security officers resorted to coercive forms of control, normally resulting in spatial displacement. As part of their job description, municipal staff and the private security officers employed at the shelter could make decisions, either jointly or independently of one another, about what actions, conduct and behaviours were acceptable inside the shelter territory and which ones constituted grounds for temporarily barring someone from entering the building or for expelling someone from the building and its surrounding area. One of the security officers explained it as follows:

They [the municipal staff] make their own rules: ‘You are not allowed to do this, you are not allowed to do that, and if you do those things then you get expelled.’ I'm not saying that this is wrong; it is, after all, done to prevent violence, and many [shelter clients] in fact comply very well.

The day-to-day work of the officers manning the reception desk in the lobby was dominated by what Lister and colleagues (2008) have termed ‘communicative surveillance’, which consisted for the most part of letting people know that they were continually being monitored, watched and scrutinized. Shelter clients were, for instance, engaged in small talk as they entered the building and made their way towards the elevators. To facilitate their information gathering, the security officers

attempted, in their own words, to appear “nice and friendly, just leaning back on my chair” and “us[ing] my entire body language to show that I’m not threatening”, rather than giving the impression of someone alert and tense. From the policing point of view, all this was to serve as a way of imposing discipline to encourage shelter clients to conduct themselves in an acceptable manner (Rose, 2000; Lister *et al.*, 2008).

The shelter’s clients always knew they were being watched, but usually accepted it as an unavoidable fact of life, even though many actually experienced it as something unpleasant and even objectionable. Indeed, there were some who resisted the behavioural borders established by the shelter staff and private security officers. In their cases, communicative or consensual control strategies were typically regarded as insufficient and were substituted with coercive control strategies (Kempa *et al.*, 1999), which usually took the form of expulsion and spatial displacement (Lister *et al.*, 2008). During the course of this research, several examples of this kind of situation were observed, but they all tended to follow a certain pattern.

As the homeless clients approached the broader shelter area, they first walked over the railroad crossing before arriving at the entrance to the shelter. In the lobby area inside the building, they encountered the security officer on duty, whose main task was to assess and judge the approaching clients’ conduct: their overall condition, degree of drunkenness and general mood. As already noted, clients were allowed access even when under the influence of alcohol or drugs, but they could not *appear* ‘too intoxicated’ or ‘disorderly’ and they were not allowed to bring alcohol or drugs into the shelter building. Since the security officers were not permitted by law to act on suspicion only – to, for example, conduct frisk searches of shelter clients – they could only, as one of them put it, “act on what we are able to see”, referring to visual inspection of the clients’ general conduct and appearance. Individual clients judged ‘too aggressive’ or ‘too drunk’ were asked to leave the premises – to ‘wait outside’ – for two hours, and if, upon returning, they were still judged as not being in a condition to enter the premises, they were asked to leave and come back in four hours, regardless of whether it was day or night.

The municipal employees at the shelter sometimes informed the security officers about individual clients who seemed ‘not too sober’, ‘in a bad mood’ or, more generally, ‘not in a great shape’. They could also ask officers to keep an eye on individual persons and let them know when these persons entered the shelter area or were seen approaching it. The officers performed this kind of social sorting often, even deciding directly who was going to be allowed inside and who was to be barred from entering the shelter either temporarily or – occasionally – on a permanent basis, with the latter case resulting in the person’s eviction. Sometimes,

however, security guards were also asked merely to act on or implement decisions taken by the staff: "If they [the staff] tell me 'he needs to wait outside for a couple of hours', I'll be the one taking him outside."

When shelter residents complied with the decision of security officers and/or the shelter staff to bar them from the premises, a few hours spent outside was often deemed enough. However, if they resisted the decision, they could end up being transported to a police station by police officers called to the scene. In one example of the former happening, a shelter resident was barred from entry into the building for a period of two hours for behaving inappropriately; he was informed that he would be allowed back inside again afterwards if he behaved appropriately. The man in question went outside but soon returned to explain to the front-desk security officer why he had been angry: he had just gone to fetch his clean laundry from the laundry room in the premises, but had then realized that his clothes were nevertheless:

still dirty, and I didn't discover it until it was too late, and now I look like a bum again.... So I got sent outside for two hours just because I raised my voice a bit and used a serious tone of voice with them.

The man then sat down on a bench in the lobby inside, but the front-desk officer informed him that because he was now barred from entering the shelter for two hours, he could not stay there. The man responded by saying that he was not feeling well, that it was freezing outside, and that he was not wearing clothes that were suitable for being outdoors. To this, the officer responded that he had to "look elsewhere for warmth". At that, the man sighed and walked out. After one and a half hours, he returned to the lobby, saying he thought it was now time for him to be let inside again, to which the officer responded, "You know it's not until ten past twelve, they told me." The man then requested permission to use the bathroom and, having been allowed to do that, returned outside once more. Another man in the lobby then raised his voice, stating to the officer: "Two hours in the penalty box, he got."

On another occasion, however, there was a situation that resulted in the arrest of a shelter resident, where a security officer handcuffed the man and pinned him to the floor until the police arrived. The decision to call the police was taken when the man started throwing small objects at the officer in anger. The latter described his reaction and his reasoning behind it as follows:

It's not me – it's not us – who create such situations. There's no desire to start picking fights with people here. It was he who started spouting off about everyone being idiots and animals, so I kindly asked if there was some problem, if I could help him with something. He just went on and on. So I decided that I didn't want him there in the building. I really don't want to put handcuffs on

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anyone; I try to avoid that for as long as I can, for sure. It's a terrible way to restrain someone – a violation. But it's like at the pub: you don't want the problem inside, so you tackle it at the door.

In this incident, the shelter resident breached an important behavioural rule and transgressed a major boundary. As a result, he was expelled from the shelter area, was transported away by the police and was not allowed back. What his example further illustrates, however, is that the security officers were dependent on swift assistance from other policing agents for the successful completion of some of their work tasks – in this case, the police.

Punishment for disorderly conduct was an important tool used by the security officers in their work defending behavioural and territorial borders. In addition to being expelled for a couple of hours (but allowed back inside again) and being transported away by the police (and consequently being permanently listed as 'barred'), the punishments used in the shelter included the issuing of warnings. On one occasion, for instance, two men staying at the shelter entered the building in the early hours of the evening. The security officer on duty greeted them both with an "hello", addressing them by their first names before inquiring "and your bag: is it empty?" The two men seemed to understand immediately that they were to show the contents of the bag they had with them, as one of them placed it on the reception desk straight away, thus complying with the request of the officer to have it checked out. The officer opened it and pulled out a saw, two pairs of scissors, a heavy iron bolt, a razor-sharp knife, a meat cleaver, a folding pocketknife and other similar objects. The men claimed that these were all 'work tools' that they used to extract copper from scrap. While waiting for a municipal staff member to arrive, the security officer and the man that had handed over the bag spoke about the weather in a relaxed and casual manner. When the staff member turned up, he greeted the shelter resident in a friendly manner and allowed him and his companion to come upstairs after having confiscated some of the items. Afterwards, the officer recorded the items that the shelter client had tried to take with him into the building; he made one list for his fellow security officers at the shelter and one for the municipal staff working there. He explained that he and his colleagues were to note down in writing "everything that's worth knowing about", adding that the shelter resident in question "will receive a warning for this": if he continued to contravene shelter rules in a similar manner, he would face expulsion from the shelter.

As already noted, the security officers did not have the authority to conduct frisk searches or demand shelter residents to hand over their bags so they could be examined. Nevertheless, the municipal administration that contracted the security company had instructed them to check all bags brought into the shelter by its residents. This task was also listed in the monitoring guidelines produced by the

security company's management for the individual officers working at the shelter. The latter usually solved the dilemma by asking the clients in a loud and stern voice if they could show what they had in their bags, with most shelter residents complying.

As described above, when behavioural borders were transgressed at the shelter, such as by aggressive behaviour or in a manner that could be perceived by staff and security officers as threatening, shelter residents were punished: they were temporarily barred from entering the shelter building (for either two or four hours at a time) before being allowed back inside. Issuing warnings for improper or inappropriate behaviour (such as bringing prohibited objects inside) was also commonplace. Moreover, as already noted, there were incidents that led to shelter residents being expelled for good from the shelter and its surrounding area; typically, this happened when violence was used towards one or several of the security officers, fellow shelter residents or municipal staff. This, indeed, was the most severe form of boundary transgression at the shelter and resulted in the harshest penalties. All of these punitive measures constituted essential tools in the defence of both the territorial and the behavioural borders, which in turn was understood as necessary for maintaining or re-establishing a secure and safe shelter environment (mainly) for the municipal staff.

### *The challenges of policing partnerships*

The private security officers who were performing de facto public functions at the shelter received clear instructions on their tasks from the public authority that had contracted them. Interestingly, these instructions at times implied disregarding, in practice, the public sector ethos of transparency in decision-making and equal treatment of all clients. The security officers, for instance, were to check everyone entering the building to stop those 'too intoxicated', but those who were stopped in practice tended most often to be individuals using alcohol rather than drugs. One officer explained what he saw as his and his colleagues' dilemma in this regard:

When they [the municipal shelter staff] made the decision that we are to stop everyone who *appears* intoxicated, I told them right away that that means we'll be stopping the boozers only.... 'Well, yeah, we know', they said. 'But don't you realize what'll happen when they figure out it's just the boozers who get stopped?' 'Well, yeah', they kept staying; the staff knew that, but they say it's calmer on their floors when those who are really drunk are stopped, because it's really them, those who drink, who cause the most trouble.

The security officers, in other words, were instructed by their customer to act (only) in cases of those who were visibly intoxicated. In reality, however, this meant leaving the door open for those doing drugs. These and other similar guidelines issued by the contracting public authority through the shelter management thus led to differ-

ential treatment in practice, which clashes with the public sector ideal of transparency in decision-making. In any case, however, even in the absence of such instructions it would have been difficult to uphold the ideal of equal treatment in the everyday reality of the shelter, given that drug users were more difficult to detect than those under the influence of alcohol, as explained by the above-quoted security officer:

When they're on something they act almost like a normal person; it's when they haven't taken anything that they're showing it, twitching and shaking and whatnot. So [to detect if someone is under the influence of drugs] I'd need to go talk to them and check their pupils, but I can't do that, can I, because then I'd be acting on suspicion, and I'm not allowed to do that.

The situation led to complaints from shelter residents being temporarily barred due to being visibly intoxicated by alcohol. Such resistance, in turn, could be met with threats that the person would be taken away by the police. On one occasion, a shelter resident, having just been temporarily barred for being visibly intoxicated (by alcohol), uttered in anger to the security officer: "Hey you, you look like a fucking jailer, don't you; but you know, the cops won't take us, because we're peaceful and we're behaving nice." The nurses at the holding unit, the municipal staff present and the security officer all continued to insist on him leaving the premises, with the municipal staff members trying to calm him down: "Now, be sure to only drink water, and then you'll be able to come back inside again.... You *can* come back, you know; you don't have to stay out for the rest of the night." The now visibly upset man responded with "You, have a look over there", pointing towards the green area alongside the public road just outside the shelter area; "they're all just sitting around over there, taking drugs and smoking dope; I think this sucks, big time." To this the security officer replied with a firm "No; this is enough now; this is just too much talking going on and too little action", and he began to close up on the man as he exited the building.

A few days later, the shelter staff manager came down to discuss this male shelter resident with the security personnel. According to the manager, the security officers tended to stop and check this man in particular on a regular basis. "This is not a prison," the manager exclaimed; "we don't want to have any watchdogs here." As a result of the discussion, the security officer in question wrote a message to his colleagues telling them that they were not to stop and check that particular man any more. Not long after, however, the officers received a new set of instructions from the manager, this time advising them that they were now *always* to stop this man, check his bags and ask him to take the alcometer test. The security officers had the impression that not only were they implicitly asked to turn a blind eye to drug use (and drug dealing) in the area, but also that the police were slow to respond

to a request for assistance when it was about a shelter resident expelled by the security officers who was high on something other than alcohol. One security officer elaborated on this as follows:

The police, they don't come [to take the expelled person to the police station] if the person is under the influence of drugs. They only come and pick them up if it's someone drunk who's being evicted. It's only if they're disorderly and aggressive when they're high on something that they come pick them up. So then you also often have to lie to the police to make them come pick them up: 'He refuses to take the alcometer test, is acting aggressively and is disorderly'...

Previous research has highlighted how police officers often only grudgingly accept the need to work more closely with their private-security counterparts (e.g., Loftus and Skinns, 2014). As in the above quote, the security officers at the homeless shelter in this study who depended on the co-operation of, and back-up from the police in their work at times depicted the latter as being unreliable in this respect. Indeed, they claimed that their work was sometimes directly hampered by the slow emergency response times of the police. Furthermore, as already noted, officers were de facto asked by the public authority contracting their services to disregard public sector values, such as equal treatment and transparency, in decision-making about punitive measures.

In the 'plural policing' (Crawford, 2008) of the homeless shelter, the private security officers working in co-operation with the municipal staff and the police thus sometimes found the policing partnership arrangement difficult to manage and implement. Many of them felt, moreover, that their customer (the municipality) had, at times, unrealistic expectations about what they should and could accomplish. Some voiced qualms about the very aim of their services: "They [our security firm] are selling the illusion of security, the illusion of safety, the illusion of being protected by someone who has the power and authority." Another officer added: "They [the customer, i.e., the municipality] don't realize that we're just ordinary guys in work clothes", referring to the officers' perceived lack of official authority and power.



## Conclusions: Too Little or Too Much Security?

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Metaphorically, the shelter studied for this article could be viewed as the last outpost of the welfare state, beyond which there was little or nothing to fall back on if expelled, and with the private security officers employed there performing what were essentially public functions of that welfare state in acting as gatekeepers to its services. The shelter functioned as a container for a residual group of homeless persons – a group of individuals with lengthy experience of ‘the homelessness industry’ (Ravenhill, 2008) who had in many cases been permanently evicted from other forms of temporary homeless accommodation in the city. In contrast to security personnel who are contracted in order to ensure that public and semi-public spaces such as shopping malls and residential neighbourhoods are attractive to the general population and local inhabitants by physically removing all undesirable elements from them, the security officers employed at the shelter had to co-exist with the population they targeted: the (homeless) shelter residents. Policing the social order in and around the shelter was accomplished through visual surveillance, video monitoring and other means of controlling the territory, people and conduct, including the degree of intoxication, behaviour, general conduct and appearance of shelter residents. Those deemed ‘overly’ intoxicated, aggressive or a disturbance were issued warnings, temporarily barred or transported away by the police and told not to return.

In performing the tasks and duties assigned to them, the private security officers working at the shelter relied on partnerships with the shelter’s municipal staff and the police. When making and enforcing the decisions of the public authority, they needed the back-up of the former, and when spatially displacing unwanted persons, they needed the support of the latter. The municipality, through the shelter management, at times requested ‘more security’ at the shelter in the form of even harsher measures to be applied, based on the assumption that some of the homeless clients staying at the shelter, as well as others not staying there but frequenting its territory, posed a serious threat to the safety and security of the municipal staff and security officers working there (and to the general public more broadly, which was the reason the homeless clients needed to be contained in the shelter in the first place). Indeed, this need for ‘more security’ had even come to be understood as necessary and natural from the point of view of the shelter management.

While the party pushing for this increase of security in the premises, for instance by instructing the security officers not to let certain residents inside and to inspect everyone’s belongings at the entrance, was typically the contractor of the security services – the municipality, through the shelter management – the officers themselves were well aware of their limited powers and authority as private *våktare*. This was well illustrated by their complaints that their customer was unaware that they,

the security officers, were 'just ordinary guys in work clothes' and that the security company they worked for was selling merely 'the illusion of being protected by someone who has the power and authority'. At the same time, their ability to police the shelter population effectively according to the instructions given depended on a lack of awareness among those policed of the exact powers and authority of the security officers as *våktare*. From time to time, the officers acted beyond the scope of their authority in order to better defend the borders of the shelter territory, take control over situations and live up to the expectations of their customer. It also happened, on the other hand, that the same customer criticized – via shelter management – the very work done by the officers to satisfy its expectations; they instructed the security officers not to act like 'watchdogs' and make the shelter appear like 'a prison'.

The initial interest in carrying out this study on the private policing of a municipally owned and operated homeless shelter as a case of private security performing essential public functions, was to examine whether or not frontline public services could be provided by private actors without losing the public sector ethos. While the policing of homeless people in the shelter territory did indeed rely on disciplinary measures often perceived by the shelter residents as fundamentally unjust, inequitable, humiliating and degrading, these measures were for the most part initiated by the shelter management in its role as representative of a public authority, rather than by the private security officers charged with the task of policing. The latter were often following the instructions and wishes of those contracting them to patrol the border of eligibility to the services of the welfare state using harsh disciplinary measures for maximum efficiency. Quite conceivably, these measures were, however, ultimately counterproductive to their stated aims in actually contributing to a less secure and safe shelter environment. As Desai (2000) has noted, CCTV surveillance, for instance, means that individuals may be watched at any time, even constantly, without knowing. While an awareness of this possibility may encourage docility, in the case of the homeless shelter studied, at least, it seems that the panoptic effect of CCTV surveillance and the general style of policing employed were more likely to increase than decrease the likelihood of the very kind of conduct they were installed to prevent by provoking aggressive responses, contemptuous behaviour, 'bad moods' and threats of violence among the shelter residents under surveillance. Accordingly, where security is the objective, 'more security' might not always be the best approach, especially when coupled with even more severe forms of control and punishment.

While 'security' is typically presented as an unquestionable public good, it relies in reality on coercion and social exclusion of the unwanted – those perceived as a security threat (Zedner, 2003). Besides being counterproductive to its own aim at times – a poorly chosen strategy – coercion as a means to security may also be problematic in another respect. While at the shelter in this study, too much security probably produced more un-security, it did that in two different ways: it provoked threats, aggressiveness and violent responses among those controlled, but it also caused highly insecure and unsafe situations for shelter residents who were expelled and barred from the shelter and who ran the consequent risk of finding themselves back on the streets again. The daily work of establishing and maintaining security at the shelter thus potentially counteracted another goal: that of reducing the number of homeless people in the municipality. As exclusions and expulsions are built-in features of systems of homeless accommodation, they will always create a new need for bottom-of-the-barrel homeless accommodation (Juhila, 1992; Sahlin, 1996; Löfstrand, 2005; Wagner, 2005). If (as the professional rhetoric suggested) temporary accommodation at the shelter in this study represented only the first step on the path towards re-integration into mainstream society, other means of ensuring security are needed here and in places like it – means that can ensure the fair and inclusive provision of security without violation of the rights of shelter residents as clients of publicly-provided social services and as citizens in a welfare state.

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# Differential Treatment of Rental Home Seekers According to their Sociodemographic and Economic Status by Real Estate Agencies in Belgium<sup>1</sup>

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› **Abstract\_** *In this article we aim to discover whether anti-discrimination laws guarantee equal access to housing for all rental home seekers. We focus on private rental housing offered through real estate agencies as we assume that these are aware of the existence of anti-discrimination laws. Our investigation takes place in Belgium where frequent reporting on discrimination in access to housing led to a large investigation to learn more about how this discrimination takes place. The method used in this article consists of two approaches. In one part we approach the real estate agency from the supply-side through a fictional private landlord who wants to rent out his apartment, and who asks the real estate agency if they are willing to avoid some type of candidates. In the second part we approach the real estate agency from the demand-side, conducting situational tests by visiting vacant houses. Our results suggest that different home seekers are treated differently. Even where real estate agencies are aware that the practise is discriminatory, they are still willing to avoid renters with certain characteristics, either by not granting them a visit in the first instance or in more hidden ways later in the search process, whether before, during or after the actual visit.*

› **Keywords\_** *housing discrimination, private rented sector, real estate agencies, field tests*

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis was part of a bigger research on diversity in housing, funded by the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities.

## Introduction

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Some rental home seekers face more obstacles than others in the process of finding a suitable place to live. The difficulties they face can be due to their perceived ability to pay rent or maintain the property. As knowing what a person's ability is to pay or maintain a house in advance is not straightforward, landlords will often use their own experience or prejudices about certain groups to estimate a rental candidate's ability to maintain the home, or their ability to pay the rent. On top of this statistical discrimination based on perceived average group characteristics (Choi *et al.*, 2005; Bosch *et al.*, 2010), some groups may be faced with straight out taste-based discrimination where some groups will not be selected based only on their ethnicity, sex, age, religion, family situation, sexual orientation, physical condition or other characteristics.

Discrimination based on ethnicity is the most widely researched. Where discrimination based on ethnicity is tested, its existence is confirmed (Choi *et al.*, 2005; Carpusor and Loges, 2006; Ahmed *et al.*, 2010; Bosch *et al.*, 2010; Baldini and Federici, 2011). Other grounds of discrimination that have been tested in the private rental market include sexual orientation (Ahmed *et al.*, 2008; Lauster and Easterbrook, 2011), handicap (Turner *et al.*, 2005; CERA, 2009), family situation (single parents) (Galster and Constantine, 1991; CERA, 2009; Lauster and Easterbrook, 2011) or type of income source (CERA, 2009). In most cases, the research confirms what has been hypothesized – that discrimination exists – with the exception of sexual orientation (in Sweden). While discrimination towards male homosexual couples exists (Ahmed and Hammarstedt, 2009), this has not found to be the case for lesbian couples (Ahmed *et al.*, 2008).

In Belgium, a country with a lot of ethnic and wealth segregation (see Schuermans *et al.*, 2015), ethnic discrimination in access to housing has been quantitatively detected (Van der Bracht and Van de Putte, 2013), while there is also a lot of qualitative evidence of discriminatory practices against financially vulnerable families (see Meeus and De Decker, 2014; Verstraete and De Decker, 2014). Even with anti-discrimination laws, reports of discrimination via the discrimination hotlines have continued and even increased. Discrimination in the housing sector (usually the private rental sector) constituted a large share of reports in cities, with the discrimination ground often relating to (lack of) wealth or ethnicity (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, 2014). In response to this, the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities commissioned a study to find out the degree of discrimination and the different ways that discrimination manifests itself both in public and private housing (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, 2014). Different phases of the housing search process were studied, including the phase of advertising a vacant dwelling, the phase of first contact via phone or e-mail in response



to an advertisement, the phase of visiting the vacant dwelling, and the rental contract itself. In addition, the experience with discrimination of the renters and the discriminatory motives of private landlords and real estate agents were studied (see Loopmans *et al.*, 2014).

In the part of that research that is reported in this article, we have tried to detect the willingness of real estate agencies, and the strategies employed by them, to discriminate against rental candidates. In existing studies that focus on the contact phase there is usually no distinction made between private owners or real estate agencies. In the Spanish study by Bosch *et al.* (2010) it appears to be the case that real estate agencies discriminate less, but in Carpusor and Loges' (2006) study in LA County, where the same outcome was hypothesised, no difference was found in the degree of discrimination practised by private landlords and real estate agencies. We focus on real estate agencies for two reasons; first, they manage a large part of the supply of rental properties. In Flanders, management in the rental market is increasingly dominated by real estate agencies (Heylen, 2015a), while the opposite is the case in Wallonia. And secondly, we may expect there to be no (overt) discrimination in the highly regulated market segment of properties offered via real estate agencies (as opposed to private landlords); as these agents are professional intermediaries in the rental process and compulsory members of the Professional Institute of Real Estate Agents, they are bound by the code of conduct of their institute, which implies that they must not contravene antidiscrimination laws.

In our research, we do not aim to measure the incidence of discrimination<sup>2</sup> or to investigate the discriminatory practices of private landlords or neighbourhood residents but rather to investigate if real estate agents, who are bound by their deontological code including non-discriminatory behaviour, are willing to act in a discriminatory manner when commissioned to do so by their clients, the property-owners, and, if so, to identify strategies they use to avoid selecting certain potential renters. We look into four groups of would-be renters that are typically exposed to discriminatory behaviour: rental candidates with Moroccan or Turkish origin;<sup>3</sup> disabled (blind or visually impaired) rental candidates; single mothers; and low-income rental candidates. In what follows, we will first discuss briefly the context of the private rental market in Belgium. After this, we present the research design, the results and a conclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> Measuring the incidence of discrimination was one of the other subjects in the study commissioned by the Interfederal centre for Equal Opportunities (see also Heylen and Van den Broeck, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Moroccans and Turks are the largest immigrant groups in Belgium from outside the European Union. They constitute 7 percent and 3 percent of the foreign population respectively (Vanduynslager *et al.*, 2013).

## The Private Rental Market in Belgium

In Belgium, as in many other countries, the right to decent housing is included in the Constitution.<sup>4</sup> It is not only considered one of the elementary necessities of life, but the link with poverty, health, educational outcomes and harmonious coexistence between different groups is acknowledged (Hubeau and Vermeir, 2013). Housing is a regional competence so each of the three regions (Flanders,<sup>5</sup> Wallonia<sup>6</sup> and Brussels<sup>7</sup>) has their own Housing Code, which protects the right to decent standard of living for all. Each Code has an explicit focus on providing housing to low income households or the households most in need (Flanders: Art. 4, §1 & §2, 1997; Wallonia: Art.2, 1998) or advocates equal treatment, explicitly incorporating the rules of the anti-discrimination law (Brussels: Title IX, Art. 176-183, 2013).

Equal access to housing should therefore be secured by anti-discrimination laws, which include the anti-racism laws (1981; 2007<sup>8</sup>) and the law on equality of men and women (2007). These laws prohibit discrimination on the following grounds: assumed race, nationality, skin colour, ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, handicap, religion or philosophy, civil status, birth, resources, political or philosophical beliefs, language, current or future health status, handicap, physical or genetic characteristics and social background. So, not selecting a rental candidate purely on the basis of one of the protected criteria is illegal. This law offers victims of discrimination the opportunity to take judicial action in a civil court. The law forbids not only discriminatory behaviour itself but also the incitement of discriminatory behaviour.<sup>9</sup> There are exceptions to these criteria where there is objective justification for the exclusion.<sup>10</sup> The advice of the Privacy Commission (2009) has also put some restrictions on inquiries into solvency in order to protect the privacy of those seeking to rent. For example, demanding tax letters, recommendations

<sup>4</sup> Art. 23 of the Belgian Constitution ([http://www.senate.be/doc/const\\_nl.html](http://www.senate.be/doc/const_nl.html)).

<sup>5</sup> Vlaamse Wooncode (1997) <http://codex.vlaanderen.be/Portals/Codex/documenten/1005498.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Code Wallon du Logement (1998): <http://wallex.wallonie.be/index.php?doc=6086>.

<sup>7</sup> Code Bruxellois du Logement (2013): [http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi\\_loi/change\\_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=2003071748&table\\_name=loi](http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=2003071748&table_name=loi).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.diversiteit.be/sites/default/files/legacy\\_files/wetgeving\\_legislation/ADW\\_NL%20-%202031-01-2013.pdf](http://www.diversiteit.be/sites/default/files/legacy_files/wetgeving_legislation/ADW_NL%20-%202031-01-2013.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.diversiteit.be/de-antiracismewet-van-30-juli-1981#Injonction de discriminer](http://www.diversiteit.be/de-antiracismewet-van-30-juli-1981#Injonction%20de%20discriminer).

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.diversiteit.be/de-antidiscriminatiewet-van-10-mei-2007#Objectieve rechtvaardiging](http://www.diversiteit.be/de-antidiscriminatiewet-van-10-mei-2007#Objectieve%20rechtvaardiging); see the Bilka-judgment (H.v.J., 13 mei 1986, Bilka, zaak 170/84, Jur., 1986, 1607) which gave rise to the terminology and rules of 'objective justification' in cases of (indirect) discrimination. Objective justification can occur when the goal is legitimate (for example, the timely receipt of monthly rent payments) and the means are appropriate and necessary (checking solvency situations).

from former landlords or certificates of good conduct and contacting former employers are considered actions that are not strictly necessary or that may violate the privacy law.<sup>11</sup>

In the real estate agent code, which is regulated by the Professional Institute of Real Estate Agents (of which membership is compulsory for agents), anti-discrimination laws are explicitly mentioned.<sup>12</sup> If real estate agents do not respect the rules of the code, they risk disciplinary procedures, which can take the form of a warning, a reproach, a suspension or a cancellation of their membership.

A problem that might make part of the discrimination problem in the private rental sector worse – that is, statistically-based discrimination on ability to pay the rent – is the fact that the private rental sector in Belgium is to a large extent considered a residual sector to which those with weaker socio-economic profiles turn as they do not have access to other sectors (Hubeau and Vermeir, 2013; Winters and Heylen, 2013). Lower income groups in particular, but also the lower educated irrespective of their income, appear to experience difficulties in buying their own house (Heylen and Winters, 2008; Heylen, 2015b) and will need to find housing in the rental sector. Housing affordability among private renters has been decreasing in recent years.<sup>13</sup> Figures for 2009 suggested that this affordability problem is significantly higher in Brussels and Wallonia than in Flanders (Winters and Heylen, 2013).

Due to weaker socio-economic profiles and high (and increasing) rates of overburden in housing costs in the sector, renting to a candidate with a low ability to pay rent or to maintain the property is not without risk, from the private landlord's point of view. Recent Flemish research points out that about one fifth of private landlords have experienced a conflict with (at least) one of their tenants about timely rent payments and 8 percent have experienced conflict about the maintenance of the dwelling (Heylen, 2015a; b). Landlords will therefore thoroughly screen a potential tenant's ability to pay. However, in doing so, landlords might base their selection on certain characteristics of the potential tenant, which they assume can be linked to the ability to pay. These characteristics may be the income source, activity status, household type, or physical or other characteristics.

<sup>11</sup> The Professional Institute of Real Estate Agents and the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities have developed a questionnaire that respects the antidiscrimination and privacy laws, which landlords can use to collect information from rental candidates.

<sup>12</sup> Art 1, 7° and 8° (<http://www.biv.be/admin/userfiles/file/NL/Nieuw%20website/Juridische%20teksten/Reglement%20van%20plichtenleer.pdf>)

<sup>13</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income\\_social\\_inclusion\\_living\\_conditions/data/main\\_tables](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/main_tables); <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tessi164&plugin=1>. The housing cost burden is defined as the ratio of total housing costs (net of housing allowances) over total disposable household income (net of housing allowances).

Prior to the point of writing, discrimination as specifically practiced by real estate agencies towards renters with a certain socio-demographic or economic profile had not been investigated in Belgium. And with the role of real estate agencies as intermediary partners in the housing search increasing, especially in Flanders, their behaviour may have an impact on housing access for certain groups of rental home seekers. In our research we include four groups at risk of discrimination, either because their situation might –wrongly – signal a low ability to pay rent or maintain the property or because they evoke taste-based discrimination: persons with a different ethnic background; persons who are blind or vision impaired; single mothers with one child; and those on low incomes. We aim to discover whether real estate agents practice selection processes that can be discriminatory.

## Research Design

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To detect the incidence of discrimination in the housing (or labour or consumer) market, field experiments are commonly used. Until recently, only personal situation tests (including house visits or telephone contact) were used, where fictional candidate home seekers are matched and trained in order to display the same characteristics relating to the criteria that a landlord uses to select a candidate. Differences in treatment are linked to the characteristic being tested, which is supposed to be the only difference between the candidates (Heckman, 1998; Riach and Rich, 2002). Alternatively, the experiments can be based on correspondence tests where written applications are sent (e.g., in the labour market) or by e-mail (e.g., by contacting landlords/real estate agencies in response to the advertisement of a vacant home). By avoiding personal contact, it is easier to create exactly the same profile except for the tested characteristic.

Personal situation tests and, more recently, correspondence tests have been used in many countries to detect discrimination – e.g., in the US, Canada and European countries such as Sweden, Greece, Spain, Italy and the UK (Yinger, 1986 in Boston; Massey and Lundy, 2001 in Philadelphia; Turner *et al.*, 2002 and Choi, *et al.*, 2005 in metropolitan areas in the US; Carpusor and Loges, 2006 in Los Angeles County; CERA, 2009 in Toronto; Hanson and Hawley, 2011 in a number of cities in the US; Ahmed *et al.*, 2010 in Sweden; Bosch *et al.*, 2010 in Spain; Baldini and Federici, 2011 in Italy; Drydakakis, 2011 in Greece; Bengtsson *et al.*, 2012 in Stockholm).

Even though correspondence methods have advantages over personal situation tests, they are often restricted to the first phase of the search for a home, where a prospective renter seeks contact with the landlord or real estate agent in order to

get an appointment. If he gets an appointment, he will most often need to visit the dwelling in person. As such, discrimination can only be detected by means of personal situation tests in later stages of the search process.

We use a dual methodology to find out whether the behaviour of real estate agencies in Belgium is discriminatory towards certain groups or whether only legally permissible selection strategies are used. Real estate agencies are in fact an intermediary between a renter and a house-owner, making the relationship between them indirect. Real estate agencies will be approached both by those that want to rent their housing out to others (supply) and by those that seek to rent a housing unit (demand). We aim to investigate the selection strategies of real estate agents from both the supply and demand side. On the one hand, we approach the real estate agency from the supply side: a fictional home-owner contacts the agency and proposes renting out his property via that real estate agency on the condition that the agency is willing to avoid certain types of prospective renters. On the other hand, we implement situational tests, where a pair of trained testers calls the real estate agency in response to an advertisement about a vacant housing unit in order to arrange an appointment for a visit. If a visit is agreed for both testers, it will effectively take place.

### ***Supply-side approach***

In this part, we investigate how real estate agencies react to the question of a fictional homeowner who considers renting out his apartment via the agency and who asks whether certain groups of rental home seekers can be avoided. In particular, we focus on two groups, namely 'foreigners' and 'unemployed people'. 600 real estate agents, located across Belgium, were contacted in June 2013. These were randomly picked from real estate agents available on the Internet (members of the Professional Institute of Real Estate Agents). 300 of them were asked if they would be willing to avoid 'foreigners', while the other half were asked if it was possible to avoid 'unemployed' persons.

In the scenario, the caller first asked about the conditions and procedures of the real estate agency, the cost and the services. After an explanation by the real estate agent, the following question used to detect a willingness or otherwise to avoid certain groups of prospective renters:

'Ok, that sounds fine. But I have an additional question. Some of my friends have had rather bad experiences with renting their apartments to foreigners/unemployed people. Therefore I wondered whether it would be possible to avoid foreigners/unemployed people?'

With respect to income, it is worth noting in order to minimise risk, landlords are allowed to select candidates on the basis of income level but not on the basis of the nature of income (such as unemployment benefits). In our test case, the fictitious homeowner does not specify anything further with respect to the rental cost of the dwelling he offers. Hence, if a real estate agency immediately agrees to his request, without knowing the type and price of the dwelling, we can conclude a willingness to withhold some candidates on the basis of income alone or ethnicity alone, both of which are protected discrimination grounds in Belgium.

The results of this part of the study will give an indication of the willingness of real estate agents to agree to the request of a potential customer with respect to discrimination. Moreover, it will give insights into how real estate agents suggest doing so. We compare these intentions with the experience of mystery clients via the demand-side approach.

### ***Demand-side approach***

As mentioned above, we base the experiment on situational tests. By doing so, we do not aim for this study to be representative of the whole of Belgium; nor do we aim to calculate the incidence of discrimination by real estate agencies. The approach is more qualitative in nature. We perform 124 paired tests spread across Belgium in order to identify selection strategies applied by real estate agencies, which may affect certain groups of prospective renters differently. A similar set-up was used by the High Authority of the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality to test discrimination in access to privately rented dwellings in two regions in France: Ile de France and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (HALDE, 2006).

We defined four experimental groups (with around 30 paired tests for each group) that potentially could face differential treatment: (1) prospective renters whose background (Moroccan or Turkish) is signalled by their name but who master Dutch or French perfectly; (2) blind prospective renters; (3) single mothers with a one-year old child; and (4) rental home seekers characterised by low income. This could either be an unemployed person or a person employed in a poorly paid sector (more specifically, in a call centre).

Testers were matched in pairs in order to have the same gender and age but so that they differed with respect to one of the four characteristics. The control person bore a typically Belgian name and was earning the median income. Testers were trained in other socio-economic characteristics so as to be able to give the same answers when questioned by the real estate agent. In the case of the blind rental home seekers, the testers acted as a friend accompanying the blind person. The latter was usually recruited from the testers' network or via organisations for blind or visually impaired persons.

Vacant houses or apartments rented out by real estate agents were found on the two largest real estate websites in Belgium.<sup>14</sup> The search area was concentrated in the regions that the testers came from so as not to invoke questions about reasons for moving out of a region (which could be revealed by their accent).

After finding a vacant home on the Internet, the normal procedure would be to contact the agency and arrange a visit. The home is then shown and if the candidate is still interested, he will be put on a list that will be presented to the homeowner. It is the homeowner who will make the final choice. The rental candidate may then have to provide the real estate agency with some information in order for the real estate agent to compose a rental file.

In the first step of the investigation, the testers contacted the real estate agent by phone to book a visit. In half of the cases the control persons rang first and in the other half the experimental testers rang first. The visit only took place if both testers could agree a time to visit the residence that was for rent on the same day. Otherwise the candidate that did get an appointment cancelled it politely as soon as possible. The tests were performed in June 2013.

## Results

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In this part we discuss the results of both approaches separately. We make a comparison of the results of each side in a separate paragraph.

### *Supply-side approach*

In Table 1 we show the results of the supply-side approach. We find that the willingness of real estate agencies to avoid certain groups of rental home seekers at the request of the fictional property-owner is quite high: 42 percent of the agencies contacted answered directly that they were willing to do so in the case of foreigners. For unemployed rental candidates, there is an even higher willingness of 61 percent. Only one in seven (14 percent) real estate agencies answered that they are not willing to avoid foreigners. But this percentage was only half as high where it concerned unemployed people: only one in fourteen real estate agents were not willing to avoid unemployed people just because they were unemployed. There are also quite a lot of real estate agencies that refer to their procedures; it is not they themselves who will deny these groups a visit but the owner will make his choice from a list of candidates (34 percent in case of foreigners and 24 percent in case of unemployed persons). If we combine both 'no' and 'no, it is the owner's choice'

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<sup>14</sup> Immoweb ([www.immoweb.be](http://www.immoweb.be)) or Vlan ([www.vlan.be](http://www.vlan.be)).

we find that nearly half of the real estate agencies are not willing to discriminate against foreigners directly (48 percent). With respect to unemployed rental home seekers they are not willing to do so in less than one third of the cases (31.6 percent).

**Table 1: Willingness to Avoid Certain Types of Rental Home Seekers**

Is it possible to avoid [...]? (percentages)	Foreigners N=300	Unemployed people N=300
Yes	42.3	61.3
No	14.0	7.3
No, it is the owner's choice (list)	34.0	24.3
This needs to be discussed with management	1.0	0
We do not discuss this over the phone	2.7	1.7
The question is ignored	1.7	0.3
The common procedures are explained (e.g., payslips, consulting the former letter,...)	1.0	2.7
The procedure is explained including preselection by the real estate agent based on solvency	0.7	1.3
Other	2.7	1.0

### Willingness to avoid foreigners

In addition to their answer to the question posed by the interviewer, which was categorised as in Table 1 above by the interviewer, the real estate agents often elaborated on their answer. They added to it, for example, by saying:

‘We cannot put this in writing’

‘Officially it is not allowed but unofficially...’

‘It is difficult to answer this question over the phone’

By their reaction on the phone (see above quotes), it is clear that real estate agencies realise that differential treatment of rental home seekers on the basis of ethnicity, nationality or colour is illegal. It is compulsory for all real estate agencies operating in Belgium to be a member of the Professional Institute of Real Estate Agents (Beroepsinstituut van Vastgoedmakelaars) and to abide by its professional code, which states that all members must act according to the anti-discrimination laws.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, some agencies seem willing to co-operate with their clients in perpetrating discrimination, perhaps fearing that the clients will use the services of another, more willing competitor.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.biv.be/NV\\_3\\_C.php?lingua=NL](http://www.biv.be/NV_3_C.php?lingua=NL).



There are agencies that are willing to refuse a visit from the first contact by phone or e-mail, as the following quotes indicate:

‘From the first phone call we take into account the requests of the owners’

‘We recognise foreigners by their name in the e-mail or by their accent on the phone’

Even if a visit is agreed, the visit can still be pro forma, as, for example, the following suggests:

‘We are required to allow everyone a visit; otherwise we can be prosecuted for discrimination’

The real estate agency then uses false pretences to exclude someone or to put him or her on stand-by. The real estate agencies indicated the existence of ‘shortcuts’ – for example, not putting certain people on the list of candidates the owner can choose from or falsely informing the candidate that there was either a better candidate or someone from the owner’s family who wanted to rent the property. A candidate can also be put on stand-by by telling him or her that someone else already has an option on the property.

Discouragement strategies were also identified, such as asking candidates to come into the real estate office and demanding additional documentation such as a document on family composition – for which one has to go to the town hall – or a certificate of good conduct,<sup>16</sup> or making the rental conditions stricter – for example, by requiring a higher rental deposit<sup>17</sup> or a higher number of months of payslips.

But there are also those who do mention the fact that the request is discriminatory and prosecutable:

‘We are not allowed to discriminate’

‘We only check their solvency’

‘We are not allowed to refuse foreigners because they can file a complaint’

They then point out that it is the homeowner who makes the final choice. There are also real estate agencies that answer straight from the start that they are not allowed or are not willing to discriminate on the basis of ethnicity and that their most important selection criterion is solvency, as is legally allowed.

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<sup>16</sup> The Commission for Privacy Protection judges this to be an illegal demand since a certificate of good conduct is a judicial document, the processing of which is not allowed by private landlords (Recommendation 01/2009-CBPL).

<sup>17</sup> Officially the rent deposit amounts to two months of rent.

### **Willingness to avoid unemployed renters**

With respect to the group of unemployed potential renters, the reactions of the real estate agencies showed a higher willingness to discriminate directly from the first contact based on the nature of income, and rental home seekers who are entitled to social assistance (paid by the Public Centre for Social Welfare) or to disability benefits (paid by their health insurance) are especially easily excluded:

‘We do not rent to persons with a subsistence income or disability benefits’

‘Our renters have to have a steady job’

This selection occurs only on the basis of the nature of income and falls therefore under the discrimination law.

Some real estate agencies are found to be unwilling even to grant a visit to this group of rental home seekers. Where a visit does take place, discouragement strategies are used; the prospective renter has to be able to show payslips (=have a job), sometimes for up to 6 months; or the employment contract or tax bills may be requested. The real estate agents may even call the rental candidate’s employer to ask for more information about the candidate – e.g., to find out if it is likely that this candidate will be dismissed in the near future. Or real estate agents may mention during the visit that the unemployed person’s candidacy is doubtful and the owner prefers someone who works.

Some real estate agencies present certain risk-reducing solutions to the homeowner. To give the owner an option to get out of the rental contract if there are problems, these agencies mention the possibility of starting with a shorter-term rental contract instead of the typical long-term one. Furthermore, they present the possibility of demanding a guarantor who signs the rental contract together with the actual renter. But there are also agencies that defend the unemployed rental home seekers, for example by saying that they are more timely payers than some of the employed renters, and mention the fact that this is discrimination.

### ***Demand-side approach***

We discuss the results according to the ground for discrimination and combine them in an overview table (Table 2 at the end of this section). The results discussed always involve cases where there was differential treatment compared to the control group. So, if for both the experimental and control tester alike the visit was cancelled, we do not mention it. The findings are based only on these cases where the experimental and control tester were treated differently.

### **Ethnicity (Moroccan/Turkish rental home seekers)**

In the case of ethnicity, we found that there was already some discrimination from the start (4 out of 31 cases), where the experimental tester was not granted a visit while the control tester was. Obviously, the denial of the visit occurred not directly but under false pretences by telling the rental home seeker that the owner was looking for an older renter (while this was not the case for the control tester who was of the same age as the experimental tester) or needed some documentation first (again, this was not the case for the control tester). The documentation requested concerned a copy of the identity card of the caller and the three last payslips. In the last case, a visit was originally arranged but cancelled later under the false pretences that the property was already rented out (but not for the control tester who had a visit at a later time).

The use of discouraging strategies was also reported. For example, if a visit was agreed, the experimental group was asked in advance to bring some documents to the visit. After the visit, experimental testers were asked to pass by the office of the real estate agent (with some documents). The conditions of the visit itself seemed to differ between experimental and control group. For the available pairs, punctuality seemed slightly more respected for the control testers, and the visit lasted a couple of minutes more on average for the control testers. Furthermore, real estate agents often use information documents that the candidate renters need to fill out (this can contain a lot of detailed questions) if they want to apply as candidate renters. It seemed that the control testers mentioned having received this document more often, which may suggest a larger interest in this group. Also the attitude of the agent sometimes differed in showing low enthusiasm towards the experimental tester or mentioning a low probability of being selected by the owner, as following quotes from the mystery clients suggest (this type of answer was not mentioned by the control group on equal income):

‘The real estate agent was rude on the phone. He was impolite and asked if I could bring payslips and that I definitely had to be on time’

‘He made me understand that I did not have a big chance of being chosen because my income was too tight’

### **Single mothers**

In the case of the single mothers, the control group was, exceptionally, not of the same sex. The control tester is a single male (same age and income) without children. So in this case we have to bear in mind that any possible discriminatory behaviour may be due to several causes: (1) being female or (2) having a young child or (3) being female and having a young child together. (1), (2) and (3) together can also make the candidate appear at a higher risk of non-payment because although she has the same income as the control tester, there is an additional person to support.

We did not find any immediate discrimination on the phone. And none of the agreed visits were cancelled before effectively taking place. This was also the case in a very similar study in France on discrimination based on ethnicity and single parenthood (HALDE, 2006); whereas the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan African candidate already experienced discrimination in the telephone phase, this was not the case for the single parents. The latter had the same visit ratio (compared to the total amount of vacancies contacted) as the reference person. Other formal conditions of the visit, such as punctuality, duration and number of other visitors, do not appear to differ between the single mothers and the control group.

What does appear to occur is that the single mother candidates are more often put on stand-by or selected as a second-best choice. The real estate agent mentions, for example, that an option was put on the property just before the visit or that candidates who can move soonest will get preferential treatment.

‘The real estate agent told me at arrival that it had been too late to inform me but that there was now an option on the place. This afternoon the other candidate would confirm. If he did not take it, the real estate agent would contact me’

If a single mother is linked to a higher risk of non-payment, risk-reducing solutions are offered – for example, having a guarantor. What also occurs is the demand of a ‘reservation deposit’. The candidate is asked to deposit a certain amount, which will be returned if she is not selected or deducted from the first month of rent if she is.

‘The agent gave me a piece of paper with all the things I had to bring along to constitute my file. He asked 100 euro to reserve the dwelling, or if I did not get it, he would return them to me. If it was ok, the amount would be deducted from the first rent’

### **Blind candidates**

In the case of blind situational tests, 3 out of 29 stopped at the first phone contact because of discriminatory behaviour towards the experimental tester. In some cases the real estate agent objects directly to the fact of accepting a blind renter, stating that he or she is required to have a guarantor or suggesting looking for another vacant property because, according to him, the one in question is not suitable for blind persons. If the blind candidate managed to get an appointment, it was cancelled in 3 out of the 26 remaining cases (while not cancelled for the control tester).

Once the appointment took place, there did not seem to be any differential treatment during the appointment with respect to the formal conditions of the visit or the attitude of the real estate agent. With respect to the demand for more documentation or information we did not see a consistent pattern.

Discouragement strategies seem to be used for this group, too, as the blind or vision-impaired candidates are sometimes presented with additional costs, as in the following quote:

‘When the visit was finished we went back to the office, where we met the usual agent who was normally doing the visits for this apartment. He talked about additional costs and electric equipment in the kitchen...[...]. The costs in the ad only mentioned electricity and heating’

Also, risk-reducing solutions may be presented if the blind candidate is considered a higher risk, even though he has the same income and profession as the control tester. Real estate agents may ask for a guarantor.

‘As a disabled person, he needs a guarantor,’ was the explanation’

### **Low income**

With regard to the low-income group, out of the 31 paired tests that were planned, only 27 continued to the phase of the visit. Four were not allowed to visit the property because of the source or level of their income (the former is discrimination, the latter is regarded as selection). It is clear that some property-owners demanded that their renters have a job because they put forward the condition of being able to show pay slips. One of the experimental testers reported the following:

‘The agent asked on the phone what the source of my income was. Then he answered that he is working for owners who do not want to rent out their property to persons who cannot show pay slips’

So here we find direct discrimination based on the source of income. In the other test cases, the agent never expressed directly that the owners did not want to rent to people with a non-Belgian background or a handicap but the discrimination took place in a more indirect form by cancelling the visit under false pretences or by making the visit pro forma while the candidate does not really have a chance of ending up on the list that will be presented to the owner.

In relation to punctuality and the duration of the visit, we do not find any differences between experimental and control group testers. However, with respect to the number of other rental home seekers present at the visit, the results suggest it occurs more often that there are more other rental candidates present at the visit in the case of unemployed rental home seekers. It is worth noting that in these cases, it is not that the agency always organises group visits – we are reporting only *differences* between the experimental and control group. So in this case, the experimental testers were more often shown around with more other people present while this was not the case for the control testers. It could be a

strategy whereby candidates who are less likely to be selected are allowed to visit the property together with other visitors so it requires less time from the real estate agent.

The real estate agents also seemed to ask more questions related to family composition to the experimental testers in order to make an evaluation of the risk they pose. With respect to the documentation required, there were remarkable differences between the control testers and the low-income testers; for example, where the control testers were required to show only one month's pay slip, the experimental testers with the low-income job were required to show more months. Additionally, the experimental group testers were required to add to their file recommendations from former landlords. However, The Privacy Commission (2009) judged that this practice is unnecessary for the selection process and that the absence of these documents may not be used to justify the refusal to engage in a rental contract.

During the visit, the real estate agent sometimes points out – whether implicitly by his attitude or explicitly – that rental home seekers of a certain source or level of income have less probability of being selected. The following quotes indicate some ways in which this would occur (again, the control groups did not report anything similar):

'He said it was a pity I didn't have a good profession because otherwise he would be able to rent out the property immediately' (unemployed tester)

'The agent said there were other candidates, and he asked whether I had a job and whether I would be able to pay the rent. When he heard I was unemployed, he was far less friendly from then onwards' (unemployed tester)

'The atmosphere during the visit was cold and there was no way this could lead someone to believe he could rent the studio' (call centre employee)

We also found that estate agent sometimes required payment of a deposit fee (as with the single mother, where financial considerations also could play a role) and that certain documents be provided at the office of the real estate agent, which can have a discouraging effect:

'He needed €100 as a deposit fee, which will be deducted from the first rent if the candidate is selected or returned in case he is not selected. In case the candidate is selected but is not interested in the property anymore, the €100 is lost' (call centre employee)

These findings show similarities with an Australian investigation into practices used by real estate agencies to evaluate the risk posed by rental candidates (Short *et al.*, 2008). Having a low income was identified here as the most important factor in the

considerations of real estate agencies for granting rental homes. Real estate agents mentioned that both formal as well as informal strategies were used to calculate both the financial and the maintenance risk of the rental candidates. The researchers identified the following factors that were used as indicators of a low ability to pay or maintain the property: unemployment, big families, single parenthood, physical inability or 'presentation'. As these authors also remark, rental home seekers with low income may actually be confronted with a more competitive housing market due to a lower number of advertisements within the segment of low-rent homes. A more competitive market where demand for housing is high and supply is low may lead to more opportunities for discrimination. Baert *et al.* (2013) effectively show that the tightness of the market is an important factor in determining the degree of discrimination that takes place. They find for the labour market in Belgium that discrimination is non-existent where demand for labour is high and supply is low, while there is quite a degree of discrimination in the opposite case.

### ***Demand-side and supply-side information combined***

Tables 2 and Table 3 summarise the selection practices or de-selection strategies that fictional rental home seekers were confronted with.

**Table 2: Overview (De)selection Strategies – Demand-side Approach (Rental Home Seekers)**

Strategies	Moroccan/ Turkish candidates	Single mothers	Blind candidates	Low-income candidates
Visit refusal from first contact-direct by tested characteristic				x
Visit refusal from first contact-indirect	x		x	
Visit cancelled	x		x	
Use false pretences	x			
Put on stand-by/use as second-best option		x		
Discouragement	x		x	x
Formal conditions of the visit	x			x
Attitude of real estate agent	x			x
Need to provide more 'proof' of ability to pay				x
Offer risk-reducing solutions		x	x	
Reservation fee/deposit		x		x

**Table 3: Overview (De)selection Strategies – Supply-side Approach  
(Home-owners)**

Strategies	Foreigners	Unemployed persons
Visit refusal from first contact	x	x
Use false pretences	x	
Put on stand-by	x	
Discouragement	x	x
Offer risk-reducing solutions		x
Defending/Mentioning discrimination	x	x

Both the results from the supply- and the demand-side approach confirm the existence of discriminatory behaviour by real estate agencies. The strategies used to treat some rental candidates differently include a direct refusal to arrange a visit on the basis of a certain characteristic (source of income, disability) and an indirect refusal under false pretences, where no reason is given for the refusal of the visit.

Unlike the other groups, single mothers do not seem to be treated differently in the first phase of arranging a visit. In their article on discrimination during the phase of first contact with private owners, Heylen and Van den Broeck (2015) find that single mothers who approach the landlord by telephone are discriminated against in 5.5 percent of cases. In our qualitative testing, it was the group of blind testers that was faced with the strongest reluctance to arrange a visit (that is not cancelled afterwards) when making contact with the real estate agent. But Moroccan/Turkish candidates and low-income candidates also face this problem.

Apart from not arranging a visit, we find that visits can be agreed in the first instance but cancelled afterwards (under false pretences). This occurs for Moroccan/Turkish candidates and blind persons. While the immediate refusal of certain groups at first contact is also mentioned to the fictional home-owners, the strategy of cancelling visits after they were agreed is not mentioned. The use of false pretences is mainly used to avoid rental candidates with a non-Belgian background.

Also, discouragement strategies can be used during the visit so that the candidates themselves will decide not to apply for the vacant property, discouraged either by the attitude of the real estate agent or by his request for more documents for the rental file. All groups but the single mothers seem to have experienced this kind of behaviour and it is referred to by the real estate agencies in informing potential clients of how they avoid certain groups of rental home seekers.

Even though single mothers seem to be the group facing the fewest of all possible differential treatment strategies of the real estate agents, they can still be put on standby only to be selected if no other, better candidate comes along. From the



demand-side approach, we do not see this strategy used for the other tested groups but it is mentioned by real estate agents as a way of avoiding foreigners. For some groups that may pose a risk to the landlord, the real estate agent may suggest some risk-reducing solutions to enhance the chance of their being selected – mostly the co-signing of the rental contract by a guarantor. From the demand-side we found that single mothers and blind candidates were offered this possibility. From the supply-side approach we also found it was used as a suggestion to reduce the risk of letting the property to a low-income renter. Another strategy that may be used to avoid potentially risky candidates is to demand a reservation fee. The group that needs to provide most (or excessive) proof of their ability to pay is the group of low-income rental home seekers.

Overall, the low-income group seems to be treated the least favourably; they may be directly refused a visit on the first telephone contact based solely on their source of income, but during the visit they also face the most difficult conditions, where all strategies identified in this study for avoiding certain groups of prospective renters seem to be used.

## Conclusion

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Investigating discrimination in a context where anti-discrimination laws exist and are assumed to be known, our results suggest that the incidence of discrimination as measured by field experiment studies using situational tests or e-mail correspondence methods in the contact phase of the search for a rental home is most likely an underestimation of the true incidence of discrimination in the search for a rental home. We find, namely, that there are more opportunities for discrimination after the first contact phase or that discrimination is hidden.

Even though real estate agencies are bound by a code of conduct, which includes having to act according to the anti-discrimination laws and which, if not respected, could result in a disciplinary sanction that can take the form of a warning, a reproach, a suspension or a cancellation of membership, we did find a willingness to discriminate and we identified a number of discriminatory strategies that real estate agencies use in dealing with certain groups of rental home seekers. Real estate agents do know the rules – the anti-discrimination laws – but they do not always abide by them; they use what they call ‘shortcuts’. It may be that the risk of being caught or punished for not abiding by one of the rules in their professional code – namely, respecting the anti-discrimination laws – is too low. This is something that can be further investigated in looking at how these rules can be better enforced.

Besides the refusal to grant some groups a visit (directly or indirectly) at the first telephone contact, there are many ways used to avoid potential renters with specific profiles after the first phase of contact. So it is important to look beyond this first phase of contact, which is the topic of most of the literature on (quantitative) housing discrimination. Although some are, many of the tactics used to avoid certain groups are not overtly visible or measurable; tactics may be used to discourage potential tenants or to encourage them to deselect themselves from the process.

Even though all groups tested appear to be subject to differential treatment by real estate agencies, some groups face more different conditions than others or they face different treatment in different phases of the search. The groups facing most problems were the candidates with a foreign background and low-income rental home seekers. They face difficulties at all stages of the search process. Due to the exclusionary strategies, some groups may find it harder to find a home, may need to spend much more time in finding one and may need to spend a period of time in homelessness (including staying with friends and relatives). Or they may find themselves in a situation of limited housing options only within the segments of lowest housing quality. They may also end up in more insecure housing situations due to shorter contracts. As such, these exclusionary practices may result in a situation of homelessness for persons with certain characteristics.

Even though we would expect real estate agencies to respect the antidiscrimination laws, they still appear willing to use discriminatory selection practices that go beyond the mere objective screening of candidates in order to select the candidate who appears best able to pay and maintain the rental property.

These exclusionary practices are hindering the enforcement of the right to housing for all, and research is needed into ways that they can be ended. Definitely, sensitization of real estate agencies will not be sufficient, as many of them already know the existing laws. More could be done to make them act in a more uniform way with respect to their selection processes, via both the supply and demand sides. This could include, for example, putting in place agreements on zero willingness to discriminate or another example, using the same formal form to be presented to all interested candidates for information-gathering.

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# Pathways through Homelessness in Helsinki

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► **Abstract\_** *The aim of this paper is to identify different pathways for different groups of homeless people: from where do they end up homeless, where do they stay during homelessness and how do they exit homelessness? The homelessness pathways in Helsinki were charted through a postal survey addressed to residents who had been registered as having no permanent place of residence in the population register, but who had moved to a permanent address. Pathways through homelessness were identified with the help of cluster analysis, which groups respondents according to similarity of pathways. Pathways of respondents were classified with consideration of four variables: housing type before homelessness, accommodation during homelessness, the way homelessness ended and housing type at the time of responding. Eight clusters were identified as a result of the analysis. The clusters can be roughly grouped into three categories: 1) transitionally homeless people, whose pathways lead to stable housing in either rental or owner-occupied housing after an episode of homelessness spent at friend's or relative's home; 2) homeless people with insecure housing careers, for whom living with a partner, friends or relatives without a lease of their own, or subletting, are common features at some point of the housing pathway; and 3) disadvantaged homeless people – often those who are long-term homeless and who have to rely on homeless services to exit homelessness.*

► **Keywords\_** *homelessness, homelessness pathways, hidden homelessness, cluster analysis*

## Introduction

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The research on homelessness has drawn on the notion of pathways for a few decades now to highlight the dynamic and often transitional nature of the homeless experience. In particular, longitudinal quantitative research has made researchers increasingly aware that homelessness is transitory, that most homeless people exit homelessness rather quickly; and for the most part, homelessness is episodic rather than continuous, although some remain homeless for long periods. This understanding has shifted the focus from routes into homelessness to routes out of and through homelessness. (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). Also in Finland, the need to explore the dynamics of homelessness in different cities has been acknowledged (Pitkänen, 2010). Homelessness in Finland is concentrated in the metropolitan area, especially Helsinki. According to the homelessness statistics, 49 percent of single homeless people and 66 percent of homeless families are located in Helsinki (ARA, 2015). Thus, it is important to study homelessness above all in Helsinki.

Research on homelessness has often been based on snapshots of the users of homeless services; this is also true for Finland. This means that significant components of the homeless population – those whose homelessness is not visible and who do not come to the notice of authorities – is left out. The characteristics of the 'hard core' of the homeless population that is reached by homeless services has been looked into thoroughly by different studies. However, less is known about 'hidden' homelessness, even though two thirds of single homeless people are staying temporarily with friends or relatives (ARA, 2015). Biographical studies have shown that often the 'official homelessness' of persons using homeless services is preceded or interrupted by periods of hidden homelessness, when people lacking a home of their own stay with friends or relatives while trying to find a permanent place to live. According to a Danish study, staying with friends or relatives was a significant route to homeless services but was also common after the period of official homelessness (Christensen and Koch-Nielsen, 2005). This informal strategy of temporary accommodation is common among young people and is often said to be a dominant feature of women's pathways to homelessness (Watson *et al.*, 1986; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). However, studies have shown that men also try to find informal ways of securing temporary accommodation with friends or relatives (May, 2000; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010), while in Finland, the homelessness of immigrants has been stated to be hidden and outside of the official homelessness statistics that are mainly based on service use (Hannikainen and Kärkkäinen, 1997; Mikkonen and Kärkkäinen, 2003).



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This paper applies the pathways framework, according to which homelessness is understood as a result of dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and actions, and structural factors and change. Instead of seeing homeless people as static entities, the notion that households and individuals can move between homelessness, poor housing and adequate or good housing in different stages of their life cycle and housing pathway, is central (Clapham, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). The aim of the paper is to identify and describe different pathways for different groups of homeless people by clarifying from where it is that they end up homeless, where they stay during homelessness and how they exit homelessness.

Homelessness is approached through the population register and the residents of Helsinki, who had been registered as having no permanent place of residence (NPPR). This way it was possible to reach a broad spectrum of people who had been in different precarious housing situations and not only the explicitly homeless people. The paper is based on a study (Kostiainen and Laakso, 2015), in which the pathways through homelessness in Helsinki were charted via a postal survey of people who had been registered as having no permanent place of residence in the population register, but who had subsequently moved to a permanent address. The identification of pathways through homelessness was done with the help of cluster analysis.

## Research on Pathways

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Within the pathways framework, structural factors – namely, adverse social and economic trends – are seen as creating the conditions within which homelessness occurs – factors that people with personal problems are more vulnerable to than others (Anderson and Christian, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). The research literature distinguishes four broad groups of risk factors that increase the probability of becoming homeless: 1) structural (economic processes: poverty, unemployment, housing market processes, social protection/welfare, immigration); 2) institutional (shortage of adequate services and lack of coordination; allocation mechanisms; institutional living/prisons; institutional procedures: admission, discharge); 3) relationships (family status; relationship situation: abusive partner/parents; relationship breakdown: death, divorce, separation); and 4) personal (health; education; addiction: alcohol, drugs, gambling). In addition, triggers – specific events related to broader risk factors – may lead directly to an episode of homelessness or to a further step in a 'career' ultimately resulting in homelessness (e.g., eviction, economic crisis, relationship breakdown, falling ill).

The degree to which the vulnerabilities of an individual lead to homelessness depends on the welfare policies in each country (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Edgar, 2009; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Shinn, 2010).

From this understanding, a vast conceptual framework that studies pathways into and out of homelessness has emerged. According to Clapham (2002; 2003), the concept of a pathway functions as a metaphor rather than as a theory or a research method. The pathways approach stresses changes in a person's housing circumstances and emphasises the dynamic and changing nature of pathways over time. At its most simple, the idea of a pathway through homelessness describes the route of a person or household into homelessness, the experience of homelessness and the route out of homelessness and into secure housing. According to Anderson and Tulloch (2000) and Clapham (2003), pathways through homelessness can be seen as a particular part of the life-time housing pathway of a person, as individuals undergo different housing situations during their lifetime. Changes in housing are related to key life events such as household formation and breakdown, employment, and choice of housing type, quality and location. Individual choice on housing moves is constrained by the housing system and by the resources available to the individual. In addition, homelessness pathways may reflect problematic life events and related support and care needs (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2002; 2003; O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010).

The diversity of people classified as homeless demands a theoretical and methodological framework that acknowledges that the experiences of entering and exiting homelessness are structured by at least age, gender, ethnicity and geography, such as the pathways approach. Pleace (2005) has argued for a complex definition of homelessness and suggested that the notion of homelessness needs to be disaggregated into verifiable sub-groups of people who share pathways through homelessness. Accordingly, homelessness is increasingly understood as a differentiated process with different routes and exits for different sub-populations (O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). Along these lines, this paper aims to identify and describe distinct sub-populations with similar pathways in the previously homeless population of Helsinki.

The paper applies the operational ETHOS typology, developed to reflect the different pathways into homelessness and to emphasise the dynamic nature of the process of homelessness. The typology features four main concepts of homelessness: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2005; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). It is a good starting point for a study on homelessness that targets hidden homeless people; the majority of people registered as having no permanent place of residence live with friends and relatives and do not have a legal title of their own.

### ***Pathways into and out of homelessness***

In their review of research on homelessness pathways Anderson and Tulloch (2000) were able to identify pathways into and out of homelessness, but simply linking routes into homelessness with specific routes out of homelessness to produce clear pathways through homelessness could not be done because of the number of permutations possible and due to the lack of longitudinal research. In addition to low income and poverty, age was identified as the most influential characteristic defining pathways into homelessness. Three pathways into homelessness coinciding with key stages in the life course were identified: youth pathways (15-24 years), adult pathways (20-50 years) and later life pathways (50+ years) (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003).

Among young people, disruptive childhood experiences – from family break-up to experience of the care system and child abuse – add to the risk of homelessness. The ability to return to the family home appears to be a crucial factor differentiating young people who end up falling into homelessness and those who avoid the experience (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003). Based on biographical interviews with Irish young homeless people (14-24 years of age), three broad overlapping pathways into homelessness were identified: a history of state care; family instability and conflict; and the young person displaying ‘problem’ behaviour combined with negative peer associations. Home and family situations were found to be the key contexts for understanding why and how young people become homeless (Mayock *et al.*, 2011). According to Lehtonen and Salonen (2008), within the pathways framework homelessness can be seen as a failure in the transition between life stages. Transitions from the parental home to independent living, education and work, and from institutional housing to independent living are critical (Lehtonen and Salonen, 2008).

Adult homelessness is associated with household formation and change. Structural factors, particularly individual’s economic position and position in relation to legislative framework for social housing, determine which people end up homeless at points of housing or household change. Also, gender and household type are found to be important factors in determining homelessness pathways (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003). Single people without children are most vulnerable to extreme forms of homelessness – e.g., rough sleeping and long-term homelessness – because of their disadvantaged position in the housing market and in relation to the social housing system, combined with risk-increasing personal factors, such as mental illness or substance abuse (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003). In a British study on pathways into multiple-exclusion homelessness, multivariate analysis showed that childhood trauma and deprivation were significant predictors of extreme exclusion (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2013). Research evidence demonstrates that, across the developed world, the part

of the homeless population that sleeps rough or uses low threshold services is dominated by single men with complex support needs associated with substance abuse and physical and mental health problems (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2013). Later-life pathways through homelessness have been associated more with micro-level factors, such as the late onset of mental health issues, loneliness etc., than with structural factors (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003).

Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) have identified five typical pathways into adult homelessness. 1) 'housing crisis', where the pathway to homelessness is precipitated by financial crisis: low income, loss of job or collapse of a small business; 2) 'family breakdown', where one partner leaves the family home due to domestic violence or the failing of a relationship; 3) 'substance abuse', where the recreational use of drugs leads to loss of employment and housing as a result of the need to raise money for what has become an addiction; 4) 'mental health', which leads to homelessness when family members are no longer capable of support; and 5) 'youth to adult', where homelessness had occurred first when the person was a minor and the pathway featured state care and traumatic family experiences. The pathways differed by length of homelessness; while two thirds of those on the substance abuse, mental health or youth pathway had been homeless for over a year, only one third of those on the housing crisis and family break-down pathways were long-term homeless. (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011).

The research literature suggests that the most important factor in exiting homelessness is the availability of adequate affordable housing. Some homeless households also need further support. Pathways out of homelessness are delineated by the independence or dependence of exits of statutory or voluntary agencies, by being accepted or rejected as eligible for homeless services and by solutions offered to different household types by statutory and voluntary agencies. Pathways thus reflect the ability of individuals to negotiate access to appropriate accommodation and the support services offered by authorities and other providers (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Anderson and Christian, 2003; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Mayock *et al.*, 2011).

## The Research Frame

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The research frame of the study presented in this paper was a postal survey combined with population register data on housing history and personal information. The population of the survey were residents of Helsinki who had been registered as having no permanent place of residence (NPPR) but who had ended this period and moved to a permanent address in the one year period between 14 October 2012 and 13 October 2013. There were 3,501 such persons in the population register of Helsinki in October 2013, of whom every other person (1,750) was included in the sample. For 1,515 persons a domestic address was found from the Population Register Centre (others had forbidden the disclosure of personal information, lived at an unknown address, had died or resided abroad). Questionnaires were sent to 1,515 persons (translated to English, Somali, Russian, Kurdish and Arabic) in December 2013. There was also a possibility to respond on-line in English and Finnish.

After one reminder, a total of 252 responses were received. The group of respondents was skewed by gender and to some degree by mother tongue (see Table 1); half of the respondents were women, whereas their share of the sample was only 36 percent. The share of Finnish- or Swedish-speaking respondents was somewhat higher (73 percent) than their share of the sample (64 percent). Otherwise, the group of respondents was quite representative in terms of age, albeit slightly older, and the year they had moved to Helsinki. Also, the housing histories of the sample and those of the respondents were close to each other. However, the group of respondents had a larger share of people who had moved to Helsinki recently than the sample. Also, in the group of respondents there were slightly more people who had been living at one address at the turn of each analysis year than in the sample, and slightly fewer people who had had both housing and NPPR periods or who had been continuously without a permanent place of residence. The register data consisted of a cross-section of individual-level Population Register data collected at the turn of the year for the period 1 January 2005 to 1 January 2013 as well as three quarterly datasets from 2013. The survey data and register data were merged for those respondents who gave permission ( $n=195$ ).

**Table 1. Comparison of the Sample and the Respondents**

	Sample (percent)	Respondents (percent)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	64	50
Female	36	50
<b>Native language</b>		
Finnish and Swedish	64	73
Somali	6	3
Russian	5	7
Kurdish	3	2
Arabic	3	2
Other	19	13
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	50	48
30-39	23	19
40-49	13	15
50-59	10	12
60 +	4	6
<b>Moving year to Helsinki*</b>		
2004 or earlier	41	38
2005-2008	10	10
2009-2012	30	31
2013	19	20
<b>Housing history of those who moved to Helsinki in 2008 or before (at the turn of the year, from 04/05)*</b>		
At one address	9	10
Several addresses	18	16
Both housing and NPPR periods	18	14
Continuously NPPR	4	3
Moved to Helsinki after 2008	50	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>1 515</b>	<b>252</b>

\*Share of respondents who granted permission to connect responses with register data (n=195)

Having no permanent place of residence is a register term of the Population Register. The entry is based on information provided by people; their real housing situation cannot be checked. These entries are made for various reasons, not all of which are related to homelessness. The key question of the survey – whether the entry was made due to reasons related to homelessness, lack of permanent housing, difficulties in finding an apartment or other reasons – failed somewhat, as many people didn't answer the question or answered in a way that was clearly not what was intended by the researchers (whereby evidently homeless people responded that the entry was not made because of homelessness etc.). These answers were classified or reclassified based on other questions, by the criterion as to whether the respondent's previous housing had terminated without

knowledge of other available, permanent housing, or not. Combining these results, 76.5 percent ( $n=179$ ) of the respondents were shown to have made the entry due to reasons related to homelessness, while the rest had some other reason. These two groups differed clearly by income, education and household type; those having made the entry because of homelessness were in a weaker position. Thus, the re-classification can be regarded as successful. In addition, the questionnaire featured questions about the length of the NPPR period, place of residence before the period, previous housing, socio-economic background and current housing situation for all respondents. The questionnaire contained a section for both groups about the factors that led to the NPPR entry, accommodation during the NPPR period and how the period ended, which included both multiple choice and open questions.

Cluster analysis was used to identify shared pathways of respondents who had made the entry due to reasons related to homelessness. It is a quantitative statistical method that was used to group the respondents in such a way that respondents in the same group were more similar to each other according to their homeless pathways, than to those in other groups (Tan *et al.*, 2006). The clustering is based on the distance of respondents to other respondents on four variables ranked and interpreted as ordinal scale variables: housing type before homelessness, (worst) accommodation during homelessness, the way homelessness ended and housing type at the time of responding. Hierarchical clustering was performed with SAS cluster procedure, and a tree diagram (dendrogram) of pathway clusters was presented (Tan *et al.*, 2006; SAS Institute Inc., 1989a). The researcher had the power to consider the number of clusters set in the analysis. The optimal number of clusters was decided according to their analytical meaningfulness and was set to eight. Only the respondents who had answered all the above questions ( $n=164$ ) could be included in the analysis.

A discrete choice logit-model was used to analyse the probability of respondents to belong to clusters, in which respondents had turned to homeless services to exit homelessness (see SAS Institute Inc., 1989b). Explanatory variables in the model were age, gender, mother tongue, income level, previous municipality of residence and housing history, computed to binary dummy-variables. Also, variables describing life situation, barriers to finding a new apartment, and the accumulation of problems leading to the homelessness period were added to the model.

## Helsinki Residents' Pathways through Homelessness

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According to the survey, the principal reasons for homelessness are divorce or separation (21 percent), termination of a tenancy agreement for reasons not related to the tenant (18 percent) and changing locality due to work, studies or relationships (12 percent). Eviction or threat of eviction due to unpaid rents or disturbances was the cause of homelessness for a significant share of respondents (7 percent). Also, too-high housing costs and problems related to gaining independence from the parental home are factors leading to homelessness, especially among young people. Common factors affecting the life situation leading to the homelessness period (where it was possible to choose several options) were financial difficulties (25 percent), the end of a relationship (21 percent), unemployment (18 percent), depression or mental health issues (12 percent) and substance abuse (10 percent).

The most common reasons for not finding a new apartment (several possible options given) were that respondents couldn't find an apartment at affordable price (43 percent), their bad credit record hampered their getting a new tenancy agreement (26 percent) and they couldn't afford the rental deposit (25 percent). Most people experiencing homelessness in Helsinki found accommodation with friends or relatives (43 percent), for at least part of the homelessness period; many had stayed in several places during their period of homelessness. Only a small proportion had used homeless accommodation services (7 percent). However, experiences of sleeping rough outdoors or in public places were common – in rubbish containers, parks, staircases, etc. (11 percent); in a car (8 percent); at a campsite in a tent, cottage or caravan (6 percent); or in the woods in a tent or hut (3 percent). For a third, the period had lasted for over a year; for a quarter it had lasted 1-3 months; and for one-fifth of respondents it had lasted 6-12 months. Only 6 percent had been homeless for less than one month and 15 percent for 3-6 months.

The most common way for the homelessness period to end was managing to get a rental apartment from the private market (21 percent), other social rental housing or big landlords (13 percent), municipal social rental housing (11 percent) or a homeless housing unit (8 percent). The most important factor affecting the ending of the homelessness period (several possible options were given) was help from the people respondents were close to (18 percent). Other common factors were finding employment (10 percent), and getting guidance from district social services (8 percent) and from the Housing Support Unit for single homeless adults (8 percent).



## The Clustering of Pathways

Resulting from the cluster analysis, eight clusters of different pathways through homelessness were identified among the Helsinki residents (see Table 2). The clusters can be roughly grouped into three categories: transitionally homeless people, whose pathways lead back to stable housing in either rental or owner-occupied housing after an episode of homelessness spent at friends' or relatives'; homeless people with insecure housing careers, for whom living with a partner, friends or relatives without a lease of their own, or subletting, is a common feature at some point of the housing pathway; and disadvantaged homeless people, who are often long-term homeless and who have to rely on homeless services to exit homelessness. Two-fifths of respondents fell into the first group; just over two-fifths into the second group, and just under one-fifth of respondents fell into the third group. These shares represent the respondents of this study and cannot be directly extrapolated to the homeless population as a whole. However, they give an approximation of the order of magnitude.

**Table 2. Clusters of Pathways through Homelessness**

Cluster name	Respondents in the cluster	Share of respondents, percent
Cluster of owner-occupied residents	11	7
Cluster of tenants in a stable housing career	54	33
Cluster of ascending housing careers	26	16
Cluster of descending housing careers	18	11
Cluster of hard-hit tenants	24	15
From stable housing career to homeless services -cluster	13	8
From unstable housing career to homeless services -cluster	7	4
Cluster of long-term homeless	11	7
Total	164	100

### *Transitionally homeless people*

The group of transitionally homeless people consisted of two clusters: the cluster of 'owner-occupied' residents, whose homelessness pathway started and ended in owner-occupied housing, and the cluster of tenants in a stable housing career, whose homelessness pathway started and ended in rental housing. Homelessness in these clusters was, by its nature, transitional; it related to moving house or was caused by divorce or separation, change of locality or termination of lease agreement for reasons not related to the tenant. Too-high housing costs and having

to give up a student flat after graduation were common reasons for young adults below 30 becoming homeless. Respondents in these clusters were more often women, in employment or students with higher education than those in the two other groups. Those coming from owner-occupied housing were mostly middle-aged, whereas those coming from rental housing were mostly below 30 years old. Homelessness periods were generally short, 1-3 months, and related to difficulties in finding suitable or affordable housing. Few had had economic difficulties or been unemployed. Most found accommodation with friends and relatives during the homelessness period.

### ***Homeless people with insecure housing careers***

The group of homeless people with insecure housing careers consisted of three clusters in which living with a partner, friends or relatives without a lease of their own, or subletting, was a typical phase at some point of the housing pathway. The respondents in the cluster of 'ascending housing career' consisted mainly of young people whose homelessness pathway started from dependent housing without a lease agreement of their own and ended in rental housing via stays with various friends and relatives. Respondents in the cluster of 'descending housing career' ended up homeless from rental housing, but ended their homelessness period, after circulating between friends and relatives, by moving in permanently with friends or relatives, or as subtenants. Respondents in the cluster of 'hard-hit tenants' ended up homeless either from rental housing or from dependent housing. During the homelessness period it was common for them to find lodgings with occasional acquaintances or to sleep rough in public places, parks, trash containers or staircases. Most ended their homelessness period by getting a rental apartment.

In this group, separation or divorce was the most common reason for having had to move out of previous housing. Also common were termination of lease agreement due to reasons not related to the tenant and gaining independence from the childhood home, especially among young people. The group consisted of both middle-aged and young people at the beginning of their housing careers. Educational level was generally low, and unemployment and low incomes common. Finding an apartment had often been hampered by economic difficulties, high rent levels, bad credit records and high rent deposits. Homelessness periods within these clusters were rather long: 6-12 months or over a year. Many had unstable housing situations at the time of responding. A common solution to precarious housing situations among young people was renting with flatmates and sometimes even rushed cohabitation, which in turn are risk factors for homelessness. Help from people this group was close to was the most important factor affecting termination of the homelessness period.

### *Disadvantaged homeless people*

The group of disadvantaged homeless people consisted of three clusters, where most respondents had used homeless services to exit but some were still homeless at the time of responding. In the first cluster, respondents ended up homeless from mainly stable housing careers in rental or owner-occupied housing. During the period of homelessness, most slept rough or with occasional acquaintances. In the second cluster, people had ended up homeless from rental housing or from dependent housing without a lease agreement of their own. During the homelessness period, most lived with friends or relatives or circulated between different friends and relatives. Respondents in the cluster of 'long-term homeless people' ended up homeless mainly from various homeless accommodation services or prison. Most slept rough during the period.

The group consisted mostly of men. The share of older people was higher and the share of people with a foreign native language was lower than in the two other groups. Unemployment, low income and low educational levels were common features in these clusters. Previous housing had ended for various reasons, but eviction was a common reason for homelessness in all three clusters. Economic difficulties, substance use and mental health problems generally affected the life situation of members of these clusters. Many of the people ending their homelessness in homeless services saw that their NPPR period was a continuation of their previous problems, which had accumulated over time – often from childhood. Homelessness periods were long – mostly over a year, and several years for some. Bad credit records, rent deposits and not having looked for a new apartment due to lifestyle or substance abuse hampered them from finding a new apartment. Many had ended their homelessness period by contacting social services and ending up in supported housing or in the new Housing First units for homeless people.

### **Factors Explaining the Belonging to the Clusters of Disadvantaged Homeless People**

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A discrete choice logit-model was used to analyse the probability of respondents who had done the NPPR entry due to reasons related to homelessness belonging to the three worst-off clusters, in which most respondents had to turn to homeless services to exit homelessness. According to the analysis, the probability was increased by income levels of below €1,000 and especially below €500 per month, by being male (in two out of four models), by dropping out of school or studies, the death of a close person, mental health problems (almost near statistical significance), rent arrears and bad credit records. The fact that the person did not look for a new apartment after losing the previous one increased the probability of homelessness, as did the perception that the homelessness period was a continu-

ation of difficulties accumulated since childhood or youth. The probability was decreased by young age (below 30 years). The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3. Goodness of fit was tested with the Pearson chi-square test. Due to small size of the dataset, none of the models proved to be statistically significant in explaining the belonging to the group of disadvantaged homeless people as a whole. The results are thus approximate. This, however, does not repudiate the significance of individual variables stated as having a statistically significant effect on the probability.

**Table 3: Logit-model for the Probability of Belonging to the Group of Disadvantaged Homeless People**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Gender (ref.: Female)</b>				
Male	-1,053	-3,384*	-1,988*	-1,142
<b>Age (ref.: 30 years+)</b>				
Below 30 years	2,812***	3,505**	3,775**	4,368***
<b>Native language (ref.: Other)</b>				
Finnish or Swedish	-0,392	-0,127	1,172	0,230
<b>Income, euro (ref.: 2 000 +)</b>				
1-499	-4,840***	-7,186***	-6,430***	-5,212***
500-999	-2,832*	4,238*	-3,258*	-2,582*
1 000-1 999	-0,952	-0,094	-0,318	-0,561
Missing	-2,905	-5,151*	-4,588	-4,199
<b>Previous place of residence (ref.: Elsewhere in FI)</b>				
Helsinki	0,017	0,494	0,054	0,340
Helsinki Metropolitan Area	-0,551	-0,239	-1,253	0,282
Abroad	25,069	71,550	26,545	25,875
Missing	24,341	24,012	24,253	25,801
<b>Housing history 2008-2013 (ref.: Moved to HKI after 2008)</b>				
At one address	-1,559	-3,747	-0,686	-1,103
At several addresses	-1,489	-4,583*	-3,064*	-0,966
Both housing and NPPR periods	-1,011	-2,095	-1,298	-0,359
Continuously NPPR	0,407	-0,215	1,812	1,300
No permission to merge data	-0,402	1,407	-0,520	0,192
<b>Factors affecting life situation (ref.: Factor had no effect)</b>				
Financial difficulties		-0,344		
Debts		1,183		
Bankruptcy		27,424		
Substance abuse		0,192		
Depression; mental health problems		-2,554		
Other illness, serious accident		3,874		
Unemployment		1,157		
Retirement		-48,506		
Interruption of studies/school		-4,789*		
Conflict with parents		-1,389		

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
End of relationship		-0,682		
Independence gained by grown-up children		-56,002		
Death of close family member		-5,636*		
Lack of support networks		26,823		
Domestic violence		-3,018		
Other		1,069		
<b>Obstacles to finding a new apartment (ref.: Factor was not an obstacle)</b>				
Could not find apt. in one's price range			-0,679	
Could not find apt. suited to one's needs			-0,841	
Too-strict requirements for apt.			-2,772	
Could not afford rental deposit			-0,740	
Bad credit record			-2,085*	
Unpaid rents			-3,592*	
Earlier eviction			-3,444	
Discrimination due to unemployment			0,341	
Discrimination due to ethnic background			-1,175	
Did not look for a new apt.			-4,792**	
Other			-1,637	
<b>NPPR-entry was caused by/ continued due to (ref.: No opinion)</b>				
Sudden crisis				-0,636
Difficulties accumulated in adulthood				-1,013
Difficulties accumulated since gaining independence				1,142
Difficulties accumulated since childhood/ youth				-5,782**
Missing				1,891
<b>X2</b>	<b>80.1295</b>	<b>53.1295</b>	<b>79.0039</b>	<b>89.2824</b>
<b>d.f.</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>p</b>	<b>0.9377</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>0.9984</b>

\*: p<0.05; \*\*: p<0.01; , \*\*\*: p<0.05

## Discussion

The aim of the paper was to identify and describe pathways through homelessness for different groups of homeless people. An innovative way to approach the population of Helsinki with experiences of precarious housing situations was developed to target people who had ended their homelessness period and to reach also the experience of hidden homeless people; the population of the study was defined as residents of Helsinki who had been registered as having no permanent place of residence in the population register, but who had ended the NPPR period. Their current addresses were available from the population register. A postal survey was chosen as the method of data collection so as to reach and analyse the experiences of homelessness of a large number of people using quantitative methods.

When considering the results of the analysis, the limitations of the research conducted have to be taken into account. The population of the study can be assumed to be in a less disadvantaged position than those living without a permanent address on an ongoing basis, but nothing definite can be said about those not included in the study. The chosen method to reach people having experienced homelessness proved to be successful in that a variety of people with various housing histories and demographic features could be reached and differing pathways through homelessness could be identified. In particular, new light was shed on the pathways of hidden homeless people – those who cannot be reached through the services targeted at homeless people. The response rate remained low even though special attention was paid to the matter in advance, as using postal surveys to contact presumably ex-homeless people was known to be an ambitious task.

Even though the response rate was low, the number of responses was enough to enable statistical analysis. The registry data allowed a reliable comparison of the respondents and the sample. The group of respondents was to some extent skewed by gender and mother tongue when compared to the sample of the study, and it was also slightly skewed by time of moving to Helsinki and housing history. This may indicate that part of the most marginalised male homeless population still in precarious housing situations and immigrants in the weakest positions did not respond to the survey, even though the questionnaire was translated to the most common languages among the NPPR population. It is also likely that some respondents who had entered the NPPR for reasons other than those related to a lack of housing did not respond. The partial failing of the key survey question about the reason for the NPPR entry narrowed down the numbers of respondents that could be included in the cluster analysis of the pathways. However, approximate extrapolations can be made of the population of the study.

The analysis is by its nature descriptive and discerning; as a result, eight clusters were identified. The findings are unique in the Finnish context and supportive of earlier findings on pathways through homelessness and different groups of homeless people. The results give valuable information on preventing homeless pathways from occurring. The clusters can be roughly grouped into three categories: 1) transitionally homeless people whose pathways lead to stable housing in either rental or owner-occupied housing after an episode of homelessness spent at friends' or relatives'; 2) homeless people with insecure housing careers, for whom dependent living with a partner, friends or relatives without a lease of their own, or subletting, is a common feature of their housing pathway; and 3) disadvantaged homeless people, often long-term homeless, who have to rely on homeless services to exit homelessness. Crucial for the forming of the pathway is the question of whether, at the moment of losing their previous housing without any knowledge of where to find housing next, the person can turn to friends and relatives and of how used this resource is.

The results show that homelessness is, indeed, a dynamic process and clearly a phenomenon that goes beyond just the experiences of the users of homeless services. Independent exits are in fact the norm for the majority of people who had ended their homelessness period in this study. For transitionally homeless people, their period of homelessness is likely to be a rather short, one-time event in their housing pathway. However, there is a large number of people living constantly in precarious housing situations, dependent on others and without a legal title of their own. They mostly solve their situation of homelessness with the help of friends and relatives, while some even experience rough sleeping but are still able to exit homelessness without the help of homeless services. They are at risk of repeated homelessness if the resource of hospitality from friends and relatives is used up and housing is lost again. A smaller yet not insignificant share of homeless people rely on homeless services to exit homelessness. Some end up in services from stable housing after a period of rough sleeping, others from dependent housing and circulating between friends, and some have lived in accommodation for homeless people before their latest period of homelessness or have been released from prison. For the last group, homelessness has been a longer part of their housing pathway and the last period has been for over one year for most, and may not be solved even within this time for the entire group.

The groups of pathways identified here are similar to the homeless sub-populations among the homeless accommodation services users identified initially in the US: the transitional, who exit homelessness rather quickly; the episodic, who move repeatedly in and out of homelessness services, and the chronic, long-term users of homeless emergency services (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998). The difference here is that the experiences analysed in this study also included those who didn't use homeless services. However, the structuring of the homeless experience by nature as a transitory onetime event, a longer period of repeated precarious housing situations, or a long-term experience with higher support needs, is visible also here. Also, within the EU there is evidence of a corresponding small group of homeless people with very high support needs and of a larger group of people who are not homeless for a very long period and who have low support needs. Those in the latter group have access to social support from family and friends, are often able to secure paid work and face barriers to exiting homelessness that are mainly structural, such as an inadequate supply of affordable housing and meeting housing costs. They are often able to 'self-exit' from homelessness and their needs are best met with the simple provision of affordable housing and help with meeting housing costs. Addressing the high support needs of those experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness, on the other hand, is crucial for sustainable exits and may require a complex package of services – from settled housing to social care, mental health care and substance abuse care (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010).

Points of confluence can also be found with the five pathways into homelessness identified by Chamberlain and Johnson (2011). The pathways of substance abuse, mental health and youth to adult are more likely to be found within the group of disadvantaged homeless people, whereas pathways created through housing crises and family break-downs can be found within all groups, although the methodology used here doesn't allow as deep understanding of the life situations leading to homelessness. Probably because their data was gathered from service users, pathways caused by other ways of losing one's home, which do not particularly relate to economic difficulties or social exclusion, are not identified by Chamberlain and Johnson. Instead, among the respondents of this study, of whom majority had been part of the hidden homeless population, common reasons for losing one's apartment included termination of a tenancy agreement for reasons unrelated to the tenant (e.g., fixed-term lease agreement); changing locality due to work, studies or relationships; gaining independence from the family home; and having to give up a student flat, while difficulty in finding a new apartment in the tight housing market of Helsinki was the actual reason for the lack of housing.

The experiences of entering and exiting homelessness are structured at least by age, gender, ethnicity and geography, level of education, wealth and income level and household type. These factors also structured the pathways through homelessness presented in this paper, as clusters and groups were differentiated by age, gender, share of foreign language speakers, level of education, level of income, main type of activity and household type. The clusters formed almost a continuum in relation to income; the cluster of owner-occupied residents had the highest levels of income while the level decreased almost continuously by cluster and the cluster of long-term homeless people had the lowest level of income. The share of unemployed people was lowest amongst the two first clusters and highest among the last cluster although the decrease wasn't strictly linear. Educational level was highest among the two first clusters; however the cluster of long-term homeless people wasn't the cluster with the lowest level of education. According to the statistical analysis, the probability of belonging to the weakest clusters was increased by low income at a level below €1,000 per month, and especially below €500 per month.

Age has been found to be a central denominator for pathways into homelessness in previous studies; Anderson and Tulloch (2000) identified youth, adult and later life pathways into homelessness. In this study, pathways were not primarily delineated by age, as clusters contained respondents of several age groups, but age was still a very central factor. Young people (below the age of 30) were found mainly in the cluster of 'stable rental housing career' and in the group of 'insecure housing careers'. The cluster of owner-occupied residents consisted mostly of middle-aged people, whereas the group of disadvantaged homeless people had a higher share



of older people. Hidden homelessness – when people lacking a home of their own stay with friends or relatives while trying to find a permanent place to live – has been acknowledged to be a common strategy among young people, and the results of this study confirm this, as young people in the study were mostly able to pull through their homelessness period with the help of friends and relatives. Young age – those below 30 years of age – was also found to be a factor that decreased the probability of belonging to clusters where people used homeless services to exit homelessness.

Homelessness is a gendered phenomenon everywhere; in Finland fewer than one quarter of single homeless people were women in 2014 (ARA, 2015). In this study, women formed a clear majority of people belonging to group of transitionally homeless people, whereas over half those with insecure housing careers were men, and only a few women, fewer than one quarter, belonged to the group of disadvantaged homeless people. This confirms the common understanding of hidden homelessness as a dominant feature of women's homeless pathways. While men also try to find informal ways of securing temporary accommodation with friends or relatives, the ones having used homelessness services to exit homelessness were predominantly male in this study. It is widely known that the homeless population overall, and especially the section of the homeless population that is sleeping rough and using homeless services, is dominated by men; In this study, being male increased the probability of belonging to the three worst-off clusters in two out of four statistical models. Single people without children are acknowledged to be most vulnerable to extreme forms of homelessness because of their disadvantaged position in the housing market and in relation to the social housing system, combined with personal factors. In this study, those whose family members had also been homeless during the period belonged mainly to the group of transitionally homeless people. Families with children are the group most protected against homelessness in Finland, as the Child Welfare Act (407/2007), in the last resort, obliges municipalities to organise housing for children. To some degree this also protects women, as they form the majority of single parents (Kettunen, 2010).

The ability to exit homelessness independently has been stated to be a central structuring factor of the pathways. Also, the pathways identified here were determined by whether or not the persons could exit homelessness independently without homeless accommodation services, and the degree to which homelessness was the result of mainly structural factors, such as the tight housing market of the Helsinki metropolitan region, or whether it was connected to other social problems and forms of exclusion. In the three worst-off clusters, the exit from homelessness happened mainly through gaining housing from homeless or other social services. Pathways out of homelessness reflect the ability of individuals to negotiate access to appropriate accommodation and the modes of support offered

to different household types. Also in Helsinki the services for homeless people are divided by household type; single homeless people are mainly directed to the Housing Support Unit under the health- and substance user services, which are targeted to homeless people in need of supported housing. In 2012, 10 percent of the customers of the Housing Support Unit had no need for social support in housing and thus did not meet the criteria for the right to organised housing according to the laws on social services and healthcare, as their only problem was the lack of housing. Those eligible are directed to supported housing, but the service is heavily burdened; people in the queue spend their nights sleeping rough, in the service centre for homeless people or in crisis accommodation (Helsingin kaupunki, 2013a). Homeless families with children are accommodated in crisis accommodation organised by the municipality and then directed mainly to municipal social housing (Helsingin kaupunki, 2013b).

Research evidence suggests that disruptive childhood experiences add to the risk of homelessness among young people. Childhood trauma and deprivation are also found to be significant predictors of extreme exclusion among the population experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness. In this study, a significant share of people belonging to the clusters of disadvantaged homeless people considered the homelessness period a continuation of prior difficulties. According to Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2013) substance misuse and mental health issues typically occur early in the pathway into multiple exclusion, whereas homelessness, street lifestyles and adverse life events typically occur later as consequences of deep exclusion. Also, the statistical analysis confirms the link between exclusion, homelessness with higher support needs and early problem accumulation; the perception that the period of homelessness was a continuation of difficulties accumulated since childhood or youth increased the probability of belonging to the three worst-off clusters. So did dropping out of school or studies, the death of a close person and, to a certain extent, mental health problems. Rent arrears, bad credit records and the failure to look for a new apartment after losing the previous one also increased the probability.

The most important factor in exiting homelessness is, however, the availability of adequate affordable housing. Finding suitable and affordable housing was difficult for all groups of homeless people in the study in Helsinki's tight housing market. Young people, people on low-income, unemployed people and immigrants have severe difficulties in competing in the private housing market and paying market rents and rental deposits. Obvious structural factors behind homelessness in Helsinki are the small size and the slow growth of the housing stock compared to the demand, which has led to a quick rise in rents and prices. Also, the production of social housing has been at a low level for over a decade and the number of applicants to social housing is many times that of the number of

households being allocated an apartment. For single households, it is relatively more difficult to get a social rental apartment, as one-bedroom and family apartments dominate the stock nonetheless, the majority of applicants are single households looking for a studio (Laakso and Kostiainen, 2013; Kostiainen and Laakso, 2015). Also, the allocation mechanisms of the social housing stock affect the possibilities of those threatened by homelessness getting an apartment; in the first priority group there are several groups of people besides homeless people, and many homeless risk groups are only in the third priority group (Pleace *et al.*, 2011; ARA, 2014; Viitanen, 2015).

## Conclusion

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The innovative research design of the study enabled the researchers to reach a wide spectrum of Helsinki residents who had experienced precarious housing situations, which is not always possible when researching homelessness. The chosen quantitative methodology proved to be successful in analysing and identifying shared pathways through homelessness and, as a result, a simple analytical categorisation of pathways could be made: transitionally homeless people, homeless people with insecure housing careers and disadvantaged homeless people. The methodology also allowed the identification of factors that increase the probability of turning to homeless services to exit homelessness. Pathways are clearly affected by gender, age, forms of social exclusion, service provision and time, and these seem to be intertwined in a complicated way; more longitudinal research is needed to deepen the understanding of pathways, the mechanisms behind them and their development over time. Even though most of the respondents were able to exit their latest homelessness period independently, there seems to be the possibility that some pathways may descend towards more extreme forms of homelessness. How to prevent this is a crucial question for policy. Also, the fact that people don't turn to services even in the event of rough sleeping raises questions about the appropriateness of the services available for all groups of homeless people.

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# Parenting within Homelessness: A Qualitative Study on the Situation of Homeless Fathers and Social Work in Homeless Support Services in Vienna

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› **Abstract\_** *The relationship between homelessness and male parenting is rarely discussed in the professional discourse on family homelessness. There are few international empirical studies that analyse the relationship between homeless men and their children. This paper is based on a one-year exploratory research project, which was financed by the University of Applied Sciences FH Campus Wien and carried out in 2013 and 2014. The qualitative study aimed to explore the situation of homeless non-resident fathers living in transitional shelters and tried, furthermore, to reconstruct their parenting and constructions of masculinity from a gender critical viewpoint. The study paid particular attention to the parent-child relationship, parental practices, the housing situation and the support services of the social work staff. The results indicate that housing shelters represent an important resource for sustaining a relationship between homeless men and their children. They are characterized simultaneously by a wide range of control mechanisms and by a lack of privacy and adequate spaces for children. The study has further shown that the homeless support services mainly concentrate on the restoration of independent living and thus rarely address psychosocial topics such as parenting. Furthermore, the men seem to develop new forms of parenthood, which are not necessarily reflected upon as such, nor are they integrated into future ideas of parental practices. Under the enormous pressure of homelessness and the experience of acute poverty, men strive to recreate their own social status and draw on established notions of normality, such as the nuclear family and men being responsible for its financial wealth. Thus, the establishment of different long-term parental*

*practices proves to be difficult. We, therefore, suggest intensive psychosocial and gender-reflective support measures to dissolve polarized gender arrangements and facilitate greater compatibility between care work and market-mediated work, within the men's perceptions of parenthood.*

› **Keywords\_** *homelessness, parenting, social work, gender, housing shelters, poverty*

## Introduction

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Research in the field of homelessness often explicitly or implicitly focuses on men as the norm due to their greater visibility, while gender relations and masculinity are hardly dealt with. This indicates a gender bias and can be described as 'gender blindness within men's studies' (Harner *et al.*, 2013). It is noteworthy that within social work theory and practice, homeless men are seldom addressed as parents, which suggests hegemonic gender perceptions and related selectiveness within the support system. The limited international studies about support systems for homeless people indicate that fathers who are single parents and not accommodated with their children or who are social fathers largely remain invisible (McArthur *et al.*, 2006; Paquette and Bassuk, 2009; Barker *et al.*, 2011). The relationship between male homelessness and parenting is barely discussed within international academic literature, and only a few empirical studies try to sketch the relationships between homeless men and their children or their parental lifestyle in such precarious situations (for an overview, see Arhant *et al.*, 2013).

In this respect, questions about 1) changes in family relationships, parental activities and tasks, 2) the influence of the institutional context within the transitional shelters of the homeless support services on parenting, or 3) the dynamics within the support relationships between social workers and homeless men, point toward a wide and scarcely researched field of study. This one-year exploratory research project was situated in this context. It was financed by the University of Applied Sciences FH Campus Wien and carried out in 2013 and 2014 (see Diebäcker *et al.*, 2015; Harner *et al.*, 2015).



## Gender-Critical Men's Studies in Marginalised Contexts

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This study focuses on masculinity and fatherhood and is positioned in the field of critical gender studies. We understand critical gender studies as a process by which gender power relations are made the subject of research, without reproducing them. Our interest, therefore, does not lie solely in how individuals are made to become gendered subjects, but also in “how they exist as such” (Maihofer, 1995, p.66). Thus, in this study the analysis of gender is traced in three steps: “construction – reconstruction – deconstruction” (Frey *et al.*, 2006, p.2). This is done in order to understand how gender (as a paradox category) is created and becomes effective within social practice, as well as how it can be overcome as a category of order. Moreover, an intersectional research perspective is taken and it is assumed that there is an overlapping of different categories of inequality (compare, for example, Knapp and Wetterer, 2003; Klinger *et al.*, 2007; Winker and Degele, 2009).

Men, or rather fathers, are the subject of our research, and thus our interest is focused on ‘male gender’ dimensions. In accordance with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (compare, for example, Carrigan *et al.*, 2001 [1985]; Connell, 2000; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) we distance ourselves from the understanding of ‘men’ as a homogenous group.

Generally, categories of masculinity and fatherhood are discussed separately from each other in academic literature (Baur, 2007; Matzner, 2009). In men’s studies, fatherhood is mostly considered in relation to the concept of the male breadwinner, failing to acknowledge “fatherhood as a set of attributions, expectations, behavioural orientation and competences” (Bereswill *et al.*, 2006, p.10). In contrast, we view fatherhood and masculinity as interconnected dimensions, contextualized within a hegemonic order. For a better understanding, it is necessary to analyse these dimensions in the sense of identity constructions, subjective concepts and societal interpellations (Matzner, 2009). Regarding a broad term of practice we prefer the term ‘parenting’, as we stress the connection between parental thinking and behaviour, taking the subject’s perspective into account.

We assume that family represents an historically evolved construct, which is subject to constant flux, and that *the* family does not exist. On the one hand, families do meet functions for society as a whole. These functions include self-recruitment, in the sense of biological reproduction and the socialisation of its members, as well as the social positioning or placement of subjects in societal hierarchies. On the other hand, tasks and services associated with the family are discussed at the level of everyday life, which relate to individual needs or are performed in interpersonal exchange. These functions and tasks can be fulfilled by different social actors, like social fathers and mothers, or other persons regardless of their gender, and include

social, emotional and material functions (Böhnisch and Lenz, 1999). Yet, in this process, areas of responsibility are historically and culturally shaped – often through capitalistic and patriarchal processes.

Drawing on relevant literature (Böhnisch and Lenz, 1997; Werneck, 1998; Baur, 2007; Hofmeister *et al.*, 2009), we have identified seven categories for the empirical analysis of parental practices in order to differentiate between the ranges of tasks that relate to parenting. Though a differentiation has been made, the practices identified are strongly interrelated; with the term ‘care function’, we refer to practices that relate to the physical well-being of children in particular, such as the provision of food, physical hygiene, washing clothes or health care. The term ‘financial provision’ relates to activities that ensure the material revenue or welfare of the family, usually through income. Within the term ‘upbringing function’, activities are included that generate moral and ethical guidelines, and that result in normative interventions in the area of conflict between the child’s preservation of autonomy und parental aspirations for normalization. The term ‘education function’ is used to mean parental conduct that supports children in their developmental processes in the sense of knowledge, skills and capabilities, such as early childhood furtherance, homework assistance or engagement at school. The term ‘emotional care’, then, denotes interactions that are dedicated to the emotions of the child and that attend to the child’s experiences and social behaviour in its relation to the outside world. The term ‘leisure function’ is understood to refer to activities that serve as entertainment, relaxation or pleasure, and that can usually be characterized as a context that is more informal and less functionalized. The function of ‘parental protection’ is less present in its physical component nowadays. It refers to the social positioning of the adult in the sense of knowledge, experience and relationships, which, as a socialising safety measure, protects the social standing of the child, even if the determining character has been weakened in present times (Werneck, 1998).

Furthermore, consideration of the societal processes of exclusion and situations of marginality are at the centre of our research perspective. In the analysis of societal fringes and of the realities of lives that are specifically problematized as deviant, on the one hand, systematic disadvantages, societal power structures and conditions of inequality can be exposed while on the other, perspectives of a more just society can be drawn up (Mohanty, 2002). At the same time, these situations of marginality – social crises, dangerous daily lives, as well as the precarious lifestyle of the subject – create the possibility of discovering gender constructions and practices beyond hegemonic stereotypes. In this process, individuals are able to reflect on “operational modes and mechanisms of social order” (Meuser, 2009, p.253) from the position of societal deviation. Especially in the area of social work, important impulses can be identified to review structures

and re-constructions of gender compositions within the context of precarious lifestyles. These include fragility and conflicting life conditions, the analysis of institutional conditions and dependencies, as well as reflections on specialist conceptions that are taken as 'matters of course'.

## Qualitative Research Design

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This research project was qualitative in nature, in order to generate explorative results about the parenting of fathers in situations of homelessness, as well as to analyse social work practices for this target group within homeless support services. With a focus on the subjective experiences of homeless men, we first directed our attention toward the pathways into homelessness, in order to be able, secondly, to reconstruct changes and/or continuities in social relationships, problematic situations and the needs and lifestyles of the individuals in question. Thirdly, the influence of precarious housing situations (specifically, the transitional shelters of homeless support services) on parental practices were of special interest to us. At the centre of our analysis was the relationship of support between the fathers and social workers in the homeless support services. Aside from the perspective of the service user, we focused on social workers' perceptions of homeless men's parenting. This was done in order to be able to reconstruct the conditions of the social work driven relationships, intervention approaches and as well as specialist reasoning with this target group in particular.

As part of this study we cooperated with two providers of homeless support services in Vienna – Caritas Wien and the neunerhaus, who were convinced to participate by the project targets and the research design. The four transitional shelters in this study provide transitional accommodation and support services specifically designed for a particular group of the homeless population. Examples of that group are young adults who are provided with options to stabilize their situation or persons who have completed alcohol addiction therapy. The shelters differ in whether they provide short- or longer-term support and assistance, which is due to the diverse requirements and resources of service users. In this respect, the general institutional conditions, norms and specialist concepts differ in each transitional shelter. This range of institutional contexts was deliberately chosen to capture the diversity of situations and practices, to gain deeper insights through comparisons, and to support the explorative approach of the study.

The study looks at homeless men who are not accommodated with their children, as this area represents both a research gap within the relevant academic literature and constitutes the common reality of men who have children in the homeless support services in Vienna. A further prerequisite of the study was that the men had

at least one child between the ages of 0 and 12, in order to help us understand parenting in its present significance and not only retrospectively. Young interviewers were intentionally sought to record the rarely dealt with connection between early parenting and homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Because of the challenging survey conditions, it can reasonably be assumed that the men who agreed to participate in the study seek or maintain contact with their children. At the same time, it is important to note that the selection criteria and the specific emphasis on the target group by the participating transitional shelters influenced the results of the study. In this process, specific social work practices or specific life situations and lifestyles of the fathers were put into focus.

The qualitative research design involved eight problem-centred interviews with fathers,<sup>2</sup> eight problem-centred interviews with social workers, seven theme-centred consultations between homeless men and social workers<sup>3</sup> as well as two group discussions.<sup>4</sup> Recruitment was done using the contacts of social workers who agreed to participate in the research process. They provided their personal resources and contacted potential study participants. The interviewees were recruited on a voluntary basis and asked by their case manager if they would like to participate in the study. Before the first interview took place, we, as researchers, informed the men again in detail that participation was voluntary and a confidentiality agreement was signed. We are especially thankful to the staff and residents of the four researched transitional shelters who agreed to be interviewed. Three

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<sup>1</sup> The age of the service users interviewed was between 20 and 54 in the following distribution: 20-30 years old: 3 persons; 31-40: 2 persons; 41-50: 1 person; 51 and older: 2 persons. Between them, these men considered themselves fathers to 15 biological and 2 non-biological children. 50% of respondents had one child, while the other 50% had two or more children. The age of the children was distributed as follows: 2-6 years old: 4 children; 7-12 years old: 6 children; 13-17: 4 children; 18 and older: 3 children. All fathers lived separately from the mothers of the children and were – though to different degrees – in contact with at least one of their children.

<sup>2</sup> The interviewees were coordinated by social workers and agreed voluntarily to take part in the study. The theme-centred conversations took place in the common room of the respective shelters, lasted between 40 and 105 minutes and can be characterised as open conversations.

<sup>3</sup> The seven theme-centred consultations between service users and the respective case workers on 'perspectives on parenthood and the possibilities of shaping family relationships' were carried out without further guidelines and were recorded in the absence of the research team. The aim was to gain deeper insight into the support relationship through conversations, interactions and the themes discussed. The length of these conversations varied between 20 and 75 minutes. Only in one case did the final theme-centred consultation not take place.

<sup>4</sup> Each of the group discussions, with twelve staff members in total, lasted for about two hours and took place toward the end of the investigation period. Participation in the group discussion was voluntary. The make-up of the groups was decided by the teams themselves, so that ten social workers and two residence carers were represented.

case studies were provided by JUCA – Haus für junge Erwachsene (Caritas Wien), two cases each by Haus Billrothstraße (neunerhaus) and Haus Hagenmüllergasse (neunerhaus), and one case by Vinzenzhaus (Caritas Wien).

In the period between January and June 2014, 25 audio files were recorded, with a combined length of over 1,500 minutes. Two conversations were conducted in English, the others in German. They were transcribed in the respective languages<sup>5</sup> and transcripts subsequently underwent an interpretative analysis using the methodological perspective of the grounded theory (see, for example, Strauss, 1998). Transcripts were inserted into software for qualitative data analysis, where relevant passages were selected, reflected on and documented with memos. By following a process of open coding and inductive constructions, the analysis was systematized by mind mapping the various code relations.

Using axial and selective coding strategies, the interpretation process was intensified. A thorough investigation of the research subject was facilitated by the combination of different perspectives (of homeless men and social workers), different research methods (individual interviews, consultations and group discussions) and different research settings (interactions of researchers with subjects, interaction between the subjects). This systematic triangulation of perspectives (see, for example, Flick, 2004) was followed in eight different case contexts, in which three different datasets were positioned in relation to each other.

## Causes and Pathways into Homelessness

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Situations of homelessness must be understood as dynamic processes, in which interactions between structural factors and individual life circumstances are merged. These circumstances constitute decisive biographical ruptures for those concerned, in the sense of social crises, dangerous daily realities and precarious lifestyles. When these life situations are reconstructed and contextualised socially through the men's biographical pathways into homelessness, the following structural features can be identified.

A lack of integration into the labour market was a central feature of the men interviewed. Only one of the men was employed part-time, one person was unable to work and six were unemployed or looking for work. Retrospectively, the employment history of almost interviewees can be described as discontinuous. Whereas the older interviewees had experienced regular employment and the comparative material security associated with it during their lifetime, this experience was usually unknown to the younger participants.

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<sup>5</sup> The interviews were transcribed by Maria Austaller, Iris Grammelhofer and Roswitha Harner.

With regard to income, all interviewees were reliant on social security service benefits or government transfer payments such as unemployment benefits and welfare. Seven of the eight interviewees had access to a monthly income of minimum needs-based benefits and thus lived at subsistence level. Some of the interviewees were indebted.

Most interviewees can be described as having impaired health, with descriptions of physical and psychological symptoms varying considerably. The interplay between psychological illnesses (i.e., depression) and addiction (here, alcoholism in particular) constituted a burden for the interviewees in terms of their current lifestyle, or retrospectively. With regard to individual pathways into homelessness, the research showed that (suddenly occurring) loss of work and unemployment, material poverty and health impairments were central structural parameters of the homelessness of the interviewees.<sup>6</sup>

Access to housing is very difficult for the men who were interviewed; among other things, this can be attributed in particular to the enormous cost increases in the private housing sector and the long waiting periods for public housing in Vienna.

The men interviewed described homelessness as a drastic event in an already precarious living situation; the fear of losing contact with children, the loss of a caring relationship with a former partner who often supported them in crisis situations, the loss of everyday structures that provided orientation, not having access to resources or their own living space, and the discontinuation of contact with former colleagues, relatives or neighbours are some of the aspects that increase the acute psychosocial burden of homelessness. Here, the data shows that most of the older men already had fewer socially supportive relationships before they lost their accommodation, and that family relationships, which are destabilized due to separation and moving out, are associated with a deep sense of insecurity and the weakening of self-worth. Using Robert Castels' (2000) model of social exclusion, the interviewees can be categorized as multi-dimensionally disconnected, in view of their lack of social integration through work or relationship networks.<sup>7</sup>

In discussing their lives prior to becoming homeless, most men talked about their former employment context, stressing their financial responsibility for providing material safety for the family and the associated breadwinner function. In this context of societal integration through work, the central importance of education is often referred to in relation to the men's children. Examples of this include having to ensure the financial resources for school or their active, everyday

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<sup>6</sup> For example in the following interviews (See Index at end): IU1; ; IU2; IU4; IU5; IU8; IS6; IS7; IS1; IS2; IS3.

<sup>7</sup> In, for example: IU1; IU2; IU6; IS1.

involvement in early childhood or school-age development. At the same time, most men were used to regularly spending free time with their children, albeit to a lesser degree than their former partners did. Particularly in these contexts, the emotional care involved in this parent-child contact is emphasized retrospectively, even if more significance is usually given to mothers in this respect. Educational activities, which are associated with situations of conflict, everyday confrontations or parental 'boundary setting', are also taken on more frequently by women than by the men, it seems. In this regard, very different patterns can be identified – depending on gender relations within the family system – where decision-making powers and everyday instructional practices can diverge. Parental care functions, on the other hand, seem to have been almost entirely assigned to the woman before homelessness occurred.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, it can be assumed that, before becoming homeless, most of the men interviewed oriented themselves along the lines of hegemonic norms for a nuclear family, which involved specifically male familial and fatherly tasks structured in line with the male role of breadwinner. From a gender relation perspective, women are ascribed the 'caring' role in terms of family and parental work, which includes primary responsibility for care work and is usually accompanied by domineering instructional and emotional caring functions. When financial difficulties emerge and poverty develops, it can be observed that the men start making demands, requesting the women to contribute to the financial security of the family. Here, the 'dual socialization' (Becker-Schmidt, 1987)<sup>9</sup> of women into single earner households is a result of the precarious earning capacity of the men.

## The Relationships of Homeless Men with their Children

Their relationships with their children is of major significance for the interviewees, which is emphasized and expressed through emotional attachment. This becomes apparent through fear of losing them, missing the children or the desire for love and acceptance from them.<sup>10</sup> In most cases it emerges that the reduced day-to-day contact resulting from moving out is perceived as a central experience of loss. Accordingly, contact with the children is initially destabilized through

<sup>8</sup> In, for example: IU1; IU6; IU2; IU5; IU8.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'double socialization' (*doppelte Vergesellschaftung*) refers to women being socialized in two social realms – wage work and reproduction work – and thus experiencing a 'double burden'. The term, developed by Regina Becker-Schmidt (1987), includes the process of how society reproduces itself and the process by which an individual becomes part of this society (see Umrath, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> In: IU1; IU6; IU7; IU3; IU4; IU5.

different forms of homelessness or stays in therapeutic settings. Through stabilizing their living situation and resolving family or personal crises, is it possible for the men to rebuild contact with their children.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of most of the interviewed men, the contact with children is strongly limited in terms of time; it takes place regularly in some cases and irregularly in others. The forms of contact range from speaking on the phone or using messaging services, to personal meetings or sleepovers by the children in the institutions of the homeless support services. On average, the fathers see their children once or twice a week, mostly at the weekends, while for the younger interviewees there is a trend of less continuity of contact than for the older ones. Several of the younger men only became parents shortly before or during their homelessness, and thus have little or no experience of unburdened and settled parenting.<sup>12</sup>

For the homeless men, the relationship with their children is often characterized by insecurity and heavy pressure on parental practices. This is partly due to the circumstances of their relationship – past and present – and the unfamiliar nature of their meetings, which take place at new locations or at unusual times. It is also partly due to the fact that the men's efforts at presenting themselves as good examples to their children is not only attributable to their own motivation to stabilise the relationship, but can also be traced back to expectations or situations of control generated by the children's mothers or by social workers in the shelter, for example. In this challenging situation, the desire to intensify the relationship with their children is often also related to having to offer the children something special within the limited time available. Accounts of the men and social workers interviewed indicate that the conflicting tension between high motivation and fear of failure can quickly turn into frustration. These frustrations, in turn, result in tendencies to retreat that are linked with damaged self-esteem – for example, where specific plans do not succeed or cannot be achieved.<sup>13</sup>

In trying to re-establish or stabilise the parent-child-contact while homeless, the quality of the relationship with the former partner or the mother of the children seems to be of importance. The interviewed men outline that it was particularly through the consent of the former partner that contact with the children was made possible and that relationships could be stabilised while homeless. In the case of a fragile relationship with the mother, the parent-child-relationship was more strongly impaired. Where this was the case, fathers were more aware of their dependence on the will of the mother, and formalised contact and visit regulations tended to lose significance. In particular, when considering the youth welfare

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<sup>11</sup> In: IU1; IU6; IS6; IU3; IS3; IU8.

<sup>12</sup> In, for example: IU1; IU2; IU6; IU7; IU3; IU5.

<sup>13</sup> In, for example: IS1; IU6; IS6; IU7; GD2; IS3; CI8.



authority or court, fathers view their own position as weak. The social workers interviewed also stressed that where relationships between the former partners are functional after the separation, this may promote the stabilization of the father-child-relationship within homelessness.<sup>14</sup> If the relationship between the parents does not remain functional – for instance where there is emotional hurt – the father often reacts by retreating. When it comes to their children, on the other hand, this fear of conflict combined with the great pressure to succeed can in some cases lead to a dichotomization of parental practices, exemplified in situations where men perceive themselves and act as a ‘good friend’ or leisure partner for their children while transferring other parental tasks to the mothers.<sup>15</sup>

The younger homeless men in the study are unsure about their ideas of parenting and are searching for role models for successful parenting. This can emerge either in a desire to acquire more knowledge related to parental practices or in a lack of positive perceptions about parenting, which can be attributed, for example, to negative experiences in their own childhood or an incomplete adolescence. For the older participants, in contrast, the perception of parenting seems to be completely formed and the related competences are understood as self-evident, or at least as already learned. Yet, there is a somewhat ambivalent connection between their position as competent fathers and as men, and they commonly uncertainty to take support – something that William Marsiglio and Joseph Pleck (2005) also found.<sup>16</sup>

In situations of divorce and separation, it becomes evident that there are similarities between homeless men and those who live in independent living conditions. This mostly relates to the impact of father-mother relationships on father-child relationships, the correlation between financial resources and the frequency of contact between fathers and children (for an overview see Tazi-Preve *et al.*, 2007). However, the consequences of homelessness seem clearly to aggravate the parenting situation for men – for example the material poverty, the institutional accommodation, the complex stigmatisation processes, individual crises and upbringing settings, which are controlled on several levels.

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<sup>14</sup> In, for example: IU1; IS2; CI2; IU6; IS6; IS7; IU3; IU4; IS5; GD1; GD2.

<sup>15</sup> In: CI1; CI6; IS3; IU4; IU8.

<sup>16</sup> In: IU6; IU2; IU3; IU4; CI4; IU5.

## Destabilisation and New Formations of Parental Functions

At the beginning, we briefly sketched the parental functions of men preceding their homelessness and will now depict to what extent tasks and activities change after becoming homeless – both their practice and the men's perception of them. Below, we focus on the functions of leisure, upbringing, care function and financial provision. For the men in this study, the 'leisure function' presents itself as the dominant aspect of parental interaction with their children and consists mainly of excursions, a range of entertainment activities and spending time together in public parks and playgrounds. During these excursions the men try to play with their children, spend quality time with them, have fun together and in this way often reconnect through a formerly shared experience in which they felt quite safe and uncontrolled. Through the free time spent together and through re-connecting through shared experiences, situations repeatedly develop in which the fathers act caringly, express their emotional attachment and are able to signal that are still part of their children's lives and 'are there' for them as parents. These two functions – leisure and emotional care – play a central – and a comparatively greater role than before, in the relationship of the men with their children, despite the fact that these situations are also associated with challenges due to a lack of spatial and financial resources, and to the increased intensity.<sup>17</sup>

The 'upbringing function', here specifically related to dealing with children's resistance, 'setting boundaries' and parental discipline, is mostly avoided by the interviewees, even if it was part of the relationship with their children prior to their homelessness. This can be attributed, in particular, to fears about children reducing or even avoiding contact in response to being sanctioned by their father. At the same time, the rules and norms involved in the discipline are not necessarily set by the men, but rather are based upon the mothers' ideas and set by the institutional norms (i.e., house rules) of the respective shelter, which evokes a process of tactical and situational assessment within this area of tension. In this web of relationships and in light of limited time and rather unstable parent-child relationships, we can see that autonomous parental upbringing practices are severely limited by threats of discontinued contact, the danger of conflict with the former partner and the normative functions of the staff at the respective shelters. In reality, behavioural tasks are almost entirely assigned to the mothers. Most interviewees perceived this as a loss, even if some ambivalence was expressed about it.<sup>18</sup>

'Care functions', in the sense of such tasks as cooking, washing, ensuring physical hygiene, putting the children to bed and carrying out health checks, are rarely carried out by the men. Limited time and space and the lack of shared everyday

<sup>17</sup> In, for example: IU1; IU2; IU6; IU3; IU4; IU8; CI7.

<sup>18</sup> In, for example: IU1; CI2; IU7; IU4; CI4; IU8.

activities mean that conditions are not ideal within homelessness for such activities. Given that the interviewed men did not take on these tasks prior to homelessness, this form of care work seems mostly unfamiliar to them and they expressed insecurities in this regard during the interviews. Only in terms of prospective independent housing with the possibility of more frequent or longer visits by their children do they stress their responsibility for such daily tasks.<sup>19</sup>

The 'financial provision function' mainly emerges in terms of paying child support for the interviewed men, on which they take diverse positions. Beyond fundamental agreement on wanting to provide the child support payments, we were able to make out three arguments for their problematization within homelessness. First, where relationships with former partners are tense and there are limited contact opportunities with the children, payments seem to be suspended. Secondly, although there is a reduced rate for homeless people, the payments represent a burden on their materially deprived situation. Thirdly, the men want to spend the money on the children themselves, to reconnect with their images of former financial provision.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, homelessness affects parental functions. While financial provision decreases because of acute poverty, the leisure function gains in significance. At the same time, the interviewees assign special significance to the relationship with their children because of their own insecurities, feelings of inferiority and damaged perceptions of identity, or due to their destabilized parent-child relationships and fear of losing their children. This usually leads to high motivation to construct, secure or further develop positive contact with their children – even if this is not always successful in their acutely stressful situations. The planning of leisure activities and emotional care for their children seem to be particularly important, both subjectively and in practice, while the behavioural-educational parenting is reduced and everyday care activities are hardly observed.

We assume that, in part, new concepts of fathering also emerge within the precarious situation of homelessness, as is argued by Schindler and Coley (2007). However, such concepts are not necessarily reflected as such or consciously integrated into what the men project as future parental practices. When asked about their prospects, many of the interviewed men formulated 'classic' images of nuclear families, full-time jobs and secure living situations, in which they feel responsible for the financial security of their children. Under the enormous pressure of homelessness and acute poverty, they aspire to recreate their social status and in this process connect with established perceptions of normality. This is done, for example, by once more assigning themselves the role of 'male breadwinner' and assigning to the women the 'caring' part of family responsibility. This holds true for

<sup>19</sup> In: IU1; IU6; IU3; IU4; IU5; IU8.

<sup>20</sup> In: IU1; IS1; CI1; CI2; IS3; IU4; IS4; IS6; IU8; IS8.

young men as well, who also connect with influential hegemonic images of the father as the family breadwinner and convey images of normal housing, normal family and normal employment when asked about their prospects.<sup>21</sup> Based on these general interconnections between constructs of masculinity and fatherhood, in which employment and the adoption of financial responsibility for the children constitute a central and identity-establishing feature within male biographies, the enduring establishment of other parental practices proves to be difficult.

## **The Housing Situation and Institutional Influences on Parental Practices**

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Accommodation at homeless support services is limited in terms of time and, aside from personal support requirements, associated with an extensive administration of everyday life for the service users, which impedes contact with their children. The shelters included in this research can generally be characterised as cramped, even if the almost exclusively single bedrooms are characterised as important private spaces for retreat. There are some kitchen and sanitary facilities in the rooms though these are more generally incorporated into shared apartment structures or available for communal use on each floor. In addition, common rooms are important alternative spaces to spend time in. In transitional shelters, where residents do not have a key to the main door, admittance is supervised by staff at a reception desk and is limited to the opening hours – for example, until 12 midnight. Between 28 and 73 people live at the transitional shelters in this research: some for men only, and some for both men and women. How much contact there is between residents depends on the institution.

The men interviewed describe living at the shelters with ambivalence. As parents, the desire to organise visits and sleepovers by their children is strong, but accomplishing this depends on spatial conditions and the institutional visitor regulations, which determine if, and in what way, contact with the children can take place. This is possible to varying degrees depending on the shelter, while consultations with social workers or shelter management are a prerequisite. In some shelters, visits are permitted during the day; in other shelters, additional, overnight visits by children are possible once or twice a week. If social workers have concerns about the children being neglected at the shelter, visits can be forbidden. They are usually permitted in private rooms as well as in commonly accessible rooms, but are sometimes limited to specific spaces within the shelter, such as common rooms.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In, for example: IU1; IS1; IU2; IU3; IS3; IU5.

<sup>22</sup> In, for example: IU1; IU6; IS4; GD1; GD2.

The fathers in this study are ambivalent about bringing their children to the transitional shelters. On the one hand, the shelter is a resource that saves the fathers from having to depend on other people's private rooms – such as the children's mothers, or relatives or acquaintances of the men – or on public spaces; it allows them to avoid the obligation of consumption, and it offers independence in terms of weather conditions and a shared space for retreat. However, visitor contact is perceived as difficult at the shelter. This often results in problematization of the location and its residents, and the perception of the shelter as a stigmatised space. The fathers interviewed substantiate this by explaining that their homeless living conditions and all its associated problems become visible, that it is unreasonable for children to witness this, and that contact between their children and co-residents must be avoided.<sup>23</sup>

Visits to the shelter are described as challenging by the fathers due to the spatial conditions. The children usually cannot move around freely, and sometimes permanent supervision by the fathers constitutes a prerequisite for the visit. The rooms that can be used are restricted and there are few possibilities to arrange them to suit the children's needs. Outside the rooms there is little or no space designed according to the needs of children. The residents usually try to arrange the conditions as best they can, they demand consideration from their co-residents and they make requests of the social workers. They fear that the children's visits could be judged negatively by other people – including the mothers of the children, social workers or the youth welfare authority – and that contact could be threatened as a result.<sup>24</sup>

There is broad agreement between the men and social workers interviewed about the limited space and the lack of child-friendly common rooms in the transitional shelters for the homeless, which they describe as non-child-friendly. Depending on the perspective in question, dissatisfaction can also extend to residents, or rather service users, and their behaviour, although when asked to give specific examples, none were given. This is how images of a stigmatised space of deviation emerge (Foucault, 2006 [1967]); these are juxtaposed with standards on adequate space to raise children, and demands for cleanliness, calm or empathetic communication and a drug-free space result. While the views of the men interviewed about co-residents can in part be traced back to previously mentioned stigmatization, differentiation or fears about the loss of status, the social workers interviewed substantiate the problematization via the risk of unforeseeable events or the important aim of protecting the child, among others. In this ambivalent position of wanting to facilitate parenting for the men within the shelters and, on the other hand, feeling

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<sup>23</sup> In, for example: IS1; IS1; IU8; IS6; IU3; IS7.

<sup>24</sup> In, for example: CI6; IU1; IU6; IU1; IU8; CI7.

responsible for the children's welfare within their professional context, a foreshadowing mode of control seems to manifest itself. It is possible that this impedes autonomous parental practices or contact between the men and the children.<sup>25</sup>

In summary, the transitional shelters represent the possibility of facilitating encounters with children and stabilizing the parent-child-relationship. At the same time, within the institution there is a degree of ambivalence and insecurity about such contact, in part because the space is not conceptualized for the temporary co-residence of children. Simultaneously, parenting in transitional housing within the homeless support services takes place in a very specific order dictated by social relationships, institutional norms or hierarchical relations of control, and it is evident that there are restrictions on the privacy of parent-child relationships and parental practices.

## Social Work with Homeless Men and Fathers

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In the transitional shelters in this research, a variety of support services are put in place for the service users. These range from social work counselling to consultations with general practitioners, psychiatrists and psychologists, from offers of leisure or occupational activities to daily routines. The specific social work support is usually made use of between once a week and once a month, depending on the needs of the individual and the conceptual conditions of the shelter.

There are social work support programmes on a wide range of topics. However, all shelters focus on securing an independent livelihood, albeit to varying degrees, and there is a particular focus on such activities as securing income, debt regulation and applying for financial claims with a view to developing the material conditions for independent housing.<sup>26</sup> In dealing with these topics, social workers try to remain objective in order to provide or facilitate support. However, because of diverse legal, social security and political labour market norms, as well as institutional regulations, the asymmetrical support relation is penetrated by normative and sanctioning elements, in terms of power. In this area of tension, having to switch between legal, assessing or administrative activities and an open, conversational, need-oriented, psychosocial counselling context, the situation proves to be particularly challenging for the social workers, as well as for the residents.<sup>27</sup>

Addressing parenting within the counselling contexts reflects this clearly, where parenting is mentioned during the initial registration conversations, but is usually

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<sup>25</sup> In, for example: IS6; GD1; IU3; IS4; GD2.

<sup>26</sup> In, for example: IS1; IS3; IS4; IS5; IS7.

<sup>27</sup> In: GD2; IU3.

only related to financial responsibilities or debt due to child support payments. Dealing with family circumstances is reduced to underage or dependent children, and not identified in its psychosocial dimension of a possible support requirement for the fathers, or as a social work target. The basic focus on securing an independent livelihood with a simultaneous subordination, or rather, neglect of a psychosocial emphasis are critically reflected by the social workers from a professional standpoint, even if they see themselves as being confronted with a lack of resources within the homeless support services, as well as with the governmental authorities setting priorities of housing and securing a livelihood.<sup>28</sup>

Against this backdrop, social workers explain that parenting is not dealt with much for men within the homeless support services. In transitional shelters with both genders, the social workers interviewed self-critically reflected on the fact that the parenting of mothers is given more attention. From a professional point of view, this is partly explained through a needs-focused orientation, or the voluntary addressing of psychosocial problems. These topics are thus only dealt with when social workers recognise the need and willingness for it in their counterpart, or if the men actively broach the topic themselves. When resources in terms of time and a viable relationship permit, psychosocial aspects become part of the support relationship. In particular, many social workers see their support with regard to addiction problems as significant, and their professional competences as relevant.<sup>29</sup> Parenting, on the other hand, is hardly focused on, as little care demand is signalized and responsibility beyond child support payments is largely pushed into the realm of private responsibility. This can, in part, be attributed to knowledge gaps and insecurities about the technicalities of family, raising children and parenting.<sup>30</sup>

The interviewed men also explained that beyond the issue of child support payments, parenting is scarcely dealt within counselling sessions. The men themselves also push the topic of securing an independent livelihood into the centre of the support relationship and try not to mention psychosocial topics, or to do so as little as possible. In their aspiration for normalcy, the residents perceive support from the social workers as a possibility for attaining independent housing prospects. Thus, they share the focus on material security conveyed to them by the social workers. This emphasis is strengthened in as far as public housing approval is written by the responsible social worker, who thus shares a lot of the responsibility

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<sup>28</sup> In, for example: IS1; IS3; IS2; IS7; GD2.

<sup>29</sup> In: IS1; IS4; IS7; GD2.

<sup>30</sup> In: IS6; IS5; GD2; GD1.

for the attainment of independent housing with the service users. In this strategic support context, the interviewed men try to present themselves in the best light for the social workers, and avoid mentioning psychosocial struggles.<sup>31</sup>

During the interviews for this research, on the other hand, the men talked about crisis situations, hardship, their need for parenting support, and unstable relationships with children or their mothers quite openly. For the most part, they do not see support opportunities within social work, as mentioned above, and in many cases, it is explicitly out of the question for them. This is because parenting is seen as 'private', or it is stressed that, in principle, consultations with social workers are appropriate, but that they do not currently have a need for them. When formulating the explicit wish for specific information, practical advice or concrete support, social work is considered inappropriate. Reasons given in this regard include, for example, the suspicion that the social workers are not competent, that psychological or psycho-therapeutic support contexts are more helpful, or that private relationships are more personal or are separate from the strategic context.<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of the interviewed men, where social workers facilitated the children's sleepovers at the shelter or provided information about free leisure activities, this was experienced as helpful to their parenting.<sup>33</sup>

In summary, the support relationship between social workers and fathers as service users in homeless support services is categorised by a broad failure to address parenting due to complex interrelations. The men's need for support, which we believe to be quite apparent, is not dealt with; rather, it is largely pushed into the private sphere, and thus often remains unresolved. In the strategic support context, the professional tendencies of social workers to take an open, holistic or multi-perspective approach with service users seems to be reaching its limits. While the professional-normative demands are, indeed, partly formulated in psychosocial questions in this area of conflict, their responsibility is placed on other actors, such as psychotherapists, psychologists or internal residence housing care workers.

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<sup>31</sup> In, for example: IU4; IS3; IU3; IU5; IS6; IU8; IU6.

<sup>32</sup> In: IU6; IU8; IU4; IU3.

<sup>33</sup> In: CI2; IU8.



## Outlook

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The experiences of homelessness and acute poverty represent a decisive biographical rupture for those affected, as well as an enormous psychological burden, in which they are confronted with unemployment, debt, health problems or fragile social relationships. The experience is categorised by the loss of social recognition, a perception of social decline and deep feelings of failure. With the simultaneous loss of their position within the family and in parental functions, those affected can no longer relate to their personal and usually hegemonic images of masculinity or fatherhood.

We have argued that men's parental functions change with homelessness. In this respect, we assume that concepts of fathering are destabilized in the precarious situation of homelessness. Similarly to what Schindler and Coley (2007) have argued in terms of homeless fathers who are accommodated with their children, we see how new tasks and activities can emerge here. However, changed practices are hardly noticed or rationalized by the men, and in terms of prospects, they often want to reconnect with their former positions and practices.

The prospect of living independently is a significant motivation for personal lifestyle changes, as well as a central condition for the restoration of continuity in their everyday relationships with their children. Related socio-political demands for the speedy provision of affordable and adequate living spaces – regardless of whether there is a social work support requirement – can constitute a major foundation for stabilizing parent-child systems (see Bui and Graham, 2006; McArthur *et al.*, 2006; Barker *et al.*, 2011).

If temporarily destabilized hegemonic representations of parenting should be treated from a gender-critical normative perspective, in order to, for example, open up dichotomized gender arrangements, or to support men in connecting them to market mediated employment and care work more strongly, then intensive psycho-social and gender reflective support is necessary.

The relationships of support between social workers and fathers are marked by a mutual dynamic of not addressing family burdens, as the establishment of a secure livelihood is the priority of the social work. This results in an inability to really relate to their crisis, or gain deeper insight into their problematic situations (Duttweiler, 2007); as such, social workers are unlikely to notice signs that parenting support is needed.

Our findings suggest a need for support for this specific target group, as the motivations and efforts in relation to parenting are often associated with the stigma of homelessness. This highlights how low self-esteem can influence the practice and

construction of parenting. Thus, we argue for a stronger social work emphasis on psychosocial aspects within the area of the homeless support services, which also focuses on the psychological and identity crises of parenting.

As regards changed and often fragile parent-child relationships, as well as multi-layered insecurities, the research shows, first, a specific need for support in terms of parental education. This would facilitate discussion about child development, challenges in single-parent relationships or ambivalence in relation to hegemonic norms of masculinity and fatherhood, as well as the development of a successful and self-esteem fostering conduct (see also Bui and Graham, 2006; Schindler and Coley, 2007; Barker *et al.*, 2011). Secondly, we believe that supportive or autonomously organized group work activities for parents in homeless support services are important to foster communal educational processes of reflection or involvement in care activities (Arhant *et al.*, 2013). In relation to family crises, the men described burdensome, but quite common relationship conflicts and separations. Taking into account that the quality of the relationship between the parents is a crucial factor in the re-establishment of parent-child relationships and successful parenting, we are of the view, thirdly, there is a need for measures geared towards dealing with separation and changed or alternative family structures and their dynamics.

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# Institutionalisation and Deformalisation: Reorganising Access to Service Provision for Homeless EU Migrants

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› **Abstract\_** *Since the European Union enlargements, NGOs across the 'old EU' have been reporting increasing numbers of clients from the 'new' Member States. As local authorities and service providers respond to these needs, policies are in a dynamic process of being made, changed and negotiated. This article presents findings from a recently completed research project on services and the situation of Polish migrants in cases of rooflessness in Copenhagen, Dublin, Amsterdam and Stockholm. Most changes in provision and policy are incremental in nature, as actors 'muddle through' and adapt to the immediate problems they are facing to the actions of other actors. 'Institutionalisation' and the 'deformalisation' of support for EU migrants occur simultaneously in all cities. There are programmes aimed specifically at migrants but they may have negative effects and exclude those who do not fit a predefined profile. Informal, short-term solutions in individual cases may also occur in more restrictive contexts. Migrants are left uncertain and have to carefully balance their survival strategies as they compete with other groups of homeless persons for dynamically changing access to resources.*

› **Keywords\_** *EU migrants, services, rough sleeping*

## Introduction

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Since European Union enlargements in 2004 and 2007, NGOs across the 'old EU' have been reporting increasing numbers of clients from the 'new' Member States. Additionally, the recent economic crisis has resulted in harder conditions for EU migrants, observed for instance in increased amounts of financial help received from families back home (reverse remittances) (Pemberton *et al.*, 2014). The situation demands new policies and, indeed, the policies and practices of access to services for this group are in the process of reorganisation.

Simple policy-making models have suggested that the process occurs in consecutive steps such as: identifying the problem, agenda-setting and policy implementation. These stages may be supplemented by policy evaluation, which would complete the circular model and conclude the cycle of policy-making (Jann and Wegrich, 2007). These models suggest that policies are steered by superior institutional actors, which in many cases seems contrary to empirical evidence. It has been pointed out that policy-making does not usually proceed neatly in stages and, hence, other models move away from rational choice and clear-cut stages of a linear or cyclical framework (Jann and Wegrich, 2007).

The incrementalist approach, for instance, claimed that since policies are created in the environment of already existing policies, the means and the end are not clearly distinct and it is easier for the actors to agree on a specific policy proposal than on values or objectives. Hence, small adjustments to current policies are most likely to be implemented. According to this approach, policy-making is thus about dealing with immediate problems as they arrive and 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959). Further, 'garbage can' models in organization theory showed how problems, solutions and participants meet with no particular order or rules (Cohen *et al.*, 1972). These 'organized anarchy' models assume that various policy streams progress simultaneously. For instance, Kingdon (1984) proposed a model of three, largely independent, streams; problem-defining, the political agenda and the policy stream may or may not converge in a 'window of opportunity' ultimately to structure the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1984).

The recently noticed problem of homelessness among EU migrants is partly due to uncoordinated policy-making within the European Union. European regulations on free movement and an open labour market are set against welfare and housing policies, which are left to the discretion of individual Member States. The right to reside for over three months (and hence access some forms of support) is based on having employment or sufficient means of one's own. Contributory benefits do not cover 'economically inactive' persons or migrants who have worked on an undocumented basis, were in employment for very short periods of time or worked previously in other states. Furthermore, due to long periods of unemploy-

ment, their entitlements may have already expired in the home country. Further still, it is usually the local governments that are responsible for implementing policies and they impose their own restrictions, such as the criterion of having a 'local connection'. Municipalities also bear the responsibility for emergency provision, such as night shelters.

The legal limbo some EU migrants find themselves in was addressed in FEANTSA's policy statements (2011; 2013) and during the FEANTSA conference in 2012. FEANTSA advocated – as did other voluntary organizations – clarity at EU level in relation to the ambiguous position of EU migrants and their access to services, including on the terms 'genuine chance for employment', 'job-seekers' status and 'unreasonable burden on social welfare system' included in the EU Directive on Free Movement (FEANTSA, 2013; 2015; Homeless Migrants in Copenhagen, 2012).

In spite of this need for a European policy change, it is the service providers, often from the voluntary sector, that are the first to meet migrants in need. Services adapt to the new situation and to the different needs of different groups of migrants. Providers have to take into account the specificity of migrant homelessness. They also have to modify their funding for programmes that can no longer be based on the fact that users are entitled to claim benefits. This process of service reorganisation and policy-making in relation to the homelessness of EU migrants lies at the centre of this paper.

The paper is based on data from a project financed by a research grant of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (0369/IP3/2011/71). One of the principal aims of the research project was to look at the reorganisation of access to homeless services for migrants in various cities in Europe. Homelessness among EU migrants is a relatively small-scale issue but, as mentioned above, it concerns policy-making on various levels: from the responsibility of municipalities to provide emergency support to the transnational and European issues of mobility and welfare coordination. The aim of the study was also to analyse the processes of mutual adaptation of migrant survival strategies and the social practices of services for homeless persons. The objective was to capture the dynamic, interactive process of adaptation and negotiation of rights, accessibility of services and assistance.

Fieldwork concentrated on the case of Polish migrants sleeping rough in four Western European cities: Copenhagen, Dublin, Amsterdam and Stockholm. The cities chosen were deliberately not metropolises such as London or Paris, but were nonetheless capital cities and the largest cities of the most prosperous EU countries with established welfare systems and with extensive provision for homeless people.

Policy documents, reports and available data on homelessness among EU migrants from each country and city were analysed. Fieldwork for this project was conducted in the summer months of 2012 and 2013. I spent 30 days in each city and in total conducted 52 interviews with authorities and NGOs, including officials, managers, front-line staff and volunteers in various organizations dealing with homelessness or migration. Many hours were also spent on ethnographic participant observation at services and interviews with Polish migrants experiencing homelessness (rough sleeping, using shelters and day centres) (Table 1). All participants were informed about the research project and gave their consent to be interviewed.

The possibility for migrants to access some services changes very rapidly. The cases described refer to the situation on the ground during the fieldwork. However, rather than capturing a snapshot of the situation, the aim was to look at policy in the process of being made and the dynamics of the situation, as well as to see how different actors influence each other.

**Table 1. Basic Fieldwork Information**

	2012	2012	2013	2013
	Copenhagen	Dublin	Amsterdam	Stockholm
Number of expert interviews (NGOs)	16 (8)	16 (8)	9 (7)	11 (8)
Size of the Polish rough sleepers population in contact (women)	15 (2)	19 (2)	30 (1)	35 (6)
Collected interviews/life stories (women)	7 (1)	5 (0)	7 (1)	5 (1)

## **Migrant Homelessness**

As mentioned above, migrant homelessness is in some respects different from the typical situations of homelessness among indigenous persons. Many studies have shown an increased risk of poverty and destitution for migrants. Migrant vulnerabilities that have been identified are linked to a precarious situation on the labour market (also de-skilling) and the housing market, a (transitional) lack of access to financial support, a poorer knowledge of the welfare system and differing social safety nets (Edgar *et al.*, 2004, Pleace, 2010).

The situation of EU migrants has been studied predominantly in the UK, where the share of rough sleepers from Eastern Europe rose sharply in the mid-2000's (Homeless Link, 2006; 2009; 2010; Broadway, 2007; 2009). Evidence on the situation of EU migrants in other countries is not well documented, and for the countries in question it will be summarised further below.

In the UK, the causes of migrant homelessness and the question of whether destitution predated migration were the subject of contradictory findings (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012). It was observed that homeless EU migrants have support needs that are different to many indigenous clients of low-threshold services; for instance, fewer of them had mental health or drug-related problems (Bowpitt *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, a survey on multiple exclusion among service users found lower indicators of severe problems among migrants, who nonetheless had higher rates of rough sleeping (probably mostly due to a lack of access to shelters). Adverse life events were equally common among all participants. Overall, however, the 'structural causes' of migrant homelessness seemed to be more important. Destitution, including homelessness, usually happened after arrival to the UK, even if some psychiatric problems or drug use preceded migration (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012).

Still, East European migrants who were homeless in the UK had multiple problems. They had limited English language skills and mostly used the social networks of their peers, which led to a depreciation of job status and low pay, as well as to living in overcrowded situations in the private rented sector. They were often dependent on charitable support and informal networks since they were usually excluded from more long-term support (Bowpitt *et al.*, 2011).

Two main groups of homeless EU migrants were described in the British context: (1) those with migration-related difficulties and (2) those with long-term vulnerabilities (Bowpitt *et al.*, 2011; Garapich, 2011; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012). It was observed in the UK, but also in Ireland and Denmark (Christensen and Kubickova, 2011; Focus Ireland, 2012), that migration can trigger not only a situation of homelessness in the case of those at highest risk, but can also increase vulnerability. For homeless migrants, the lack of a quick response and a change in situation were particularly likely to lead to long-term rooflessness with increased health and substance misuse problems (Bowpitt *et al.*, 2011; Garapich, 2011).

## Putting the Selected Cities and Countries in Context

After Romania, Poland is the largest sending EU Member State. The main destinations of Polish migrants are the UK and Germany, but a significant number of Poles emigrated to or are temporarily residing in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden (Table 2). These selected countries may be described as prosperous welfare states, albeit with different social welfare regimes. All of the countries chosen are also 'new' migration countries, where the majority of Polish workers emigrating after 2004 did not have long-established national social networks to depend on. Ireland and Sweden opened their labour markets to new EU citizens in 2004, the Netherlands in 2007 and Denmark in 2009.

**Table 2. Polish Citizens Residing Temporarily in Other EU States (still registered in Poland)**

Polish emigration		2002	2007	2011
	<b>European Union</b>	<b>451,000</b>	<b>1,860,000</b>	<b>1,670,000</b>
	Of which to:			
<b>Largest emigration</b>	United Kingdom	24,000	690,000	625,000
	Germany	294,000	490,000	470,000
<b>Countries studied</b>	Denmark		17,000	21,000
	Ireland	2,000	200,000	120,000
	The Netherlands	10,000	98,000	95,000
	Sweden	6,000	27,000	36,000

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny

The size and characteristics of labour markets have a large influence on migration patterns to these countries. Polish migrants to the EU are generally young and well educated. Some official data about Polish migrants to these countries are supplemented by results from surveys using the Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) method, which were recently conducted in Denmark (Hansen and Hansen, 2009) and Ireland (Mühlau *et al.*, 2011) to study the living and working conditions of Polish migrants that are partly hidden from the official registers. These are mobile citizens who are not always registered abroad; they work off the books or temporarily. Many are low skilled, with no knowledge of foreign languages, often living in poor conditions and situations of overcrowding.

Ireland absorbed a high number of Polish workers in the post-accession period, but the effects of economic recession are visible in the high foreign-unemployment rate and many Poles leaving Ireland after 2008 (Tables 2 and 3). Even though Polish migration in Ireland became more settled with an increasing number of family reunions, many Poles lived in situations of overcrowding, renting on the private market and usually sharing dwellings (only 5 percent of respondents in an RDS survey did not share with another family) (Mühlau *et al.*, 2011). Many Polish migrants in the Netherlands were employed via temporary work agencies; they were mostly low-skilled men engaged for seasonal work in agriculture. Unfavourable work contracts and exploitation by employers were named as the most significant problems for Polish migrants in the Netherlands (Kaczmarczyk, 2013). On the other hand, Denmark and Sweden experienced much more moderate immigration, probably due in part to language barriers and the big influence of trade unions, especially in sectors like construction. Polish migrants in Sweden (at least those residing there officially and for long enough to be registered) are young and generally well educated (Gerdes and Wadensjö, 2013). However, an RDS survey of the Polish community in Denmark found that 12 percent of respondents had neither a legal residence nor employment and another 22 percent were in a grey zone (not having fulfilled all formalities). Also 45 percent of them had previously worked in another state (other than Poland and Denmark) (Hansen and Hansen, 2009).

**Table 3. Comparison of Countries of Polish Migration**

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>The Netherlands</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
Population 2012	5,580,000	4,580,000	16,730,000	9,480,000
Percent foreign-born (percent born outside EU27)	8.8 (6.2)	14.1 (3.1)	10.9 (8.4)	13.8 (8.8)
Three largest foreign-born groups	Germany, Turkey, <b>Poland</b>	UK, <b>Poland</b> , Lithuania	Turkey, Suriname, Morocco	Finland, Iraq, <b>Poland</b>
Polish population 2006 and 2012	21,000 32,000	63,000 123,000	30,000 78,000	52,000 75,000
Opening labour market to A10	2009	2004	2007	2004
Unemployment rate 2006 (and 2012)	3.9 (7.5)	4.5 (14.8)	4.4 (5.3)	7.1 (8.0)
Foreign-born unemployment rate 2009-2010 (EU-born)	13.0 (9.0)	16.0 (17.0)	8.0 (5.0)	15.0 (8.0)
Estimated homeless population	4,998	3,808	18,000	10,100
Estimated % homeless migrants	21%	19%	46%	34%

Sources: Eurostat; Benjaminsen, 2009; Central Statistics Office, 2012; Central Bureau voor de Statistiek; Socialstyrelsen, 2012.

In the selected countries, the capital (and largest) cities were chosen as field sites. Denmark and Ireland are small countries with a large share of the population concentrated in capital cities, where Polish people have also recently become one of the largest foreign-born groups. Sweden and the Netherlands, on the other hand, have a larger share of non-European migrants (Table 3). A large share of the Polish community outside of Poland is concentrated in Dublin, Copenhagen and Stockholm. Amsterdam stands out as the only city studied that does not have a concentration of Polish expatriates, as it does not offer many jobs (or housing) for menial workers. Amsterdam, however, is a popular tourist destination, which explains the migration strategies of some individual migrants (Table 4). All four cities are comparable in terms of the size of their metropolitan population and in terms of facing large problems with homelessness. No easily comparable data on the scale of homelessness exists, but each of the cities has a substantial number of rough sleepers or people in acute housing situations. Also, the estimated percentage of foreign-born persons among the homeless population is high and varies from 19 percent in Copenhagen to 60 percent in Amsterdam (Table 4).

**Table 4. Comparison of Cities**

	Copenhagen	Dublin	Amsterdam	Stockholm
City population	550,000	530,000	790,000	880,000
Metropolitan population	1,700,000	1,300,000	2,300,000	2,100,000
Percent minorities	16%	16%	30%	22%
Polish population 2012	12,000	31,000	3,000	31,000
Estimated number of homeless persons	1,542	2,375	937	3,400
Estimated % of homeless migrants	19%	24%	60%	40%

Sources: Danmarks Statistik; Central Statistics Office; Central Bureau voor de Statistiek; Statistiska centralbyrån; Benjaminsen, 2009; G4, 2012; Socialstyrelsen, 2012.



## Access to Services for EU Migrants in Selected Cities

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In accordance with EU Directive 2004/38 on the right of Union citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, an EU migrant “should not become an unreasonable burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State”. With minor variations, the Directive is implemented in all Member States (for instance, in Ireland migrants must satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition to receive welfare payments). Generally, therefore, funding for homeless EU migrants with no right to reside does not come from the host state and the solution offered officially is repatriation. ‘Local connection’ restrictions may further limit migrant access to services, as happens in all the cities under consideration, with additional restrictions in Amsterdam, where one has to be in a ‘socially vulnerable’ target group to qualify for benefits.

Estimates from all those cities show that at least a couple of hundred EU migrants were trying to access basic services during the year; 10-50 percent of them were Polish (Homeless Migrants in Copenhagen, 2012; Focus Ireland, 2012; G4 User, 2012; Socialstyrelsen, 2013). The groups I came in direct contact with during fieldwork in the centres of those cities numbered approximately 20 to 50 persons. Those were mostly members of a core group of long-term Polish rough sleepers. Polish homeless migrants are by no means a well-defined category and they may have different residence status and employment history. My respondents, however, did not usually meet the criteria of the EU Directive on free movement (they had no right to reside) and were excluded from most financial and long-term support. Available data on homeless EU migrants and access to services for such persons will be described below for each city.

### *Copenhagen*

Even though a lack of work was reported as the principal problem of migrants using the Kofoeds Kælder day centre in Copenhagen, the study found that they had multiple, severe problems; most were rough sleeping or using emergency shelter, their language and professional skills were low and their levels of addictions high (Christensen and Kubickova, 2011). Going back to Poland was not seen as an option by most of the Polish clients interviewed. According to another report, this severe marginalization could be identified in 20 percent of cases of about 500 EU migrants estimated to be in acute homelessness in Copenhagen in a particular year (Homeless Migrants in Copenhagen, 2012).

At the time of the fieldwork, Polish rough-sleeping migrants were using outreach food distribution, a couple of day centres serving free meals and there was one ‘night café’ for about 25 people, where one could spend the night and no questions were asked. My respondents were sleeping in parks, vehicles and spending the days in the public space in the city centre, most often individually or in groups of 2-3 persons.

### *Dublin*

In 2006, it was estimated that about 60 to 120 EU migrants were homeless in Dublin (Homeless Agency, 2006). They were predominantly recently-arrived migrants who had no access to payments. Their problems revolved around a lack of employment, poor knowledge of the language, and formalities. It was stressed that they need different support from 'traditionally' homeless people. Six years later, the consequences of long-term destitution were apparent. Most Polish respondents had been homeless for 1-2 years, their health was poor, they had usually never asked for any formal support, they did not participate in any courses, and they were entrenched in street culture (begging, scavenging and drinking) (Focus Ireland, 2012).

In 2012 a pilot programme aimed at 'reconnecting' Eastern European migrants with their home countries was launched by Dublin City Council, the Mendicity Institution (a local NGO) and the Polish Barka Foundation. The goal was set at 20 reconnections within half a year, as each "successful reconnection is value for money" (Reconnection and Reintegration of Central and Eastern European migrants, Dublin 2012). In order to provide comprehensive case management, a hostel for persons participating in the programme was opened. The pressure for effectiveness was criticized by some of the staff, while uncertainty about the hostel's future was a matter for concern among participants (Mostowska, 2014). Other voluntary and municipal organizations were also helping with documents, advice, courses or repatriation. Homeless Polish people in Dublin that I had been in contact with were either staying at the 'Polish hostel', had received payments and were staying in mainstream hostels, or were rough sleeping. They visited various day centres during the day and spent most of the time in large groups in and around these facilities. Repatriation was not seen as a real option. Also, the group was wary of individuals who declared a readiness to go back to Poland, as it undermined the group's solidarity.

### *Amsterdam*

In 2012, FEANTSA filed a collective complaint to the Council of Europe against the Netherlands (Complaint No. 86/2012, 2012) on the basis that lawfully resident EU migrant workers were being excluded from shelters where they lacked the 'local connection'. In 2014, a lack of access to emergency shelters was declared not to be compatible with the provisions of the Revised Social Charter.

An emergency shelter for all operated in Amsterdam only during winter time (as in other cities) and in the warm months, beds were only available in some of the organizations on an exceptional basis (before being admitted to hospital, a couple of days before repatriation). The Municipality funded the Polish Barka Foundation to operate an outreach team for a 'reconnections' programme. The De

Regenbooggroep organization was running a centre for migrants (Amoc) and in 2011 opened a helpdesk for Eastern Europeans. Amoc offered some emergency beds, advice and repatriation. Various day centres, soup kitchens and food outreach were available.

Amsterdam is exceptional among other large Dutch cities as it has more transient rough sleepers who are more often in contact with law enforcement and who use illegal drugs more often (G4 User, 2012). Also, the Polish migrants using the services that I met were substantially younger and more mobile than in other cities. Many were in their twenties and were 'on the way' to England, France or the Scandinavian countries.

### *Stockholm*

Even though NGOs were reporting an increase in migrant homelessness, the 2011 homelessness survey revealed a low number of migrants. Hence, the Swedish Health and Social Welfare Board conducted another survey specifically on the homelessness of EU migrants with no right to reside. Romanian citizens were the largest group, while Poles comprised 10 percent of cases (Socialstyrelsen, 2013). Another report showed that migrants' problems were mostly due to unemployment and that their episodes of homelessness were relatively short (Stadsmission, 2012). Street workers on an average night counted about 150 rough sleepers in the city centre and another 100 in tents in green areas.

In 2011, a joint project of Stockholm's Stadsmission (one of the largest and oldest voluntary organisations working in the field of homelessness in Stockholm), the municipality and an employment agency, in cooperation with other NGOs and with funding from the European Social Fund, was launched in Stockholm. 'Crossroads' offered both basic support (meals, showers, emergency beds) and employment advice and courses. Other voluntary organizations offered soup kitchens and day centres. Emergency shelters operated in the wintertime.

Crossroads was hailed a success and was subsequently rolled out in other cities. Its focus on employment meant that it was predominantly visited by 'third country nationals' – for instance, many Africans with permanent residence in Southern European countries. The Polish group, which was much less job-ready with poorer health and language skills, stopped coming to Crossroads and limited itself to soup kitchens and day centres in other organizations. Some of these NGOs, especially smaller ones, were very critical of the 'official' policy, which they saw as the city side-lining their efforts to serve everyone and as removing such services from the city centre to less accessible locations. One place, about 20km from Stockholm, has become a safe haven for Poles. A little day centre run by the Swedish church has attracted the whole Polish group. They drove most of the older guests away

and kept other groups from approaching it. Polish migrants have developed very friendly relations with the staff there and internal group mechanisms for keeping order to keep up good relations.

As summarised above, in all cities, service responses and policies are fragmented, not well coordinated and constantly changing. Organizations adopt policies as to which groups they want to and can serve. This can change quickly due to financing but also for more mundane reasons – for instance, when a staff member with knowledge of a foreign language leaves the job. Some programmes have been financed through private funds (Kofoeds Kælder, Projekt Udenfor, Amoc) or as ‘projects’ (the cooperation of the Dublin City Council and Barka Foundation, or Crossroads co-financed by the European Social Fund). This means that they are terminated once the project is completed. This dynamic has further been complicated by the strategies of individual migrants and groups of migrants as well as interaction between different groups of users.

Most of these processes seem to be incremental in nature, as a particular actor adapts to the immediate problem they are facing and to the actions of other actors. Depending on who those actors are (local government, NGOs or individual staff members) these actions may be roughly put in two categories: ‘deformalisation’ and ‘institutionalisation’.

## Deformalisation and Individualisation

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In circumstances where migrant access to services that are run or financed by the local government becomes increasingly restricted, usually other options appear. Such was the case with the outreach and mobile café by Projekt Udenfor that was run in Copenhagen. Likewise, the Salvation Army soup run in Amsterdam was a reaction to increase in demand. These kinds of services are aimed at the most excluded; support is offered anonymously and involves food, the delivery of clothes and sleeping bags, keeping in contact where there are health problems, helping with lost documents and the like.

In a restrictive national and municipal context, low threshold service providers may choose deliberately not to report the nationality of clients. Another strategy they implement is to fund this part of their work through private means. This was the case with Amoc serving Eastern Europeans clients and Kofoeds Kælder in Copenhagen. Providers run the risk of conflict with authority or other organizations, but also that the programme will have to be discontinued when the money runs out, which leaves destitute migrants insecure and uncertain.

Restrictive contexts however also lead to ‘individualisation’. By this I mean, for instance, informal referrals and the placement of individuals in shelters or hospitals. On an exceptional basis, help is ‘deformalised’ and the solutions offered are usually to individuals in the most dramatic circumstances. These are quiet acts of professional noncompliance by staff with restrictions and are usually short-term solutions for individual persons (Mostowska, 2014). Local government may deliberately avoid institutionalising support for migrants, shifting the responsibility to the voluntary sector, even if it is in fact financing it. NGOs may also have a better knowledge of the groups in questions and be more flexible (Olsson and Nordfeldt, 2008).

We depend on private organizations. And of course NGO organizations, they can do something that the city perhaps can’t do. They have access to something and they don’t have to be so strict. We have to follow the law. (Interview, Municipal Social Services, Copenhagen 2012)

In Copenhagen and Amsterdam, where there were fewer formal options for migrants, contacts with clients were also much more individualised, as no strong Polish group existed. Outside of routine, individual help and advice was also declared in Dublin and Stockholm, with regards, for instance, to obtaining payments. Restrictions in access to services may leave individuals in long-term homelessness with increasing health and addiction problems. ‘Cracks’ in the system, however, mean that deformalised help may become possible for individuals.

## Institutionalisation

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Visible groups of foreign rough sleepers in the public space put greater onus on local authorities to take action. Institutionalisation is understood here as the creation or organization of governmental institutions or particular bodies responsible for overseeing or implementing policy. The local government thus takes responsibility and formally takes part in some sort of programme aimed especially at EU migrants. Such was the case with the agreement between Dublin City Council, the Mendicity Institution and the Polish Barka Foundation, and with the creation of Crossroads in Stockholm (an organization created through the collaboration of NGOs and the municipality with ESF funding).

Such programmes have a limited time perspective and are aimed at solving the immediate and most visible part of the problem. They may also have negative consequences. It seems that these actions monopolise support for migrants; that is, they allow organizations to justify their practices of exclusion and refer individuals to that one ‘official’ programme. In the case of many Poles, such referrals to Crossroads were futile. Large group of Polish rough sleepers stopped coming to Crossroads. They were often intoxicated and got into conflict with African and

Roma migrants there. They were also not utilising the employment and formal help offered by Crossroads. This group's needs were actually closer to those of the 'traditional homeless' with severe addiction and health problems. Their nationality was irrelevant, but their 'fragile residence status' (Stenum, 2011) was excluding them from other forms of help.

Large programmes like Crossroads or the cooperation between Dublin City Council and Barka focus on efficiency. Even though Dublin's programme was aimed at the most excluded people, the financial aspect was clear in the project's overview:

The cost/benefit analysis would suggest that the programme cost of €68,000 which indicates a cost per person of €3,400 per successful reconnection is value for money, when one considers the identifiable cost of maintaining an individual in homeless services at a minimum of €20,000 per annum (including accommodation, care and support costs, not including cost impact on other services such as health, prisons, and welfare). (Reconnection and Reintegration of Central and Eastern European migrants, Dublin 2012)

'Institutionalisation' and a focus on efficiency in the case of Stockholm led to specialisation. The largest group of migrants, the easiest and the most common cases received more support more quickly. Those individuals who didn't fit the profile were left at the end of the line. Critique and disagreements arise when authorities engage in such selective policy. In Stockholm, NGOs dealing with migrants not ready for the Crossroads idea were very critical of it.

I don't like Crossroads, because I don't see the point in the EU spending a lot of money so a lot of people can be paid just to tell them that they cannot stay and have to go home. (Interview, Ny Gemenskap, Stockholm 2013)

A tense situation between NGOs was also seen in Amsterdam, where Amoc – which started the project for Eastern Europeans using their own funds – was somehow neglected by the city, which invited Barka to cooperate with the 'reconnections' project.

## **Group Strategies of Homeless Polish Migrants**

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In most research, people in situations of homelessness are seen as individuals acting under structural constraints, having their capabilities and vulnerabilities, interacting with state agencies or NGOs. The importance of group dynamics is often left out. In the case of destitute migrants, the group aspect is particularly interesting. People who lack entitlement to benefits and who lack access to many services, whose social networks are limited, who often have little knowledge of the system and poor command of the foreign language, rely in greater part on their peers. This has been observed during participant observation and has appeared

in many interviews with migrant service users. The short duration of the fieldwork and the way that informants were recruited, however, (mostly in and around low threshold services) might have affected observations, which nevertheless will be summarised here as opening remarks for further discussion.

Differences in migrant situations between cities were significant in terms of the ethnographic field and the main characteristics of the rough sleeping population in contact (Table 5). Polish people using services in Copenhagen and Amsterdam were much more mobile (had usually travelled before between different EU countries) and had been in their current location for a much shorter a time. Especially in the case of Amsterdam, they were also on average much younger. Dublin and Stockholm groups consisted mostly of middle-aged men who had spent many years abroad. As mentioned before, this could be attributed to the characteristics of Polish migration to these cities, but also to the available services and the way they functioned.

Relatively closely-knit groups of Polish migrants were observed in Dublin and Stockholm. These street groups were formed in the vicinity of anchor places: hostels, day centres, railroad stations. Additionally, those cities have much more 'refuse space' around services, which is suitable for hanging out (Höjdestrand, 2009). The availability of services is crucial to group formation, but oppressiveness or friendliness in the public space also plays a vital role. In Amsterdam, where public spaces are especially heavily controlled (and the city centre is also a very densely-built urban fabric), gathering, smoking or talking in front of a soup kitchen is virtually impossible. Service staff themselves are vigilant not to let groups hang out in front of their door.

**Table 5. Basic Information about Polish Migrants Contacted during Fieldwork**

	Copenhagen	Dublin	Amsterdam	Stockholm
Number of Polish rough sleepers contacted (women)	15 (2)	19 (2)	30 (1)	35 (6)
Average age	43	43	36	41
Main characteristics of the population	Individuals, pairs, scattered throughout the city, couple of years or less in Denmark	Largest share of people in hostels, closely-knit drinking group	Scattered, young and mobile (least attached to the city/country) population	Large groups in sleeping places, meeting in one day centre, many years in Sweden
Ethnographic field	Scattered places mostly in public space throughout the city centre	Very limited space within the city centre, public space and institutions, also hostels	Limited space, mostly parks, and institutions in the centre, sleeping places outside of the centre	Very scattered and sometimes distant places throughout the city and beyond Stockholm

The situation in Copenhagen, where most homeless services are located outside the tourist-commercial zone, was between the two extremes. Finding a place to hang out during the day in Copenhagen and Amsterdam was more often done in small groups of two to four people. Lack of access to shelters (with the exception of Dublin) led to the disintegration of migrant groups. In Stockholm, however, a large group of about fifteen persons was living in an abandoned warehouse, and although they travelled by train in smaller groups to a day centre, they remained closely integrated.

In addition to some degree of safety, companionship and access to some (shared) goods, a group also provides easier access to information. This is especially vital for migrants. What was observed during fieldwork for this project, and has been observed on other occasions (Mostowska, 2011; 2013), was that the most important capital among this population is knowledge of services, their schedules, locations, people who could help, knowledge of the language, and ways of taking care of formalities. The same was true of food distribution in front of the Sankta Klara church in the centre of Stockholm. A clearly visible crowd attracted attention and was a meeting place where one could learn about other services located outside the city centre in Hjorthagen, Högdalen or Handen.

Foreign surroundings and using low threshold services means also that migrants usually deal with 'first-come, first-served' type of arrangements. Being physically fit and being in a group is a huge advantage. The Polish people I observed during fieldwork used the strength of their group especially against Roma groups and indigenous drug users. 'Third-country nationals' were often stronger and quicker than the Polish group.

Being in a group also helps in distancing themselves from the state or any support provision (Garapich, 2011). These dense social networks were especially visible in Dublin, where group members cared for each other, shared food, drinks, cigarettes, clothes or information. The group usually puts its internal solidarity above individual interests. As already mentioned, the group's solidarity made it very hard for individuals to 'break away' and, for instance, to admit to engaging in the 'reconnections' procedure.

The particular situation that Polish homeless migrants find themselves in means, however, that there were drawbacks to being associated with the migrant group. Many service providers pointed out that migrant group behaviour was one of the challenges of working with them. Because of the poor reputation Polish people had in some of the day centres, and because of gate-keeping practices, my respondents utilised certain tactics so as to be less noticeable. They meticulously adhered to the rules, did not speak too loudly and kept to the queues. They would also avoid coming to a soup kitchen or day centre in a large group so as not to be associated



with the troublesome element. Also, a more individual personalized contact with service staff made it possible to be treated on exceptional basis, even if residence criteria were not formally met. For many Polish migrants, therefore, daily strategies involved a careful balancing of their identity and attachment to the group depending on what kind of institutional environment they found themselves in. Often, they had to choose between solidarity with their compatriots and seeking cracks in the system to approach a social worker individually. Sticking with the group was particularly important in situations of competition with other groups of (migrant) homeless persons in accessing resources.

My informants had very little knowledge of the system, their rights or entitlement to support. They did not distinguish between different voluntary organizations and municipal or state institutions. The most prevalent opinion was that “Poles don’t have access” in contrast to other groups: “Roma, drug-addicts, Blacks”. Repatriation was not seen as an option by most of them. Employment advice was seen as too bureaucratic and ineffective. Their opinions were mostly influenced by how friendly and open an atmosphere there was rather than what a particular service could actually offer. They therefore especially appreciated the freedom of using a place and, as in the case of Mendicity Institute in Dublin or Kryckan Vallakyrka near Stockholm, used group self-controlling mechanisms to keep order (see also Johnsen *et al.*, 2005). Individual stories and rumours (“she can get you a free ticket home”) spurred short-lived hopes for changing one’s own situation.

For migrants with no right to reside, even access to basic shelter was limited in all the cities studied. Also, programmes aimed specifically at migrants, like the ‘Polish’ shelter in Dublin or Stockholm’s Crossroads, had insufficient capacity to meet needs. Day centres and soup kitchens were the only support that most of the migrant rough sleepers used. The degree of openness of NGOs, the general attitude towards EU migrants and repressiveness in public spaces were the most important factors shaping the strategies of my informants. Begging has been forbidden in Copenhagen and Amsterdam. Dublin has partially banned it. In Copenhagen, Polish rough sleepers relied mostly on bottle collecting and scavenging to survive. In Stockholm, begging was an accepted activity and practiced by some of the respondents. In Amsterdam, on the other hand, many Poles boasted about engaging in small hustles – pickpocketing, shoplifting, dealing drugs or bicycle theft. Generally, homeless Polish people had no confidence in the state or the service providers. They were critical of the system but very thankful to individual people who helped them.

## Comparison and Conclusions

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The problem of EU migrant homelessness was recognized in all cities. Everywhere, municipal responses included winter emergency shelters (although not necessarily specifically for migrants, they were used in large numbers by this group). Outreach teams were reorganized to adapt to new tasks: municipal teams in Copenhagen and Stockholm, and an outreach run by a voluntary organization in Dublin. Repatriation was organised by various voluntary, local and state agencies, and also by Polish consulates. Repatriation was seen the official long-term solution to the problem, with the exception of the Crossroads approach in Stockholm. Municipalities financed voluntary organizations to run low threshold services, but also financed the Polish Barka in Dublin and Amsterdam. Other organizations that targeted this group specifically had to find their own resources (Amoc in Amsterdam, Kofoeds Kælder and Projekt Udenfor in Copenhagen, Kryckan Vallakyrka day centre near Stockholm). Also, other NGOs that served the most marginalised criticised the city's policy of removing services from the city centre (Ny Gemenskap, Convictus in Stockholm). Bans on begging and restrictions on the use of public space can also be seen as policy instruments to repress the presence of migrants in the city.

The rapidly-changing situation of access to support and provision offered to EU migrants is a result of small, incremental actions that are taken at NGO and local levels. Clearly, defining problems, raising awareness, gathering evidence and policy-making are simultaneous processes. There is virtually no EU or national set-up for strategic goals or policy-making. In each municipality, the problem concerns a relatively small group of migrants. It seems also that the definition of the problem is not clear. Is EU migrant homelessness a problem of 'managing migration' or coordinating welfare policies? Should it be approached at local, national, EU or transnational levels? Who is responsible for researching, seeking solutions, financing and implementing such policies – and to what degree?

Interviewees representing authorities and services framed the process of reorganizing services differently. In Denmark, the migration perspective was very apparent. Migrant homelessness was seen particularly as a consequence of 'unprepared migration', which should be prevented. The lack of shelter and restrictions on the use of public space were a way to stop this type of migration and increase repatriation (Mostowska, 2014). The 'troublesome groups of Polish drinkers' causing public nuisance was also a main concern in Amsterdam. Inviting Barka's outreach team was a way to increase repatriations and to counterbalance repressive public space practices and the lack of shelters. Interviewees in Dublin focused on the need to change the behaviour of Polish rough sleepers (drinking, hanging out with the group), but it was also acknowledged that it is a flaw in the welfare system that prevents Polish people from being treated in the same way as Irish citizens. In

Stockholm, again, there was a focus on the concept of the 'migrant worker'; nonetheless, a migrant in Sweden could be helped on the spot with finding employment and gaining independence.

Furthermore, the problem with policy-making in respect to EU migrant homelessness is that it doesn't have powerful policy entrepreneurs, which are crucial in the process of agenda setting. It is also clear that the attention of the media, the public but also researchers and politicians varies over time. The importance of the EU migrant homelessness issue fades with time and as new problems appear. Until now, changes in policy have been rather reactive with no long-term goals, strategies or institutional solutions. Individual organizations respond *ad hoc* to the situation.

Using Kingdon's (1984) conceptual framework, one can say that the window of opportunity for policy streams to converge and reach the decision agenda was very narrow. With no opportunities for change in EU or national policies, local governments and NGOs are introducing small adjustments. In particular cases, when local policies don't offer solutions, it is up to an individual social worker to help a particular migrant. In fact, actors on various levels – municipalities, service providers and individual migrants – are all 'muddling through'.

Strategies of muddling through vary. On one hand we see the progressive exclusion of EU migrants from services. Support then sometimes takes place on an individual and exceptional basis in a deformed way. On the other hand, the acknowledgment of this new migrant group leads to the formation of new services and programmes aimed at EU migrants. All changes, however, occur in a dense context of other policies and interests and can therefore lead to conflict or other unintended consequences. The 'institutionalisation' of support, coupled with pressure for results and efficiency, excludes the most vulnerable individuals. Repressive policies on the use of public space and uncertainty about access to services have serious consequences for migrant survival strategies and future opportunities. 'Institutionalisation' and 'deformalisation' occur simultaneously in all cities and are in a way complementary, as each policy change leaves some individuals out. This creates the space for critique, innovation and change.

New types of institutions and practices are currently forming as part of the difficult processes of bargaining and the reorganisation of services. These include, for example, hybrid organizations (non-governmental/local authority partnerships) and transnational outreach work. In addition, the EU has acknowledged some responsibility for 'the most destitute', including migrants with no right to reside, devoting over 3.8 billion Euro for the 2014-2020 period to the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). Unfortunately, it has not been envisaged that the money will

be used for cross-border support. In 2015 the Swedish government appointed a National Coordinator for Vulnerable EU Migrants who is to look for best practices and find solutions in between the level of the municipalities and the state.

Recently, with the increased visibility of Roma migrants in some countries, the attention shifted again to this group with still other needs. The provision of support in countries of origin is seen as one of the long-term solutions. The current need for services in response to EU migrant homelessness – but also in an increasing degree to the homelessness of undocumented migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees – could be an opportunity to develop truly innovative solutions that see homelessness as a phenomenon not fixed in space. People are mobile, within states and across Europe. Various groups seek help at low threshold services and their needs are different. If authorities and the voluntary sector could adapt to the dynamics of the current situation, perhaps they could respond better in new circumstances.

### **Acknowledgments**

Research financed by the State budget 2012-2014; grant from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (0369/IP3/2011/71). The author would like to thank reviewers and editors of the European Journal of Homelessness for their comments and suggestions, which helped to improve the manuscript.

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# Revisiting the Concept of Shelterisation: Insights from Athens, Greece

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› **Abstract** \_ *This paper reflects on findings from a recent study on the provisions for homeless and poor people in Greece. The paper revisits the concept of 'shelterisation' and assesses whether it can be usefully employed, albeit with certain modifications, in the current discussion of urban and social policy responses to poverty and homelessness. Using Athens, Greece as a case study, we comment on policy changes in Southern European welfare regimes and the countries most affected by the current financial crisis. We argue that shelterisation forms an integral part of an emergency model for managing the social effects associated with the sovereign debt crisis and austerity, we highlight criticisms of the concept and we set out alternatives that have been suggested by service providers and civil society organisations.*

› **Keywords** \_ *Shelterisation, Greece, homelessness, social exclusion, social policy*

## Introduction

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Homelessness as a social policy issue in Europe, in general, and in the crisis-ridden countries of the south, especially in Greece, has only recently been recognized in the context of the prolonged economic crisis. Data from recent FEANTSA reports (2012) emphasize the dramatic increases (25-30 percent) in homelessness in those countries most affected by the current crisis – namely, Greece, Portugal and Spain. This paper reflects on the findings of recent research, which was conducted in 2014, aiming to assess the magnitude of different forms of homelessness and housing deprivation in Athens, by using participative methods and a variety of sources (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2014). The core of the research was a survey of the largest and most significant shelter providers in the wider metropolitan area of Athens.

Representatives of local authorities, the ministries of Health and Employment, the Greek Housing Network and the Greek Anti Poverty Network were invited to participate in two workshops; in the first we discussed the research tools and in the second we discussed the results. We compiled a comprehensive list of forty organisations; they were approached and we received responses from twenty-five of them. Amongst those unable to respond were the welfare agencies of the Church of Greece, some charities administering community homes for children and juveniles, and one shelter for asylum seekers.

The twenty-five organisations that completed our survey were implementing a total of 77 projects of direct assistance, addressing the needs of approximately 120,000 people; these included 30 housing assistance schemes and 47 schemes providing access to other elementary resources. The survey collected a variety of diverse data including the number of accommodation units; the type of services offered and the numbers of individuals accommodated and/or served in 2013; and data on shelter capacity, costs, sources of finance and personnel. In addition, open questions were asked in an effort to capture the effects of austerity on both the organisations and the people they serve.

Inevitably, survey data are confined to those in contact with services, as a result of which some populations that do not have access to services are underrepresented. To address this gap, we included specific questions on rejection rates and capacity utilisation.

Additionally, we conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with directors and administrative personnel in shelters, clinics and day centres, and four interviews with central administration organisations: the National Centre of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Employment. Three case studies of NGOs examined the challenges to expanding supported housing schemes in Greece. In focus groups, personnel

from each organisation explored their experience of the daily operation of shelters and the applicability of supported housing schemes to the complex needs of homeless people.

The research has also contributed to the consolidation of a database through combining various sources that map the spatial distribution of various levels of housing inadequacy and insecurity. The database combines variables mainly derived from the registries of mental health and welfare agencies in Greece, the reports of the Greek Ombudsman and the 2011 census on population and housing conditions, which, despite its limitations, is a valuable source of information for devising indicators to enrich the ETHOS categories on inadequate and insecure housing (for a relevant discussion in Europe, see Baptista *et al.*, 2012).

Adapting the ETHOS typology developed by FEANTSA, our findings demonstrate a significant rise in visible homelessness and an excessive magnitude of hidden poverty, housing inadequacy and insecurity. These are generating demands that can barely be met. A total of 17,800 people were estimated to have been in the ETHOS categories of rooflessness and houselessness during 2013 in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. However, this figure is only a fragment of the whole picture; in a metropolis of 3.8 million people, 305,000 Greek and 209,000 foreign nationals in private rented accommodation are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as defined by Eurostat. A total of 514,000 individuals can be taken as an estimate of those in insecure and inadequate housing, whose trajectories into and out of visible homelessness are affected by strict regulations for the receipt of assistance and complex societal processes, which shape access to secure housing, income and community care. Significantly, the demand for assistance comes not only from people on the streets but from an invisible population in insecure and inadequate housing, whose needs can hardly be met by existing and newly funded shelters.

Compared to the last decade (Arapoglou, 2004; Sapounakis, 2004), these numbers indicate a rise for all the ETHOS categories of homelessness. The increase in the numbers of those in the roofless and houseless categories is moderate and largely due to the establishment of new emergency and crisis related structures. Alarming, however, it has been reported that for those in these categories, the conditions of their exclusion have worsened – especially as regards their physical and mental health conditions. Most significantly, the figure for those in insecure and inadequate housing has doubled since the early years of the 2000s. Comparison of our recent findings with similar studies in the past also reveals that the demographic profile of the serviced population has changed and includes more Greeks, because the dramatic rise in housing insecurity due to unemployment is now coupled with the loss of insurance coverage and income. At the same time, our research confirms

reports by international human rights organisations and FEANTSA (2012) on the degrading conditions in which refugees and asylum seekers are forced to subsist in prisons and detention centres, on increased coercion by the police and on violence perpetrated against them in public spaces.

The aims of this paper are to reflect on the inadequacy of new, crisis-related and older provisions for homeless people in Athens, to highlight changes in social policies for homeless and poor people in Greece, and to look at these from a comparative perspective. A key concern is to revisit the concept of 'shelterisation' and assess whether it can be usefully employed, albeit with certain modifications, in the current discussion.

## **The Management of Homelessness and Shelterisation: North American and European Versions**

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'Shelterisation', a type of institutionalisation specific to homelessness, refers to the effects of prolonged dependency on institutional regimes that tend to colonize a homeless person's everyday routines in ways that render long(er)-term life paths and objectives impossible even to contemplate. Contrary to what may appear the obvious meaning of the term, we view shelterisation as a structural condition (Hopper 1990; Gounis, 1992a; 1993), rather than a personal, subjective state of apathy and resignation (Grunberg and Eagle, 1990). Since first used in the 1980s, the term has been associated with the large shelters that sprang up in US cities in the face of a dramatic rise in visible homelessness (Dear and Wolch, 1987; Gounis, 1992a). In line with Goffman's commanding analysis of what he calls 'total institutions' (1961), there is ample documentation of the ways in which these settings, as well as the wider array of emergency services for homeless persons, capture the time and exhaust the energy of those that have to stay there (Gounis, 1992b; Lovell, 1992; Desjarlais, 1997; Marcus, 2003). In the US, use of the concept of shelterisation gradually receded as community interventions and housing-led solutions grew in strength. Yet, in reviewing newer forms and functions of shelters in Los Angeles, DeVertuil (2006) documented a diffused shelter system, which functions to subtly conceal visible homelessness, and a hands-off local policy that shifts the direct provision of sheltering to the voluntary sector.

Thus, it may be instructive and relevant to current conditions in Europe to point out that the essential features of shelterisation involve more than the specific institutional settings. First, as already mentioned, shelterisation is generated by an emergency-oriented system of limited, inadequate and/or inappropriate resources that homeless people have to compete for. Second, in times of crisis, the whole circuit of agencies and services for the homeless – a whole 'homelessness industry'

– ends up functioning as an abeyance mechanism (Hopper and Bauhmol, 1994), which either endlessly ‘prepares’ people for re-integration (for example, through training programmes for non-existent employment opportunities), or, alternatively, stores them away, out of sight, in ‘specialized’ facilities. Third, in a combination of the above, the emergency-minded orientation of institutional responses, whether public or private (e.g., NGOs), renders both providers and ‘clients’, the servers and the served, unable or unwilling to consider pathways to exiting homelessness other than a gradual trajectory along a continuum of care that aims to build ‘housing-readiness’ (in contrast with the Housing First model developed by Pathways to Housing – see Tsemberis, 2010). Using evidence from our study of homelessness in Athens, we explore whether these features of shelterisation continue to dominate the urban landscape across which homeless people and services are distributed.

Our understanding of shelterisation is placed within a historical context of broader social policy changes that have an effect on the competencies and initiatives of homeless service providers (for Europe, Cloke *et al.*, 2010; for the U.S., Wolch and DeVertuil, 2001; for a recent cross-Atlantic comparison, DeVerteuil, 2014). We wish to consider how shelterisation may result under conditions that favour the promotion of ‘welfare pluralism’, ‘urban governance’ and ‘social innovations’, which permeate most suggestions for policy reforms in the European context (see recent EU guidelines to address homelessness in FEANTSA, 2012; 2013).

In this broad context, questions about the persistence of shelterisation, as defined above, can be dealt with by examining whether homelessness policy is narrowly designed so as to address only the visible aspects of poverty as opposed to a more comprehensive approach, which could include its invisible dimensions – the population in insecure and inadequate housing. Additionally, choices on the welfare mix of services (public, private, non-profit), the decentralisation of resources and responsibilities, the targeting of vulnerable groups or the universality of services, as well as choices on provisions in cash or kind, are related to the issue of a ‘homelessness industry’ being fashioned as part of the wider management of poverty and the ultimate determination of whether it is a ‘care’ or a ‘control’ component that prevails in policy reform (Wolch and DeVertuil, 2001; Lyon-Callo, 2008).

Choices on the balance between ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ provisions, and on the balance between housing, health and employment assistance, are indicative of the extent to which shelterisation persists as an inescapable component, or effect, of this industry. Although such choices are made centrally and relate to regulations and social protection provisions, the type of care available is also shaped by the ability of providers to attract funding, their expertise in a specific field or service, their alliances and partnerships, and the methods used to assess the needs of

homeless people. The international literature suggests that 'emergency' solutions, the decentralisation of competencies without resources, and preferential treatment by certain providers give rise to fragmentation and the 'creaming-off' of applicants, and, ultimately, to a series of exclusions (Wolch and Deverteuil, 2001; Hopper, 2003; Cloke *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, it is worth exploring how social innovations and advocacy for supported housing have been successful in certain cases as viable alternatives to shelterisation and advancing inclusive strategies for homeless people (Hopper and Barrow, 2003).

In the European context, much of the national variation in policy responses to homelessness can be explained by the historical features of welfare regimes, which either countervail or complement neoliberal processes (O'Sullivan, 2010; von Mahs, 2011). Recently, in European Union policies the idea of 'social innovation' has been advanced in connection with poverty and homelessness. Nonetheless, according to recent conceptualisations of innovation, research is needed as to which policy reforms can counterbalance the social effects of austerity measures and advance social cohesion (Moulaert *et al.*, 2007; Peck, 2011; Novy *et al.*, 2012). Although the idea of social innovation has attracted the attention of not-for-profit organisations and homeless advocates, particularly with the introduction of Housing First models (Gosme, 2014), some of its applications could be criticized for introducing market forms of provision and finance and for neglecting the context of implementation.

Bonifacio (2014) suggested that social innovation could better be viewed as a policy compromise that can detract from the debate around the need to develop a fully-fledged EU social policy. In this sense, we suggest that social innovation ideas that orient EU anti-poverty policies should not be viewed as involving deep-seated consensus but rather as a compromise, formulated within what Peck (2011), called a 'zone of experimentation' delineated by the market ideology. However, such 'zones of experimentation' can actually be limited to a narrow range of available options of policy change – tight fiscal constraints thwart the development of integrated anti-homelessness strategies, while clientelistic, discriminating, or populist practices, impose additional local impediments to change. It could also be the case that priority is given to financing and diffusing short-sighted/short-lived experiments attempting to shape homeless lives according to workfare principles by disregarding their long-term needs for treatment and housing stability. The remainder of this paper examines whether policy reforms encourage the deployment of managerial practices and encourage forms of shelterisation, which are consistent with both the historical features of a Southern European welfare regimes to which Greece belongs, and the introduction of neoliberal austerity policies.

## **The Rise of an Emergency Model of Social Crisis Management: A Greek Version of Shelterisation?**

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### ***A brief history of policy changes: 2011-2014***

Specific policy changes directly affecting the institutional framework and the financing of policies for poor and homeless people in Greece can be traced back to 2011 when the Greek government and the EU had to finalize the bailout package and secure the transfer of emergency aid for Greece. Two main processes delineated the arena for policy experimentation for local and civil society actors: residualisation of key social policy areas and devolution of central state powers.

Other than the social impact of structural adjustments through wage squeezes, weakening public services and social protection associated with memoranda and aid policies, residualisation constitutes a drift from universal coverage to state responsibility being limited to the more vulnerable populations and basic necessities. Similarly to other Southern European countries, universalism in the Greek welfare regime has been weak, but the national health care system, despite its belated development, had achieved a considerable level of population coverage. Housing, on the other hand, has historically been an area of limited state intervention, mainly involving the construction of dwellings for workers by the Greek social housing agency. The bailout package specifically included the abolition of the main Greek social housing agency in 2012 and a set of measures promoting the gradual drift away from universal health coverage (Petmesidou, 2013).

Furthermore, the decentralisation of social policy competences, which was instituted in 2010 – the so-called Kallikratis reform – took place within a crisis-ridden environment, parallel to significant local administration budget cuts of more than 50 percent in some cases, strict budget control, and limitations – if not an outright prohibition – on hiring new personnel. The Greek Government was also advised by the troika to give priority to the most vulnerable groups, to local social service delivery, and to urban regeneration so as to make effective use of EU structural funds. In addition, EU funding regulations enforced partnership schemes between local agencies and service charities. Although local authorities can set policy priorities regarding the type of services or the populations to be served, they are in effect without adequate means to implement such schemes. Local strategies also can vary as to whether private donors and market solutions will be pursued or not.

It is quite enlightening that the very same law advancing the reorganisation of the health care system introduced social services for the poor, on the advice of the technocratic echelons of the lenders. In the same context, the Greek administration produced an operational definition of homelessness so that homeless people could be recognized as a 'vulnerable group' and that EU funds could be drawn on accord-

ingly for their relief. Law 4052 laid the foundation for subsequent measures for poor and homeless people but a disagreement within the administration has left an important imprint. An *Action Plan for a Network of Immediate Social Interventions to Address the Psychosocial Needs of the Poor and the Homeless* was drafted and implemented by the Ministry of Labour. The plan gave priority to emergency and employability provisions by applying a clear 'workfarist' approach, and ignored the alternatives suggested by the Ministry of Health and a wide array of providers, which emphasized the need for targeted prevention, user participation in service delivery and the introduction of supported housing schemes.

As a response to public concern and pressures from NGOs, but also obviously for political capitalisation on humanitarian sentiments in approaching the date for European Parliament elections, the Greek Prime Minister announced a new initiative for homeless people on 14 April 2014. The initiative was announced as part of the allocation of a 'social dividend', of which €20m was earmarked for homeless services. Of this, half went into funding a housing programme designed to assist 800 individuals for up to one year (of which approximately 55 percent were in the region of Attica). The programme declares a planning preference for housing apartments over emergency and transitory structures, and sets out a concrete target that 30 percent of the eligible population should reach complete autonomy and independent living. The target groups of the programme include families and individuals accommodated in transitory hostels, those in night shelters, day centre service users, families and individuals who have been registered as homeless by municipal social departments, female victims of violence, and individuals to be discharged from child protection structures. The programme includes housing benefits, and partial cover of utility bills or other living expenses.

On paper, the programme seems a corrective step to the severe imbalances that have resulted from emergency type measures, and it introduces housing benefits as a component of social inclusion policies. However, significant drawbacks are noticeable. First, there were no formal and substantive procedures for public deliberation. Second, the duration of the programme, and the funds secured, is extremely short for the planning targets, and this can ultimately be harmful to those it claims to help, because one year of implementation is inadequate time for the recovery and reintegration of vulnerable persons. Third, the programme lacks a coherent philosophy, structure and priorities. There is a lack of distinction between prevention and rehousing. Likewise, it is unclear whether it prioritises a Housing First or a 'staircase' approach. Last, but not least, the target of 800 beneficiaries is inadequate to address the needs of the real number of homeless individuals in need of assistance.



Nonetheless, unrecognised pathways of policy change can be identified in initiatives financed through European funds prior to the crisis and these have been embedded in the national policy framework, such as the assistance of the European Refugee Fund for asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> and the most innovative aspects of the reform of mental health services in Greece. Notably, both pathways involved the collaboration of international human rights organisations and European institutions, with NGOs, professional associations and pioneers within the Greek administration, particularly under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. In both cases, policy change has proceeded in complex and often conflicting ways. Yet, good housing practices in asylum provision and mental health remained unexploited in policies to tackle homelessness, often as a consequence of adopting a narrow definition of visible, chronic and 'voluntary' homelessness amongst Greek citizens. In this context, social innovation ends up experimenting with do-it-yourself types of welfare or outsourcing to private agencies. The attempts of NGOs and local authorities to use the new financial instruments of the EU and other international agencies remain fragmented and the capacity for developing integrated social inclusion policies is severely diminished.

### ***'Project led' responses, welfare mix and targeting***

NGOs have been at the epicentre of what has been described as the 'humanitarian crisis' in Greece since 2010. From the total number of seventy-seven projects in our survey, sixty-two were implemented by NGOs, nine by local agencies and only six by central public institutions. Since the beginning of the 1990s, NGOs came onto the scene due to humanitarian concern for the conditions of immigrants, the mentally ill, women and children in Greek cities, and over the next decades grew through financing by the EU and the Greek state. In responding to the emergence of new, urgent needs in the current crisis, most NGOs developed actions for a variety of populations beyond their initial target groups and expertise. Official policies are increasingly designed to give NGOs a prominent role in addressing poverty and social exclusion, while the central state role has been downgraded to accountancy and cost-containment. Despite their increased role and anti-poverty rhetoric, local authorities lack not only resources but also planning capacities and expertise. Increasingly, local authorities, mainly in the municipality of Athens, rely on the support of NGOs to access private and international sources of finance.

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<sup>1</sup> Along the same lines, funding from the European Economic Area (EEA) Grants was directed to recent important initiatives like the 'SOAM Programme /Supporting Organisations that assist migrant asylum seeking population in Greece' and 'Solidarity and Social Inclusion in Greece' (involving the city of Athens).



We recorded many forms of collaboration between NGOs and local authority agencies, evidencing a new kind of mix in service delivery. Certainly, this was not the case 15 years ago, when collaboration between providers was extremely limited (Arapoglou, 2004). In fact, such collaborations have recently become obligatory; they are a precondition for securing EU funding and offer a solution to local authorities barred from hiring or who lack the finance to purchase supplies. Nonetheless, service delivery on an *ad hoc* basis seems to be contributing to fragmentation, partnership tensions and accountability disputes, as we learned through in-depth interviews.

Characteristically, in the context of individual interviews with the representatives of a local partnership, the municipal authority administrator was sceptical about the role of NGOs. In her words, ‘often all the NGOs really want is an opportunity to issue a press release’ – i.e., to advertise themselves for the services they offered to this or that group. On the opposite end, an NGO representative assessed the same municipal agency for the homeless as ‘stagnant’ and another NGO as ‘arrogant’ with a ‘know it all’ attitude. As these instances illustrate, collaboration is indeed a difficult task.

The NGOs in our survey alone serve close to 113,000 persons in the metropolitan region of Athens (see Table 1 below). The total number reveals a dramatic picture, especially when considering that no housing assistance of any type or form is available for this deprived population. The breakdown of individuals served, in Table 1, also indicates that, despite political rhetoric, local authorities play only a secondary role in actual service delivery; instead, it is the big NGOs that largely set the service agenda. Public agencies are minimally involved in providing services and accommodation. They are left to wither silently and for a variety of reasons, including public under-financing, moratoriums on hiring, lack of expertise, out-dated delivery of services and restrictions on admission.

**Table 1. Number and Share of Individuals Served by Provider and Service Type**

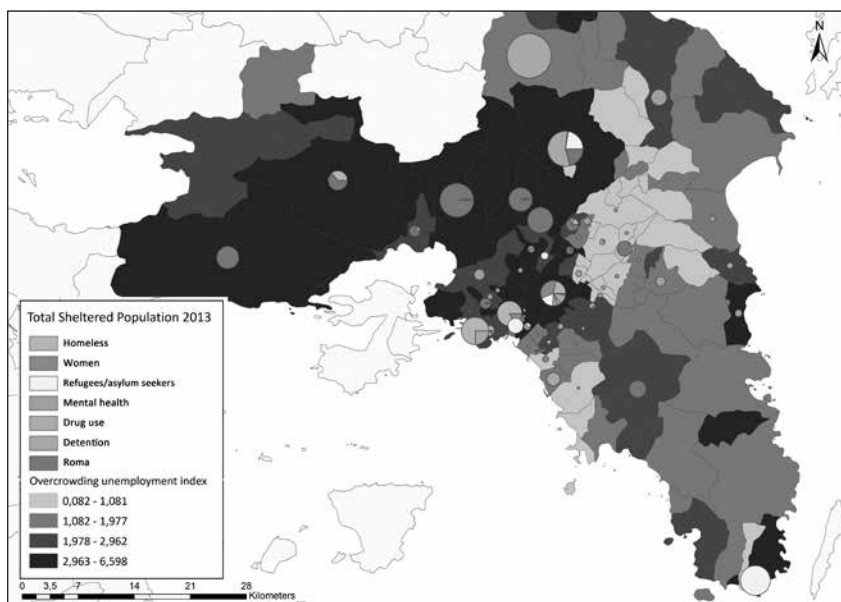
	Generic services		Targeted services		Total	
	Individuals served	% of total	Individuals served	% of total	Individuals served	% of total
Local	6572	5.5%	69	0.1%	664	5.5%
NGO	4811	4.0% p	108131	90.2%	112942	94.2%
Public	51	0.0%	274	0.2%	325	0.3%
Total	11434	9.5%	108474	90.5%	119908	100%

Source: UoC Survey 2014 (housing and all other services included)

Significantly, the prevalence of NGOs is related to the introduction of targeted measures for specific categories of homeless people, partly as a result of EU guidelines to advance policies addressing specific 'vulnerable groups', and partly as a result of organisational and service expertise. This is vividly illustrated in Table 1, which reports the total number of individuals served and the percentage of the total population served. Prior to the debt crisis, the prevalence of targeting was not so striking and was mainly related to the advocacy interests of agencies working with some homeless groups. In contrast, generic services and shelters for homeless people, which were initiated in the 1990s, are still the primary form of provision for local and public agencies.

As vividly illustrated in Figure 1, different projects are often implemented within the same premises, creating a distinctive landscape of provision with diverse individuals in terms of gender, ethnicity or age. Figure 1 has been created with the help of variables combined from different sources. It aims to visualize the interplay between different forms of housing insecurity and visible homelessness, as well as between containment and care. The dark shading represents different levels of housing insecurity that we attempted to capture by devising an overcrowding-unemployment index for 116 municipalities in the Greater Athens Metropolitan Area. The index reports the share of unemployed persons living in rented dwellings with living space of less than 20sqm per capita to the total number of inhabitants in each municipality. The index was calculated with 2011 census data.

**Figure 1. Landscapes of Homelessness in the Athens Metropolitan Area 2013**



Source: 2014 survey data; elaborated 2011 census data; registries and reports

Within the city of Athens and in the port of Piraeus, emergency services and shelter are offered to a variety of groups in need within the same or neighbouring premises. Frequent sites of street working and congregations of homeless persons are close to the 'historical centre', squares and public parks. Inner suburban areas seem less affected by the crisis. Northern suburbs and residential areas for upper middle classes and professionals are 'homeless and poverty – free' zones. Lower middle class suburbs to the South host small, dispersed units of care for women and their children, refugees and the mentally ill. The deprived western part of the metropolis remains invisible to social policy-making, being reserved for keeping detention centres and refugee camps out of public sight. Recent civic initiatives, some in collaboration with local authorities, are more responsive to the needs of deprived local populations, as evidenced by supported housing schemes and visits of mobile health care units. Roma camps are located close to settlements of migrants, mainly from the Balkans and former Soviet republics, on industrial or working class city outskirts.

On the one hand, demographic and ethnic diversity is an asset for NGOs and is related to their role in advocating for the rights of clients often excluded from public provisions. On the other, as one of our informants self reflectively stated, the 'project culture' introduces the risk of turning NGOs into 'Supermarket-NGOs.'

A very significant change is that private sources are now the most vital resource of finance for NGOs and, increasingly, local authorities, whereas public and EU grants were the primary source of finance even for NGOs during the last decade. Private companies and charitable foundations now play a key role in policy-making and service delivery. However, as some service providers noted, reliance on donors and sponsors enhances uncertainty and undermines the sustainability of projects because the preferences of donors are highly volatile.

Our research documented a host of limitations and obstacles facing NGOs and service providers in general: inadequate funding across the board; excessively bureaucratic management and monitoring structures; employment insecurity of staff in public agencies, NGOs and charities; severe wage cuts in all agencies and several-month delays of staff payments. In addition, the shift to 'per capita funding' is said to have led to practices of 'client hunting' and small, locally-based organisations expressed concerns that charity funds and donors prefer 'big players' with greater visibility.

On the other hand, our study documented ample evidence of organisational resilience to adverse conditions, including increased willingness for voluntary work, intensification of cooperation between local and social agencies, and improvement of neighbourhood attitudes to NGOs. The list is indicative of an atmosphere of solidarity and a culture of giving that the researchers confirmed in many instances through their on-site visits.

### *Housing and links to services*

The survey recorded 30 accommodation and housing assistance projects: nine emergency shelters, mostly introduced by the new plan of the Ministry of Labour; ten transitory shelters run by local authorities, the National Centre of Social Solidarity and NGOs; six supported housing schemes, financed by the Ministries of Health and private donors; and five schemes of housing benefits financed by private donors and the European Fund for Refugees.

The majority of survey respondents reported an increase of approximately 40 percent in shelter users since 2010. Only two public shelters and one local agency report a decrease in shelter users, and this possibly relates to the fact that new shelters that have more relaxed admission regulations have provided an alternative. The average increase in demands for housing assistance since 2010 has been reported at 58 percent. On average, 40 percent of applications remain unmet, however, and it should be taken into consideration that many individuals are deterred from applying by strict regulations and waiting periods for admission tests. Average capacity utilisation has been estimated to be 80 percent, but with great variation (25 percent-100 percent): some shelters are full, while some others do not operate throughout the year, and some constantly have empty beds.

**Table 2. Populations of Day Centres and Housing Assistance in the Greater Athens Area in 2013**

People Using Day Centres (declaring being roofless)	2,360
People in accommodation for homeless people	750
Homeless hostel/ Night shelters ('new emergency type' shelters)	580
Transitional Accommodation/ to mainly Greeks or Mixed ('old type shelters')	170
People in Women's Shelter/ transitional	80
People in accommodation for asylum seekers/ refugees	1,200
Transitional supported – reception/ refugee shelters	1,000
Transitional supported apartments for vulnerable asylum seekers/ refugees	200
People receiving short-term financial support due to severe housing need	4,546
Benefits for poor and unemployed Greek families	3,622
Benefits for vulnerable refugees	924

Source: UoC Survey 2014

The housing assistance categories in Table 2 clearly fall within the broader ETHOS definition of 'houseless'. Emergency shelters are a new form of accommodation in the Athenian context and mainly attract Greek homeless men who do not have access to transitory shelters. Although the number of people accommodated is not

large, it should be taken into consideration that most of the shelters were in the first year of their operation. Usually they are small units that do not attract the attention of passers-by and are located in densely populated areas.

Transitional shelters are the prevalent form of accommodation and include both shelters for the general homeless population (mainly older Greek men), as well as shelters for specific target groups of women, children and refugees. Such shelters are dominated by a 'staircase' culture that is widely and, often uncritically, accepted.

The legislative and regulatory framework does not clearly specify which homeless services are emergency or transitional and what constitutes proper or good quality support. There is also a lack of clarity regarding both broader policy objectives and the approaches of specific projects (housing-led/staircase, re-housing/prevention). In practice, there are often misinterpretations. For example, the municipality of Athens had launched a programme entitled 'Social Housing' but this is actually a six-month hospitality scheme for families in a block of flats.

Overall, our research indicates that a model of 'emergency' shelters and assistance-in-kind has been introduced by the policies of the Ministry of Labour and is gradually being consolidated. Night shelters, day centres, food banks, social pharmacies and social groceries have been established in this context. Night shelters provide a temporary solution to many applicants rejected from other transitory shelters, which often apply strict regulations for admission; mental disorders, substance use or lack of 'clearance' for medical conditions were cited as primary reasons for exclusion. Night shelters are also a relief for episodic homelessness, but do not prevent shifts in and out of different forms of homelessness. It is premature to assess their impact, but the American experience points to the ineffectiveness of emergency provisions. Our site visits and interviews informed us about a significant aspect of the operation of day centres, namely that day centres attract not only street homeless individuals but an array of invisible poor in their search for healthcare services; day centres that are linked to day clinics, in particular, open the door for health care and assistance. It has been a matter of great concern that a poor population with no health insurance or capacity to pay medical contributions revolves around day centres and clinics. From interviews and data released by the Church of Greece and the Athens Medical Association, we estimate this number to be around 200,000 people in the Greater Athens area.

This distinctively 'new' policy landscape does not mean that the inadequate services and old-fashioned structures established during the 1990s have been made obsolete – for example, large generic units intended to offer transitory accommodation to individuals with the aim of gradual social reintegration. Shelters of this kind are mainly run by local and public agencies, combining bureaucratic procedures with a philanthropic spirit. A significant number of beds are empty due

to strict admission regulations, while at the same time, the majority of residents remain longer than expected. The history of this type of accommodation and its deficiencies, as it has appeared in Greece and the US, have been discussed elsewhere by the authors of this report (Arapoglou 2004; Gounis 1992a). During some of our on-site visits we experienced a sense of *déjà vu*; different people, different places, but a familiar spirit and rhetoric – tokenism combined with blaming homeless people, lack of expertise and resistance to change.

Preventive measures were minimal; training and/or employment counselling, which we witnessed in some key settings, were offered as ritualistic complements to transitional interventions, while their efficiency was doubted by the very providers who recognised the lack of real employment opportunities. Moreover, social services for homeless families and individuals, such as childcare or proper psychological treatment, are on offer only by a few specialized agencies. On the positive side, a private donor has financed a new scheme of housing benefits for Greek families (This type of assistance was an innovation introduced for refugees and financed through the European Refugee Fund). 4,546 individuals were assisted through some form of housing benefit. However, financial assistance of this kind was either occasional (e.g., assistance to pay bills) or of short duration (3-6 months) and contingent on strict means testing and supervision of the beneficiaries.

Regarding direct, supported housing, such as Housing First, we should note that in our research we encountered providers willing to introduce such schemes for homeless people. Such housing schemes have been initiated in Greece in the context of mental health reforms and more recently in the context of support for asylum seekers. However, currently they face a lot of pressure stemming from severe cost containment measures, while additional pressure comes from the hurried closure of psychiatric facilities and the transfer of the patients to community housing. Thus, going in this direction is largely contingent on available funding sources.

Overall, when we attempted, in focus groups and interviews, to explore the extent to which agencies and their personnel were ready to consider community-housing types of interventions, such as Housing First, we came across a generalized resistance. Front-line staff, especially, were reluctant to entertain the possibility of a successful transition to stable, autonomous housing for their clients, citing, on the one hand, their opinion – a kind of service ‘philosophy’ really – that people had to become ‘housing ready’, which meant adhering to treatment regimes, becoming able to manage their own finances and the like. On the other hand, however, in a realistic vein, they would acknowledge that independent living was contingent on (non-existing) employment opportunities.

## Conclusions

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Some evidence for policy 'learning' has been reported in liberal and social democratic regimes, especially with regard to targets for reducing the use of temporary accommodation and providing long-term support and individualised services (Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009). But this does not appear to be the case with Southern European regimes (Pezzana, 2012; Baptista, 2013) and charities are struggling to counterbalance the effects of severe austerity. The rise of NGOs has not been a uniquely Greek phenomenon; a similar trend combined with public expenditure cuts and contracting of services for homeless people has been reported for other countries of Southern Europe. Nonetheless, we wish to emphasize the contradiction that at the same time that as a resource-depleted Greek Government shifted responsibilities onto NGOs, it also depleted their capacities.

To capture the interplay between the 'supranationally' induced social policy residualisation and 'domestic' impediments to change, we suggest that shelterisation is a principal component of an 'emergency model' of managing the social consequences of the financial crisis. The most distinctive feature of the 'emergency model' is the prevalence of very short-term provisions-in-kind to meet the basic needs of the visible poor, such as emergency shelters, soup kitchens, free clinics and day centres. Such a constraining and time-limited horizon reinforces the tendencies towards the creation of a homelessness industry.

Furthermore, a crucial issue is whether targeted policies, such as the ones the European institutions press national governments to advance, are effective remedies for the erosion of universal provisions. Our findings, especially with regards to health and housing needs, indicate that specialised services alone are inadequate, for a variety of reasons. The multiplicity and deepening of exclusions renders targeting a meaningless exercise that results in strict regulations for providing assistance, administrative rejections and long waiting lists. Moreover, targeting is often used as an excuse for getting rid of clients in inadequately staffed agencies and it cannot counterbalance stigmatisation, discrimination and racism within local and public agencies. Such deficiencies are aggravated by the lack of preventive policies, a fact that ultimately means that targeting can, at best, only alleviate extreme forms of despair and cannot countervail the stigmatisation of the most vulnerable segments of the poor population.

The contradictions discussed above require that we pay attention at different levels of policy-making. A distinctive feature of the current condition is the lack of deep-seated consensus on policy reforms and a continuous series of experimentation, which involves successive tactics of manoeuvring and adaptation. However, how a certain 'zone of experimentation' (Peck, 2011) is shaped, both in discursive as well as financial terms, needs to be explained. Austerity is the very material



condition delineating the kind of policy experiments and governance manoeuvres. We wish to highlight four explanations as to why shelterisation prevailed despite EU rhetoric on the promotion of integrated strategies. We also draw attention to alternatives aiming to remove impediments for the successful design and implementation of long-term supported housing schemes.

First, anti-poverty measures most often rely on 'soft', 'bottom-up' mechanisms of policy learning, in contrast to 'hard', 'top-down' mechanisms of monetary and fiscal consolidation surveillance, as has been witnessed in both transitional and southern European economies. As a typical example, homelessness emerged on the EU policy agenda through the Open Method of Co-ordination but without any common policy objectives or any instruments for policy evaluation (Gosme, 2014). Within such restrictive environments, less powerful actors can only consent or adapt by cherry-picking socially innovative examples.

Second, a series of unintended consequences and misunderstandings occur when attempting to transfer policy models without considering whether the underlying normative assumptions, created in their place of origin, are suited to the context in which they are being implemented. For example, in the Greek welfare context, the concept of 'housing rights' do not sit easily with the familial values associated with homeownership, xenophobia, and the secrecy and stigma of poverty and mental illness. Not surprisingly, in combination with the lack of resources that could have been directed towards long-term public spending, the idea of long-term support remained off the policy agenda, shelters were misleadingly presented as 'social housing,' and 'rapid re-housing' was disconnected from treatment but linked to employment rehabilitation plans (yet another precondition for EU structural funds), because it was impossible to consider that the poor, the mentally ill, drug users or asylum seekers were entitled to support. An organised effort at transnational policy learning, intensive staff training and standardised criteria for quality implementation could be remedies to the above-mentioned pitfalls.

Third, typical constraints for up-scaling social innovations within Southern European regimes, like the gradual erosion of public deliberation, clientelism and political tokenism (Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2013), were evident in the Greek case of drafting emergency plans for EU finance.

Fourth, specific institutional and financial arrangements are necessary to embed special assistance within broader social and urban development objectives. Supported housing schemes can operate effectively by eliminating barriers to health and social services, and this actually requires combining universal health coverage with specialized or supported housing structures for the most vulnerable, especially the mentally ill and refugees.

Key questions also arise regarding the financial architecture for supported housing and the means for achieving housing affordability and security of tenure. Several of the Greek examples were initiated by private donations, but upscaling requires considering sources of public finance as well. Given ample supply of inexpensive housing in the private market during these times of economic downturn, there are good opportunities for the introduction of low cost schemes. Yet, some sort of benefit or income assistance is necessary to partially finance their operation, especially if minimal requirements for 'normal' housing are adopted. Thus, the lack of adequate income assistance schemes becomes the major constraint for the development of supported housing in Greece. Two further possibilities can be considered: a) combining housing with supportive employment and the operation of social co-operatives according to the experience of rehabilitation units in psychiatric reforms, and b) the use of available housing stock by public agencies and local authorities, especially in the context of revitalizing deprived neighbourhoods.

Last but not least, reversing the processes of shelterisation requires addressing the invisible aspects of homelessness, and preventive policies are the most efficient way of doing so. As a term, shelterisation was first used during the years of the Great Depression (Hopper, 2003) and was rediscovered and reapplied during the 1980s in the US as a diagnosis that explained, at least partly, the perpetuation of this entrapment. As pointed out earlier, there, shelterisation implied different things – conditions, causes, remedies – to different people who became involved with homelessness in whatever capacity – researchers, advocates, policy-makers. However, these diverse views all shared, to some extent, the recognition that 'shelterised' individuals were largely exceptional, passive and unmotivated users of the elementary services provided in the types of shelters mentioned above. In light of the developments outlined in this paper, challenging the stereotypes of visible homelessness and recognizing the invisible social effects of the second Great Depression could open up alternative pathways to policy change in the countries of the European South.

### **Acknowledgements**

Research has been supported by the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics and the National Bank of Greece – Research Innovation Fund on South East Europe. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Hellenic Observatory or the National Bank of Greece. We also thank the Greek Housing Network and Greek Anti Poverty Network for encouraging their members to respond to our survey and participate in workshops.

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# Strategy Review



***Part B***

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# Searching for a Homeless Strategy in Sweden

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› **Abstract\_** *The aim of this article is to critically review the Swedish Government's Strategy against Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, operational between 2007 and 2009. This is done through, first, a discussion on the functions of national action plans in general and a brief comparison with homeless strategies in other Nordic Countries. Secondly, the Swedish strategy is presented and put in a context of other government initiatives against homelessness since the early 1990s. These are then compared to a previous, comprehensive housing policy between 1947 and 1990. The recent state initiatives against homelessness and the previous housing policy differ not so much in their explicit ambitions to combat housing exclusion, but rather in the relationship between such words and ideas and the governments' actions. Nils Brunsson's theory on political hypocrisy as a way to handle contradictions between actions and ideas, and to understand the difference between decisions and actions is then presented. In testing this theory, government actions and decisions of relevance for housing access and housing exclusion in 2007 are reviewed. Most of these decisions implied increased difficulties for homeless people to access housing. Hence, the main conclusion is that in 2007, the Swedish government launched a strategy that it probably never intended to follow up with actions. Rather, its main function may have been to divert public attention from an implicit strategy, the realisation of which implied more market-oriented public housing, higher rents, withdrawn building subventions and massive subsidies to home-owners.*

› **Keywords\_** *national action plans, homeless strategies, housing policy, political hypocrisy*

## Introduction

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In Europe, in general, public concern and state involvement in the problem of homelessness have grown in recent decades, and measures to counteract housing exclusion are developing. There are also indications of progressive success and a growing professionalism in handling homelessness at the local level, with support from the central state levels in terms of resources, research funding and highlighting evidence-based methods. The proliferation of Housing First as a privileged model (Busch-Geertsema, 2014) and ambitious national strategies to prevent and counteract homelessness in many EU Member States are apt illustrations of this new awareness and attention.

In this respect, Sweden is an interesting deviant case. Up to 1991, preventing housing exclusion in a broad sense was high on the political agenda, and in the late 1990s, interest in homelessness and in developing measures to solve the problem was growing. A public investigation was set up in 1999 and its final report was published in 2001 (SOU 2001: 95). Between 2002 and 2009, limited state funding was given to local development projects and their evaluation, and the government adopted a strategy to counteract homelessness for 2007-2009. Since then, however, no official strategy or action plan on homelessness has been presented.

The limited resources invested in, and attention to homelessness at the central state level in Sweden stand in stark contrast with the actions of its neighbouring countries and with their interest in the issue. Among the Nordic countries, only Sweden has no national strategy to reduce homelessness, despite statistics showing a growing number of homeless people. There is also an intriguing inverted link between suggestions based on research, evaluations and inquiries into homelessness, and the government's initiatives and activities in terms of budgets and tax legislation. The fact that the situation was rather the opposite during most of the twentieth century, when research, public policy and state decisions and legislation were integrated and harmonised, adds to this paradox.

The aim of this paper is to try to understand why Sweden has no national strategy or action plan aimed at combatting and preventing homelessness, and why it did have such a strategy for 2007-2009, and what that meant. In addition, I will search for the existence of a homelessness strategy, whether or not it is named as such, through reviewing government actions and decisions of relevance on housing access and housing exclusion in the past decade.

After a discussion on the phenomenon of national action plans and their functions in general, I will briefly present state initiatives on homelessness in recent decades, with a special focus on the only homeless strategy that Sweden has had and its results. I suggest that these initiatives – and the lack of response to them by the

governments – indirectly result in ‘responsibilization’ (Rose, 2000), where access to housing has been defined as a responsibility for ‘consumers’ in the housing market, or as an issue for the municipality alone. The rest of the article comprises a discussion of how this apparent withdrawal of the state from the homelessness issue might be understood. I present Nils Brunsson’s (1982; 1993) theory on hypocrisy as a convenient way for politicians (and other organisational actors) to act in a way that is contradictory to their explicit ideas, and then briefly review the history of policies on counteracting housing exclusion during the last century, including the rise and fall of a general, inclusive housing policy.

I claim that this inclusive housing policy was achieved in accordance with the ideas that it was explicitly based on, while its destruction was not presented as a way to improve housing conditions but accounted for in other ways. I suggest that a lingering image of Sweden as a modern, inclusive welfare state blocks some solutions to homelessness that are common or emerging in other countries. The relevance of Brunsson’s theory is finally tested through a more detailed review of government decisions affecting homeless people’s access to housing at the time of the homelessness strategy. Was the explicit strategy against homelessness actually only a way to divert attention from the implementation of an implicit strategy, which, instead, aggravated the problem?

## A Note on National Action Plans

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National Action Plans (NAPs), strategies or programmes emerged in the 1990s as a common way to coordinate, launch and attract attention to the government’s ambitions within various policy fields. These plans may be either time-limited with a prospect of evaluation and revision, or intended to be valid until they are revised at a time not settled in advance. In Sweden, NAPs have been issued for crime prevention; disability policy; elderly care; combatting drugs, alcohol, tobacco and doping; for health care, elderly care, dyslexia, the reduction of traffic accidents and the prevention of chlamydia, to name just a few targeted problem areas. Some of these plans have been underpinned by comprehensive public investigations and government propositions, and subjected to debates and decisions in the Parliament,<sup>1</sup> while others, such as the late homelessness strategy, are adopted by the government alone, possibly after consulting statutory bodies and national organisations, and then communicated to the Parliament as ‘government strategies’.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the case for the Government’s Action Plan against alcohol, illegal drugs, doping and tobacco, which is based on a parliamentary decision from 2010 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014a).

The motives for issuing NAPs are diverse. For the central authorities in charge of their coordination, dissemination and implementation, they usually mean both extra work and additional funding; other stakeholders, including NGOs, may view them as an option for influencing national policies, while the government can treat them either as actual plans or only as a way to demonstrate decisiveness and capacity to act. External parties, such as political opponents, interest organisations and researchers, may appreciate NAPs because they make the government's goals for, and views on, a certain problem area explicit and thereby subject to possible debate, suggestions for change and external monitoring and evaluation. It is probably for similar reasons that the central state, in turn, encourages or demands that municipalities adopt local action plans against various problems. However, when the EU requested at the beginning of the 2000s, as part of the 'open method of coordination', that all Member States adopt and issue National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPsincl), there was a considerable variation in the extent to which the resulting plans were actual plans for action or merely descriptions of what was already going on in the member countries. National strategies may not serve the same symbolic function for the government when they are requested from above (or below) as when they are introduced on the initiative of the government itself.

Many western countries, including the EU Member States, have adopted explicit national policies, strategies or action plans to combat homelessness. Norway, Finland and Denmark all have rather forceful national strategies, which besides quite ambitious goals involve partnership with a number of major cities and considerable funding for local development projects (Dyb, 2005; Benjaminsen and Dyb, 2008; Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009; Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009; Pleace *et al.*, 2015).<sup>2</sup> As Benjaminsen and Dyb (2008,) have shown, the national strategies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden differ more in their implementation than in their wording. An interesting and somewhat surprising conclusion, presented in Benjaminsen *et al.* (2009), is that liberal welfare regimes (as defined in Esping-Anderson's typology of welfare regimes) tend to focus more on rights and on housing policies in their homeless strategies (the UK and Ireland in their study) than do the social democratic regimes (represented by Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). Another paradox at first sight is the fact that the strategy against homelessness adopted in Sweden was actually issued by a neoliberal government.

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<sup>2</sup> The Finnish homelessness strategy 2008–2011 had funding of €48 million. In contrast, the 2007–2009 strategy against homelessness in Sweden had 46 million SEK in funding (approximately €4.8m), of which two-thirds was spent on local development projects.

Before presenting state interventions and policies against homelessness it may be relevant to note that Swedish elections to the parliament are held in September every fourth year (previously every third year) and that the majority party (or coalition) forms the government immediately after that. The Social Democrats dominated the governments in the years 1982–1991, 1994–2006 and 2014 to date, while the Moderates (right-wing and neoliberal) dominated in the years 1991–1994 and 2006–2014.

## State Initiatives to Counteract Homelessness since 1990

During most of the twentieth century, homelessness was conceptualised and approached as a housing issue, as ‘houselessness’ (*bostadslöshet*). Up to 1990, the word ‘homeless’ (*hemlös*) was rarely used in Sweden. In the mid 1980s the ‘noisy neighbour’ was constructed as a social problem in housing projects, and the municipal housing companies (MHCs) started to evict tenants and reject housing applicants that they viewed as risks. A new discourse on homelessness developed when the image of the unwanted tenant was integrated into media reports on growing numbers of rough-sleeping homeless people in foreign cities like New York and London. By 1990, several major cities had already divided off sections or staff in the social services especially for homeless clients. One of their services was to make homeless people ‘capable of independent living’. Another one was to allocate accommodation controlled by the social services: a mixture of traditional shelters and supported housing, training flats for substance abusers, and scattered or grouped flats that the social services rented and then sublet to homeless clients – the emerging secondary housing market. These different forms of housing for homeless people were – and are – often organised as a ‘staircase’ between shelters and the envisioned goal: regular tenancies (Sahlin, 1996).

### *Mapping and defining the problem*

These activities were all shaped and implemented at the municipal level. However, in 1993 the government requested that the National Board of Health and Social Welfare (NBHW) map the number of homeless people who were clients of the social services or staying in treatment institutions or shelters (NBHW, 1993). A new mapping was carried out by the NBHW in 1999, and then again in 2005 and 2011, with gradually refined definitions, questions and analyses.

By Christmas 1999, the government had appointed a parliamentary committee to conduct a public investigation of homelessness. Two years later, the committee presented a report called ‘*Counteracting Homelessness. A Comprehensive Strategy for Society*’ (SOU 2001: 95), which contained a number of suggestions, including regular homelessness counts every third year, reintroduced subventions

for rental housing construction, modified rules for evictions, subsidies to NGOs working with homelessness and, above all, a right to housing. However, the suggestions were not followed up with government bills or legislation, with funding or further investigations by the social-democratic government, much less a strategy against homelessness. One of the explanations given was that since 1991, housing policy issues had been spread over a great number of ministries, none of which took any interest in homelessness issues, and that this facilitated tactics of non-decision (Sahlin, 2004). In addition, between the homeless counts, there was no central authority in charge of these matters.

### ***The 2007–2009 strategy to combat homelessness in Sweden***

The right-wing – neoliberal – government that came into power in 2006 was the first one to adopt a strategy against homelessness and housing exclusion. It was announced in February 2007 and was set to end in 2009, and it had the title '*Many Faces: The Responsibility of Many*'. It had four goals:

1. All people shall be granted roofs over their heads and be offered continued coordinated interventions according to their needs.
2. The number of women and men staying in prisons, treatment units and supported housing with no housing arranged at the time for their discharge shall be reduced.
3. Access to the regular housing market shall be facilitated for women and men, respectively, who reside in housing staircases, training flats or other forms of housing supplied by the social services.
4. The number of evictions shall be reduced and no children shall be evicted (NBHW 2010, p.7; author's translation).

The main activity set out for achieving each of these aims was the support of local development work. In its final report, NBHW (2010) concluded that none of these goals had been reached, although the conditions and motivation for obtaining them in the future had improved. An external evaluation of 23 local development projects found that no consistent results of relevance for future homelessness policies could be identified, and the researchers' recommendations were similar to the ones already formulated in various other contexts, namely that there is a need for a working national housing policy and housing provision, and that Housing First should be tried out on a larger scale than previously. They also suggested that future project funding should focus on larger and better prepared initiatives, rather than on small *ad hoc* projects (Denvall *et al.*, 2011).

Since the NBHW published its final report, conditions have deteriorated somewhat. A great number of people,<sup>3</sup> mostly poor Roma people from Romania, are now in Sweden on a temporary basis, begging in the streets during the day. A few night shelters for this group have been set up in the big cities but the great majority sleep rough, in caravans, cars and tents or on the streets. Hence, goal No 1 has not been met. According to the NBHW's own mapping in 2011 (NBHW, 2012), the number of homeless people had increased substantially since 2005, especially on the secondary housing market, which comprises dwellings that the social services rent and then sublease on special terms – with special contracts – to their homeless clients. Since 2008, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (NBHBP) has counted the number of such special contracts every third year, as well as the tenant households that have been allowed to become regular, first-hand tenants of these flats (which is generally the explicit plan).

**Table 1. The Size and Efficiency of the Secondary Housing Market (Goal 3)**

Year	Number of flats sub-leased with special contracts	Share (%) of households allowed to take over the lease 1st hand	Share (%) who got regular leaseholds somewhere else
2008	11,270	10.0	4.5
2011	13,359	9.5	3.5
2014	16,386	7.5	2.5

Source: NBHBP reports on the secondary housing market (NBHBP, 2008; 2011; 2014).

The NBHBP (2008, p.18) concluded as early as 2008 that “(i)t appears to be an extremely small share of all homeless people in the great city regions and other bigger cities that get a home of their own through the secondary housing market”. It should be obvious from Table 1 that the result has not improved since, so goal No 3 in the national strategy is also very far from being reached. Children are still being evicted from regular leaseholds (goal No 4), although the number of such evictions have decreased, and evictions from the secondary housing market are still not recorded as such.

### ***Post-strategy initiatives***

In 2012, the government appointed a national ‘homelessness coordinator’, who approached many municipalities and completed his mission with a final report on 30 June 2014 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014b). Among his suggestions were that a new homeless strategy be adopted; that the MHCs’ role in the housing market be reviewed with special attention to the possibility of reintroducing social goals; that an investigation into the possibilities for people with poor resources to access

<sup>3</sup> By the end of April 2015, there were approximately 4,000 EU migrants begging in Sweden, according to a survey by Swedish Television (Svt, 29 April 2015).

housing be carried out; that the municipalities provide more permanent, normal housing to homeless people; that eviction prevention be strengthened; and that more regular homeless counts be carried out that should include migrants from EU and third countries. However, as was the case with the public investigation published in 2001 and the evaluations of the homeless strategy in 2010 and 2011, none of his suggestions has (so far) been followed up by the government through propositions, legislation, subventions, research initiatives or the like.

Apart from attempts by the NBHW to encourage municipalities to develop and adopt their own local strategies, and the appointment in February 2015 of a National Coordinator for Work with Exposed EU Citizens in Sweden<sup>4</sup> there is currently no formal state involvement in homelessness issues, nor any valid strategy or action plan; there is no funding of development projects or research; and there is no investigation or commission working to suggest policy measures or reforms. The need for a new strategy and measures against homelessness and for a housing policy is sometimes highlighted in the Parliament, but neither the former, right-wing government, nor the one in power since September 2014 (consisting of Social Democrats and the Green Party), have indicated any such plans.

The new minority government did not put homelessness and housing exclusion on the agenda when it came into power in 2014. The social democratic Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, did not mention housing and homelessness at all in its 'Government Declaration' of October 2014, and only a few sentences on homelessness appeared in the Budget Proposition (Government Proposition, 2014/15: 1).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is hard to see where the issue could be initiated in the current organisation of the government. There is still no housing ministry and homelessness is not mentioned as a problem area for any of the ministries.<sup>6</sup> However, since spring 2015, rapidly growing house prices and the shortage of rental dwellings have attracted substantial

<sup>4</sup> This Coordinator has publicly criticized local attempts to find temporary accommodation and camping sites for the Roma beggars, claiming that the latter should not be treated better than other homeless people (Ankersen, 2015), and requested that the police 'step forward' and evict those who set up camps without permission (Radio Sweden 31 Oct. 2015). He is expected to publish a final report in February 2016.

<sup>5</sup> In Sweden, the government's general plans for its future four years in power are presented in the Government's Declaration, while its detailed plans for the year to come are presented in the so-called Budget Proposition.

<sup>6</sup> There is indeed a 'Housing Minister', but he is also Minister for 'Urban Development' and for 'Information Technology' and is actually only one of four ministers placed at the Ministry for Enterprise and Innovation. In the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs, there are three ministers, responsible for 'Social Security', for 'Health Care, Public Health and Sport', and for 'Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality', respectively. Hence – and despite the great number of issues that have been assigned a special minister – it is difficult to find somebody whose natural remit would include developing a homelessness strategy.



media attention and debate, and in August 2015, the government announced plans to allocate 5.5 billion SEK (approximately €574m) to investments and subsidies in the housing sector in the 2016 budget (Löfven *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Dislocated and obscured responsibility***

The missing homeless strategy and policy might be captured as an instance of an on-going responsabilization process. The title of the government's former strategy was *'Many Faces: The Responsibility of Many'*, which is similar to the name of the National Crime Prevention Strategy adopted in 1996: *'Everyone's Responsibility'* (Ds 1996: 59). The concept of 'responsibilization' has mostly been used to describe the new way of making individuals (within one community or another) responsible for their destiny, thus substituting the fading state (see e.g., Rose, 2000). However, it can also be used to conceptualise the transference of responsibility from the central state to the local one (Garland, 2001).

The responsibility for the homelessness problem has, in some respects, been spread 'horizontally' from the NBHW to other authorities on the state level. One aspect of the strategy was that other central authorities should be more actively involved in the work of following up on and counteracting homelessness. The NBHBP in particular has published a series of reports on obstacles to housing access, the secondary housing market etc., and the Enforcement Services have improved their statistics on child evictions. This shows that responsibility has been spread to more authorities at the central level than just the NBHW.

The special investigators appointed for homelessness in general (2012–2014) and for begging EU migrants in particular (2015) have been called 'coordinators'. They have not been offered any staff or any mandate to direct other government agencies but are expected to communicate, start dialogues etc. with all relevant parties in a somewhat vague assemblage of stakeholders. Coordination is in line with the current mode of governing through governance: informal partnerships with local and central authorities, NGOs, companies etc., which entails obscured accountability and unclear responsibility for the problem at hand.

However, while coordinating the government's former strategy, most efforts of the NBHW targeted the municipalities, which were encouraged to make their own mappings and follow-ups of the local homeless population, to work towards evidence-based solutions to the homelessness problem and to make their own local plans for combatting homelessness. The municipalities, in turn, transfer the responsibility for homelessness to their clients, who are offered services and accommodation only on certain conditions.

When the welfare state is contracting, and deregulation makes national legislation and funding less important for the outcome of different policy areas, expectations on the municipalities grow. It is illustrative that the homelessness strategy primarily tried to impact the municipalities, but did not imply any changes on the central level in terms of legislation or subventions. Like in the other Scandinavian countries, Swedish municipalities tax their inhabitants – most people pay income taxes only to the municipalities and counties – and have always had the main responsibility for social welfare, care, housing provision, etc. But they cannot adopt laws or constitute individual rights, they are not in the position to coordinate or oblige other municipalities to take action or to make local action plans, and they have lost essential tools for housing provision. Instead, they transfer the responsibility for homelessness to homeless people themselves – people who are quite powerless in relation to property owners and landlords, especially in a situation where there is a surplus of housing applicants with good income and references.

### Political Hypocrisy

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When rationality in terms of consistency between ideas and actions is impossible or difficult to obtain, organizations may apply *organisational hypocrisy* (Brunsson, 1982; 1993). This concept may offer a way to understand how the Swedish homeless strategy operated. Brunsson's point of departure is the observation that organisations' decisions are sometimes at odds with their actions and that political ideas do not control or steer actions in the rational way that might be presumed. This may be due to the fact that actions and measures are commonly influenced by other forces than the will of politicians or electors, such as power relations, co-optation, shortages of time, funding and other resources. Or it may be due to ambivalence. In this situation, politicians may choose between two possible solutions. One is to justify their actions as, nevertheless, the best possible and most feasible measure, which implies to modify their ideas; the other is what Brunsson terms 'hypocrisy', which "means that what can and should be said is said... but without the talk leading to the corresponding action" (Brunsson, 1993, p.502). This implies that the rhetoric is separated from the practice. In this way, parts of the constituency will be content with the message, while others will be satisfied by the actions. In this conceptual framework, many national action plans would belong to the sphere of words and ideas rather than the sphere of action, and might even facilitate actions that are at odds with the articulated policy.

In his analyses, Brunsson first disentangles decisions from actions, claiming that "there exist both decisions without actions and actions without decisions" (Brunsson, 1982, p.32), and then he detaches ideas from actions (Brunsson, 1993), as if these phenomena were relatively independent of each other, while recognising

that the belief that ideas control actions and that actions are consistent with ideas is an essential condition for the legitimacy of politics. Thus, he argues that an efficient organisation or agency may consciously do things that cannot be talked about and say things that it will not do. The constituency can only control what the executives say, and maybe what they decide, but not so easily what they actually do. This provides an opening for acting at odds with what is said, but also for balancing contradictory opinions: "It may be necessary to compensate for socialist actions by liberal talk, as well as the other way round. In this way both liberals and socialists may be relatively satisfied" (Brunsson, 1993, p.501). Likewise, a government might talk about people's need for affordable housing but act for higher rents in order to satisfy different groups of voters.

The homelessness strategy was initiated in 2007 and was valid for the first two years of the right-wing Reinfeldt Government, which simultaneously implemented a series of decisions that were clearly neoliberal and can be reasonably assumed to have obstructed a reduction in homelessness (see below). It acted in a way that was not possible to justify in the homelessness debate, while it launched a strategy that it did not intend to follow up with actions. Likewise, the social democratic government that commissioned the homelessness investigation in 1999 took no notice of the suggestions that resulted from it, and despite their criticism of the right-wing government's actions in the early 1990s and from 2007 on, the Social Democrats did not restore the housing policy when they came back into power 1994 and 2014 (see also Bengtsson, 2013).

## Swedish Housing Policy: Ideas, Images and Actions

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Considering Brunsson's thesis that political actions may well be relatively independent of expressed political ideas, I will now go back in time to discuss the emergence of the Swedish housing policy that dominated the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as its rapid destruction in the 1990s, with a special focus on explicit policy ideas and their relationship to action at the state level, as well as on images of the country's policy.

### *The Swedish model*

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Swedish parliament and governments were explicitly reluctant to being involved in housing issues, referring instead to the old tradition that employers are responsible for their employees' housing, as well as to the growing liberal belief that an unregulated market would fix temporary unbalances, such as housing shortages in the growing cities (Sheiban, 2002).

In the turbulent 1920s, the Swedish housing market was characterised by severe shortage of housing and increasing rents (SOU 1945: 63; Eriksson, 1990), and at the beginning of the 1930s miserable housing conditions and overcrowding were considered a danger to public health. Birth rates decreased to very low levels, which was defined as a severe social problem. In their seminal book on the 'population crisis', Myrdal and Myrdal (1934) linked the declining birth rate to the housing issue. Their thesis was that in the absence of good housing, young couples could not form families and did not want to give birth to children, but that improved housing conditions – in addition to more developed services for families, including child health care, nurseries, etc. – could reverse this tendency. It seems as though homelessness and housing problems were not taken seriously until they affected the image of the future of the people, or of the nation. This idea would later result in political activity.

At about the same time, in 1933, the state appointed a Housing Social Committee (of which Gunnar Myrdal was a member) to suggest, first, short-term measures to deal with slum dwellings and housing for poor families with children and, secondly, to develop a robust, long-term housing policy, including systems and standards for the financing, planning, construction and allocation of housing, as well as the means to counteract homelessness and segregation. In its first report, the Committee suggested inspections and the improvement of slum housing, and subsidized housing for poor families with three or more children (including unborn children) (SOU 1935: 2), but in the following decade it outlined a new, comprehensive housing policy, which was worked out in detail (SOU 1945: 63). This policy included subventions for housing construction in accordance with local plans for housing provision and land use, which the municipalities were to develop and adopt regularly; housing allowances for families and pensioners; the constitution and financing of MHCs as tools for the municipalities when implementing good housing for all inhabitants; the redevelopment of deteriorated housing blocks; rent regulation, and many more. The result was a proposed 'universal' policy, where public housing was accessible for all and housing allowances were available for all terms of occupancy, while all kinds of builders were eligible for state loans. State subsidies were allocated through the municipalities on the condition that new homes were constructed according to local plans and needs and distributed through municipal housing agencies. Social housing for families with several children was phased out, and low-income families would instead be granted integrated housing through the MHCs.

This 'Swedish model', which meant strong local, democratic control over the allocation of building rights, subsidies and actual dwellings was adopted by the Parliament, and then established and implemented as a great modernisation project from 1947 on. Actions and ideas, rhetoric and practice seem to have accorded at this stage. However, the intensified efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to modernise cities and

dwelling and to eradicate homelessness – including through the provision of one million uniform multi-family or single-family dwellings in large residential areas on the outskirts of the cities between 1965 and 1975 – gradually came under question by both left and right.<sup>7</sup> When municipal parliaments and MHCs acted at odds with the expressed will of many local resident and citizen groups or failed to provide promised services, their legitimacy was threatened (see e.g., Soidre-Brink, 1991). In the following decade, the reform agenda was implemented more gently but without any radical change of either the goals or the means of the housing policy. Rather, actions were modified to fit the ideas and, in the main, ideas and actions still accorded.

### *The 'system shift'*

After several decades of predominantly Social Democratic governments, the appointment of a right-wing, neoliberal government in 1991 enforced a rapid 'system shift' in housing policy (Bengtson and Sandstedt, 1999; Lindbom, 2001; Bengtsson, 2013). This second turning point involved the immediate dissolution of the Housing Ministry, the phasing out of state subsidies for building and the repeal of the 1947 legislation regulating the provision and allocation of housing and of special financing for public housing. The eviction of misbehaving tenants was facilitated and municipal control over housing allocation impeded, with the result that almost all municipal housing agencies closed down within a few years. The conversion of rental dwellings into tenant-owner societies – TOS: where tenants can sell (the right to) their flats on the market – was facilitated and the MHCs were allowed to sell properties to TOSs. This system shift is an apt example of 'neoliberalism as creative destruction', an expression coined by David Harvey (2006). However, it was not articulated as a new housing policy or as a departure from previous, inclusive ideas; rather, it was enforced primarily on the basis that the country was in a severe economic crisis in terms of the expected requirements for joining the EU, and with regard to general ideas on the need to make citizens more responsible for their consumption, increase their freedom of choice and promote private ownership (Government Proposition, 1991/92: 34; 1991/92: 150; 1991/92: 160). Hence, the neoliberal ideas behind the changes were spelled out in general terms but acted out in detail and – in the absence of a housing minister or ministry – presented by the Minister of Finance as parts of a new economic regime more than as a way of providing good housing for the people.

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<sup>7</sup> Protests were invoked by the extensive clearance not only of uninhabitable slum dwellings but of housing blocks which residents were attached to and which architects appreciated.

### *Post-destruction development*

When the Social Democrats, who were opposed to the dismantling of the housing policy, came back into power in 1994, they did not try to restore it (Bengtsson, 2013). On the contrary, they reduced housing allowances sharply in 1997, referencing the severe national financial crisis with subsequent budget cuts in the early 1990s. Since then the number of eligible households and the total cost for these allowances have declined substantially.<sup>8</sup> Explicit ideas, including those contained in a government report on 'Just and Equal Conditions on the Housing Market' (Ds 2006: 9), were actually very far away from government actions in this period, which lasted until the 2006 election.

Without subsidies, very few homes have been built in Sweden since the early 1990s. As the conversion of rental flats into TOS dwellings has been strongly favoured by tax rules and profitable for both property owners and purchasers, the ownership structure on the housing market has changed. Stockholm City, in particular, has sold many MHC properties to TOSs, while some municipalities have sold their whole housing companies to private companies. This means that the stock of public housing has declined in absolute as well as relative terms in the country,<sup>9</sup> particularly in the Stockholm region.<sup>10</sup> An uncontrolled urbanisation process and increased shortage of rental housing have led to a dramatic growth in the prices of private homes, including TOS flats, and to very high levels of indebtedness (EU Commission, 2015).<sup>11</sup> Through more recent legal changes, rents on newly-built housing and subleased homes have been partly deregulated, resulting in considerably higher rents.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> According to Social Insurance (2014), the number of households that received housing allowances in 2013 was 184,000, which corresponds to 3.6 percent of all households in Sweden. The total sum was 4.5 billion SEK (approximately €0.47b).

<sup>9</sup> By 31 December 2013, there were 4.63 million homes in Sweden, of which MHCs owned 720,000 or 15.5 percent (excluding special housing for the elderly). About the same share was private rental housing while 39.5 percent was owner-occupied housing and 21.5 percent was owned by TOSs (NBHBP, 2015). The share of housing that is public has decreased from 22 percent to 15.5 percent in two decades.

<sup>10</sup> In the years 2008–2013 Stockholm City sold 35,857 MHC flats, more than two thirds of which (69 percent) were converted into TOS dwellings, while the rest were sold to private housing companies (NBHBP, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> According to Brokers' Statistics, the prices for TOS flats increased by 64 percent between July 2008 (before the recession) and July 2015 (<http://www.maklarstatistik.se/foerklaring-till-statistik/foerdjudpad-statistik---augusti-2015.aspx>). Even the director of the Swedish Central Bank has called the housing issue a 'blind spot', warned about rapidly rising house prices and claimed that a system was developed over decades in Sweden that does not work but that 'strong interests want to keep the current order' (Stefan Ingves in Lucas, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> The average rent for a 3-room apartment allocated by the Stockholm Housing Agency increased by 48 percent between 2005 and 2014 (Gustavsson, 2015), while rents on subleased dwellings in Stockholm have risen by 40 percent in three years (TT News Agency, 2015)

In retrospect, the socially ambitious ‘universal’ housing policy in place during the four decades after World War II appears to be only an historical parenthesis (Strömberg, 2001). However, it seems to have had a more lasting impact on a symbolic level. Although inequality is clearly growing in the country,<sup>13</sup> Sweden has developed, and still defends, an image of itself as a genuinely equal country – a reputation that the nation also gained abroad in the decades after World War II, when its relative wealth, stability, equality and progress was uncontested.<sup>14</sup> The consistently negative view on social housing in Sweden is illustrative of the power of this national self-image. Sweden is one of very few member countries in the EU that has no social housing, and governments and parliaments, regardless of their political colour, have repeatedly turned down suggestions to provide such housing (Sahlin, 2008). A common argument is that Swedish public housing (the MHCs) is a more effective and less stigmatising solution to homelessness and housing exclusion, which was, indeed, a strong argument for the inclusive housing policy set out in 1947. However, today, these companies are not expected or even allowed to have regard to any social considerations unless they are profitable (see below), which is why they cannot be an alternative to social housing any more. This is also a serious obstacle to the introduction of Housing First, which has been tried on a project basis and has proved effective in several cities, but which cannot be fully implemented in practice as neither public nor private landlords will provide flats for first-hand leaseholds to the target group.

Hence, some possible solutions to homelessness may be rejected because they are at odds with this country’s self image as an inclusive country with a universal housing policy, despite the fact that this policy is since long dismantled. Other solutions – including public control over housing allocation, rent control and continuous housing construction for rent and for low-income tenants – have been abandoned since 1991 or made impossible because the municipality has no power over housing allocation, which is the case for Housing First. In a situation where neither traditional domestic or international measures to counteract homelessness nor any new ones are accepted, what remains are staircase models and secondary housing markets and shelters – that is, special local solutions for a minor portion of those who lack housing.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the OECD (2015), “Sweden still belongs to the group of the 10 most equal OECD countries, despite a sharp rise in income inequality since the mid-1980s, the largest among all OECD countries (more than 7 points in terms of the Gini inequality coefficient).”

<sup>14</sup> Another curious example of the mismatch between image and reality, or perhaps of political hypocrisy, is the fact that the Moderate Party, which is responsible for the second step of the system shift in housing policy, introduces itself as ‘A Modern Labour Party’ (Moderaterna, 2013).

To sum up: the housing policy designed after World War II and implemented in the following decades was an example of actions and ideas being consistent, and of ideas controlling actions. But then this policy was dismantled through a series of decisions, leading to drastic deregulation and active measures to turn the policy over to neoliberalism. These latter decisions, however, were not set out as a means to solve homelessness and segregation, or even as a new housing policy, but rather they were justified as necessary due to problematic state finances, and with reference to the idea that a 'free' market was something good in itself.

In the next section I will look more closely at governmental decisions in the same year as the homelessness strategy was issued. The aim is to find out if there is, indeed, a link between the ideas and goals of this strategy and actions at the level of the central state.

## An Implicit Strategy?

In 2007, when the government adopted its two-year strategy to combat homelessness and housing exclusion, it made many other decisions of clear relevance for housing access and housing exclusion. The overall goal for the housing policy was cleansed of previous references to housing as a social right or objectives like 'good housing for all'. Instead, it was formulated in the following way: "The goal for housing issues is housing markets that function well in the long run, where the demand from consumers meets a supply of housing that corresponds to the needs" (Committee on Civil Affairs, 2008), and a great many Commissions were appointed for the deregulation of housing construction, land use, building standards, rent setting and so on. However, a series of decisions were also made without being preceded by special inquiries and these were implemented very quickly: 1) a rather modest – but effective (see NBHBP, 2005) – subsidy for the building of affordable rental flats, introduced in 2002, was abolished; 2) rents for newly-built flats were deregulated (during the first 15 years); 3) MHCs were allowed to sell their properties to TOSs without asking permission from the counties; 4) home-owners, including TOS tenants, were afforded a specific subsidy, through which half of the labour costs for repairing, rebuilding and extending privately owned dwellings were paid by the state;<sup>15</sup> 5) property taxes were abolished and replaced by a small, almost flat annual fee;<sup>16</sup> and 6) taxes on assets were repealed (inheritance taxes had been removed in 2005).

<sup>15</sup> In 2014, the total state cost for this so-called ROT-deduction for home owners was 17 billion SEK (approximately €1.84 billion), which is about four times the total sum for housing allowances that year.

<sup>16</sup> The annual real estate fee is 0.75 percent of the taxation value up to a ceiling of 7,112 SEK (approximately €755), which is already reached when the house is valued at half of the current average price for owner-occupied single-family houses.



Combined with the fact that 30 percent of interest costs are tax-deductible, which amounted to 30 billion SEK (approximately €3.2b) in reduced tax income in 2014,<sup>17</sup> the favouring of owner-occupied housing in Sweden is obvious, albeit it was never launched as a strategy. Although this trend is not unique to Sweden (Elsinga, 2015), this country stands out within the EU for this reason, according to a recent country report by the EU Commission:

The current taxation system in Sweden tends to push up house prices. Sweden (together with the Netherlands) applies the highest incentives in the tax system for home ownership. Taxation of properties in Sweden is below the EU average, producing revenues equivalent to 1% of GDP in 2012 /.../. In addition, the most generous tax subsidies to mortgage interest in the EU are recorded in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, which further incentivise household to take debts. While most countries made efforts to reduce tax incentives and to apply more neutral tax treatment to home ownership (also due to strong fiscal consolidation needs), these incentives have been unchanged in Sweden (EU Commission, 2015, p.18).

In 2007, the government also changed its directives to an on-going public investigation on the future of public housing. When the EU Commission concluded that Swedish MHCs were run in a way that could not justify them being defined as providers of social housing – that is, as services of general interest (EU Commission, 2005) – a committee was appointed to consider whether the Swedish MHCs should be re-oriented either to deal with social housing or to become pure for-profit companies. However, in 2007, this committee was told by the government *not* to consider social housing as an alternative. The end result was new legislation, valid since 2011, obliging the MHCs to act in a business-like manner and in just the same way as for-profit housing companies, which is often interpreted to mean that they are prohibited from taking social considerations into account in their allocation, eviction and rebuilding practices, and obliged to ensure a return for their owners (the municipalities). In combination with still valid rent regulation for older housing, this has provided the MHCs with incentives to rebuild their properties in a way that allows them to increase rents, instead of merely carrying out regular maintenance (which is not accepted as a ground for increasing rent) and to build new homes in expensive sites, where they will be able to charge higher rents in the first 15 years.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> According to research by Statistics Sweden, commissioned by Swedish Television, the wealthiest 50 percent of households receive 85 percent of this subvention because they have much more expensive homes (Svt, 24 March 2015).

<sup>18</sup> According to statistics from Stockholm's Housing Agency Ltd., the average rent for a three-room, apartment allocated by the agency and owned by the MHC 'Stockholm Homes' has increased by more than 80 percent in ten years (Gustafsson, 2015).

Put succinctly, while the strategy against homelessness was not followed by any legislation or redistribution aimed at facilitating housing access for homeless people, a lot of effective decisions were taken that have had a clear impact on the distribution of wealth and rights in the housing market. Therefore, there is much to indicate the existence of an *implicit strategy* to pave the way for and fortify market forces and to benefit home-ownership at the cost of public control and social concerns, and to subsidize private property owners at the cost of tenants and low-income home-seekers. Some resulting market effects – hardly unexpectedly – are increased rents, quickly rising prices on owner-occupied dwellings, including TOS flats, a massive shortage of rental housing and, consequently, homelessness. The result is “a huge success from the standpoint of the upper classes” (Harvey, 2006, p.152), but a big failure for those less privileged and a tragedy for homeless people.<sup>19</sup> According to Brunsson (1993, p.501), decisions “can be part of hypocrisy; they can be contrary to actions, compensating for action rather than controlling or justifying it.” The decision to launch a strategy against homelessness in 2007 was clearly that kind of decision.

## Conclusion

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In this article I have deliberately presented a contradictory image of Sweden. This country has a proud history of comprehensive housing policies and well-developed welfare arrangements, aimed at ensuring safety and equality for its population, since a time when ideas and actions seemed to reinforce each other. However, from the beginning of the 1990s and onwards, the previously inclusive housing policy was dismantled and welfare policies slimmed down, due to a neoliberal turn that meant welfare austerity and promoted a free market, private ownership and institutions that favour owners. This ‘implicit housing policy’ was initiated by a neoliberal government in 1991, sustained by the social-democratic government in the following decade, and then pushed a step further by a new neoliberal government upon its return to power in September 2006.

Since the system shift, there have been sporadic initiatives on homelessness. Homeless people have been counted every sixth year since 1993, and the size and efficiency of the secondary housing market have been analysed since 2008. A parliamentary committee was appointed between 1999 and 2001 to suggest measures to counteract homelessness, a time-limited national strategy against

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<sup>19</sup> This is certainly a tendency that is common to many European countries (see Elsinga, 2015), but Sweden seems to be an extreme case. It deviates from other countries, e.g. from the UK, in its negative attitude to social housing, in its previously very comprehensive housing policy, and the lateness with which it was dismantled. Another difference is that the more local financial crisis of the early 1990s was more severe in Sweden than the international one in 2008.

homelessness was in force from 2007 to 2009, and a national coordinator for homelessness was appointed from 2012 until June 2014. All of these initiatives have resulted in similar conclusions and suggestions, but the different governments they were presented to have remained passive and undertaken none of the recommended measures. None of the governments has responded to the shared conclusion that homelessness cannot be solved by social services alone and that a solution must involve some kind of provision of affordable housing and norms for its allocation.

A weak or absent homelessness strategy could have been balanced by a strong housing policy, or vice versa: a vigorous strategy against homelessness could have mitigated the effect of a deregulated housing market on the most vulnerable. The latter seems to be the choice of several other countries, not least the other Nordic countries. However, in Sweden, the governments have instead taken forceful measures to implement an implicit strategy that is at odds with proposed solutions to homelessness.

The Swedish homelessness policy is characterised by contradictions between rhetoric and practice at the level of government. Formally, the state has obliged the municipalities to provide housing for its inhabitants and shelter for homeless people, but in practice it has deprived them of the means to do so. In 1998, Sweden ratified the revised European Social Charter (see Helenelund, 2015), and thereby committed itself to implementing a right to housing and to working towards the reduction of homelessness and improved access to housing for vulnerable groups, “in particular social housing” for “in particular the most disadvantaged” (ECSR, 2008, p.173). The parliamentary Homelessness Commission and the 2007 strategy against homelessness have been useful to refer to in country reports to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR, 2012; Government of Sweden, 2014), but they have not had any impact on domestic policies. On the contrary, at the time the strategy was launched, the process of ‘liberalisation’ of the housing market was especially intense.

State subsidies are today predominantly directed to home-owners and home-buyers, and indirectly benefit primarily the most wealthy home-owners (and their heirs) through almost flat-rate property taxes, tax deductions of mortgage interest, heavily subsidised re-building and repairs to private homes, and tax-free private capital and inheritance. Considering the fact that homelessness has grown substantially and that the secondary housing market has failed to provide homeless people with regular housing, while an increasing share of the population is being excluded from the housing market due to a serious shortage of rental housing, quickly rising prices on owner-occupied homes, high (and unregulated) rents on newly-built flats and subleased homes, and unregulated allocations of

the diminishing share of public as well as private rental housing, it is not going too far to identify an implicit policy on housing, which promotes homelessness, or at least accepts it.

Decisions on taxes, subventions and regulations should be placed in the domain of actions, since they regulate rights and/or can be implemented by force. Decisions to ratify a social charter or to adopt strategies and action plans, on the other hand, are, in this context 'decisions without actions' (Brunsson, 1982, p.32) and could be viewed, rather, as parts of the state's 'impression management' and located in the domain of ideas and images and as enabling strategic hypocrisy. Therefore, the problem is not that there is currently no homeless strategy, but rather that an implicit strategy is being executed through governmental and parliamentary actions, with or without specific decisions being made. It seems apparent that this implicit strategy is set to increase rather than reduce homelessness. Hence, in retrospect, Sweden's short-lived strategy against homelessness is best understood as a way of diverting attention away from the expected victims of the policy changes: as hypocrisy.

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# Research Review



***Part C***

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# Findings from A Fidelity Assessment of a Housing First Programme in a Small Canadian City

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‣ **Abstract\_** *This paper presents the findings of a second fidelity assessment of a Housing First programme in a small Canadian city. The evaluation included two components: a) a fidelity assessment by an external team of experts; and b) key informant interviews and focus groups with programme staff to identify contributors to programme areas of high fidelity and low fidelity. Findings from the second fidelity assessment indicated that the programme in Moncton had effectively addressed a number of issues raised in the first fidelity assessment. However, the second fidelity assessment also identified the presence of a number of challenges that continued to be faced by the programme. Notable programme areas requiring further development included the integration of substance abuse treatment into services delivered by the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team, the use of individualized service planning focusing on recovery goals, and the addition of a peer specialist to the ACT team. The findings from the fidelity assessment are interpreted in the context of information collected from key informants and programme staff. Recommendations coming out of the assessment for addressing programme areas of low fidelity are discussed.*

‣ **Keywords\_** *Housing First, Assertive Community Treatment, fidelity assessment, homelessness*

## Introduction

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The *Pathways* Housing First model represents a shift in the traditional service philosophy for homeless individuals with severe and persistent mental illness (Tsemberis, 1999; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Tsemberis *et al.*, 2004; Greenwood *et al.*, 2005). Homeless individuals are rapidly placed in the housing of their choice, provided with a rental subsidy, and offered support through an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team (Tsemberis, 1999; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000). The model has demonstrated superior outcomes, particularly with regard to housing retention, compared to traditional residential continuum models (Aubry *et al.*, 2014). Because of the success of the model, Housing First programmes are now being implemented in communities across Canada (Goering *et al.*, 2011), the United States (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013) and Europe (Greenwood *et al.*, 2013).

Due to the rapid uptake of the Housing First model in various locales, a new wave of research regarding programme implementation has emerged (Stergiopoulos *et al.*, 2012; Stefancic *et al.*, 2013; Fleury *et al.*, 2014; Gilmer *et al.*, 2014; Nelson *et al.*, 2014; Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015; O'Campo *et al.*, 2015). This type of research, which can help guide the development of Housing First programmes, is important, as the model is based upon several core concepts, and improper implementation may diminish the programme's ability to produce the expected positive housing outcomes (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). Research has shown that Housing First programmes with high fidelity demonstrate better outcomes for their participants in relation to housing stability, community functioning and quality of life (Gilmer *et al.*, 2013; Davidson *et al.*, 2014; Goering *et al.*, 2015).

In recognition of the importance of adherence to the Housing First model, this article presents findings from a fidelity assessment of a Housing First programme in Moncton, New Brunswick – a small Canadian city. The city was one of five participating sites of the At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project (Goering *et al.*, 2011). The assessment included two components: a) a fidelity assessment conducted by an external team with expertise in the delivery of Housing First; and b) a qualitative evaluation of factors contributing to programme areas of low and high fidelity. This article provides a significant and new contribution to the literature, as it presents the findings from fidelity assessment of a Housing First programme three years after its launch in a community with no prior experience administering Housing First services. It also describes the mixed methods undertaken to assess fidelity and provides unique insights into improving the programme fidelity of Housing First programmes.

### ***Critical ingredients of Housing First***

Housing First is guided by principles of the supported housing model. Although supported housing is a well-known model, there has been considerable variation in its implementation (Aubry *et al.*, 2014). Several review articles have been published to try to determine the critical ingredients of supported housing (Rog, 2004; Wong *et al.*, 2007; Tabol *et al.*, 2010). After a review of the literature, each of these cited articles identified a set of ingredients that encompassed supported housing models. These ingredients fit into the following categories: 1) use of regular housing; 2) separation of housing and services; 3) delivery of flexible supports; and 4) facilitation of choice. Tabol *et al.* (2010) also included immediate placement into housing as a critical ingredient.

Based upon these critical ingredients, the review articles then compared these criteria to supported housing models presented in the literature. Rog (2002), Wong *et al.* (2007), and Tabol *et al.* (2010) all found substantial variation in the adherence of the programmes to these five critical ingredients, with some programmes demonstrating strong fidelity and others meeting few of the critical ingredients. These findings demonstrate that it is important for new and existing Housing First programmes to monitor their programme implementation to ensure that they have fidelity in line with the tenets of the model. In recognition of this, the At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project in Canada used mixed methods to evaluate how well the participation sites across five cities were adhering to the Housing First model (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2012; Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Mixed methods and fidelity***

Mixed methods designs are common in programme evaluation. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989, p.256) defined mixed methods designs as those that 'include at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words), where neither type of method is inherently linked to any particular inquiry paradigm.' Mixed methods can serve several functions, with triangulation being perhaps the most common; however, mixed methods can also function as a means of complementarity.

In these types of studies, 'qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon' (Greene *et al.*, 1989, p.258). This type of analysis differs from triangulation as the quantitative and qualitative methods do not counteract one another. The At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project used the complementarity mixed methods approach to evaluate the fidelity of the programs in the different sites (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2012). In particular, a fidelity assessment

by an external team (evaluation on a quantitative measure) and discussion of the fidelity results with programme stakeholders (in-depth qualitative focus groups and interviews) were used as complementary measures.

Fidelity assessments provide a systematic manner by which to evaluate programme implementation. They are important tools, as programmes with strong adherence to the philosophy of established models demonstrate better outcomes than programmes with poor adherence (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Goering and her colleagues (2015) showed a positive relationship between programme fidelity and the housing stability, community functioning and quality of life achieved by the programme participants. Fidelity measures also 'reduce the chance that outcomes, positive or negative, will be misappropriated to a model never fully implemented in practice' (Watson *et al.*, 2013, p.2).

### ***The At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project in Canada***

The At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project was a multi-site randomized controlled trial that examined the effectiveness of Housing First services relative to treatment as usual in five Canadian cities (Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver) (Keller *et al.*, 2013). The design and methods of the project have been described in detail in previous publications (Goering *et al.*, 2011) and therefore only a brief synopsis is provided here. The Housing First services followed the Pathways to Housing model (Tsemberis, 2010). In Moncton, Housing First consumers were provided with subsidized housing in the private rental market and with Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services. The ACT services operated with a consumer to staff ratio of 10: 1, which is the standard practice for ACT. Staff members of the ACT team represented a mix of mental health disciplines that included a nurse practitioner, psychiatric nurses, an occupational health therapist, a home economist, a social worker, human resource counsellors, a physician clinical director and consulting psychiatrists. The Moncton site also provided Housing First services to individuals living in a rural region adjacent to Moncton. The city had only limited community mental health services in place and no previous experience implementing a Housing First programme or ACT.

As part of the mixed methods analysis, an early implementation and a follow-up implementation evaluation were conducted. As previously mentioned, this included a fidelity assessment using the Housing First Fidelity Scale (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013) and a qualitative evaluation of program implementation. Previous articles have presented the fidelity scores and implementation evaluation findings aggregated across the five sites of the At Home/Chez Soi project (Nelson *et al.*, 2014; Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015) and from the Moncton site (Ecker *et al.*, 2014). When averaging the domain scores across the five sites, 71% of the Fidelity Scale items were rated as higher than three on the four-point scale (i.e., interpreted as high



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fidelity) at the early implementation phase, conducted approximately one year after programme launch (Nelson *et al.*, 2014). At the follow-up implementation, conducted between two and two and one-half years post programme launch, 78% of items were rated as higher than three (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). These percentages indicate that the five programmes were demonstrating high levels of fidelity in both time periods. Moreover, improvements were made across four of the five domains when examining all five sites together: *Separation of Housing and Services*, *Service Philosophy*, *Service Array* and *Programme Structure* (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). The score for *Housing Choice and Structure* showed a high level of fidelity in the first fidelity assessment and remained the same thereafter.

The fidelity scores of the five At Home/Chez Soi sites demonstrated several sustained and improved strengths, as well as some challenges from early implementation to later implementation. Strengths included separating housing and support services, providing permanent and affordable housing, and providing choice in housing (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). There were specific challenges uncovered by the fidelity assessment that were faced by the Housing First programmes, which reflected continued low levels of implementation; these included the availability of housing, the provision of person-centred planning, the provision of motivational interviewing, meaningful representation of consumers within the programme, the availability of psychiatric services, the provision of substance abuse treatment, the provision of employment and educational services, the encouragement of the social integration of consumers, and the provision of 24-hour coverage (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015).

The follow-up qualitative evaluation of implementation also uncovered several strengths and challenges that impacted the implementation of the Housing First programme in the five cities. Strengths included staff commitment to the programme, improvement over time of staff expertise, the leadership of site leaders, the organizational culture, the local partnerships that were developed, and the training and technical support provided (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). Challenges that arose included staffing concerns regarding job security, ensuring peer specialists were meaningfully integrated into the programme, providing vocational support to the consumers, the availability of quality housing, and a small minority of consumers unwilling to engage with the programme or having repeated episodes of housing instability (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). The results from the fidelity assessment and the qualitative evaluation of implementation presented above demonstrate the utility of mixed methods analyses. Significant overlap occurred between the results of both types of analyses; however, unique strengths and challenges were also presented within each. As such, the goal of complementarity was achieved.

### ***Fidelity assessment at the Moncton site of the At Home / Chez Soi project***

The early fidelity assessment and implementation evaluation of the Moncton site of the At Home/Chez Soi project demonstrated high fidelity to the Housing First model, but certain challenges did arise given the unique context of the city (Ecker et al., 2014). The site scored particularly well on four of the five fidelity dimensions: *Housing Choice and Structure*; *Separation of Housing and Services*; *Service Philosophy* and *Programme Structure*. The one domain to score lower on fidelity was *Service Array*. Particular challenges noted in the fidelity assessment were the small landlord network, the limited housing stock available, the need for staff training in motivational interviewing and substance abuse treatment, and the lack of meaningful involvement of the Housing First participants in the programme. The implementation evaluation also uncovered a small number of challenges and modifications that resulted from operating a Housing First programme in a small city. Challenges included rapid information-sharing within the community, a lack of adequate public transportation for participants, and limitations to offering participants choice in their housing. Modifications included not providing 24-hour care, having limited psychiatric services, and the inclusion of participants with moderate needs.

### ***Study objectives***

The remainder of this article provides a site-specific account of the second quantitative fidelity assessment and related qualitative evaluation of the Housing First programme in Moncton as part of the At Home/Chez Soi research project. The quantitative fidelity assessment was intended to identify changes in fidelity ratings since the first fidelity assessment, programme areas with high fidelity, and programme areas with low fidelity. The qualitative evaluation of implementation, conducted after this second fidelity assessment, was intended to explain the contributors to programme areas of high and low fidelity from the perspective of key informants and Housing First programme staff.

## **Method**

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### ***Mixed methods approach***

We used a mixed methods approach in which a quantitative fidelity assessment was conducted by an external team to evaluate the fidelity of the programme on a set of standards. This was followed by a qualitative evaluation of implementation that used protocols informed by the results of the fidelity assessment with the objective of identifying factors perceived by key informants and programme staff as contributing to programme areas of high fidelity and low fidelity.

## ***Fidelity assessment***

### **Fidelity measure**

The team assessed the Moncton programme with regard to its adherence to the standards set out in the 38-item Pathways Housing First Fidelity Scale developed by Stefancic *et al.* (2013). The scale was developed through a literature review, an assessment of similar fidelity scales, and consultation with a selection of Housing First programmes and experts in Housing First. Following these three steps, the key ingredients were validated through consensus-based procedures.

Five domains of the scale emerged, with a specific number of items within each: 1) *Housing Choice and Structure* (6 items); 2) *Separation of Housing and Services* (6 items); 3) *Service Philosophy* (10 items); 4) *Service Array* (8 items); and 5) *Programme Structure* (8 items). A 4-point rating scale is used for each criterion, with higher scores indicating greater fidelity. Half-point increments are used in the scale and a score of 3.5 out of 4.0 represents 'high fidelity'. The items making up the subscales for each of four domains other than *Programme Structure* demonstrated acceptable to good internal reliability based on Cronbach alpha coefficients (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). As well, it has been shown to have discriminant validity in differentiating Housing First programmes from programmes that did not follow the Housing First model in the domains of *Housing Choice and Structure*, *Separation of Housing and Services*, and *Service Philosophy* (Gilmer *et al.*, 2014).

### **Procedure and sample**

An external team of evaluators made up of experts in the delivery of Housing First services (i.e., a programme manager, a service provider and a researcher) conducted the fidelity assessment. The fidelity assessment was completed in January 2012 at which time the programme was 27 months old. The data for the fidelity assessment came from observations of the daily ACT team meetings, interviews with key informants, focus groups with programme staff and consumers, and chart reviews. Based on the collected information, each member of the fidelity assessment team scored the programme on the standards itemized in the fidelity measure (Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). Once each team member had scored the individual items of the scale independently, they discussed them collectively and conciliated differences until they reached a consensus score on each item.

### **Data analysis**

Analyses for the fidelity assessment involved calculating an overall average across the 38 items and averages for each of the domains. In addition, we examined the scores of individual items on the scale. These averages and individual item scores of the second fidelity assessment were compared to those from the first fidelity assessment conducted in August 2010, ten months after the launch of the programme (Ecker *et al.*, 2014).

### ***Qualitative evaluation of implementation***

We conducted the qualitative evaluation between February and July 2012, at which time the programme was approximately two and a half years old and operating at full capacity in terms of the number of service recipients (i.e., approximately 100).

#### **Sample**

For the qualitative evaluation of implementation, we interviewed the Physician Clinical Director, the ACT Team Manager, the Housing Coordinator and the At Home / Chez Soi Research Site Coordinator individually. We also conducted two focus groups with staff members of the ACT team – one in English ( $n = 6$ ) and one in French ( $n = 2$ ).

#### **Procedure**

For the individual interviews and focus groups, we used the common protocols developed by the national qualitative group for the five At Home/Chez Soi sites. The protocols included questions focusing on programme strengths and challenges revealed in the fidelity assessment. The questions were open-ended and included a series of probes to engage participants in a discussion. The protocols were semi-structured, in that the interviewers had a specific list of questions but could deviate from the script depending upon the responses provided by interviewees. Given that the programmes across the five sites were diverse, a semi-structured protocol was important.

We interviewed key informants in person. The duration of key informant interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. We conducted the focus groups with ACT staff at their team office. They lasted approximately 90 minutes. We audio-recorded and transcribed the key informant interviews and focus groups.

#### **Data analysis**

Five research team members conducted thematic coding of transcripts intended to identify factors contributing to programme areas of high and low fidelity as revealed in the fidelity assessment. The researchers used a thematic coding paradigm as outlined by Padgett (2012). The analysis took place in stages. The first step involved the open coding of the data, which involved reading the transcripts line by line and developing codes for segments of the data. In vivo coding was used as often as possible, since codes should stick closely to the data (Charmaz, 2006). Following open coding, a process of focused coding was completed. In this stage, codes were synthesized and developed into meaningful themes.

Members of the research team were put in pairs to code at least one of the research questions. Each member of the pair independently coded the transcripts and followed the two-step coding process. Subsequently, the two coders compared their themes and discussed them until a consensus was achieved on a common

set of themes. Through this initial process, the quality of the data analysis was established. Members of the research team were then assigned individual research questions and began to code independently. Once all of the research questions were coded, the team reviewed all of the themes and sub-themes that were created. This last step served as a verification process.

## Results

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### *Fidelity assessment*

Table 1 presents the average scores for all of the items and for the items in each domain of the scale as well as the individual item scores from the first and second fidelity assessments. The second fidelity assessment found high levels of fidelity (i.e., 3.5 or greater) on 78 percent of the items. In contrast, the first fidelity assessment rated the programme as having a high level of fidelity on 65 percent of the items. Overall, the average score for individual items increased from 3.47 at the first fidelity assessment to 3.74 at the second fidelity assessment. A comparison of the individual item scores for the two fidelity assessments showed continued high levels of implementation in several programme areas as well as continued low levels of implementation in some programme areas. In addition, there were areas that showed both improvements and deterioration in terms of adherence to fidelity standards.

The second fidelity assessment found improvements in the programme, which were evident across four of the five domains of fidelity standards. Specifically, the five rated fidelity standards in the *Housing Choice and Structure* domain (i.e., choice, permanence, affordability, integration and privacy) were all assessed as being at maximum implementation (i.e., average of 4.00), demonstrating the programme's commitment to providing participants with choice regarding accessing regular housing of good quality. Improvements in fidelity to offering participants choice in their housing was evident in comparing the first and second fidelity assessment.

The fidelity ratings in the *Separation of Housing and Services* domain also demonstrated noteworthy strengths. It was assessed as being at the highest level of fidelity possible on all of the seven items in this domain (i.e., average of 4.0). Moreover, two areas in this domain improved from the first to the second fidelity assessment – namely the access that participants had to off-site community services and to mobile services. These improvements were due to the success of the programme in developing partnerships with community programmes. The staff were focused on helping participants to access these services to help them work through difficulties that may have contributed to their need for re-housing.

**Table 1. Fidelity Assessment Domain Means and Individual Item Scores**

Domain	Domain Mean / Standard Score (Out of 4)		Difference
	Fidelity Assessment 1	Fidelity Assessment 2	
<b><i>Housing Choice and Structure</i></b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.25</b>
Housing choice	3.5	4.0	0.5
Housing availability	3.0	n/a <sup>2</sup>	n/a
Permanent housing tenure	4.0	4.0	0.0
Affordable housing	4.0	4.0	0.0
Integrated housing	4.0	4.0	0.0
Privacy	4.0	4.0	0.0
<b><i>Separation of Housing and Services</i></b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.10</b>
No housing readiness	4.0	4.0	0.0
No programme contingencies of tenancy	4.0	4.0	0.0
Standard tenant agreement	4.0	4.0	0.0
Commitment to re-house	4.0	4.0	0.0
Services continue through housing loss	4.0	4.0	0.0
Off-site services	3.5	4.0	0.5
Mobile services	3.5	4.0	0.5
<b><i>Service Philosophy</i></b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>0.05</b>
Service choice	4.0	4.0	0.0
No requirements for participation in psychiatric treatment	4.0	4.0	0.0
No requirements for participation in substance use treatment	4.0	4.0	0.0
Harm reduction approach	4.0	3.5	-0.5
Motivational interviewing	2.0	2.5	0.5
Assertive engagement	3.0	3.0	0.0
Absence of coercion	4.0	4.0	0.0
Person-centred planning	2.0	2.5	0.5
Interventions target broad range of life goals	4.0	4.0	0.0
Participant self-determination and independence	4.0	2.5	0.0
<b><i>Service Array</i></b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.53</b>
Housing support	4.0	4.0	0.0
Psychiatric services	n/a <sup>1</sup>	3.0	n/a
Substance abuse treatment	2.0	2.5	0.5
Employment and educational services	3.0	3.5	0.5
Nursing/medical services	3.0	3.5	0.5
Social integration	3.0	3.5	0.5
24-hour coverage	3.0	3.0	0.0
Involved in In-patient treatment	2.0	4.0	2.0
<b><i>Programme Structure</i></b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Priority enrolment for individuals with obstacles with housing stability	4.0	4.0	0.0
Contact with participants	4.0	4.0	0.0
Low participant/staff ratio	4.0	4.0	0.0
Team approach	4.0	4.0	0.0
Frequent meetings	4.0	4.0	0.0
Weekly meeting/case review	3.0	3.0	0.0
Peer specialist on staff	3.0	2.0	-1.0
Participant representation in programme	2.0	3.0	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>3.74</b>	

1. Not scored as programme was in process of negotiating the addition of psychiatric consultation services.

2. Information available to the external team was insufficient to make this rating.

The majority of the items in the *Service Philosophy* domain were also assessed as being at full implementation in both fidelity assessments (i.e., average of 3.55). The staff were committed to the values guiding the Housing First approach as it relates to maximizing participant choice and autonomy in accessing services, promoting harm reduction, and focusing on a wide range of life areas with clients. Despite these strengths, several continued challenges in this domain were observed. The extent to which staff used motivational interviewing and adopted person-centred planning in working with participants showed improvements from the first fidelity assessment; however these areas, reflecting how staff work with participants, were still judged as being at less than full implementation. ACT team members had received training in motivational interviewing but still lacked experience and general comfort in using the approach in interactions with clients. Also, based on a review of participants' charts, there was a lack of documentation of participants' perspective in relation to service planning; rather it seemed service planning was based more on programme staff's perspective. In particular, the fidelity assessment indicated that there was still room for the ACT team to improve its long-term and recovery planning with the participants.

Another area in the *Service Philosophy* domain in which the programme fell short of full implementation involved the extent to which programme staff engaged in an active and assertive manner with participants who were not participating in treatment or accessing support. Although programme staff reported applying significant effort to engage participants, it was not being systematically documented in participants' charts, thus making it difficult for the fidelity team to determine how consistently or frequently interventions were being implemented in this area.

In addition, related to this item, the second fidelity assessment noted the need for the ACT team to continue developing social activities for participants to help engage them and overcome their reported feelings of loneliness and isolation. The programme showed a decrease in the fidelity score related to its adoption of a harm reduction approach. In scoring this item, the fidelity assessors noted that although there was an increasing number of staff who were trained in the harm reduction model, there remained a number of staff that emphasized detox and abstinence to participants who may not be ready for this step.

Among the eight items making up the *Service Array* domain, only two items were judged as being at full implementation in the second fidelity assessment (i.e., average of 3.38). In particular, the programme was rated as continuing to provide a high level of support to programme participants related to their housing. Also, the involvement of the programme in in-patient treatment when participants were hospitalized was assessed as having improved to full implementation from the first

to second fidelity assessment as a result of the addition of psychiatric consultation services being provided by two hospital psychiatrists. Other areas showing notable improvement in the second fidelity assessment, though still short of full implementation, were the provision of psychiatric services and supported employment services to programme participants.

Despite these strengths, a number of items in the *Service Array* domain continued to be assessed as being at less than full implementation at the second fidelity visit. Although a substance use specialist had been identified and trained, the fidelity team judged that the programme needed to continue to develop its capacity in this area. Furthermore, the utilization of an integrated, stage-wise substance use treatment approach to working with participants within the programme was assessed as being at less than full implementation in both fidelity visits. As well, the second fidelity assessment rated the extent to which the programme provided participants with 24-hour coverage to be only partially implemented as it relied on an external local mobile crisis services to provide this coverage overnight.

Lastly, the programme was rated in the second fidelity assessment as having multiple areas of strength in the *Programme Structure* domain (i.e., average of 3.5). Specifically, five of the eight items in this domain were assessed as being at full implementation – namely the extent to which the programme gave priority to assisting individuals facing obstacles to achieving housing stability, the amount of contact with participants (i.e., at least once per week), the low participant/staff ratio (i.e., 1: 10) and the adoption of a team approach with programme staff sharing service responsibilities for participants.

Although the involvement of participants in programme decision-making was rated as being at less than full implementation, an improvement in this area was evident from the first to the second fidelity assessment; in particular, there was now a tenant representative on the Programme Advisory Committee and there were informal efforts made at obtaining participant feedback on the programme. Other areas in the *Programme Structure* domain in which the programme was still not at full implementation were the extent it held weekly case reviews for all participants and having a peer specialist as a staff member.

The fidelity team viewed the programme as needing a system that would facilitate their following up on participants' goals in order to improve the frequency of their case reviews. The peer specialist standard was judged to have experienced a small negative change since the last fidelity visit and continued to represent an implementation challenge. The team had identified peers as potential peer specialists but had not as yet provided training to these individuals.



### ***Qualitative evaluation of implementation***

The results of key informant interviews and of focus groups with programme staff are presented next, starting with their perspectives on programme areas of high fidelity, followed with their views of programme areas of low fidelity.

#### **Contributors to programme areas of high fidelity**

Overall, in line with the fidelity assessment findings, key informants and programme staff described the housing and support delivered by the programme as being of high quality. In relation to the programme strengths associated with *Housing Choice and Structure* fidelity standards, key informants underlined success in finding committed and understanding landlords as being a very important contributor. The good working relations between the Housing Coordinator and the ACT team was also indicated as contributing to the strengths of the programme in terms of the positive nature of the housing and support being available to participants.

Key informants and programme staff considered that the programme was developing, over time, a better sense of participants' needs and a greater flexibility in service delivery. In particular, they described programme services as evolving towards being more recovery-focused. They noted that staff were less reactive in their responses and had become more comfortable with shifting the responsibility for problem-solving on to participants. The noticeable stabilization of participants over time was viewed as having contributed to these changes. A key informant stated:

We had people who have achieved incredibly stability. They were housed and received our services. Because they are intensive services, we need to be sure that we have something that is not necessarily offered by other services. Then there are some who have been able to find a path to recovery. The fact that we have three individuals who are on the road to becoming peer-helping officials, it is a result of [their recovery]. (Translated from French)

Programme staff also perceived themselves as having developed a better understanding of their roles over time. They noted that there was better communication within the team. Key informants also explained that there was now stability in the make-up of ACT team. All these factors appeared to be contributing to the programme's strengths, identified in delivering services that are in line with the values and philosophy guiding a Housing First approach, as illustrated by the following quote:

And now that we're settling in a bit and we've done staff changes that we needed to do, the stress level has gone down tremendously and [the staff are] not afraid to ask for training; they're not afraid to try new things.

Overall, the programme was described by key informants and programme staff as having a greater capacity to deliver a wider range of services and support. The local and national training provided to the staff as part of the demonstration project was perceived as contributing to this greater capacity. As well, the addition of staff and professionals with different areas of expertise was perceived as contributing to the programme's ability to deliver effective supports. For example, programme staff noted that one of the ACT team members received specific training in the area of addictions treatment with the goal that he would provide in-house training, consultation and programme development in this area.

A key informant suggested that the addition of a home economist to the ACT team facilitated the housing stability of tenants because she helped them to develop abilities in such practical areas as shopping, cooking and housekeeping. The addition of one-half day of psychiatric consultation since the last fidelity visit was also considered part of this additional capacity even though it was described as being inadequate in relation to programme needs. Key informants and programme staff highlighted the richness of services that are being delivered to programme participants because of the multidisciplinary make-up of the team.

As well, the addition of a dedicated vocational specialist to the ACT team was described by key informants and programme staff as a very positive development and an emerging strength in the programme. In particular, the vocational specialist had successfully created employment opportunities for participants. Related to this point, key informants and programme staff indicated that the programme increased its capacity through the successful creation of partnerships with community organizations that can supplement and extend the types of services delivered by the programme. The positive reputation of the programme in the community helped facilitate these partnerships. This point is emphasized in the following quote:

We also tried to create better partnerships, better collaboration with the treatment services and addiction services, to see if we could improve the service we offered to all our participants... Because it is... amazing, what we saw here with all the support of the community towards our projects.

### **Contributors to programme areas of low fidelity**

Programme staff stated that the lack of engagement by some participants was an ongoing challenge despite significant efforts on their part to establish a working relationship with these individuals. In some cases, the nature of the participant's mental health problems contributed to them having difficulty trusting service providers.

One staff member stated: 'the more paranoid people... don't recognize that they have an illness and then they're very suspicious of the team.' In other cases, disengagement was the result of severe substance abuse. For a small number of participants, they were only interested in receiving housing from the programme, as they perceived themselves as not needing ongoing services or support.

A number of factors were identified by the programme staff as contributing to their only partial implementation of person-centred planning. Specifically, they noted that in the earlier stages of the programme, the focus of service planning with participants was on immediate needs and often crisis-centred. As a result, some participants became over-dependent on the staff and were not comfortable taking the initiative required to set their own longer-term goals.

Another contributing factor was the initial lack of consistency in the goal-planning across disciplines. This problem was compounded by the multiple staff members involved with each participant. These issues were described as being mitigated through the introduction of goal-planning tools and a process wherein each team member was assigned the primary responsibility for goal-planning with a similar number of participants.

A lack of training and experience was cited by programme staff as contributing to the ongoing challenges of integrating motivational interviewing into their work. Key informants and programme staff stated that they had received some training but they had not yet succeeded in applying it effectively in their own counselling:

I've done a bit of training in motivational interviewing... but sometimes I feel like I'm missing the cues, the cues to actually do it and of course the more you do it, the better you get at it and maybe I'm doing more than I think I am, but as for this kind of defined way of doing things I feel I kind of miss it.

Key informants and programme staff viewed the programme as having insufficient psychiatric services relative to its needs. There was an appreciation for having access to one half-day of psychiatric consultation on site and having access to another psychiatrist at the hospital. However, it was noted by both key informants and programme staff that providing consultation exclusively from the hospital was less effective than having an on-site psychiatrist.

For example, one of the service providers explained that, 'when the psychiatrist was here we could know more about the situation, we could have conferences. You know, she could give her feedback, we could involve her more with the team [in] case planning.'

A lack of internal programme capacity was identified by key informants and programme staff as the major factor contributing to the programme having only partially implemented the use of integrated, stage-wise substance abuse treatment. In particular, there was recognition that most of the programme staff had not received training on addictions treatment as part of their initial professional training as mental health service providers and had had limited experience in the area in their work to date. At the same time, there was openness to and interest in receiving addictions treatment training.

Programme staff noted that the success of adopting a harm reduction approach was contingent on being able to develop honest relationships with participants. One key informant perceived variability among team members in terms of their comfort levels with, and integration of harm reduction in their work with participants. Programme staff viewed the designation of the role of an addiction specialist on the team as helping them become more familiar with harm reduction as well as addictions treatment more generally.

A key informant described how the programme had hired several people who were open about having 'lived experiences (of mental health problems)'. However, she noted that the programme was not prepared or structured to support these individuals or define manageable roles for them on the team as peers. As a result, several of them encountered difficulties that resulted in long periods of sick leave.

This situation created problems for the programme because it was not possible to replace them on the team during their leave and the team was required to function short-staffed. A significant factor contributing to the lack of an identifiable peer specialist role on the team was the fact that training for this role was not yet available in the region in which the programme was located.

Lastly, a key informant described the difficulties experienced by participants in relation to their changing social network and social isolation once they leave homelessness. In particular, becoming housed often requires them to leave their friends from their previous life when they were homeless. Programme staff mentioned that some participants started supporting each other after having met during a programme activity. This exchange of support was viewed as helping participants combat their social isolation and loneliness.

For example, a programme staff member stated that, 'we even have clients that will help each other, which we didn't have initially... I'm noticing that people are helping each other out. It's become a little community inside our programme. You know, like people are babysitting each other's dogs.'

## Discussion

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The discussion section is organized according to the five fidelity domains, interpreting the results of the fidelity assessment in the context of the information collected from the qualitative evaluation. In addition, it presents the recommendations made to the programme for improving its fidelity in the programme areas in which it was assessed as being low.

### *Housing Choice and Structure*

The Housing First programme in Moncton demonstrated continued strengths in the *Housing Choice and Structure* domains. The Moncton site scored higher than the four other At Home/Chez Soi sites in this domain at both the early and later fidelity assessments (Nelson *et al.*, 2014; Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). The community context may play a role in this result, as Moncton had a higher vacancy rate compared to other At Home/Chez Soi sites such as Toronto, Winnipeg or Vancouver (Goering *et al.*, 2014) thereby facilitating choice and the availability of housing for its participants.

The improvement in offering housing choice to participants over time in the programme was also possibly the result of the maturing of the programme. Programme staff were perhaps better able to facilitate choice when looking for housing with participants because of greater knowledge about the housing market and the development of good working relationships with more landlords. It is important for Housing First programmes to have a stock of ongoing housing options, as some participants can be expected to experience multiple moves (Aubry *et al.*, 2015). In addition to facilitating choice, the housing subsidy provided to all participants in the demonstration project aided access to private market housing of good quality as well as contributing to the permanence of their housing because of being able to afford the rent (Tsemberis, 2010).

### *Separation of Housing and Services*

The fidelity assessment judged the Moncton programme to be at maximum fidelity on all of the items in the *Separation of Housing and Services* domain. From the outset, the programme had demonstrated high fidelity in this area with no pre-conditions placed on individuals before being housed, no expectations regarding engagement in treatment to stay housed, and a commitment to re-housing when housing is lost. There were a small number of participants in the Moncton Housing First programme who experienced multiple evictions after relatively short stays in their housing. As a result, the programme had developed a 'peer supportive housing programme' comprising of a six unit apartment block. The superintendents were a

couple with 'lived experience' and being in this programme required individuals to follow certain rules particularly as it related to visitors (see Yamin, *et al.*, 2014 for a description of this programme).

It is important to note that staff in the Moncton programme had never worked previously in a Housing First programme. In fact, most of them had worked in traditional roles in office-based outpatient mental health services and psychiatric day programmes and the community mental health system in Moncton and in the province of New Brunswick more generally was under developed (Province of New Brunswick, 2013). As a result, they experienced a steep learning curve in terms of their roles and how to deliver services in the community in line with ACT standards (Teague *et al.*, 1998). The fidelity rating related to providing mobile services to participants at locations of their choice had improved from the first to the second fidelity assessment, suggesting that they had successfully adapted to this aspect of the role of service providers in the context of Housing First.

### ***Service Philosophy***

The second fidelity assessment suggested that the service providers making up the ACT team in Moncton had fully adopted the *Service Philosophy* of Housing First in terms of affording participants maximum choice in terms of the type of treatment (e.g., type, sequence, intensity) in which they accessed. One area of *Service Philosophy* in which service providers were rated as being at less than full implementation involved the adoption of a harm reduction approach, a particularly important part of the Housing First approach (Tsemberis, 2010). The fidelity assessors noted that some service providers on the ACT team appeared partial to encouraging participants to enter detox and rehabilitation programmes. Like in many jurisdictions, it was only recently (i.e., in 2005) that mental health and addiction services became integrated in New Brunswick, and harm reduction practices are still at an early stage in this newly integrated service system (Province of New Brunswick, 2013).

Other areas of *Service Philosophy* in which the programme was at less than full implementation were aspects of service delivery, namely the use of motivational interviewing, assertive engagement and person-centred planning with participants. Deficiencies in fidelity in these areas were related especially to the fact that programme staff on the ACT team had not had previous training focused on them. The use of motivational interviewing was new for most of the staff and the programme had arranged for training in this area but, as indicated by programme staff, more ongoing training seemed needed. The members of the fidelity assessment team recommended the adoption of Wellness Recovery Action Plans (Copeland, 2014) as well as having regular follow-ups and organizing therapeutic recreational activities with participants to encourage their engagement (Aubry *et*

*al.*, 2012). The fidelity assessment team also recommended the identification of a primary service provider from the ACT team for each participant to conduct goal planning and review on an ongoing basis.

### ***Service Array***

Although there was notable improvement from the first to the second fidelity assessment in the *Service Array* domain, it still remained at less than full fidelity. In fact, the items from this domain had the lowest average overall compared to the other fidelity domains. This pattern of improvement along with continued lower fidelity for the *Service Array* domain than for other domains was also evident in the programmes at other At Home/Chez Soi sites (Macnaughton *et al.*, 2015). This is not surprising given the relatively early stage of development of the programmes, even at the point of the second fidelity assessment. In particular, programmes were still in the process of developing capacity in a context where delivering a Housing First programme entailed new roles for service providers.

The ACT team in Moncton was led by a primary care physician whose practice focused on the participant population. Psychiatric consultation services were provided to participants at the programme site (i.e., one-half day) and at the hospital on a per need basis. The fidelity assessment highlighted the importance of having these services and recommended that efforts be made to increase them, allowing for some home visits by the consulting psychiatrists (Aubry *et al.*, 2012). As previously mentioned, the programme was continuing to increase its capacity in substance abuse treatment by adding an addiction specialist to the team and providing training to other ACT team members in this area. The goal was for the ACT team to be able to provide 'integrated substance abuse treatment strategies' in their work with participants, an evidence-based approach that combines mental health and substance abuse services in one setting (SAMSHA, 2010a).

The second fidelity assessment also noted improvement in the programme's provision of vocational /educational support to participants through having a vocational specialist as a member of the ACT team. This support had included the development of a number of 'in-house' employment opportunities (e.g., moving and house-cleaning services) for programme participants. As well, key informants indicated that the vocational specialist was engaging in outreach to organizations and companies in the community with the intent of creating work opportunities in the competitive work force. In this vein, it was recommended that the vocational specialist consider implementing – 'individual placement and support or supported employment, with the goal of assisting participants to work in the regular job market' – (SAMSHA, 2010b).

### ***Programme Structure***

Specific programme areas related to the *Programme Structure* domain that continued to fall short of full fidelity in the second fidelity assessment were the quality of the daily meeting, the addition of a peer specialist on staff and participant input to programme operations. In line with the aforementioned need to improve person-centred planning with participants, it was noted in the fidelity assessment that there was a need for the team to regularly review participants' recovery goals and document the outcome of these reviews in the participants' charts.

An important aspect of programme structure in Housing First programmes is the integration of the equivalent of a full-time peer specialist as a member of the ACT team, who delivers community support to participants (Tsemberis, 2010). Although individuals had been identified as meeting the criteria for becoming a peer specialist in the Moncton programme at the time of the assessment, there was no formal training available for preparing these individuals to assume this role. Subsequent to the assessment, arrangements were made for these individuals to receive training and the process of defining the role was underway so peer specialists could join the ACT team (Aubry *et al.*, 2012).

Finally, the fidelity assessment team recommended that an advisory board of participants and programme staff be developed, which would meet on a monthly or quarterly basis to provide input into the development and management of the programme.



## Conclusion

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This article provides a detailed account of the results of a second fidelity assessment and associated evaluation of implementation of a new Housing First programme in a small Canadian city with no previous Housing First experience. The results provide insights for communities in similar positions with regard to challenges faced with developing new Housing First programmes as well as suggestions for addressing these challenges in order to improve programme fidelity.

In addition, the article demonstrates the use of mixed methods to conduct a formative evaluation of a Housing First programme. An external team of experts conducted the fidelity assessment. The assessment was supplemented with qualitative data collected from key informants and programme staff. Although the cost of conducting this kind of programme evaluation is relatively modest, it is likely that some Housing First programmes will not have the resources to afford a fidelity assessment by an external team. A self-assessment fidelity measure for Housing First programmes was recently created (Gilmer *et al.*, 2014). For Housing First programmes with limited resources, carrying out a self-assessment of fidelity combined with a qualitative evaluation similar to the one in the current study is an alternative worthy of consideration.

## Acknowledgements

We thank Jayne Barker (2008-11), Ph.D. and Cameron Keller (2011-14), Mental Health Commission of Canada At Home/Chez Soi National Project Leads, Paula Goering, Ph.D., National Research Lead, the National Research Team, the five site research teams, the Site Coordinators, and the numerous service and housing providers, as well as persons with lived experience, who have contributed to this project and the research. This research has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada provided to the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Mental Health Commission of Canada oversaw the design and conduct of the study and has provided training and technical support to the service teams and research staff throughout the project. The views expressed herein solely represent the authors.

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# How Many Homeless People Live in Spain? Incomplete Sources and Impossible Predictions

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› **Abstract\_** *In Spain, it is impossible to determine the extent of residential exclusion. Despite this, predictions are made using as a basis the few sources that currently exist, which presents a dangerously biased view of the prevalence and evolution of homelessness. In December 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness published the report 'Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States', in which it warned about the current obstacles to determining the extent of homelessness in the fifteen countries where the organizations of the Federation are based. The report attempts to compare across nations, and it places Spain in a privileged position in terms of the prevalence of homelessness and the rise of residential exclusion in the latter years of the recession. This optimistic data contrasts with the macro indicators of poverty and extreme poverty, which present Spain as one of the countries where the financial crisis has had the most impact on the population. This article analyses the data sources on homelessness in Spain in order to outline the causes of the downward bias of predictions. The example of Barcelona (the city that has the most complete information) is used to identify the methodological and structural causes affecting the quality of data at state level.*

› **Keywords\_** *extent of homelessness Spain, methodological limitations, ethos definition of homelessness*

## Introduction

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Data on the extent of homelessness in Spain are few and fragmented. The fact that local governments are accountable for the social care of homeless people, and that there is no state-level social action plan are the reasons that the systematization of information depends in large part on the political will of the local administration and their priorities. Here, the current limitations to quantifying homelessness in Spain will be assessed and predictions will be made using current sources on the reach and evolution of homelessness during the recent period of austerity.

The European Commission (2013) estimates that 410,000 people sleep rough on a random night throughout the EU. It is also claimed that more than four million people are exposed to a situation of homelessness each year. As a result of the scarce statistical information currently available about homelessness prevalence in the different EU countries, these predictions must be considered with due care. In December 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness published the report *'Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States'* (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014), in which they pointed out the ongoing obstacles to determining the extent of homelessness in member states.

According to the sources consulted by the European Observatory, the prediction of homelessness prevalence in the countries demonstrates significant disparities. In the Czech Republic in 2012, a homeless incidence of 0.3 percent of the population was estimated. In Denmark in 2013, a national count set a 0.1 percent prevalence. In Finland also in 2013, prevalence was 0.15 percent and in France it was 0.24 percent in 2012. In Germany, the prevalence estimated in 2012 was 0.35 percent. In this context, the low prevalence of homelessness registered by Spanish statistics can seem surprising. From the data collected by the Survey of Homeless People conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in 2012, 22,939 homeless people in Spain were counted, which corresponds to 0.05 percent of the population. The different methodologies used to determine these estimations and the diverse definitions of homelessness currently in use make comparison between countries problematic. Whereas in some cases all the people who have experienced a homeless situation during a year are being considered, in other cases all the homeless people at a specific time are being counted. And whereas some countries are able to include those people sleeping rough in the count, other countries include them only partially or they simply count the occupied places in residential centres.



With any doubt, the low homelessness prevalence in Spain is due to methodological factors and not the social reality. Existing evidence would actually predict a strong rise in residential exclusion. The strong impact of the recession on the living conditions of the population – especially those in the lower-income social class – and the stream of evictions due to mortgage foreclosures in the last few years would suggest that Spain is at the forefront when it comes to increased homelessness. The poverty gap (percentage difference between the poverty risk threshold and the average income of homes under this threshold) rose from 26.4 percent to 31.4 percent between 2006 and 2012, whereas in the Eurozone, the rise in the same period was from 22.1 percent to 23.4 percent.

The causes of housing access problems started long before the real estate bubble burst. In 2006, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, visited Spain and compiled a report in which he concluded that the right to housing had been systematically violated in the state with the collaboration and through the tolerance of the public administration (Colau and Alemany, 2012). The report noted that the state housing sector had been extremely commercialized.

Extremely easy access to mortgage credit and public policies like the application of the ‘right of urban renting’, which promoted purchases in the housing market and converted renting into an uncertain and financially unattractive option created access problems. Those on lower incomes couldn’t deal with the demands of a mortgage despite the concessions offered by banks. Among these were many young people who were suffering a deterioration in labour conditions and adults in unstable work situations or situations of recurring unemployment. In this second group, difficulties in stabilizing their housing situation were added to other factors of social exclusion, which increased the risk of becoming homeless. While in 1997, households with a mortgage were devoting 37.6 percent of their income to mortgage repayments, in 2007 the proportion had risen to 51.2 percent (Colau and Alemany, 2012). And there is a close relationship between access to housing and the risk of social exclusion. Research by Sarasa and Sales (2009a; b) on pathways and factors of social exclusion in the city of Barcelona revealed that people who were suffering severe forms of social exclusion had faced repeated obstacles to accessing dignified housing throughout their life due to their low financial capacity and lack of family support or patrimony.

The unexpectedly low prevalence of homelessness in Spain and modest growth during the Great Recession makes a review of the sources and methodologies of quantifying housing exclusion essential. Below, the current sources are presented in order to establish the limitations of transnational comparisons of the prevalence of homelessness and detect possible methods of improvement.

## National-level Sources

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The only body that produces quantitative data on homelessness at state level is the National Institute of Statistics (INE) through two surveys: the *Survey of Homeless People* and the *Survey on Support Centres for Homeless People*. Data collected in both surveys relate only to people who have presented at 'specialized' centres for homeless people.

### *INE Survey of Homeless People*

This survey collects data from care facilities in towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants. The collection lasts six weeks (from 13 February to 25 March), when, according to the organizations, there is the highest demand for housing and food services. Two editions of the survey have been carried out – the first in 2005 and the second in 2012. As the survey indicates, a person is considered homeless when he/she is older than 18 and, in the week before the survey, has used some care facility or accommodation service and/or food service, and has slept at least once in any of the following support services in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants: a hostel, shelter or residence; a women's refuge for victims of sexual violence; a centre for refugee or asylum seekers; a flat provided by a public body, NGO or other organization; an occupied flat; a hostel or hotel paid for a public body; a public space (train, underground or bus station, parking area, public garden, parking lot...); or a non-conventional dwelling (the hall of a property, a cave, a car...).

Contact with the people surveyed was made through the facilities and services provided by specialized organisations. The frame of observation is opened through soup kitchens, hygiene services and night accommodation services, gaining access in this way to people who sleep rough in public spaces or in non-conventional dwellings. However, an important weakness of this survey methodology is that it does not provide information on roofless people who don't have any contact with the services provided by public bodies or NGOs. Consequently, the survey underestimates those who do not engage with services.

Comparing the 2005 and 2012 surveys, we can observe a decrease in the number of people who sleep rough in public spaces (from 4,924 to 3,419) and in non-conventional dwellings (from 3,294 to 2,943). This would suggest that the Spanish housing crisis hasn't had any impact on the most severe situations of homelessness. However, it is necessary to remember that the survey is not capable of establishing a total number of homeless people and that it approximates the number of homeless people who, in a certain moment, go to some service to meet different housing needs.

With regard to the rest of the housing modalities covered by the survey, there is a moderate increase in the numbers of people housed in shelters or residences, flats provided by NGOs or other organizations, or in hostels or hotels sponsored by an NGO or other organization: from 10,632 people registered in these three types of services in 2005 to 14,681 in 2012. This increase is systematic and highlights the pressure on organizations and local social services in trying to respond to the increasing demand where there are clear budget limitations and political restrictions on the number of places that can be offered. In other words, it is the growth capacity of night-accommodation places that is being measured and not the increasing need.

Finally, there are other types of night accommodation where the figures reflect random changes in access to information rather than any social phenomenon. The lower number of people staying overnight in refuges for female victims of sexual violence and those staying in care centres cannot be explained by any structural change.

**Table 1. People Without Housing According to Overnight Services**

	2005	2012
Shelter or residence	8,454	9,915
Women's refuges	666	103
Care centres	618	44
Flat provided by an NGO or other organization	1,862	3,537
Occupied flat	1,765	1,738
Hostel/hotel paid for by an organization	316	1,239
Public area	4,924	3,419
Non-conventional dwellings	3,294	2,943
Total	21,900	22,938

Sources: INE Survey of Homeless People, 2005; 2012

### ***INE Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons***

The *Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons* (INE, 2003; 2006; 2008; 2010; 2012) collects data on specialized homelessness centres throughout the country. The main objective of the research is to study the different aspects of the support centres for homeless people, ranging from the general – information on services provided, clients and their profiles – to their economic and functional aspects, including financial contributors, human and financial resources, normal periods of activity, capacity and occupancy rates. Looking at the evolution of places offered by organizations and administrations as supplied by the survey confirms that a special effort has been made in the last few years to broaden the capacity of the housing network.

**Table 2. Evolution of the Capacity of the Housing Network for Homeless People in Spain**

	Capacity	Occupied places
2006	13,033	10,829
2008	13,650	11,844
2010	15,778	13,701
2012	16,346	14,050

Source: INE Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons (2006; 2008; 2010; 2012).

**Counts and Local Research**

*Madrid*

The last count of roofless people made in the city of Madrid was on 13 December 2012. It was the sixth count and nearly 1,000 citizens volunteered to walk through the city streets to count and survey the people who were sleeping rough in public areas. The volunteers encountered 701 roofless people, of whom 83 were not sleeping rough but staying overnight in the emergency rooms of hospitals, in train stations or at the airport.

The counts done in Madrid focused on people who don't use accommodation services. In the last edition (2012), 43 percent of the people found were awake and 69 percent of them accepted to be interviewed. From this sample, it needs to be pointed out that a high rate didn't have any connection at all with support services for homeless people. The most common type of service used was the soup kitchen and only 26.8 percent of people interviewed stating that they had used them (Muñoz *et al.*, 2012). The low impact of support services among people who sleep rough highlights the poor capacity of the methodology used in the INE's Survey of Homeless People to quantify the true extent of homelessness in Spain.

**Table 3. Roofless People Located By Counts In the City of Madrid: 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012.**

	People
December 2006	621
February 2008	651
February 2009	553
December 2010	596
December 2012	701

Source: Muñoz *et al.*, (2012)

## Zaragoza

In Zaragoza, two counts have been done: the first in 2010 and the second in 2012. In both, the same methodology as in Madrid was used, deploying volunteers in a single night. In the 2010 count, 158 people sleeping rough in public areas were identified (equivalent to 0.023 percent of the population of the city of Zaragoza). In the 2012 count, 186 people were counted (0.027 percent of the population), equalling a 17.7 percent rise in two years.

## The Basque Country

In June 2013, the Documentation and Research Centre SIIS and the Eguía-Careaga Foundation published the *Study of the Situation of People with Severe Housing Exclusion* in the three capitals of the Basque country, Donostia (San Sebastián), Vitoria and Bilbao. The study aimed to quantify the number of people in a situation of severe housing exclusion, using as a reference the night of the 17 to 18 October 2012 and considering those people who slept on the streets of these three cities on that night as well as people who were housed in the different centres and specialized services for the support of homeless people. This fieldwork had two precedents in the Basque Country: the count done in Bilbao in 2010 and the one done in Donostia in 2011.

**Table 4. People in Situations of Severe Social Exclusion Counted in Vitoria, Bilbao and Donostia on the Night of 17 to 18 October 2012.**

	Vitoria	Bilbao	Donostia
People located on the street	29	148	66
People housed in accommodation services	279	738	444
Total people on the street and using services	308	886	510
Rough sleepers per 1000 inhabitants	0.12	0.42	0.31
People housed in accommodation services per 1000 inhabitants	0.86	0.64	0.67
Total rate of homelessness per 1000 inhabitants	0.95	0.72	0.78

Source: SIIS-Centro de Documentación y Estudios (2013)

The definition of severe housing exclusion used in the Basque report includes sleeping rough in a public space and staying overnight in a shelter for homeless people, be it a shelter or emergency shelter, a mid-term accommodation centre or a social inclusion flat.

## Quantifying the Variation in Changing Surroundings: The Experience of Barcelona

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Barcelona is the Spanish city that has the most detailed data on the extent of homelessness. The Network of Attention to Homeless People (XAPSLL: a network where specialized organizations and local government combine resources and work together) published three reports in 2008, 2011 and 2013, and it monitors annually all unpublished data that is registered in internal reports. The Network organizations count and collect basic socio-demographic data from people who stay overnight in accommodation centres on the night of 11 to 12 March every year. On two occasions, in 2008 and 2011, the data on people who sleep rough was collected by counts in which more than 700 volunteers walked through the city on the same night. Between 2008 and 2014, the Network worked with estimations from the Street Educators team of the Social Insertion Service of Barcelona City Council, which reports monthly on the number of new people detected in all of the city's districts.

The XAPSLL systematizes the information according to the ETHOS categories. Of the 13 ETHOS categories, the network is able to collect fairly complete information for the categories 2, 3, 7 and 8. The information gathered and handled by the City Council's Social Insertion Service provides knowledge on categories 1 and 8 – people who live in a public space or rough and people who live in settlements or shacks. It also gets partial information on category 4 – living in women's refuges – due to the partial specialization of one of the network's entities, but that is only an incidental piece of data in the wider reality of this type of support service in the city, as many such entities do not belong to XAPSLL.

Despite the fact that XAPSLL is not able to monitor all the ETHOS categories, the understanding that the different realities of housing exclusion are interconnected has meant that, since 2011, these categories are considered a reference point in the production of knowledge about homelessness and social exclusion in Barcelona. In the period between 2011 and 2014, a stability in the total numbers of homeless people counted in all the categories is observed, and there is even a decrease from 3,126 people in 2012 to 2,749 in 2014. This decrease is due to a small reduction in the numbers of people detected on the street and a reduction in the numbers of people living in settlements of non-conventional housing. The remaining categories, which are linked to the offer of places provided by the Network, continued to grow because of the collective effort of the organizations and the administration to tailor those offers to the strong demand for housing services that they meet on a daily basis.

**Table 5. Number of Homeless People in the City of Barcelona by ETHOS Classification**

	Operational category	Number of people, 8 November 2011	Number of people, 11 March 2012	Number of people, 11 March 2013	Number of people, 11 March 2014
Roofless	1. People sleeping rough in a public place	726	731	870	715
	2. People in overnight shelter and/or forced to spend the day in the public area	197	230	259	304
Houseless-ness	3. People who live in hostels or accommodation for the homeless. Temporary housing.	320	281	333	407
	4. People who live in women's refuges for victims of sexist violence	<i>n/a</i>	20	4	15
	5. People who live in temporary accommodation for immigrants and asylum seekers	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	6. People who live in a care centre or residential centre with the perspective of being discharged shortly without an available sheltering facility	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	7. People who live in supported accommodation housing for homeless people	342	332	356	548
Insecure housing	8. People who live in legally insecure housing	399	698	499	337
	9. People who live under threat of eviction	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	10. People who live under the threat of violence from the family or the partner	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Inadequate housing	11. People who live in 'non conventional' and temporary housing	695	834	595	423
	12. People who live in an unfit housing according to Law	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	13. People who live in overcrowded housing	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,679</b>	<b>3,126</b>	<b>2,916</b>	<b>2,749</b>

Source: Sales (2013) and Non published data provided by XAPSL<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Network of Attention to Homeless People in Barcelona (XAPSL) collects annual statistics and publishes biannual reports. XAPSL provided figures of 2014 for this article.

In general terms, we could conclude that the effort of the organizations in broadening their services is reducing the number of people on the street, despite the recession in Barcelona. To do so, however, would be to omit the qualitative information provided by the same organizations and the local government. In the period 2011 to 2014, there were strong fluctuations in the numbers of those living in settlements as a result of evictions and police operations in industrial units and other buildings. There is no way of knowing where the people who have disappeared from the count went, though a fairly plausible hypothesis would be that there has been a rise in the number of hidden and smaller settlements.

With regard to the people who use the accommodation services, there has been a diversification in the types of support being offered, which could distort the data series. New services aimed at preventing homelessness in cases where people have been seriously affected by the recession have emerged. These services have also been offered to people who are experienced in living on the street. The service that modifies the reading of the data series most significantly is one concerning one-family housing provided by Cáritas Barcelona. Between 2013 and 2014, this organization launched 342 one-family accommodation units; in March 2014, these units hosted, with social support, 512 families (more than 1,000 people). Although it is not considered a specialized service in providing shelter to homeless people, with any doubt these services contributed to the decrease in categories 7 and 8, since they are providing housing to an unspecified number of people who may also be on the list of possible tenants of inclusion flats or hostels/hotels funded through the organisation. Both Cáritas and other big social organizations in Barcelona admit they have diversified assistance modalities without having a clear idea of the boundary between the fight against housing exclusion and the classical approach to homelessness.

Although before 2011 the ETHOS categories wasn't used as a reference point, we can reconstruct the data series for 2008, when the first count of people on the street was done. In March of that year, the number of people counted sleeping rough and in accommodation services for homeless people on one single night was 2,017. By March 2014, the total numbers of people registered as being on the street, in settlements and in network accommodation facilities had risen to 2,749. The 36 percent rise in the homeless population (defined as the number of people sleeping rough, housed in the network services and living in settlements) is due to a 27 percent increase in the numbers of people sleeping on the street, a 60 percent rise in the number of people living in settlements and a 35 percent increase in the number of people housed in accommodation services.



**Table 6. Number of Homeless People in the City of Barcelona 2008, 2011, 2013, 2014**

	12 March 2008	12 March 2011	12 March 2013	12 March 2014
People sleeping on the street	562	726	870	715
Settlements	265	695	595	423
People sleeping in the network's accommodation facilities	1190	1258	1468	1611
Total	<b>2,017</b>	<b>2,679</b>	<b>2,933</b>	<b>2,749</b>

Source: Sales (2013); Non published data provided by XAPSL

If we look at the two main data sources on the evolution of roofless people sleeping in a public area, there is an obvious rise between 2008 and 2011. The number of different people registered by the Social Insertion Service of the City Council rose progressively from 2011 until coming to a halt, and the counts made in a single night in March 2008 and November 2011 present a 32 percent rise.

**Table 7. Evolution of People Detected Sleeping in the Public Space by the City Council's Social Insertion Service Street Team In Two Counts.**

	People detected by SIS	People counted on the one-night counts	Deviation
March 2008	562	634	<b>12,81 percent</b>
March 2009	669		
March 2010	619		
March 2011	711		
November 2011	726	838	<b>15,43 percent</b>
March 2012	731		
March 2013	870		
March 2014	715		

*Note: Data of settlements in temporary or non-conventional dwellings not included*

Sources: Sales (2013); Non published data provided by XAPSL

Between 2008 and 2014 a noticeable increase was thus registered in Barcelona in the most severe type of housing exclusion, which contrasts with the stability conveyed, according to the State, by the INE surveys results. The systematization of data in Barcelona enables us to identify tendencies that, due to a lack of complete information, cannot be fully quantified, but they hint at a possible bias in the quantification of homelessness in Spain.

Firstly, the rise that was found in Barcelona in the numbers of people sleeping on the street cannot be compared with the rest of Spain because of the deficiencies in the only source available. The *Survey of Homeless People* only accounts for people who use hygiene, food or accommodation services and who confirm they have slept on the street in the week before the survey. A true figure for numbers of people who are sleeping on the street doesn't exist and data reading must be done in relation to the capacity of the assistance network to provide services and not the reality of the street.

Secondly, data from Barcelona indicates that there are new necessities that are being attended to by services traditionally aimed at homeless people. The report published by XAPSLI that contained data from 2011 (Sales, 2012) warned about the changing profiles of homeless people, seen in almost all European countries, as there was a sharp increase in the numbers of families using night accommodation services. Between March and November 2011, the number of people belonging to families that used these services rose from 114 to 178. These figures didn't include people housed in pensions or subletting and thus couldn't quantify the actual size of the problem; they merely raised a concern regarding the trend. The 2012 and 2013 data collection for services does contain the number of people housed in pensions and subletting with their nuclear family. This change in data collection, along with the response of entities and social services, which prioritize housing in inclusion flats or specialized facilities – such as the Temporary Family Shelter in Navas – makes it difficult to construct a readily comparable statistical series. However, the differences between 2012 and 2013 do outline a continued rise in the number of families in need of housing. The 343 people that used services with their family in 2012 rose to 531 in 2013.

Thirdly, in the context of a social emergency, assistance dynamics have diversified. In Barcelona, several entities have launched new forms of support that are not considered homeless services, but they are providing services to families and individuals who would otherwise swell the numbers of people sleeping on the street. At the same time, in the process of reviewing the inclusion pathways of people who have lived a certain time on the street, the classification of services has become blurred, which leads us to question of just what is a homeless facility and whether it is useful to distinguish it from other types of housing available for people without a home. In Barcelona, it is very significant that in just one year Caritas made available 512 supported one-family accommodation units, which house people who have suffered homelessness and others who haven't – especially families with minors. The specialized nature of the INE's Survey of Homeless People and its definition of support services limit the tool's capacity to gauge this type of reaction by the organizations.

Fourthly, the restrictive definition of homelessness used by the INE surveys ignores the reality of the settlements of shacks or substandard housing, which have grown intensively in recent years in cities like Barcelona. These settlements are linked to marginal economical activities, such as the scrap metal collection, and are full of people and families who worked in other types of jobs before 2008. The evolution of this type of housing exclusion hasn't been registered at state-level.

When comparing the prevalence of rough sleeping throughout Spain according to the *Survey of Homeless People*, and the prevalence of rough sleeping in the cities where a count has been done recently or where reliable information is available, a notable divergence is confirmed. Prevalence in cities that have their own data ranges from 0.012 percent in Vitoria to 0.044 percent in Barcelona. The INE survey, however, suggests a figure of 0.007 percent. This lower percentage is a result of not counting roofless people who don't use any support services and the fact that the survey is only carried out in towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants. The lack of data collection tools at a national level makes it impossible to know the figures and evolution of rooflessness in Spain and it would be strongly recommended not to make predictions based on the *Survey of Homeless People*, due to its enormous bias.

**Table 8. Prevalence of Rooflessness According to Local Studies and State-level Research**

	People sleeping on the street overnight	percent of population sleeping on the street overnight
Barcelona (2013)	715	0.044
Madrid (2012)	701	0.022
Bilbao (2012)	148	0.042
Donostia (2012)	66	0.035
Vitoria (2012)	29	0.012
Zaragoza (2012)	186	0.027
Spain (2012)	3419	0.007

If we look at growth in the percentages of the homeless population, big divergences are also confirmed. Whereas the Survey of Homeless People only registers a 4.7 percent growth between 2005 and 2012, in the city of Barcelona there is a 30.1 percent growth in the period 2008 to 2012, and in Madrid and Zaragoza in just two years (2010-2012), the number of people sleeping on the street rises nearly 18 percent. Part of this difference can be caused by the metropolitan characteristics of those cities, but it is clear that methodology has a deep impact. The proportion of rough sleepers who are surveyed is predictably low and it will be lower the more people remain outside the support service system. The growth registered in the INE surveys is due to the support network's capacity to spread and adapt to the new circumstances.

**Table 9. Percentage Growth of the ‘Roofless’ Population According to National and Local Research: Spain, Barcelona, Madrid and Zaragoza**

Spain 2005-2012	4.7
Barcelona 2008- 2012	30.1
Madrid 2010- 2012	17.6
Zaragoza 2010- 2012	17.7

### Conclusions

If we quantify the people who use homeless care facilities in different periods of time, any changes in the figures will be indicative of the support network’s capacity to adapt to a new context rather than the evolution of homelessness itself. The tiny rise in homelessness detected by the INE’s *Survey of Homeless People* reflects an increase in the number of places available in support services, but it does not show any changes in the number of people who sleep on the street and don’t get any kind of support, or the number of people in new housing types that have emerged in response to the housing emergency that has been ongoing since 2008.

In the transnational comparison, the low prevalence of rough sleepers or the rooflessness situation in Spain is surprising. This paper argues that the methodology deployed in the INE’s *Survey of Homeless People* limits and underestimates the phenomenon. Only those people sleeping on the street who use the care intervention network support services are surveyed and counted. Nevertheless, the number of people who sleep on the street and use hygiene or food services provided by organizations within the intervention care network is relatively low.

At the same time, the slight growth registered in the numbers of people using accommodation services can also not be considered an indicator of the evolution in homelessness in Spain. Data can be used to analyse trends as to the characteristics of the people affected but not to quantify the phenomenon. As in other European countries, for methodological reasons, the focus is placed on the offer of services, not on the demand. Despite the fact that it’s understandable to think that the places offered must be a response to the growing demand, there are many factors that influence this. Homeless policies are framed at the local level and social organizations play an important role in their development. The 2007 recession has greatly affected Spanish public bodies in general and especially the local institutions. That’s why considering the evolution of the number of places offered as an approximation of how demand has evolved is even more biased in times of crisis.

To complement and validate the trends detected in the data analysis of the support services, it is crucial to get more information about what is happening on the street. There is no data about non-supported demand, apart from the isolated pieces of local research detailed above. A state- or regional-level strategy to fight against severe housing exclusion should incorporate tools to identify the magnitude of homelessness, at least in the cities. The shortage of policies and strategies beyond the local level also means that there has been no development of integrated systems with comparable information. It would also be important to try to estimate the number of households that get support from private entities or local social services to pay for housing (or rooms) and identify the new types of housing support while quantifying their impact.

Far from the ultimate objective – which should be to predict the number of people in each of the ETHOS categories – it is essential to improve the tools for finding out what happens on the street and how the forms of support for homeless people and people who suffer housing exclusion are changing, in order that trends may be identified and policies coordinated beyond the local level.

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Translation from Spanish: Victoria Martín





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# Can We Compare Homelessness Across the Atlantic? A Comparative Study of Methods for Measuring Homelessness in North America and Europe<sup>1</sup>

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› **Abstract\_** *Comprehensive responses to homelessness, often originating at the local level, are becoming more common throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. These ambitious programmes, many of which aim to end homelessness, have a firm commitment to measuring their success and to updating their actions in accordance with the trends and data gathered from homeless counts. As counts become more common, it is inevitable that they will be used not only to track changes within a particular city, but to compare the state of homelessness in different cities. This article asks the question: can we compare homelessness across the Atlantic? It compares the definitions of homelessness and the methodologies used to measure it in New York, Montréal, Brussels and Denmark, and argues that it is possible to compare the state of homelessness within North America and within Europe. Cross-Atlantic comparisons are more difficult but not impossible. Great attention must be paid to methodological and definitional differences that affect who is counted as homeless and who is not.*

› **Keywords\_** *Point-in-Time Count; methodology; comparisons; definition; typology*

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. Eric Latimer for comments on an early version of this paper.

## Introduction

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In March 2015, Montréal conducted its first ever Point-in-Time (PiT) Count of the homeless population. Using established methods tested in Canadian, American and some European cities, Montréal designed a homeless count comparable to those of other cities, but that was also tailored to the unique realities of the city. When results were released in July 2015, journalists and commentators began asking how the state of homelessness in Montréal compares with homelessness in other cities (Woodvine, 2015). Is such a comparison valid? If so, under what conditions can comparisons be made?

This article asks whether it is possible to compare the state of homelessness across the Atlantic Ocean. To answer this question, I compare homeless count methodologies and definitions of homelessness used in New York City, Montréal, Brussels and Denmark. I demonstrate that there has been a strong convergence of count methods in North America, but that the definitions used in Canada and the United States remain significantly different. The contrary is the case in Europe, where there is some evidence of convergence in the definition of homelessness, but considerable differences in terms of the methodologies used to measure homelessness. Differences in the definition of homelessness are relatively easy to reconcile, thanks to typology tools developed in Canada and Europe; methodological differences are, however, much more difficult to reconcile.

I conclude that it is possible to compare the state of homelessness in cities within North America and to some extent in cities within Europe; cross-Atlantic comparisons remain difficult but are in some cases possible. As this article explains, and as has been persuasively argued elsewhere (FEANTSA, 2011a; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014), different methodologies and definitions of homelessness have important consequences on the final results of the effort to measure homelessness, primarily by influencing who is counted as homeless and who is not. Cross-national and cross-continental comparisons must take these factors into consideration when comparing the state of homelessness. In the interest of these comparisons, from which important lessons about policy and interventions can be learned, count organizers must be fully transparent about their methods and very detailed in their presentation of the final numbers.

This article begins with an introduction to homeless counts; specifically, as PiT Counts are becoming increasingly common in North America, the first section explains this particular methodology as well as its weaknesses. I then compare different definitions and typologies of homelessness in Canada, the United

States and Europe. Four cases – New York, Montréal, Brussels and Denmark<sup>2</sup> – are then presented to illustrate how methodological and definitional differences affect the overall comparability of the counts. Details regarding the count methodologies were gathered through a review of primary and secondary documents, as well as extensive participant observation in the development and implementation of Montréal's PiT Count and limited participant observation in New York City's 2015 PiT Count. The final section analyses the differences between methodologies and definitions, makes recommendations for how to improve comparability, and concludes.

## The Point-in-Time Methodology

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There are many ways of enumerating the homeless population; the Point-in-Time (PiT) methodology is becoming the favoured method in North America. Given its prevalence, this first section is a broad overview of the PiT methodology. The individual cases presented below demonstrate what a PiT Count looks like in practice in New York and Montréal, and further considers other methodologies, including the somewhat comparable approach in Brussels and the much different method used in Denmark.

Canada and the United States have officially adopted the PiT methodology at the national level, aligning their methodologies and greatly increasing comparability within and between the two countries. A PiT Count is an enumeration of street and sometimes sheltered homelessness at a particular point in time. Often referred to as a snapshot of homelessness, the PiT methodology is not perfect, but allows for an accurate estimation of mostly chronic homelessness and permits the public and policy-makers to monitor trends among this population over time. PiT Counts usually take place over a period of 4-6 hours on a single day and involve volunteers canvassing streets and shelters to enumerate the homeless population. Many PiT Counts also include a tally of the number of people staying in emergency shelters and other homeless services on the night of the count.

Some cities use a PiT Count as an opportunity to administer a survey and gather data about the homeless population, whereas others simply count the number of people sleeping outside, such as Los Angeles (The Times Editorial Board, 2015). All Canadian cities that do PiT Counts use some form of survey instrument. When used, surveys tend to be brief (around 15 questions), and often contain questions

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<sup>2</sup> Denmark cannot, of course, be compared to the other cases, if only because the other three are cities. The approach described below is used in cities across Denmark, and results can be broken down into municipalities. I therefore speak both of Copenhagen and Denmark, as the local approach is the same as the national approach.

regarding housing history, demographic information and income. The survey is administered directly to homeless individuals (with their consent) either by volunteer enumerators or, in some cases where homeless resources are included, by staff. In general, resource staff will administer the survey to particularly sensitive populations, such those staying in shelters for people fleeing violence.

Beginning in 2003, the American Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required that local communities applying for Continuum of Care (CoC) homelessness funding provide an estimation of the number of homeless people living in their community. The PiT Count methodology was mentioned in the original 2004 HUD 'Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People' as a possible way of doing this, but it was not the required methodology at the time (Abt Associates Inc., 2004). In 2014, HUD introduced a new Guide to replace the 2004 document entitled the 'Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide'. As the title suggests, as of 2014 communities across the United States are required to use the PiT Count methodology. The preamble to the Guide notes, "HUD is requiring that all CoCs review this entire guide to ensure that their current PIT count practices meet all of HUD's PIT count minimum standards" (Abt Associates Inc., 2014, p.2). CoCs must conduct their counts at least every two years during the last week in January.

The Canadian federal government recently announced its commitment to developing and implementing a common PiT Count methodology to measure homelessness across Canada: "The Government of Canada is supporting the first homeless count coordinated among communities across Canada in 2016. A common PiT Count approach will be developed in consultation with communities that have experience using this method" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). The counts will not be mandatory, but the Government promises to provide *additional* funding to cities that wish to conduct a PiT Count.

The Homeless Hub (the Hub), Canada's largest homelessness research network, will be providing support to communities that are conducting a PiT Count for the first time. The Hub has proposed a detailed methodology guide to the federal government, which includes a common definition of homelessness (see below), mandatory questions to be included in a questionnaire and instructions on the methodology itself (Gaetz, 2015). This proposed methodology was piloted in seven cities in Alberta in the West of Canada in October 2015. The harmonization of methodologies in these seven cities allowed for a regional comparison of homelessness for the first time. Challenges still remain, however, regarding the definition of homelessness used within this province; Edmonton, the second largest city in Alberta, used a broader definition of homelessness than other cities (Turner, 2015b).

However, the final results of each count are presented in a way that allows for a comparison of each different 'category' of homelessness, such as unsheltered homelessness (see Table 1 below).

An important element of a PiT Count's design is the question of which areas of the city are canvassed on the night of the count. The proposed national methodology in Canada and the HUD Guide identify three main strategies for determining which parts of a city to canvass. In the first method – 'known locations' – community partners such as outreach workers or the police identify parts of the city where they know homeless people are usually found. Targeted zones are created based on this information. The second method is full coverage; this usually applies to the downtown core where there tends to be a high concentration of homelessness, but may apply to other parts of a city as well. Full coverage results in an entire neighbourhood or core being cut into similarly sized zones that are all canvassed by volunteers. Some small cities have enough volunteers to cover the entire city, such as Red Deer, Alberta (Turner, 2015a), but this is rare.

The final method for identifying the zones covered in a PiT Count is random sampling. This requires a detailed and labour-intensive division of the entire city into equally sized zones. Using information from community partners, every single zone in the city is classified as either 'high' or 'low' density in terms of its concentration of homelessness. All high-density zones are included in the count. Further, a sufficient number of the low-density zones are randomly selected and surveyed as well. Cities have the option of extrapolating from these randomly selected zones to the entire city from the low-density results, as is done in New York City (The Department of Homeless Services, 2006). As of 2015, Toronto is the only Canadian city that randomly samples (City of Toronto, 2013).

Finally, a small number of cities use 'decoys' as a statistical test of the overall validity of the count. They are people who are not homeless but have been placed randomly throughout the city along the paths that volunteers are expected to follow. Decoys are instructed to remain in one spot for the duration of the count (or until they are counted). This allows for an estimation of how many people have not been approached and counted by volunteers; based on the number of decoys found by volunteers on the night of the count, statistical adjustments can be made to the final numbers based (The Department of Homeless Services, 2006; Hopper *et al.*, 2008).

## Limits

PiT Counts are always recognized as an under-estimation of the homeless population (City of Toronto 2013; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Gaetz *et al.*, 2014; Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2014; Latimer *et al.*, 2015; Turner, 2015a). One of the reasons for this is that rough sleepers may not be visible on the night of the count, such as those who live in squats or who are able to find a spot to sleep that is well out of the public's view (Hopper *et al.*, 2008). If they are not seen, they will simply not be included in the count.

Further, the PiT Count methodology results in the over-representation of the chronically homeless population and underestimates other forms of homelessness. Given the logic behind the PiT Count, the exact number of people who experience homelessness temporarily will be difficult to find using this methodology. The European Observatory on Homelessness explains why this is the case; “[a]s people with severe mental illness and problematic drug and alcohol use can experience homelessness more frequently or for longer periods, using a point-in-time approach means this group can be over-represented, simply because they use homelessness services more often or for longer than other groups of homeless people” (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014, p.31).

Another group that is not fully included in a PiT Count is the ‘hidden homeless’. Only a small minority of the homeless population is chronically homeless in North America and Southern and Eastern EU Member States (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2014; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Latimer *et al.*, 2015). Research has shown that women and youth experience homelessness differently and are under-represented in the chronic, street-involved homeless population (see, for example, Benjaminsen and Juul, 2009; City of Toronto, 2013; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Gaetz *et al.*, 2014; Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2014; Turner, 2015a; b). These same sources note that these populations tend to be more hidden by couch surfing, sleeping in cars or exchanging sex for shelter. It is important to note that PiT Counts are best able to measure visible street homelessness, but they are poorly equipped to measure these more hidden forms of homelessness (Gaetz, 2015).

In Europe, PiT Counts are not nearly as common as they are in North America; as will be outlined below, Belgium is one of the few EU Member States to use a methodology that is similar to the PiT Count methodology. Indeed, a variety of methodologies are used to collect data on the homeless population across Europe (FEANTSA, 2011a). Scandinavian countries, as will be explained in greater detail below, rely on data collected through surveys that have been completed on behalf of homeless people by service providers. An exhaustive review of all the methodologies used in Europe is beyond the scope of this article; for a comprehensive review of statistical data on homelessness in EU Member States see Busch-Geertsema *et al.* (2014).

## Definitions of Homelessness

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While an understanding of methodological differences is a crucial first step to making an informed comparison of the state of homelessness in different cities and countries, the other fundamental question that must be addressed is the following: what is the definition of homelessness that is being used? In other words, who, exactly, is the homeless count counting?

Great strides have been made in Europe and North America to develop common definitions and typologies of homelessness. HUD has developed a typology of homelessness to use in PIT Counts but does not have an official conceptual definition of homelessness. In Canada, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, formerly the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN), has developed both a definition and typology of homelessness. While this definition is not the official definition of the federal government, it is likely that the federal government will adopt it shortly as a framework for future federally funded homeless counts (Turner, 2015a). FEANTSA has also developed a typology: the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS).

By way of introduction to the definitions and typologies, Table 1 is a comparison of the European, Canadian and American typologies of homelessness. The typologies present a spectrum of housing exclusion, ranging from rough sleeping to other less extreme forms of housing instability, such as over-crowding. Each typology is broken down into conceptual as well as operational categories. Looking down the vertical lines of the table, different shades of grey indicate which operational categories are in the same conceptual category. For example, ETHOS is comprised of four conceptual categories: roofless; houseless; insecure; and inadequate. These four conceptual categories are broken into 13 operational categories ranging from people living rough to people living in extreme over-crowding. The darkest grey boxes indicate the conceptual category 'roofless', which includes the operational categories for people who live and sleep rough as well as people in emergency accommodation.

The horizontal lines show how different operational categories compare across the three typologies. For example, all three typologies begin in the same place, with people living rough or on the streets, but not all typologies include people living in emergency accommodation for immigrants. The typologies are not perfectly aligned, though the table demonstrates that there are important similarities between the Canadian and European typologies throughout the table. As we move along the spectrum to the right, however, there are more differences and, in the American case, significant gaps. Immediately preceding the table is a detailed list of the operational categories in each typology.

### **ETHOS Operational Categories**

1. People living rough
2. People living in emergency accommodation
3. People in accommodation for homeless people
4. People in a women's shelter
5. People in accommodation for immigrants
6. People due to be released from institutions
7. People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness
8. People living in insecure accommodation
9. People living under threat of eviction
10. People living under threat of violence
11. People living in temporary/non-conventional structures
12. People living in unfit housing
13. People living in extreme over-crowding

### **CHRN Operational Categories**

1. People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract
2. People living in places not intended for human habitation
  - 2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless
  - 2.2 Shelters for individuals/families affected by domestic violence
  - 2.3 Emergency shelters for people fleeing natural disasters
- 3.1 Interim housing for people who are homeless
- 3.2 People living temporarily with others
- 3.3 People accessing short-term, temporary rental accommodations
- 3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing
- 3.5 Accommodation/reception centres for recently arrived immigrants and refugees
- 4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness
- 4.2 Individuals and families who are precariously housed



### HUD Operational Categories

1.1 Has a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation

1.2 Is living in a public or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programmes)

1.3 Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution

2.1 An individual or family who will immediately lose their primary night-time residence – provided the residence will be lost within 14 days, no subsequent residence has been identified and the individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing

3.1 Unaccompanied youth under 25, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition but who: are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes; have not had a lease, ownership interest or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application; have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the preceding 60 days and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers

4.1 Any individual or family who is fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, has no other residence and lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing



Table 1: Typologies of Homelessness

Europe (ETHOS)		Canada (CHRN)			US (HUD)	
1.Roofless	1	1. Unsheltered	1.1	1.2	1. Literally homeless	1.1
	2	2. Emergency sheltered	2.1	2.3		1.2
2. Houseless	3	3. Provisionally accommodated	3.1	3.3		
	4	2. Emergency sheltered	2.2		4. Fleeing domestic violence	4.1
	5	3. Provisionally accommodated	3.5			
	6		3.4		1. Literally homeless	1.3
	7					
3. Insecure	8	3. Provisionally accommodated	3.2		3. Other status	3.1
	9		4.1		2. Imminent risk	2.1
	10					
4. Inadequate	11	4. At risk of homelessness				
	12		4.2			
	13		4.1			

## Definitions and Typologies

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The definition of homelessness used in ETHOS is as follows:

There are three domains which constitute a 'home', the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (*physical domain*); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (*social domain*) and having a legal title to occupation (*legal domain*) (FEANTSA, 2007).

This definition emphasizes the importance of a place of residence by placing it at the centre of the definition. It is important to note that the word *housing* is not used in the European definition; rather, the definition uses the word 'home',<sup>3</sup> a broader and more subjective word. Home is unpacked into three domains: physical, social and legal. Compared to the Canadian definition (see below), the most significant difference between these two understandings of residence is the social domain.

The ETHOS typology contains four overarching conceptual categories of homelessness: roofless; houseless; insecure; and inadequate. These four conceptual categories are broken into 13 operational categories, ranging from 'people living rough' to 'people living in extreme over-crowding' (FEANTSA, 2007).

Tellingly, ETHOS is available in 25 languages; FEANTSA hopes that this definition will be adopted and used across Europe so as to facilitate the accurate comparison of homelessness in EU Member States. Indeed, ETHOS is intended to provide for "a common 'language' for transnational exchanges on homelessness... it is used for different purposes – as a framework for debate, for data collection purposes, for policy purposes, monitoring purposes, and in the media" (FEANTSA, 2011b). The typology is useful even if it is not explicitly used in the data-gathering exercises (as is often the case), as it can be applied to research and homeless counts after they are completed. This allows for a detailed breakdown and comparison of homelessness across countries. The European Observatory on Homelessness recently did this in its 2014 update to statistics on homelessness across Europe (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

The Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) definition is increasingly used in homelessness plans and research across Canada (Gaetz *et al.*, 2014; Turner, 2015a; Latimer *et al.*, 2015). According to the CHRN:

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<sup>3</sup> Even in the French version of the definition, the English word 'home' is often noted in quotation marks beside the word *logement*.

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing (CHRN, 2012).

This definition revolves entirely around housing: stable and appropriate, *permanent* housing. The emphasis on permanence makes the definition relatively broad by including people who do not have rights to their housing, such as people who are living in rooming houses without a lease or couch surfers. The importance of privacy and a space for social relations, a part of the ETHOS definition, is not a part of the Canadian understanding of housing.

The Canadian definition of homelessness includes a four-part typology: unsheltered homeless; sheltered homeless; provisionally accommodated; and at risk of homelessness. These conceptual categories are broken into 12 operational categories ranging from rough sleepers to people who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The top of the spectrum is very detailed and precise, whereas the 'at risk' end of the spectrum is relatively vague and, as a result, can be more difficult to operationalize. Overall, this typology is very similar to ETHOS, though it is less detailed towards the 'at risk' end of the spectrum.

HUD does not have a definition of homelessness. Rather, there are four categories in its typology: literally homeless; at imminent risk of homelessness; homeless under other federal statutes; and fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015). The four categories are broken into six operational categories. Though HUD does not have a conceptual definition of homelessness, it does pay significant attention to chronic homelessness, which it defines as "someone who has experienced homelessness for a year or longer, or who has experienced a least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years and has a disability" (Department of Housing and Urban Development 2013; National Alliance to End Homelessness 2015).

The conceptual categories do not all line up when they are compared side-by-side in Table 1. The CHRN is the only typology to make a conceptual distinction between people who are living rough (outdoors) and people who are living or staying in emergency accommodation. It is not clear that this conceptual differentiation makes a significant difference to homeless counts, as operational categories can still be compared against one another.

More important than these conceptual differences, however, is the patchiness of the HUD typology, particularly when compared to ETHOS. The conceptualization of homelessness is much narrower in the United States than it is in Canada or Europe, with important groups of people who experience extreme housing instability being completely overlooked. Indeed, hidden homeless people, such as couch surfers or people who exchange sex for shelter, remain completely hidden. The HUD typology is not just narrow; it is also highly specific. For most operational categories, more than one requirement must be met in order for the person to be considered homeless. This is particularly the case in the middle of the spectrum, where individuals must completely exhaust their personal network of support before being considered homeless.

These definitions and typologies are used in many homeless counts; in Canada, for example, Montréal's recent homeless count used the CHRN definition and typology of homelessness (Latimer *et al.*, 2015). The CHRN definition and typology have also been fully integrated into the recent counts in seven Albertan cities (Turner, 2015a; b). Though increasingly common, the CHRN definition has not yet been fully adopted by cities such as Toronto and Vancouver that have been conducting counts for a long time. Like ETHOS, it is still useful in such cities, however, as it can be applied to counts and data after the fact to make a breakdown of the numbers comparable, notably in terms of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness.

As the above has demonstrated, definitions and typologies of homelessness are different across Europe and North America. The content of the three typologies reviewed above is similar, notably towards the top of the table. The conceptual categories tend to be more inclusive in ETHOS than they are in the CHRN typology; indeed, the broadest typology of homelessness is ETHOS and the most limited is the typology advanced by HUD (CHRN is more comparable to ETHOS than it is to HUD). The differences between the typologies, such as the operational categories that are or are not included, have important consequences – notably for who is counted in homeless counts and who is targeted for intervention by government policy (a full analysis of the latter is beyond the scope of this paper).

The following section presents details of the methodologies used in New York, Montréal, Brussels and Denmark. These case studies show how these methodologies translate into actual counts and allow for a comparison between the common PiT Count methodology (and the different forms it can take) and a much different methodology: the service-provider approach used in Denmark. This section concludes that great attention must be paid to the details of the methodology before comparisons between and even within countries can be made. Indeed, even counts that look very similar on the surface, such as those in New York and Montréal, must still be compared with caution.

## *New York*

The City of New York has been conducting annual street homeless counts since 2003. The count takes place on streets and in subway stations every year at the end of January.<sup>4</sup> Volunteers begin the count at 12: 15am and must finish by 4: 00am. Decoys are sent to some of the zones that are covered by the volunteers. The city uses the known locations and random sampling methods, making it one of the most sophisticated counts in the USA.

The city extrapolates from the number of people found in the randomly selected low-zones to the rest of the city, and makes a further adjustment based on the number of decoys who were found. As a result, around 50 percent of the final result comes from this random sampling. For example, in 2006, the final number of unsheltered homeless people in Brooklyn was 778. Volunteers canvassed all of the 116 high-zones as well as 91 randomly selected low-zones (out of a total of 1,605 low-zones). In the 207 zones that were covered, 90 unsheltered homeless individuals were 'actually counted': 54 in the high zones and 36 in the low-zones (The Department of Homeless Services, 2006).

Extrapolating from the number of people actually counted in the low-zones, the city concluded that throughout the 1,605 total low-zones in Brooklyn, there were approximately 635 unsheltered homeless people. A further 85 people were added to the count based on the quality assurance adjustment (decoys) to give a total of 720 unsheltered homeless people in the low-zones in Brooklyn. The 54 people found in the high-zones were all included in the final Brooklyn count, and an additional four were added based on calculations relating to the decoys for a grand Brooklyn total of 778. The 2006 report is the only one to present the detailed breakdown of the numbers in this way.

Volunteers in New York are instructed to approach everyone they meet on the streets and ask the screening question: "Do you have some place that you consider your home or a place where you live?" If the person is identified as homeless, there is a very brief questionnaire to administer, including questions regarding veteran status and ethnicity (white, black, Hispanic, Asian/Indian/Pacific Islander/Unsure/Other).

New York City's count is explicitly a 'street' count; the hidden homeless are not included and the sheltered homeless are counted through a difference process. Of the three PiT Count methodologies reviewed here, the New York methodology is the most sophisticated but the definition is the most narrow. This methodology is not, however, as elaborate as Denmark's service-provider approach, reviewed below.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to extreme weather conditions at the end of January 2015, the count was rescheduled for February 9, 2015.

## *Montréal*

Montréal conducted its first PiT Count at the end of March 2015. The count surveyed streets, shelters, transitional housing services, some restaurants, metro stations and day centres; the street and shelter count took place on March 24, 2015 between 8:00pm<sup>5</sup> and midnight. A further two-day count of hidden homelessness took place in day centres and soup kitchens from 8:00am – 6:00pm on March 25 and 26.

The PiT methodology for the street and shelter count on the 24<sup>th</sup> was a combination of known locations and full coverage of a broadly defined downtown core. Random sampling was not used. Almost all emergency shelters, including those for women and for families affected by violence, participated in the sheltered homeless count. All homeless-serving day centres were asked to participate in the count of the hidden homeless population on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, and the majority agreed to participate.

Over 1,000 volunteers were involved in the count. They were instructed to ask screening questions to everyone they saw on the street or, for those who were in shelters or day services during the two-day hidden homelessness count, present in the resource during the count. Screening questions were designed to capture the hidden homeless population, such as people living without a lease in a rooming house. A two-page questionnaire (available in English and in French) was administered to homeless people who were admissible and who consented to participate; the questionnaire contained questions pertaining to housing history and demographic information, as well as sources of income.

Shelters either internally administered the survey (which was most commonly done in the case of shelters for women or people fleeing violence) or welcomed teams of volunteers to administer the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary for shelter users, but shelters also provided information regarding their total occupancy on the night of the count, including their approximate age, gender and ethnicity, as well as the number of people they had to turn away (refusals). The count used 50 decoys as a quality assurance mechanism.

The count included rough sleepers but also people with no fixed address or people who listed a shelter as their address in hospitals, prisons, and alcohol and drug rehabilitation centres. A significant effort was also made to contact rehabilitation centres that were not located within Montréal, but where people from Montréal are known to go. These services provided information regarding the number of people with no fixed address, but from Montréal, who were with them on March 24<sup>th</sup>. These services were included in the count because community members see them as an

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<sup>5</sup> A small number of teams surveying in shelters started much earlier at the request of shelter operators.

extension of Montréal's homeless serving system. It was not possible to administer the questionnaire in these institutions; this portion of the street count was therefore strictly an enumeration.

The definition of homelessness used in the Montréal count followed the CHRN typology of homelessness and was much broader than is the norm<sup>6</sup> in the Canadian context as it also included hidden homelessness. In the final report, there is a very detailed breakdown of the results for the different types of homelessness. This allows for a comparison of particular types of homelessness across different cities without being affected by the inclusion of hidden homelessness.

### ***Brussels***

Homeless counts have been taking place in Brussels every two years since 2008. The count takes place over one hour between 11: 00pm and midnight in October. The count is a street count; shelters and resources are not included in the count itself. Reports of the count, written in French, do not reference the PiT methodology, but the methodology is in fact very similar. The 2010 report, for example, says that the streets were canvassed through a "one night blitz" (La Strada, 2011, p.8) and further notes that it is a "snapshot, at a moment in time" (My translation; La Strada, 2011, p.10).

The zones that are canvassed by volunteers are selected based on community expertise regarding the parts of the city where homeless people are known to sleep: in essence, the known locations approach. Services such as shelters and long-term housing for formerly homeless people are also included in the count. There is no questionnaire administered on the night of the count; rather, teams of surveyors are given a tally sheet to fill out. This tally sheet asks surveyors to mark down the exact location of the person, the time the person was found, the person's sex and approximate age. The final report by La Strada makes explicit reference to the ETHOS typology, noting that the count in Brussels includes 6 of the 13 operational categories of homelessness.

The week before the count there is a pre-survey with rough-sleepers that involves a questionnaire that is administered to approximately 90 people. The pre-survey is intended to complement the count by gathering demographic information from a small subset of the homeless population. The survey includes a small amount of demographic information (age and sex) but focuses mostly on where the person usually sleeps. For example, there is a map of the city of Brussels and the person is asked to identify the neighbourhood where he or she usually sleeps.

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<sup>6</sup> Edmonton, a mid-sized Canadian city in Alberta, also measures hidden homelessness in this way.



## Denmark

There have been bi-annual national homeless counts across Denmark since 2007. The counts take place over the course of one week, as they do in other Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway. In addition to the count week in Denmark, homelessness has been tracked through a national client registration system since 1999. Some observers consider Denmark to have the most sophisticated and detailed information about its homeless population in Europe (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

Rather than gathering data through the PiT methodology, local actors, including service providers and government social service offices, are asked to fill out a two-page questionnaire for each homeless person they are in contact with or for each person they are aware of who is homeless during the week of the count. Local actors include emergency shelters, of course, but also include job centres and drop-in cafés (Benjaminsen and Juul, 2009). The emphasis is therefore not just on emergency shelters and the approach allows the counts also to capture hidden, episodic and transitional homelessness. A challenge of this methodology can be ensuring the participation of local service providers, though it has recently been reported that “the data are generally of high quality and there is a high response rate from local services, especially from important services, including shelters and municipal social centres” (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014, p.32).

People experiencing homelessness, especially chronically, are likely to have been in contact with multiple service providers. To avoid double counting, service providers include personal information such as initials and birthdates, as well as a client number if possible. Questionnaires are then compared and cross-referenced so that doubles can be removed.

The Danish count is broad in its definition and includes not just the roofless category of homelessness but the hidden types of homelessness as well. It makes explicit reference to ETHOS and includes rough sleepers, users of emergency night shelters, hostel users, people sleeping in hotels due to homelessness, people staying temporarily with family and friends, people in transitional housing, institutional releases from prisons, and institutional releases from hospitals/treatment centres (Benjaminsen and Juul, 2009). Of the methodologies reviewed here, the definition used in the Danish count is but also captures the most broad and the methodology is the most elaborate.

## Discussion

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As the above has demonstrated, there is a strong convergence of the methodology used to count the homeless population in North America; Canada and the USA have both officially adopted the PiT Count methodology. There will still be differences between cities, such as the use of random sampling, which should be considered in any comparisons, but the overall logic and structure of North American counts are very similar. The definitions of homelessness used in the two countries are significantly different, however, with Canada using a broader definition of homelessness while the American definition is much more targeted and narrow. These differences should not affect the comparability of the results, however, as the types of homelessness that are included in the counts can be broken into operational categories and compared. In other words, the final results of Canadian and American counts cannot always be directly compared, but comparisons of the different types of homelessness can be easily compared thanks to the typology. In a similar way, ETHOS has helped to render counts across Europe more comparable by allowing for a comparison of specific types of homelessness; some counts, including the two reviewed here, make explicit reference to ETHOS. The methodologies used, however, remain very different and make accurate comparisons problematic.

### *North America*

Careful attention must be paid to differences when comparing North American cities, even when they use the PiT methodology. As a comparison of Montréal and New York illustrates, the way in which the zones are selected, the definition of who is considered homeless, and how the data is ultimately presented are the most important considerations for any comparison of North American cities. For example, as noted above, approximately 50 percent of the final number of homeless people in New York comes from the extrapolation of randomly sampled zones. This causes two complications. First, it suggests that other cities that do not randomly sample are potentially missing a significant number of people who are homeless and sleeping outside, making their overall number much smaller than it should be. Perhaps there is a much higher than normal distribution of homelessness throughout the entire city of New York than there is in other cities. In other words, if Montréal did random sampling, it does not necessarily follow that this would result in a twofold increase in its final number. But without using the same method, there is no way of knowing for sure.

The second complication is that not all cities use the data from the randomly sampled zones in the same way. New York extrapolates from the randomly selected zones, but not all cities do. Toronto is the only Canadian city to use random sampling; in 2006 and 2009, the city adjusted the final number by

extrapolating from the randomly selected zones. The city abandoned this practice in 2013 after further consultation indicated that it was not necessary or appropriate (City of Toronto, 2006; 2009; 2013). The data from New York and Toronto, though using the exact same method of random sampling, are treated differently in the analysis; this different treatment must at least be acknowledged in any comparison, as the final number in New York will be higher than it is in Toronto as a result of this extrapolation.

To be prudent, therefore, counts must report where people were counted and why zones were canvassed in the first place. The 2006 breakdown in New York is an excellent example of this detailed reporting and should be reinstituted immediately and provided, if possible, for past counts as well. The City of Toronto was consistently detailed in its reporting of the 2006, 2009 and 2013 counts, as was Montréal in 2015. If the breakdown of count results is detailed and complete, the homeless count in New York can effectively be compared to those conducted in other North American cities.

At the time of writing, there also are important differences in terms of the timing of homeless counts in North America, particularly in Canada (HUD has mandated that counts take place in the last week of January). The time of year of a count is important, as weather affects homelessness and where people sleep; for example, some cold cities in Canada and the United States open extra shelter spaces in the winter to encourage people to sleep inside during especially cold months (The Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2012a; b). Since 2006, Toronto has conducted its count every three or four years in April. Montréal conducted its count at the end of March, whereas Calgary and other Albertan cities conducted their counts in October. Different seasons and different temperatures will likely change at least the number of people sleeping rough, due to cold Canadian winters. Over the course of the next few years, federal stipulations regarding PiT Counts should result in a convergence in terms of the timing of counts in cities across Canada. This will increase the comparability of cities within Canada and, if counts are to be conducted in January as internal reports suggest will be the case, with the United States as well.

## *Europe*

The two European cases reviewed here, Brussels and Denmark, are in some respects aligned with the categories of homelessness that are included in their counts, though Denmark goes farther than Brussels by including hidden homelessness as well. The methodologies, however, are dramatically different; Brussels uses a limited PiT Count methodology (though it is supplemented with a pre-count survey), whereas Denmark uses an elaborate and rigorous service-provider approach.

The Danish methodology has a number of strengths over the traditional PiT Count, increasing the overall validity and accuracy of the final number. First, the Danish approach takes advantage of the existing knowledge of front line service providers who see and work every day with people who are experiencing homelessness. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people feel stigmatized when they identify themselves as homeless, or they might even feel threatened (as is often the case for women and young people). As a result, in North American PiT Counts, many people might not define or identify themselves as homeless; the service-provider methodology avoids this complication by conducting the count in a discreet and anonymous way.

By not just targeting shelters, but also day and employment centres, the count is able to account for people who experience homelessness in its various forms – not just chronic but also episodic and, importantly, hidden. PiT Counts tend to over-represent the chronically homeless simply because they spend more time in shelters or on the street. Further, by giving service providers a full week to fill out questionnaires for people experiencing homelessness, this approach allows them to capture more people – including, importantly, those who are experiencing homelessness for the first time – than the methodology used in Brussels, which takes place over one single hour. As a result of these methodological factors, the final number of people experiencing homelessness is likely larger than it would be if Danish cities such as Copenhagen did a strict PiT Count.

Brussels, using the PiT methodology, does not rely on such deep service-provider knowledge, though the participation of shelters results in an accurate estimation of the sheltered population. The street portion of the count, however, relies on the ability of volunteer canvassers to find people who are sleeping rough, and further requires that they do so in one hour. The zones are created based on the existing knowledge of community partners, but if a person has changed sleeping locations or is simply not in the spot when the team passes, he or she will not be included. The Danish approach avoids this common limitation of the PiT methodology.

In so far as services are involved, notably shelters and welcome halls, Copenhagen and Brussels are comparable. But for people sleeping rough and the hidden homeless, the methods are simply too different to allow for an accurate comparison. Denmark can, however, be easily compared with other Scandinavian countries who use the same service-oriented approach, and Brussels can be compared with other cities that do PiT Counts, both in Europe and across the Atlantic. For the purposes of comparability, the methodology is more important than the definition; as a result, the final numbers of homelessness in Brussels and Copenhagen are very difficult to compare.

## Trans-Atlantic Comparisons

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For the purposes of comparability, the methodology is more important than the definition. As a result, the final numbers of homeless people in Brussels and Copenhagen are very difficult to compare, whereas North American cities, which share a very similar methodology but not definition, can be more easily compared through post-count analysis.

Cities across North America and Europe, or even within the continents, will likely never agree on the question of who, exactly, is homeless. There is considerable trans-Atlantic agreement regarding the first few categories of homelessness, as Table 1 clearly shows. Beyond rough sleepers and those staying in emergency accommodation, however, there is disagreement. The typologies are tremendously useful in this sense. Cities do not need to agree on which categories to include; they just need to be rigorous and transparent in reporting the results of the count. Simply presenting one final result is as misleading for the general public as it is damaging for comparisons.

Having a common definition of homelessness, however, is not enough. For example, the definitions of homelessness in Denmark and Montréal were remarkably similar, in that both sought to enumerate the hidden homeless population. The service-provider method used in Denmark, however, is significantly different and much more effective than the PiT Count methodology used in Montréal. Because of deep methodological differences, comparisons of hidden homelessness are nearly impossible between these two cities. A comparison of different types of homelessness is easier; both cities canvassed emergency resources, for example, and have detailed quantitative and qualitative information regarding that population. Cross-Atlantic comparisons of specific populations, as Benjaminsen and Andrade (2014) have done for shelter users in the United States and Denmark, will be most fruitful.

It is unclear that other cities will move towards the Danish approach, strong though it is. Indeed, where there is convergence, it is towards the PiT methodology. There is a concern in North America, notably in Montréal, for the anonymity and privacy of people experiencing homelessness, and there is at time of writing no useful mechanism for sharing information about homeless individuals between services and government institutions. During the development of Montréal's PiT Count, service providers often expressed an unwillingness to give personal information to count organizers without the consent of the individuals experiencing homelessness. As PiT Counts become increasingly common, the Danish and Scandinavian model will likely become the outliers. For countries and cities that do use the PiT Count methodology, however, transatlantic comparisons will become more feasible. Attention will still need to be paid to the details of the methodology and the definition that is being used.

## Conclusion

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This article has presented and compared the definitions and typologies of homelessness used in Canada, the United States and Europe. It has further compared how homelessness is enumerated in New York City, Montréal, Brussels and Denmark. Where there are differences in the definition of homelessness, typologies can be used to render a breakdown of results comparable. As there is significant similarity at the top of Table 1 relating to sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, typologies for these categories can be used in different countries for the purposes of comparing results. For example, the ETHOS typology can be applied to the results of Montréal's homeless count and the CHRN definition can be applied to the results from Brussels.

Methodologies are much more difficult to align. Where methodologies are radically different, overall comparisons cannot reasonably be made. Differences in the details of these methodologies, such as using random sampling, can result in potentially significantly different final numbers, so attention must always be paid to the details. To help with comparability, reports that present the final results of the count must be clear about who exactly was counted, where the person was counted, and why. While this will not necessarily allow for an overall comparison of the results, it does allow for a comparison of different subsets of the homeless population.

Policy-makers and researchers can still be informed by tracking the results of methodologies that are not similar to their own; actors in Denmark might be interested to learn, for example, about trends that are discovered in other countries or cities that use the PiT Count. These cross-Atlantic comparisons are very valuable for policy-makers, as it can allow them to monitor trends and the effects of policies in different environments. It further allows for a larger pool of best practices from which to draw solutions.

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# Think Pieces



***Part D***

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# Thinking Outside the Charity Box: Media Coverage of Homelessness

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► **Abstract** *Academic interest in the many problematic features of media coverage of homelessness has a long history within the field (see for example Campbell and Reeves, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Devereux, 1998; Hodgetts et al., 2005; Mao et al., 2012; Feantsa, 2014; Caeiro and Gonçalves, 2015). Existing research evidences convincingly how media content concerning homelessness reproduces and circulates dominant discourses that are partial, selective and ideological. In failing to adequately explain, contextualize or critique the root (i.e. structural) causes of homelessness, media coverage may be said to contribute to its further perpetuation (see Hodgetts et al., 2006). Content produced and circulated by the mainstream media (and content concerning social inequality in particular) remains an important area of study and analysis because it has been shown to be significant in the shaping of public beliefs and likely policy responses. This 'Think Piece' attempts to do two things. First, following a Political Economy approach, it explains media coverage of homelessness through a particular focus on the organizational and production contexts of media content regarding homelessness. Second, it outlines some ways in which dominant media discourses concerning homelessness can be challenged. In the age of media conglomeration in which the public sphere is continuing to contract, the prospects for the emergence of a critical journalism about homelessness remain bleak. Academics and activists concerned about homelessness however need to re-double their efforts to inform and challenge received 'wisdom' about homelessness through re-negotiating their relationships with the mainstream media and through greater use of alternative media strategies. There is also a challenge to be met by many NGOs who themselves recycle stereotypes concerning the homeless.*

► **Keywords** *homelessness, homeless, media, discourse, disgust, ideology, political economy, routines of production, stigmatization*

## Introduction

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On Christmas Day many television news programmes in Europe, and elsewhere, will routinely include a feature on how the homeless have fared that day. Such reports, which have become a staple of contemporary journalism, follow a very predictable and sometimes highly problematic narrative. Usually told through 'charity', 'human interest' and 'deservedness/undeservedness' frames; these news reports typically focus on the actions and opinions of volunteers and charitable organisations (see Devereux, 1998 for an elaboration). In contrast to reporting norms at other times in the year in which the homeless are often rendered voiceless, they occasionally include a few words from individual homeless men or women. Overall, these reports may be read as functioning to salve consciences and to reassure audiences that on Christmas Day – at the very least – all is well with the world – including the lives of the homeless.

The sometimes obscene convention of reporters fleetingly parachuting in on the lives of some of the homeless on Christmas Day (and on Thanksgiving Day in the United States) bookends the last quarter of the calendar year in which homelessness is more likely to be visible in the media (see Bunis *et al.*, 1996; Meert *et al.*, 2004). Even well intentioned journalists who spend a night or two on the streets and write seasonal 'human interest' stories which purport to be from the perspective of the homeless, may in fact serve to further circulate hackneyed well-worn understandings of homelessness which do little to challenge existing assumptions or propose long-term solutions. The repeated use of the 'human interest' genre may work to make a connection between audiences and the homeless and to simplify what are often complex issues, however they are weak on explaining just exactly why homelessness persists. Whatever their motivations, it is common for this uneven and sometimes even overly sentimental form of journalism to result in a short-term public response in the form of either donations or offers to volunteer. One problem with the media's lop-sided and narrow approach to homelessness coverage is that it begs some obvious questions: what about the homeless for the remaining months of the year? Why is homelessness commonly reported on without reference to structural causes? Can we imagine alternative ways for the mainstream media to explain homelessness more thoroughly and that will allow us to break out of coverage routines that are cyclical, predictable and largely uncritical? Although the mainstream media are not responsible for homelessness, they occupy a privileged and powerful position in influencing public knowledge concerning homelessness. It is therefore essential that we have a critical understanding of the forces that shape this form of media content, which has a bearing on public understandings and beliefs.

While it is common for journalists and for other media professionals to say that they are in the business of reporting on the social world in 'objective' terms, media coverage of homelessness and other directly related issues such as poverty, income inequality, housing policy, 'house-squatting', migration and social welfare evidence how the mass media reproduce dominant discourses which work, in no small way, to uphold the *status quo* (see Platt, 1999).

### Media and the Perpetuation of Homelessness:

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In spite of their professional ideologies and sometimes self-congratulatory image, much media coverage of homelessness can be shown in fact to contribute to its perpetuation. This is achieved through a combination of factors including: (1) a failure to adequately explain what homelessness is; (2) a seeming reluctance to focus on the structural causes of homelessness; (3) the use of stereotypes which narrowly define, homogenize, stigmatize, exoticise and infantilize homeless people; (4) an overemphasis on charity as being the most appropriate (and inevitable) response to homelessness; (5) a focus on the 'heroic' acts of homelessness activists or celebrities such as footballers, media personalities and rock stars 'doing their bit' for the homeless; (6) persistent source bias – i.e. an over-reliance on the views of state and NGO spokespersons, as opposed to the lived experiences of the homeless themselves (see Devereux, 1998); (7) a failure to engage critically with the politically powerful as to their role and responsibility in resolving homelessness in the longer-term and (8) a distinct lack of reflexivity on the part of journalists on the likely impact of media reporting on homelessness on public perceptions and the actions (or not) of policy makers.

Taken in combination, all of these factors coalesce to create a context in which homelessness is represented as being *inevitable* (which it is not) and resulting from the individual weaknesses of homeless people themselves rather than from structural causes such as state decisions to close psychiatric hospitals; to cut funding for drug rehabilitation programmes; to regenerate (for that read 'gentrify') inner city spaces; to withdraw from social housing provision or to attempt to remove rent controls in an increasingly deregulated housing market. A further issue within recent public discourse concerns the actions and opinions of populist politicians and others who attempt to mobilize anti-immigrant sentiment by expressing latter-day concern for 'our own' homeless. Such discursive strategies attempt to pit the indigenous homeless against the needs of asylum seekers and refugees who also have precarious living conditions and are at serious risk of being homeless.

In common with media coverage of other vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, those dependent on welfare, the disabled, nomadic groups (e.g. Roma; Travellers and Gypsies), stereotypes abound. Homelessness is represented reductively through images of elderly male alcoholic rough sleepers who invariably beg and are work-shy. The use of such homogenized stereotypes may work as a sort of journalistic shorthand but they also serve to narrow public understandings of what constitutes homelessness and conceal many other groups who are homeless such as the young or entire families who have been evicted by profit-hungry landlords. Moreover, the association of the visible homeless with specific places (such as underneath the arches of the Pont Marie Bridge in Paris or 'Skid Row' in Los Angeles) results in places becoming stigmatised and understood as being dangerous 'no-go' areas. Many NGOs working with homeless people are themselves guilty of reproducing stereotypical images of the homeless. They may argue that the decision to use images of elderly (and presumably alcoholic) rough sleepers works to convince members of the public to donate money to their fundraising campaigns, but the repeated use of such images adds little to furthering public understandings of what homelessness is and its underlying causes.

Pity, sympathy, condescension and an emphasis on charity are all key ingredients. While negative discourses concerning the homeless have a very long history, they have, arguably, become even more pronounced as Neo-Liberalism has assumed its hegemonic position and as the media's public sphere role has shrunk even further owing to increased privatization and conglomeration. The rise of even more pronounced classed, gendered and racialized disgust discourses concerning the poor and marginalized in the media more generally (see for example *Benefits Street* and *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* Channel 4, UK) present a further set of challenges as does the creeping decline in investigative journalism in age of 'infotainment' (see Devereux, 2014). Disgust (see Tyler, 2013) discourses centered on the homeless may be witnessed in media-generated moral panics concerning 'aggressive' begging, 'scamming', 'welfare fraud' and street-drinking. As concrete evidence of this, on Christmas Eve 2014 cages were installed over street benches in the city of Angoulême in Southwest France. It was reported that the decision was taken with the agreement of local traders who were "concerned with how business would be affected by drunken people." The prominent regional daily newspaper *Sud Ouest* stated that the Champ de Mars shopping area, which housed the benches "... had become the scene of regular fights between homeless people, often involving dogs and drug deals." Seven years earlier, disgust for the homeless in the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil was evidenced in the controversial decision by the mayor to order the spraying emergency doorways of a shopping centre with a foul-smelling odour in order to disperse a small number of homeless men and women who were sleeping



there at night (*New York Times*, August 29<sup>th</sup> 2007). Further contempt for the homeless may be seen in the decisions to install ‘anti-tramp’ spikes outside apartments and offices in London as well as the replacement of the seats in the Paris Metro stations with ones which made it next to impossible for the homeless to rest or sleep there. One recent Norwegian study noted how the public disgust felt for ‘outgroups’ such as the homeless focused on their lack of social warmth and competence (Dalsklev and Kunst, 2015).

While counter-hegemonic interpretations of homelessness are in circulation – most notably in Street Newspapers or Street Magazines (see Howley, 2005 and 2009) like *The Big Issue* – and online in various social media settings, it is important to stress the continuing power and dominance of the mainstream media in shaping agendas and understandings of homelessness. In spite of the brave promises made concerning the possibilities afforded by citizen journalism, we should not be too complacent about online media as it, too, is the source of many myths and examples of disinformation about the homeless, most notably in the form of accounts of street begging ‘scams’ in various European (and other) capital cities. The stigmatization of the homeless even extends to the world of on-line gaming. The German ‘Pennergame’ (aka ‘Dossiergame’) is an on-line game that asks participants to take on the role of ‘dossers’ whose aim is to win by becoming millionaires. The website for the London version invites players to become ‘King of The Tramps.’ While it admits that it does not deal with homelessness in a politically correct fashion, the site rehearses all the usual Neo-Liberal understandings of how homeless people can better themselves (See [www.dossiergame.co.uk](http://www.dossiergame.co.uk)).

## The Political Economy of Media

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Any understanding of media coverage of homelessness needs to be cognisant of the macro changes that are occurring more broadly within the media industries. Fenton (2011) shows how adoption of new media technologies and the rationalization of journalism as a profession have had a profoundly negative impact on news and newsmakers. Conglomeration has resulted in an insatiable search for profit, a reduction in the number of news outlets such as local and regional newspapers, cuts in the number of journalists employed, and greater pressures to generate content across media platforms. A growing number of journalists are desk-bound and spend their time ‘mouse-chasing’ or, in Fenton’s words, ‘Speeding it up and spreading it thin’ (2011, p.65). The marketization of news and the economies being imposed by media conglomerates means fewer resources for a critical journalism. Democratic dialogue and debate are the main casualties in the crises affecting news journalism. While Fenton acknowledges the possibilities afforded by new media technologies in terms of the generation and distribution of news, she also cautions against a

utopian view of new media, as a panacea to the news needs of citizens. It has not brought about a renaissance in journalism. Curran (2012), similarly, shows how television news remains the most important source of trustworthy and credible news for audiences. All of the foregoing developments have serious implications for the likelihood or not for media coverage that critiques, challenges and informs. Devereux, Haynes and Power (2011) show how marketization processes have adversely affected the practice of journalism. From this perspective news is now primarily defined as a commodity. Crucially, McManus sees the marketization of news as: 'any action intended to boost profit that interferes with a journalist's or news organizations best effort to maximise public understanding of those issues and events that the shape the community they claim to serve' (2009, p.219). From this point of view the increased marketization of news has radically reduced the possibility that the mass media can function as a public sphere informing *all* citizens about important social, economic and political issues that may affect their lives. Thus the practice of journalism is intrinsically ideological in that the net result is that existing power structures are rarely questioned. This is particularly the case in terms of how homelessness is represented and understood.

## Media Content Matters

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In spite of the protestations of some journalists, media content is *never* neutral. It is socially constructed and ideologically laden. At any one time, it contains many clues as to the make-up of the social structure that determines so much about all of our lives. Media content matters because it is within media content that the shaping and framing of our understanding and perceptions of the social world takes place. Media content provides us with the many 'scripts' necessary for us to negotiate and make sense of the everyday social contexts in which we find ourselves. Media content informs us about the personal and the political. Understanding media content is crucial in terms of reaching a more informed understanding of how we form views, opinions and attitudes about groups who are considered 'other'. The 'other' may comprise of a range of 'out' groups in any society. They may be the homeless; members of the LGBT community; the colonized; welfare recipients; residents of stigmatized neighbourhoods; ex-prisoners; the mentally ill and immigrants, for example. Those who are othered are regularly constructed as a threat to the moral and social order. Media content not only shapes our understanding of the social world but may also influence our actions (or inactions) about issues concerning fairness, justice and equality. Media content may work to convince us that homelessness is natural, inevitable and directly as a result of individual weaknesses such as alcohol or drug addiction. Media content influences not only the opinions and attitudes of the general public

but also perhaps more tellingly the perspectives of those who possess political power (see Golding and Midleton, 1982; McKendrick *et al.*, 2008). Media content which is purportedly about ‘them’ is more often than not really more about ‘us’ in that it circulates discourses which are comforting to the majority and which fail to challenge unequal relationships of power or suggest alternatives that might threaten or destabilize the *status quo*. Mainstream media content sets agendas and determines what the public see as being important. Media content works ideologically by representing issues such as homelessness selectively. What *isn’t* included in media discourse concerning homelessness is often more important than what is. A telling example here is the press coverage of an award-winning sleeping bag – ‘Street Swag’ – designed for the homeless (see [www.streetswags.org](http://www.streetswags.org)). In 2009, the Danish print media reported the praise lavished on the project by an elite figure (Crown Princess Mary of Denmark) and noted how the bag could be kept invisible on the streets. Such coverage may be read as an example of how media coverage normalizes rough sleeping, focuses on the utterances of elite figures and fails to pose awkward questions of those in authority.

## Making The News

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Media discourses usually begin in an organizational setting. An examination of the internal workings and ownership structures of media organizations can help us understand more about media coverage of homelessness. Production Research places the spotlight on the initial ‘making’ of media content. It investigates the culture of individual media organizations; the dynamics involved in ‘gate-keeping’, and the activities, experiences and ideologies of journalists and other media professionals (Gitlin, 1994). Production Research explains how and why particular discourses, ideologies, templates or frames come to predominate within media coverage. Influenced, in the main, by organizational sociology and by theories of political economy (Fenton, 2007; Mosco and Wasko, 1988) it has the potential to reveal *how*, *when* and *why* homelessness is covered in the way that it is – and by extension why it is routinely ignored by the media. Devereux (1998) demonstrates how, in an Irish context, television coverage of homelessness is determined by organizational routines and professional practices that result in coverage that is seasonal, episodic and more likely to focus on the actions of heroic figures who work with the homeless rather than the homeless themselves. Media coverage of homelessness is shaped by deeply embedded routines and editorial practices. Homelessness is not considered to be newsworthy *per se*, rather it is framed by temporal and cultural concerns (see Bunis *et al.*, 1996). The frequency of coverage is more likely to be greater during the months of October, November and December. Coverage is more likely to be ‘episodic’ rather than ‘thematic’ (see Iyengar, 1991)

and it is more likely to focus on individual rather than structural reasons for homelessness. Episodic coverage of homelessness helps to create a context in which the structural reasons for homelessness can either be downplayed or ignored. In a now classic study, Campbell and Reeves (1989) analyze the narratives of news reporting on Joyce Brown, a New York 'bag lady' (who was allegedly schizophrenic). She refused the attentions and offers of help from social workers. They argue that network television framed and narrated the question of homelessness through four distinct stages of the routine news package. They suggest that: 'the major socio-economic problem of homelessness which requires collective participation for resolution often plays out in the news as an isolated personal problem demanding individual attention' (1989: 23).

We should not be too surprised by the fact the media ownership structures may have a bearing on the coverage of homelessness (see Barker-Drummond and Kidd, 2009). Media ownership has become more concentrated and is now largely controlled by conglomerates. Private interests control the bulk of media content created and disseminated in our media saturated world. Increased privatization has meant a more pronounced focus on marketization, growing levels of sensationalism and infotainment. In 2008, for example, the Finnish owned Hungarian subscription based channel Story TV broadcast a 'reality' TV show called 'The Big Chance.' With strong echoes of the *Big Brother* TV Series, it featured 12 homeless people who were selected following interviews in homeless shelters in Budapest (see Hodgson, 2008). Advance publicity for the show claimed that the contestants were given a makeover prior to entering a luxury chateau for six months. The language used by the Story TV website is also noteworthy in terms of its disgust overtones. The homeless participants were to: "... give up the "illnesses of suffering" such as alcohol, gambling and smoking before learning a trade and looking for a job". As part of the series the participants were offered domestic economy instruction. Media reports noted that their instructor stated: "In principle, no one will go hungry, but... if someone takes four cream cakes instead of a main course, this is not only unhealthy, but selfish too, since it means three people will miss out on dessert" (Hodgson, 2008). *The Big Chance* is an example of a prevailing sensationalist trend within the media that represents the lives of the excluded in a voyeuristic and judgemental way and which explains poverty and exclusion in terms of individual weaknesses. While this emphasis may be intriguing and entertaining for audiences, it also helps confirm prejudices and keeps the spotlight away from the actions or inactions of the powerful concerning homelessness.

Recent research evidences how media ownership structures are of significance in the reporting of homelessness. Mao *et al.* (2012) examined three Canadian newspapers' coverage of homelessness. Informed by agenda-setting theory and adopting a detailed content analysis approach, their study compared regional and national

newspaper coverage of homelessness in Canada. In addition to political and cultural contexts, they found that corporate ownership (in this instance a major multimedia conglomerate) was of significance in that such newspapers had less coverage of the complex issue of homelessness than their singly owned counterparts.

## **Challenging Representations:**

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While some recent analyses of news coverage of homelessness suggest that more sympathetic portrayals of homelessness may be emerging (see Rossall, 2011) it is the contention of this 'Think Piece' that many serious challenges remain for journalistic practice and for the Homeless NGO sector itself (for an overview of debates across Europe, see Feantsa, 2014) in terms of how homelessness is represented, explained and responded to.

## **Can anything be done to challenge media norms concerning homelessness?**

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There are lessons to be gained from the counter-hegemonic media strategies employed in the wider community sector (see Dean and Hastings, 2000). Writing in an Irish context, Haynes, Devereux and Power (2014) demonstrate how stigmatised neighbourhoods can resist, challenge and potentially alter dominant media representations of housing estates deemed to be problematic 'no-go' areas. They argue that while community based media (see Howley, 2009 and 2005) are important for constructing a positive self-image for marginalized groups, those working in the NGO sector also need to be empowered to challenge mainstream media that are consumed by the wider public. This means that NGO groups working with the homeless may need to rethink their working relationships with journalists and other media professionals. Conway, Cahill and Corcoran (2009) show how largely negative media coverage of Fatima Mansions (Dublin) was challenged and altered through the role of its residents in managing its media image. The community challenged the dominant negative storylines about their neighbourhood by emphasising positive stories, the strong social bonds, and locally based initiatives to address the neighbourhood's social problems. Media training helped the neighbourhoods' residents acquire resources to challenge their neighbourhood's 'spoiled identity' and residents became more proficient and refined in their offerings to the media (Conway, Cahill and Corcoran, 2009).

To what extent can NGOs working with the homeless influence the ways in which homelessness is covered in the mainstream media? It is worth considering that the production pressures which journalists find themselves increasingly under may be

used to the advantage of NGOs. In an environment in which the mass media are hungry for content, is it outside the bounds of possibility that NGOs working with the homeless would place a renewed emphasis on media training and the writing of press materials, which contain empirical (and challenging) evidence. There are also important lessons to be learned for those involved in journalism education. There is clearly a need for journalism to be taught not just as a vocational subject but also in the context of other disciplines focused on society, politics, economics, social justice and ethics. There is compelling evidence in countless studies of the ways in which media regularly get it wrong concerning the homeless. NGO's need to challenge such negative and ill-informed representations. This may involve regular media monitoring. It may also involve actively campaigning through social media when the media circulate content which is incorrect, ill-informed or which demonizes the homeless (See for example <http://www.trueactivist.com/lazy-crazy-addicts-homeless-people-challenge-stereotypes/>). In an era in which media content (and critical investigative journalism in particular) have become increasingly debased what are the implications for the coverage of homelessness? Fenton (2011) acknowledges the possibilities afforded by new media technologies in terms of the generation and distribution of news, but she also cautions against a utopian view of new media, as a panacea to the news needs of the public.

The many challenges outlined in this think piece are not just restricted to the mainstream media. Many NGO organizations working with the homeless are themselves guilty of perpetuating stereotypical images of homelessness and of underscoring charity as the most appropriate response (see Deutsche and Ryan, 1984, O'Sullivan, 2015). The dominant images used in advertising campaigns repeatedly use a very narrow framing of homelessness. Furthermore, the images (usually facial expressions of the homeless) have been critiqued as being exploitative (Andersson and Valentine, 2014) which serve to decontextualize, dehumanize and depoliticize homelessness. Homelessness is routinely equated with being male; elderly; alcoholic and rough sleeping. While some might argue that repeated use of this restricted interpretative framework is for practical and pragmatic reasons (i.e. to maximize public response in the form of donations etc.) it is also the case that, whatever about its effectiveness as a marketing/advertising strategy, it serves to add to a very limited public understanding of what homelessness actually is. The use of such stereotypes, the stress on charity as a response does very little to end homelessness.

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# Values, Faith and Homelessness — What Space for Atheism?

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## Introduction

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Despite the faith origins of many, if not most, homelessness service providers in the UK, as an atheist researcher in the field it is actually pretty unusual to be confronted directly with people's religious affiliations and beliefs in any kind of professional forum. It is perhaps part of the British tendency to understatement and to shy away from anything too emotional or 'personal' that there seems to be an unspoken understanding that one keeps such matters to oneself in 'mixed company'.

I understand from colleagues that this can be quite different in other national contexts, including in some other European countries, where quite prolonged declarations of faith are routine at homelessness conferences and in other formal settings. I have also now had the experience, at several international events, of discussions on the role of 'values' in inspiring work with homeless people being given over almost entirely to matters of faith. This apparent elision of 'values' and 'faith' has made me feel discomfited and caused me to reflect on my own value base and its connection with my (non) faith and attraction to this field of study.

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## Homelessness and Social Justice

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Ever since I can remember, I have been angry about social injustice and, intuitively, homelessness has always seemed the apotheosis (or nadir) of such injustice and thus a natural focus for my energies. As a young law student, I was shocked to discover that in a rich society like the UK, some homeless people (those who were 'single' and not in priority need) could quite lawfully be left on the streets by local authorities whose statutory responsibilities were limited to housing families with children and some 'vulnerable' adults. I have since learned that even this incom-

plete safety net is a great deal stronger than that which pertains across much of the rest of the wealthy, developed world, where any sort of enforceable entitlements for homeless people are very much the exception and not the rule.

But my moral animation was not inspired by faith. Quite the reverse. While the teachers at my Catholic primary school did their level best to inculcate their values into my and other young minds, encouraged by my parents who desired above all else that I think for myself, I had firmly rejected all religious belief by my early teens. By that stage I had also noted that the most reactionary attitudes displayed in my working class West of Scotland community were frequently (though not invariably) justified by direct reference to faith.

In my subsequent career I have worked with many people with more or less overt faiths, whose progressive political perspectives are very far removed from the religious reactionaries of my home community. It has been a relief to find that a faith commitment is not necessarily associated with social or economic conservatism. However, this welcome revelation has no logical bearing on the quite separate question of whether God exists. On that point, I remain steadfastly in a different place from my friends and colleagues of faith (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2015).

Moreover, atheism is intrinsic to my commitment to social justice because a) it tells us that there is no God or afterlife, meaning b) that the here and now is all that exists, and has ever existed, and we have to make the most of it; and c) it renders it ethically unacceptable that anybody's short time on this planet be spent in misery, especially d) given the human (rather than divine) nature of the agency that shapes the social and economic structures that generate these unjust outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the moral urgency of 'ending homelessness' is, for me, not rooted in religious belief but rather in the rejection of such belief.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Dr. Beth Watts for drawing this last point to my attention – one of many improvements that she contributed to this piece.

## Homelessness and Atheism

People of faith sometimes argue that atheism is ‘just another belief [system]’<sup>2</sup> – and as a non-believer the only part of that I would seriously query is the somewhat belittling ‘just’.<sup>3</sup> Atheism is undoubtedly a core metaphysical tenet, or if you like ‘belief’, and for me, it is the one that is most plausible and enables me to make sense of the world and find meaning and comfort in it. Many (probably the great majority) of people across the globe take a different view and find meaning and comfort in faiths and religious orientations of myriad types and origins. There are countless sociological, psychological and evolutionary theories that seek to explain the power and attraction of religious belief, all of them hotly disputed. For myself and many other atheists, the attraction of religion is baffling. Equally, I can imagine that the metaphysical ‘naturalism’ underpinning atheism is perplexing to many people of faith (Baggini, 2003). This diversity of world views is just how it is and we all have to live with that. Freedom of thought as well as freedom of speech is the mark of a civilised society.

But the key points here are that a) it can feel unacceptable to explicitly articulate an atheist position at homelessness conferences and similar contexts where it is expected that other belief systems will be politely entertained, and b) embedded in the elision of faith and values noted above, there sometimes appears an assumption (with a long if dishonourable historical pedigree) that atheism is ‘value-less’ in both senses of the word (i.e., it excludes the holder from possessing a moral core – “If God is dead, everything is permitted” (Mackie, 1977, p.227) – and it has no worth).

Some of this sense of being silenced may be down to self-censorship on the part of atheists; I have yet to hear an atheist speak up for their own value system or challenge the veracity or impact of faith-based world views at relevant events. So I guess we can’t be sure what the reaction would be were we to do so. But I would suggest that our collective silence is borne from painful experience of the extraordinarily strong reactions that tend to be provoked when people’s faith is questioned by non-believers. These reactions are usually justified on the basis that one must ‘respect’ other people’s belief systems, but it is seldom made clear what ‘respect’ demands in this context. Does it require atheists to accept these religious beliefs as valid and defensible? If so, that is something that an atheist, by definition, cannot do. If it is the much weaker position that we ‘respect their right to hold these views’, then this can readily be conceded but does not explain the requirement to treat faith-based values as unchallengeable. I can respect the right of conservatives to

<sup>2</sup> A position implicit in the supposedly neutral, but in fact highly theistic, ‘all faiths and none’ formulation commonly used in the UK in a misguided attempt at ‘inclusivity’.

<sup>3</sup> Though a great many atheists would offer a robust retort to the notion that their rejection of the (un evidenced) assertion that there exist deities amounts to a ‘belief’. They might also query whether one ‘belief’ can constitute a ‘system’, but I digress...

hold a very different political position from my own but that doesn't prevent me from putting an alternative view to them in the hope of changing their minds (however hopeless a cause that might be!). Perhaps what is intended is some pragmatic middle ground; there is no need to accept the views themselves as valid or defensible, but it is unacceptable to say so within earshot of anyone who might be offended by this stance. But such a position presumably requires polite silence on both sides of the metaphysical divide?

Therefore the most basic (and surely uncontroversial?) point for me is one of parity of treatment. In contexts where atheists are expected to listen respectfully to accounts of religious values and inspiration, there should be an expectation that people of faith listen to those of us without faith, about our non faith, with equal respect. People of faith should be no more entitled to take 'offence' at the world view of atheists – i.e., our rejection of their metaphysics – than we atheists are expected to take offence at the implicit dismissal of our world view in religious belief. Equity requires, of course, that the reverse position also holds; in contexts where atheist views are being aired freely, those with a religiously-informed viewpoint should not be made to feel silenced (a scenario which colleagues with faith tell me is an all-too-familiar experience for them, in the UK at least).<sup>4</sup>

## Homelessness and Faith-based Values

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Moving onto more difficult territory, perhaps, I personally would argue that if faith-based values are deployed in political and other public forums, then it is perfectly legitimate, and indeed necessary, that those values be challenged and disputed by those who do not agree with them, as with any other value base informing the shaping of societal norms that affect us all. This is in keeping with the healthy scepticism essential to rigorous academic debate and, more generally, democratic discourse. It is the expectation that faith beliefs be exempted from the usual forms of challenge that probably irks atheists most.

One could argue that the protected status of faith is justified by the evident reality that this aspect of a person's world view tends to be more fundamental to their core identity, to their sense of self, than other values that they might hold. I actually find this argument pretty persuasive. But here's the thing: it cuts both ways. Just as a person of faith might feel that to challenge their belief system is to trespass on the very core of their being, so too can an atheist experience religious sermonising (however well intentioned and innocent of proselytising intent) as an assault on their inner identity.

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<sup>4</sup> My thanks to Prof. Sarah Johnsen for ensuring that this and other points of 'balance' were included in this piece.

Moreover, the claim to protected status is surely more persuasive with respect to personal faith(s) and beliefs than to public forms of religious and irreligious expression. If beliefs – on either side of the metaphysical divide – are deployed in an attempt to influence public policy or modes of practice or service delivery, then surely they must as a consequence forfeit any claim to immunity from challenge?

Time, then, for atheists to speak up routinely for their values at homelessness conferences and other gatherings, and demand the same respect and ‘tolerance’ as is given to other world views? Perhaps. On the other hand, one could argue that ‘peaceful co-existence’ might be better served by a simple acceptance that the values and metaphysics that drive our commitment to shared goals, such as ending homelessness, are many and varied and not necessarily religiously-inspired, and as such may often be better left unsaid in ‘mixed’ company.

Where one stands on this issue turns on the empirical question of ‘what difference faith makes’ in the design and delivery of homelessness services and policy. In other words, does it have a substantive impact on how homeless people are actually treated? Does the dominance of the norm of ‘caritas’ (charity) in some religious communities (Doherty, 2014) mean that services are based on the maintenance of power relationships that enhance the status of the giver at the expense of the receiver? Is this at odds with secular notions of ‘social justice’ and ‘rights’ based on challenging such power structures and inequalities? On the other hand, are faith communities uniquely placed to invest their services with feelings of ‘agape’ (love), which means that they can achieve a degree of human warmth in their service interventions that is missing from secular sites? Does it matter if our motivations for tackling homelessness start from different metaphysical places if we end up in the same place in terms of our practices?

These questions are essentially empirical matters, eminently researchable by those with and without faith who can approach the subject with an open mind (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2015). In the UK there is evidence that the faith origins of homelessness services makes little difference to the service user experience (Johnsen, 2014), but this is in the context of a homelessness sector heavily reliant on government funding, regretted by some in faith-based organisations as begetting a secularising ‘mission drift’. It may be quite different elsewhere and hence a values debate – and the role of faith within this – might be something that we can’t avoid, even if it makes some of us, on both sides of the metaphysical gulf, feel acutely discomfited.

## Conclusion

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Finally, it might fairly be argued that many of the themes touched upon above range well beyond the homelessness sphere in attempting to make some general points about the relationship of faith and secular strands of opinion in public policy discourse. However, my contention would be that these themes are particularly apposite in 'our' sector for at least two reasons. First, and most obviously, there is the fact of the still strongly faith-based character of many services for homeless people across Europe; this faith orientation is (probably) even stronger than is the case for other areas of social services in Europe (though here I stand to be corrected). The second, and more fundamental, point relates to the extreme vulnerability of many homeless service users, whose lack of both financial and social capital – their desperation and even destitution in some instances – can place them in a peculiarly powerless position in the face of evangelising behaviour (of either a religious or secular variety). This renders such behaviour, in my view at least, even more ethically dubious than it is in the normal run of things and is the principal reason why I hope this opinion piece helps to provoke (an overdue?) debate amongst all of us concerned with the eradication of homelessness, whatever our metaphysical inclinations...

## Acknowledgements

The points made in this opinion piece have been inspired by conversations over many years with my brother, Stephen, and a range of colleagues, including Prof. Mark Stephens, Prof. Glen Bramley, Prof. Volker Busch-Geertsema, Prof. Eoin O'Sullivan and Dr. Suzi Macpherson. I would like to thank in particular Dr. Beth Watts and Prof. Sarah Johnsen for their detailed and thoughtful comments on an earlier version, and the EJH Editorial Board for their helpful suggestions. I take sole responsibility for all of the views expressed and any remaining errors.



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# Seeing the 'Homeless City'? Some Critical Remarks on the Visual Production of Homelessness through Photography

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› **Abstract** *While working with visual methodology in the 'field' of urban homelessness, it did not go unnoticed that homeless people seem to be a standard motif in urban photography. Many professional but also amateur photographers (including urban researchers) might have 'documented' or 'captured' homeless lives, faces or stories at least once in their photographic career. Whilst the reasons and intentions for doing so might vary considerably, the results remain similar (worldwide): in most cases homeless people are being presented and constructed as the 'Urban Other'. Thus, those pictures help with the production of dominant knowledge by creating images about homeless people and about their lives in the city from an outside position in a determining way. But pictures produced and distributed by institutions, NGOs or charity organizations also work with this kind of visual representation of homelessness. This paper discusses and questions the possibilities and limits of 'making homelessness visible' in the contexts of urban politics, campaign fundraising and public relations. How can NGOs, institutions and others use visualizations to work with and for homeless people without contributing to the construction of stereotypical visions of homelessness and homeless people? Drawing on experiences from the urban context of the city of Hamburg, Germany, the paper gives insights into visual representations produced by homeless people creating spaces of negotiation through exhibitions. Here, marginalized perspectives challenge how the housed public sees things.*

› **Keywords** *urban photography, Urban Other, visual representation of homelessness*

## Introduction

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Urban homelessness is a topic that is accompanied by strong visual attention. There are innumerable photo galleries, video reportages, snap shots, exhibitions, documentaries, movies and artistic practices circulating in public that use visualizations of homelessness in different ways. A critical reflection of these visual products raises questions about what is being represented, how and why it is being represented and what effects these representations have with regard to the impact on public opinion and urban societal relations?

This paper addresses the relationship between visual representations and dominant knowledge production about homelessness and homeless people, and draws on experiences of visual fieldwork from Hamburg, Germany. Based on the assertion that homelessness is the most visible form of poverty in the urban space, here, processes of sight and vision as well as their implications in urban space are discussed from a more theoretical point of view. When it comes to picturing urban poverty there are iconographic traditions as well as established photographic practices that continue to be active and effective today. The paper argues that photographic representations of homelessness in most cases work strongly to produce a 'visual regime' of homeless people and homelessness that is created through devaluation and stereotyping by means of photographic composition, production and technique. This visual regime is powerful and stable and widely taken for granted. By deconstructing the functioning of this visual regime, the aim is to contribute to an understanding of the power of these visual representations and their consequences for the subjects governed by them. On the basis of recently published portraits of homeless people living in Berlin, the paper gives some insights into deconstructing this kind of visual production, their effects and their contexts. As such, published material (e.g., photo books and websites of the project), media announcements and coverage, documentaries, and interviews with the producers of the project have been analysed and interpreted. Some of the project's findings are outlined here, within the limits of this paper. In doing so, this paper aims to sensitize the 'limits' of photography and representational works and to rethink visualization practices in private (e.g., snapshots) but also in public (e.g., NGO, institutional) contexts. However, photography also provides the potential to create spaces in which dominant ways of seeing can be challenged. As one example from the ethnographic visual fieldwork shows, images can contribute to the initiation of reflexive processes among those that view them, and homeless people can tackle power relations through photographic production. These insights draw on results obtained through collaboration with homeless individuals by applying critical visual methodology in a research project in Hamburg. Here, homeless people took over the role of the photographer by visualizing and sharing their perspectives about their city through photography.

## Seeing and Picturing Homelessness

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Visibility is a strong theme in urban (geographic) research due to the growing importance of urban aesthetics framed by neoliberal logic. Visibility of homeless people in the city is therefore mostly discussed in the context of removal and expulsion from inner city areas as part of processes of gentrification and cleansing (e.g., Mitchell, 2011; Speer, 2014). You can also find discussions on the (in)visibility of homeless people in other contexts, such as in disciplines like social work and sociology, but such discussions are found most of all in institutional publications (e.g., the FEANTSA ETHOS typology). The created categories of visible and invisible (hidden) homelessness are used throughout academic and practice-oriented publications to differentiate between different forms of homelessness. Visible homelessness is associated with practices of sleeping rough by male individuals. Invisible homelessness, however, is associated with being female and adolescent, relying on social networks and sleeping in shelters or elsewhere (Cloke *et al.*, 2007). In 2012, 24,000 people belonged to the group of so-called rough sleeping (and therefore visible) homeless people in Germany (BAGW, 2012). Following this logic, the rest of the homeless population, that is 91.6 percent, is understood as being invisible – at least in urban (public) spaces. Even though in theory and practice these forms of differentiation have proven more and more untenable, the visual regime of visibility and homelessness, and how these are imagined, continues to lag behind current developments in the scholarly understanding of homelessness.

In general, then, those interested in visually representing homeless people still focus strongly on the first category of ‘visible homelessness’. As a result, the homeless body as a photographic motif is overwhelmingly represented as a single, male person on the street. By repeating this motif over and over again, urban homelessness is depicted as a single, male phenomenon, which reproduces and stabilizes the dominant visual regime. Capturing visible homelessness is an easy task for both professional and amateur photographers and the most common reason for photographing homeless people is the intention to somehow make homelessness visible. According to the visual regime, very often a single, male homeless subject with some kind of deficiency is presented, very often in combination with a political or social statement (e.g., the ‘Who cares?’ campaign, Salvation Army, 2013). Ironically, these representations try to render the so-called visible homeless person visible, claiming that he/she had been invisible before.

This leads to the question of what is visible anyway. Seeing and perceiving have been processes in academic discussion for centuries. This paper adopts the understanding of the German philosopher Eva Schürmann, who conceptualizes processes of seeing as a performative practice. She argues that visibility is a process that is based on seeing and being seen (Schürmann, 2008). “Social visibility

is based on a physical visibility in the gaze of the Other” (Schürmann, 2008, p.86). These visual ‘seeing-relations’ (between bodies) are situated within ‘seeing-conventions’, according to current dominant norms and discourses. Hence, what is seeable can be understood as pre-structured, depending on societal contexts. Visible homelessness is therefore the result of processes of seeing and being seen under the conditions of prevailing seeing-conventions. Precisely in that point, visual representations develop a fundamental quality in transporting, supporting and stabilizing dominant knowledge production on a visual basis. Through the production and reproduction of images, symbols and signs they contribute to linking dominant knowledge through visual markers that structure our perception. In the case of so-called visible homelessness we are familiar with visual markers such as cardboard homes, tents in parks, the use of plastic bags, worn-out clothes, people sitting on the ground, etc. (depending on the context and our own perceptions). But these visual markers do not stand alone. They come with certain values – mostly negative ones, like criminal, useless, lazy, social outcast – that are ascribed to the category of homeless, even if those characteristics are not physically visible. The construction of an image of visible homelessness is then strongly linked to stereotypical processes.

A representative study about group-specific misanthropy in Germany shows explicitly how the processes of seeing and devaluation, as well as their spatial consequences, are performatively intertwined in urban space. Asking people their opinions about homeless people, one third agreed with statements that ascribed qualities such as being unpleasant and work-shy to homeless people (Heitmeyer, 2010). Demands for the physical removal of begging homeless people from pedestrian areas are made based on these non-visible attributions (Zick *et al.*, 2010). This causal dependency demonstrates how visibility is intertwined with invisibility and how dominant knowledge production is attached to processes of seeing. Seeing and knowing are being performed, and they actively include the negation of seeing somebody or something. For example, ignoring somebody is a decision not to see somebody; even if this person remains out of sight, the person is still there and cannot be defined as invisible. Making somebody invisible through intentionally avoiding a visual relationship then can be understood as performing a powerful way of seeing.

The definition of invisible homelessness is therefore only based on the opposite of being visible in the sense of being identifiable as a homeless person in public because of not meeting certain stereotyped characteristics ascribed to the imagined homeless body.

This kind of juxtaposition is the basis for processes of ‘Othering’ (Spivak, 1999). The term ‘Othering’ describes processes of making binary distinctions (such as developed/underdeveloped, male/female, etc.) that create homogeneity within contrasted categories. This homogeneity is based on reducing each category to certain characteristics attached to normative attributions that lead to stereotypes (for example: male/female = strong/weak). The function of the characteristics ascribed to the categories is to create differences between the self and the other. The mechanism of Othering defines the self as superior to the Other. Processes of Othering are therefore strongly normative and classify the opposed category or group as inferior (housed/homeless = normal/other = having/needing = healthy/sick etc.) (Glokal e.V., 2012; Thomas-Olalde and Velho, 2011).

## Visual Regimes of Homelessness

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When homelessness and homeless people are being represented as part of media campaigns, photo books, blogs or exhibitions, the question that needs to be asked is: what is actually being made visible and by whom? Rather than showing a so-called ‘truth’, the images give insights into the photographer’s way of seeing homeless people and current discourses on homelessness, as his or her way of seeing is embedded in prevailing seeing-conventions. Photography never just pictured poverty but rather worked, and still works, as a discursive element participating in the construction and negotiation of poverty as a social problem (e.g., Mirzoeff, 2009; Parvez, 2011; Lancione, 2014). There are traditional techniques and styles of picturing poverty in different photographic genres, which create visual representations of homeless people and homelessness. These seeing-conventions together with photographic practices establish a visual regime of homelessness that constructs and fosters certain ways of seeing and presenting homeless people – for example, as “monsters, angels and marionettes” (Brüns, 04.04.2011). The term ‘visual regime’ refers here to cultural constructions that determine “what is seen and how it is seen” (Rose, 2001, p.6).

Genres such as portrait photography, street photography and social documentary photography are the most common forms used to portray homeless people. Portrait photography as it is practiced today is based on the assumption that focusing on the body/face provides authentic insights into the ‘real character’ of a person. Portraying the homeless body/face is therefore to look for biographies from the streets, assuming that they can be read from the ‘real faces’ of the person portrayed. At the same time, black and white filters, close ups and strong contrasts (and other techniques) are very often used for aestheticisation. Photography thereby beautifies and creates the idea of the “beauty of the poor” (Sontag, 2005 [1973], p.79). The homeless body thus becomes an illustrative motif. Additionally, these portraits

are in some cases accompanied by brief quotes about the reason for homelessness, which give a mere fraction of the full biography of that person. In doing so, portrait photography contributes to the imagined embodiment of homelessness, individualizing the social and structural situation of homelessness.

With social documentaries and street photography the focus is more on aspects of homelessness and homeless life in a societal context. Social documentary – that emerged in the late nineteenth century as a social-critical genre of photography – dedicates itself exclusively to revealing social grievances and societal inequalities such as homelessness. Scenes often depict the so-called everyday life of homeless people. Practices like sleeping or begging in public, the conditions of living in shelters etc., are common motifs in visually representing homelessness. Sontag (2005 [1973]) criticizes this use of photography as effecting visual class tourism. In order to satisfy the interests of social voyeurism, people who do not have the power to defend themselves are often pictured and presented as victims and symbols of social misery (Sontag, 2005 [1973]). In this way, social documentary contributes to constructing an Other reality of homeless people's lives that is in opposition to the imagined 'real' and 'regular' lives of the housed public.

One analysis of current iconographic traditions in social documentary photography draws attention to the continued use of certain compositional elements in representing homelessness. Korff (1997) shows that the gestures of begging and cowering on the ground, as well as submissive positions in being helped, have dominated visual representations of the homeless/poor since the sixteenth century. These ongoing, repeated visual representations of homelessness indicate a very stable visual regime, which depicts the homeless subject as an urban Other, dissociated from 'regular' societal dynamics and behaviour. Street photography plays even more on the simultaneity of opposing 'worlds of poverty and wealth' in the urban space. Striking contrasts and surreal situations in everyday urban spaces highlight inequalities in urban societies and position the homeless subject at the bottom of the social hierarchy. At the same time, street photography is also well known for its snapshot character and the romanticisation of 'urban outcasts' that become part or a symbol of the urban lifestyle. As pictures are shared increasingly in online blogs and galleries or on Instagram, homeless people have become a classic target for street photographers trying to capture urban realities in a mixture of random, raw urban everydayness and artsy beautification (Rose, 2001; 2008).

Together these photographic genres establish a visual regime that dominates visual representations of homeless people and homelessness, as nearly every visual representation uses one form or the other of that photographic repertoire. The dominance of this visual regime, then, applies not only within the particular, internal logic of the relevant genre but is also inherent in the broader mechanisms, practices



and uses of photography, which usually are discussed less than the content of the image. For a critical understanding of the visual representation of homeless people and homelessness, underlying categories such as the photographic event itself, its intention and circulation as well as questions of power relations and ownership need to be considered.

According to Azoulay, photographs are not only final products of a photographic act, they are part of what she calls an event of photography. This event “is made up of an infinite series of encounters” (2012, p.26), and includes the conditions under which an image is produced, the situation and detail of the image itself, its encounters with participants in the image and its viewers. The event of photography cannot therefore be understood as a self-contained process; it is, rather, an ongoing temporary condition based on the circulation and use of the image, the variable spectatorship and the contexts that ascribe new (certain) meanings to it. Processes of seeing, knowing, imagining, determining and deciding are, then, part of the production but also of the reception of photography.

Nevertheless, there is a need to question power relations within this event of photography. Especially where, as in the case of homelessness, there is a strong bias among the group of individuals, the photographer and the intended audience. Usually the photographer holds the key part in this relationship, deciding on who or what is being presented and in what way. These decisions are strongly related to the photographer’s intention or assignment, as well as to his or her way of seeing and photographic style. As for the portrait, the photographer probably gives instructions on where to look, how to look, where and how to sit, etc., and thereby dominates the scene. A street photographer is more likely to pass a scene and record it from his current perspective without asking permission or without being noticed. Either way, both photographers impose their view and their will on the photographed subjects or objects.

These kinds of practices raise concerns as to ownership and ethical questions; Susan Sontag refers to photography as a predatory practice (Sontag, 2005 [1973]). This includes not only taking pictures of a subject without consent but also violation of personal rights when pictures get published, exhibited or become award-winning works of art without considering the identity and participation of the photographed subject. Even where a subject agrees to participate in the event of photography and explicitly gives permission to publish any resulting photographs, the basis of negotiation may be unequal (due to authority, lack of choice, exercise of power...) and the subject will not be able to withdraw consent once the image is circulated.

Furthermore, photographing homeless people or homelessness is never ‘innocent’. There are always ideas and intentions embedded in the event of photography that have a strong impact on the construction of the image itself. What are the pictures

for? Are they used in political or institutional contexts, circulated through galleries or sold to press agencies? Who is the target audience? What is the intended effect of the image – generating empathy, raising money, getting attention? These questions can constitute a serious dilemma for people or institutions working for homeless people, such as NGOs that have a critical attitude about how homeless people are represented but find themselves caught in the visual regime of homelessness when working with visualization. There is a good chance that they will fall back into reproducing common visual representations and power relations where practical constraints, such as the need for fundraising, can only be met by appealing to the public through stereotyped images of the accepted visual regime. In the visual regime of homelessness, there is a strong and stable bias that structures the relationship between the homeless subject, the photographer and the audience – a bias that is difficult to overcome. The argument here is that the established dominant visual regime is always an accomplice in constructing homeless people as the urban Other.

## **The Making of the Homeless Subject as the Urban Other**

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This paper retraces the functioning of the visual regime of homelessness by examining in detail one photo project (out of many) performed and implemented by a local newspaper in Berlin, which recently attracted a lot of attention. The brief analysis of the photo project and its exhibition concept provides insights into how its context, seeing-conventions and photographic logics shape the imagining of and produce knowledge about urban homelessness in the public (Website Photo Project Invisible, 2014).

### ***The context***

At the beginning of 2014, the local newspaper, Berliner Morgenpost, sent out a photographer and a journalist to the Bahnhofsmision (Railway Mission) at Berlin Zoo station to start some kind of photo project. In the end, the project generated diverse visual products about homelessness and homeless people by creating a website with videos, a photo book, reportage and an exhibition on homelessness. The leading questions of the project were: “Who are those people we often pass by on the street without looking at?” and “What is it like to be homeless?” Instead of taking “typical pictures of misery” the aim was to portray people who are otherwise not noticed by anybody – the invisible, meaning homeless people (Erdmann, 2014, p.7; Website Photo Project Invisible, 2014). The project was funded by the German railway foundation and the ‘Berliner Helfen’ (Berlin Helps) Association (linked to the Berlin Morgenpost newspaper). It is hoped that the photo book, *Invisible: Life on the Streets. Portraits of Homeless People* (Keseling and Klar, 2014), and the website of the project

(Website Photo Project Invisible, 2014) will generate a financial return that will be donated to the Railway Mission Germany Association. Thus, a media enterprise, a public-private railway company and a religious organization are involved in a project aimed at 'making homeless people visible' to a broad urban public via exhibitions in railway stations throughout Germany. Correspondingly, the project was called: 'Invisible'. Portrait photography and portrait filming were chosen as the most suitable means of making the invisible visible.

### *The images*



Figure 1. Margarete, 59, living on the streets for several years

Source: Bahnhofsmanagement Berlin, 2014; Image: R. Klar, 2014

The composition of the pictures is that of classic portrait photography performed in a photo studio. Yet, the project's website tells us that a photo studio was improvised in the cellar of the railway mission; the background canvas is made from some kind of crumpled sheet and the seat is covered by an old patterned blanket. These elements already suggest a poor environment rather than the usually clean and neutral surroundings used for portraits. The setting already works as a symbolic frame and visual marker of the topic of homelessness.

In the photo book, there are both black and white and coloured portraits, with colours and digital technology used for facial close-ups, and black and white analogue technique for the seated portrait scenes. The black and white portraits are discussed here in further detail, with a focus on the images that were displayed in the exhibition. For the black and white portraits, the photographer decided to use expensive (outdated) Polaroid footage. In an interview, he points out that

because of this technique only one shot per person was possible, but that this wasn't a problem because of the "incredible expressiveness of their faces" (compared to photo shoots with celebrities) (Klar, 17.11.2014). The majority of the persons portrayed look directly into the camera. Some also focus upwards and only a very few downwards. As such, the lighting puts a spotlight on the face and upper body of the portrayed person while the surroundings fade into the darkness. The spotlight on the face follows the intention of the photographer to "let the faces speak" as "you can see lifelines, sadness, the whole life in it" (Klar, 17.11.2014). Nevertheless, short statements also accompany each image, giving details about who the portrayed person is and his or her situation. These statements, indeed, represent a variety of perspectives and standpoints on the situation of homelessness and many share a differentiated perspective. Yet, in a radio interview the journalist in question stressed the terrible nature of all the stories she had heard, thereby creating a homogenized narrative of homeless lives as being pitiful (Keseling, 17.11.2014).

### *The exhibitions*

For exhibition purposes, 25 images were transferred onto boards that were to be set up in public. The boards were structured into three parts. The title of the project 'Invisible: Life on the streets: Portraits of homeless people' was used as a header above the image and the image itself occupied the central part of the board. The subject's name, age and a statement were put below the image as a caption. Since November 2014, the boards have been traveling as an exhibition around German railway stations. The observations made in this article refer to the particular exhibition at Hamburg Dammtor station in February 2015.

### *Circulation*

The theme 'invisibility' was immediately picked up by the media when the exhibition was announced to the public; for example, it appeared prominently on the website of German railways, in TV news reports (e.g., Arte TV, ARD Tagesschau, Hamburger Abendblatt) and in podcasts (e.g., Radio Paradiso). Local and international media interpreted invisibility in different ways. On the one hand, some reporting highlights the effort and engagement of the photographer, R. Klar, in "making the invisible visible" and "bringing them into light" (Arte TV, 24.12.2014), suggesting that homeless people usually live in the shadows. Other media outlets concentrated more on the differentiation of 'them' and 'us', for example by stating: "the invisible among ourselves" (Stern, 24.11.2014). The discourse on (in)visibility is thus being reproduced, either by ascribing magic powers to the hands and techniques of a photographer or by identifying Others (the invisible homeless) in contrast to regular urban society (the housed public). Across the whole media coverage the exhibition was applauded as "magnificent" and "impressive" (Hamburger Abendblatt,

16.02.2015; Stern, 24.11.2014). This also manifests in the strong interest in interviewing the producers, R. Klar and U. Keseling, about the exhibitions and the project itself in print, audio and TV reports.

The exhibition itself at Hamburg Dammtor station raised a new aspect of (in)visibility. The promising announcements and positive reports on national TV and local press created expectations among potential audiences. But viewers arriving at Hamburg Dammtor station were to find out that the exhibition making the *invisible visible* had itself been made *invisible*, probably by one of its own sponsors; whereas in Berlin there had been a big opening day of the exhibition at the Bahnhof Zoo station, where the exhibition had been prominently placed, in Hamburg the boards were forced into two unfavourable corners in the entrance areas of Dammtor station and placed between the automatic glass doors, where most of them were barely visible due to the mirror effects.

Additionally, the exhibition was reduced to six image boards and six text boards, with the text boards in the most visible positions. These gave broad information about the project and about railway missions in Germany, but most information was about the German railway foundation – the ‘Berlin Helps’ Association, the photographer and the author.



Figures 2 and 3. Exhibition at Hamburg Dammtor station, February 2015

Images: K. Schmidt

At this point, in critically rereading this project, the question arises of what has actually been made visible? In analysing the images and how they are produced, as well as received, the tendency towards ambivalence in the project becomes clear. Most contradictory appears to be the project's intention of doing something good for homeless people by making them visible while at the same time contributing to the reproduction of the stigmatizing dominant visual regime of homelessness.

The stability of underlying seeing-conventions and seeing-expectations become perceivable, for instance, through the decision of the photographer to use Polaroid material that creates an old, used, shabby, retro effect, which frames the portraits. Without any doubt this brings an aesthetical quality with it, but it also serves as a visual marker, which suggests that the attributions ascribed to homelessness are something dirty or filthy. Within this frame, the fascination of the homeless face is highlighted not only visually but also verbally by the photographer when he explains that: “the face tells all we need to know” (Klar, 17.11.2014). As in many other portrait series of homeless people (e.g., Serrano, 1990; Jeffries, 2011; Banning, 2013), this has the effect of silencing the voices of homeless people; only the pictured face is interesting as a kind of projection surface for the imagination and this is therefore used for external determination (this silencing theory is strongly supported by the associated video project that can be seen on the website, where each person’s face is filmed and the instructions seem to have been to look into the camera without saying a word). Altogether, the photo project captures more than 50 portraits of 50 different persons of different ages, genders and backgrounds, and by doing so tries to avoid creating a ‘single story’ (Adichie, 2009) of homelessness. Yet, reducing homelessness to individual faces and stories, detached from socio-political and economic structures, helps to construct the urban Other as individual deviations from societal norms – like the housed public.

When statements made by those pictured are used in combination with their images, like in the ‘Invisible’ project, it leaves room on the one hand for self-representation, which shows that homelessness is a diverse phenomenon, instead of representing it as a homogenous category. On the other hand, however, there is a fine line between this and the portrayal of homelessness as a self-made problem that has nothing to do with labour-, gender-, social- or other relations.

The power relations negotiated as part of the photo project cannot be traced in detail. It remains unknown, for example, to what extent the decision to take part, or not take part, in the project was influenced by the fact that the photo shooting took place in an institution of care, which is itself structured by manifold power relations, including between those frequenting the mission and those between staff and guests. It also remains unclear whether those who were photographed chose their pose themselves, or what strategies they used for giving statements about their lives. Nevertheless, the distribution of roles between the photographer, journalist and those photographed and interviewed within the photographic event is based on this powerful relation. In fact, there is an existing bias in that relationship. The role of those who are represented in public and the role of those who decide how they are represented are differentiated into passive and active roles, respectively, and this structure remains in place beyond the exhibition. As a consequence of the photo project, the photographer and the journalist are invited onto radio shows and are portrayed in TV reports, thereby gaining the space to talk about their experi-

ences with homeless people and to speak on their behalf. Those who were photographed, however, are left behind in 'their place' in the 'shadows', waiting to be looked at as images in the exhibitions, on the website or in photo books and potentially to be helped through donations to the railway mission or associations.

According to the institutional and discursive powers of the sponsors, the 'Invisible' project garnered much attention and visibility in the media due to the national campaign of the German railways foundation and respective local press at the exhibition locations. Their way of visually representing homeless people impacted on the public. The success of the project nonetheless lies in the power of the image. As images, homeless faces, bodies and stories gained access to spaces that are usually, through vigorous efforts, kept homeless-free – like train stations. Visibility here is created through objectification, by rendering homeless people as physical, aesthetic works of art and making them 'watchable' as objects but not as persons. In the end, it is the images of homeless people and not the homeless people themselves that were made visible through the photo project. In the case of Hamburg Dammtor station, the importance of the topic was devaluated by how the images were exhibited. Ironically, the dimension of spatial marginality has thereby been added to the already existing marginality in urban societal relations.

## Deconstruction through Visual Production

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Instead of being an accomplice to the dominant visual regime of homelessness, there is also the chance that the event of photography contributes to a questioning of this regime by supporting deconstructive and emancipatory practices. Of course, this does not mean that it is an easy task. Power relations are always at work in the event of photography. However, the objective can be to actively question these relations and work with or against them by, for example, making them transparent. There are many ways to work with photography and visual production in urban research, social work and other areas in a constructive way. Mixing scientific and activist practices, critical visual methodologies, for example, provide approaches for critical and collaborative analysis and engagement with and through visual production (e.g., Knowles, 2006; Hunt, 2014). In the context of the author's PhD project, which investigates geographies of homelessness, a particular kind of critical visual methodology was applied (e.g., Rose, 2001; Pink, 2010). Focusing on the perspectives of homeless people about the city they are living in, the author collaborated with people in street situation in the city of Hamburg (Germany).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Hamburg is only one case study in the research project. The second case study, where the same methodology was applied, with also six people in street situation picturing their city, is Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

### *Tackling power relations within photo projects?*

In a photo project developed by the author, six people in street situation collaborated by performing 'reflexive photography' (e.g., Dirksmeier, 2013). Using this approach, every person documented his or her perspective on the city using a disposable camera distributed by the researcher, as the task was to picture 'my Hamburg'. People in street situation were therefore active participants in the photo project, determining the content and the context of the images as well as defining the topics, the places and the stories themselves. In so-called 'photo interviews', conversations were conducted about the photos taken by the participants of the project, discussing the intentions, references and significance of the images produced. Two favourite images chosen by each participant became part of an exhibition in a day centre for homeless people in Hamburg. The exhibition created a space for and of negotiation and revealed the reactions of a homeless and housed public audience. One example gives a brief insight into how images can resist dominant visual regimes of homelessness from a social geographic point of view.

### *Contesting seeing-conventions*



Figure 4. "Everybody takes pictures there. Men, women – they position themselves in front of it. I took one without any people in front of it." ('D'<sup>2</sup>, 30.05.2012, Hamburg)

<sup>2</sup> The names of the photographers have been anonymized here. This decision of the author serves as another example of power relations in photo projects carried out in collaboration with homeless people. Even though wanting to give credits to the photographer by using his or her full name in the caption, there is doubt about doing so. The tension between gaining recognition for an achievement and being exposed to the public is complex and brings up questions of ownership and power (e.g., the power to publish, personal rights of the photographer, etc.).



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This image reveals different aspects of contesting dominant seeing-conventions. The image of 'D' in Figure 4 shows a sign attached to a building, which indicates that this building is a police department called Davidwache at Hamburg St. Pauli. Looking at this image, knowing that a homeless person took it, led some viewers (including the author) to rush to quick conclusions about the potential story behind the image as well as about the photographer. These conclusions entailed clear attributions of criminality, which can be directly linked to discourses that construct homeless people as criminal subjects. Yet the reading of the statement the photographer gave leads us in a completely different direction; carrying out an action that is common at that location due to a touristic interest in the building, he is doing something that everybody else does. The contradiction between the stereotypical imagination and the actual intention behind the content reveals the underlying prejudices of the viewers. The potentially surprising effect of the unexpected interpretation of the photographer dismantles the imagination as such and thus causes irritation and at the same time creates space for new processes of negotiating meaning. In this case, the process of deconstruction reveals that we might learn more about prejudgment mechanisms inherent in dominant seeing-conventions and the viewer's imagination than about homelessness itself. By decentering one's own perspective through critical reflection, the Othering process becomes explicit, showing that it is the Self making somebody the Other, and not the Other actually being the Other.

### *Creating space*

The previously shown picture (Figure 4) resists common practices of seeing and reading. It reveals more about homelessness discourse and imaginings, and about viewers making homeless persons the urban Other than it fulfils expectations about homeless bodies and faces. The implementation of critical visual methodology in the form of reflexive photography in this case created the space for people in street situation to appropriate places visually and gain temporary sovereignty over the interpretation of these places. The exhibition additionally made these perspectives accessible to the broader public, and it challenges contemporaneous seeing-conventions by irritating or unsettling the otherwise unquestioned dominant imagination and knowledge (Schmidt and Singer, forthcoming).

## Conclusion

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Visual representations of homeless people and homelessness are never innocent; they are always products entangled in power relations, intentions, assignments, imaginations and discourses. The currently widely accepted visual regime of homelessness establishes a social order that clearly fixes homeless subjects in the position of the urban Other in contrast to the housed public. This order is maintained by (re)producing and distributing the same images and perspectives with the same attached meanings and attributions over and over again. Rather than staying on the level of abstract critiques, this paper hopes to have contributed to illustrating the potentially problematic nature of visual representations but also to have alternative representations through the implementation of critical visual practices.

However, consciously or unconsciously, we all – as individuals, journalists, institutions or NGOs – take part in some way in the dominant visual regime of homelessness when producing, taking, printing and distributing images of homeless people. Changing the dominant visual regime of homelessness means rethinking societal norms and structures instead of supporting assistance-based approaches. But since it is much easier to begin with changing visual practices, this article concludes with a checklist that is supposed to provide some constructive ideas for questioning visual practices.

### Context and production

- What is the intention of visualizing homelessness?
- What is actually in focus?
- Do the photographed subjects know what they are being pictured for and in what context they are being exposed?

### Power

- Who is the photographer?
- Can the photographed subjects take part in decisions on what is being photographed and how?

### Content of the image

- Is the motif of homeless people being used as a symbol for something else?
- Are the photographed subjects being represented as active, capable subjects?
- Are visual markers that stereotypically indicate poverty and homelessness being avoided?

### Beyond picturing homeless people

- How can structural constraints for homelessness be visually represented?
- Why is it necessary to picture homeless bodies and faces? What about structures, institutions and techniques (for example of exclusion (fences, benches...))?

By constantly questioning our visual practices – perhaps by posing these initial questions – there is a chance that we can diversify visual representations of homelessness and people in street situation.

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# Book Reviews



***Part E***

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Nienke Boesveldt (2015)

***Planet Homelessness:  
Governance Arrangements in Amsterdam,  
Copenhagen and Glasgow***

The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, pp.222, €53.00

'Planet Homeless' is the publication of Nienke Boesveldt's PhD thesis. In this book, Boesveldt argues that the efficiency of public administration in dealing with the challenges of homelessness is appreciably better when governance arrangements are characterised by heterogenic, integrated and customised homeless services and when decision-making is centralised. The substance and validity of these propositions is based on the author's 'testing' of three 'hypotheses' using evidence derived from three north-west European cities: Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Glasgow. The selection of the three case-study cities is based on the assumption that they are all located in countries with approximately similar levels of prosperity, they are presently experiencing a collapse in public welfare expenditure and that they share a broad consensus with regard to homelessness objectives – namely its eradication and prevention. It is Boesveldt's contention that, given these commonalities, any variation in the efficacy of homeless policies can be attributed principally to differences in the detail of governance arrangements postulated in the three hypotheses.

The first hypothesis proposes that the composition and configuration of overarching governance arrangements make a difference in shaping the nature of policy goals and instruments, in determining the efficacy of network structures and resource allocation and in moulding management relations between local government, non-profit and private organisations. The second hypothesis postulates that an established network of diverse but complementary services is most effective in tackling and preventing homelessness. Boesveldt's third hypothesis suggests that the efficacy of homeless service delivery is facilitated by a more centralised structure, where decision-making is concentrated in a single organisation or department.

The methodology employed for hypothesis-testing involved collecting evidence in each city: from policy and administrative documentation; from interviews with policy-makers, service personnel and some service users; and from published municipal homelessness statistics. This evidence formed the basis for the construc-

tion of two primary measures which, Boesveldt claims, (i) differentiate the governance regimes in each of the case study cities and (ii) identify the social effects (i.e., impact on homelessness) of these governance arrangements.

In compiling the first of these measures, the author subjects the documentary evidence and transcripts of the interviews to content analysis (Atlas.ti), from which she derives nine indicators (pp.28-25) relating to (i) governance policy (e.g., internal goals and instrumentation), (ii) governance structure (e.g., allocation of budget responsibilities, networking) and (iii) governance management (e.g., relations between public, private and not-for-profit agencies). Each of the indicators is then assigned a score by the author reflecting her assessment of the degree to which the governance regimes of each city conform to the ideal governance type – that is, “heterogenic, integrated, customised homeless services with centralised decision-making”. A score of ‘0’ reflects low conformity, ‘1’ a medium level and ‘2’ a high level of conformity. Radial graphs (from Excel) provide a visual demonstration of the performance of the three cities on each of the nine indicators, with Glasgow performing best, Amsterdam next and Copenhagen in third place. A summation of assigned scores for each city demonstrates the same ranking: Glasgow (13) Amsterdam (7) and Copenhagen (3). The second primary measure – ‘social impact’ – comprises four ‘quotient scores’ derived from published housing and homelessness data. The first of these quotients – labelled ‘overall service’ – calculates the proportion of recorded homeless people receiving care from more than one provider; the second measures the proportion of homeless people with a diagnosed mental illness that are receiving assertive support; the third quotient identifies the proportion of homeless clients housed in temporary accommodation; and the fourth records the proportion who have moved on to permanent accommodation. Glasgow performed best on three of the quotient scores (overall service, temporary and permanent housing), while Amsterdam and Copenhagen tie for second place, though Amsterdam has an extraordinarily high score for ‘mental health’. Thus, there seems to be a direct correspondence between social effects (impact on homelessness) and the degree of conformity to the ideal governance model.

The headline conclusion that Boesveldt draws from her analysis is that “governance really does matter” (p.155) and that, indeed, the efficiency of public administration in dealing with homelessness is more effective when governance arrangements are characterised by heterogenic, integrated and customised services with centralised decision-making. Based on her three case studies, Boesveldt calls for a corporate, instrumentalist approach in governance arrangements relating to homelessness.

In the concluding chapters and in her detailed analysis of the individual case study cities, Boesveldt attempts to introduce some analytical nuance in separating out the differential impact of governance policy, governance structure and governance

management – but herein lies one of the major problems of this work: the writing style is so convoluted and prolix that meaning is often lost and, try as I might, I have been defeated in my attempts to decipher Boesveldt's more subtle points. I have considerable admiration for researchers who write in a language not their own and would want to attribute linguistic inadequacies primarily to failings in supervision and editorial control. I think Dutch academia is unique in publishing PhDs 'as is' without professional editorial interventions. In many cases this works well; in this case, however, the weaknesses associated with the procedure are unfortunately all too apparent. The question remains as to why these linguistic lacunae were not addressed prior to the final submission of the thesis.

There are, however, additional problems with this work that transcend language, and many of these relate to issues of research design. For example, Boesveldt's derivation of her three governance types is somewhat perplexing in that she moves from an initial consideration of Esping-Andersen's three welfare regimes to the identification of four 'western European administrative traditions' (Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian) before deciding on her final choice of 'Scandinavian', 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Continental' (Table 4, p.27). I could not find a clear explanation of the links between these typologies or justification for her final choice. Further, the selection of the three cities representing her chosen governance types seems to have been largely opportunistic – chosen because they were the ones that *agreed* to participate in the study. Boesveldt is a member of HABITACT – the European exchange forum on local homeless strategies – and helped host the first HABITACT peer review in March 2010 on Amsterdam's homeless strategy, since which time five further HABITACT peer reviews of local (city-based) homeless strategies have been published. It is puzzling as to why the findings of these studies were not called upon to support Boesveldt's definition and choice of governance regimes.

Boesveldt rightly suggests that assessment of the efficacy and efficiency of city governance should be based on the views of the 'broader public'. Yet the textual data that provides the base material for her governance analysis – derived from municipal policy documentation and semi-structured interviews – predominantly reflects the views of the policy-makers and homeless service providers. The contribution of service users – the closest we get to the 'broader public' – to the interviews seems to have been minimal. There are, of course, major problems associated with gathering the views of the 'broader public' but the impact on this study of the failure to do so has not been fully explored by the author.

In compiling her 'quotient scores', Boesveldt uses municipal homelessness statistics seemingly without recognition of the problems of definitional differences that accompany comparative analysis across national and (sometimes) regional boundaries. There has been long standing recognition of this problem and indeed

it was and continues to be a bugbear in attempts to get FEANTSA's ETHOS typology adopted by EU countries. Some recognition of this issue and assessment of the potential impact on results should have been a required part of the thesis. In this context as well, the mental health quotient as a measure of heterogenic service provision appears unnecessarily restrictive. While mental health is undoubtedly a key issue in homelessness – and clearly predominant in the delivery of complementary services in Amsterdam where Boesveldt works – a broadening of the measure to include, for example, employability and substance use support might well have changed relative scoring on this quotient.

Despite these criticisms, Boesveldt's work can be seen as a bold attempt to draw our attention to some important issues and questions regarding the efficacy of homeless services. Beyond broad notions of coordination and competence, little is actually known in detail about how different forms of public administration (governance) influence the delivery and impact of services for homeless people. Boesveldt argues that they are of fundamental importance. Indeed, this may be so, and properly edited future publications from this author may reinforce that message. Yet the suspicion remains that, within the wider context of depleted welfare resource allocation and government priorities focused on deficit and debt reduction, the minutiae of governance regimes is very much of secondary importance. Increasingly, west European governments in cahoots with the EU are transforming a crisis of capitalism originating in the 2007-2008 financial collapse into a crisis of the welfare state. The current national and local obsession with 'resilience' and the constant jiggling with governance arrangements for the delivery of education, health and social care (including 'affordable' housing and homelessness services) – a theme that Boesveldt hints at but does not develop – is redolent of 'shifting deckchairs' while the ships of welfare provision sink about us. If, however, we were to get our priorities right and invest sufficient resources, we would not perhaps need to be too precious about the finer details of governance arrangements.

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Matthew D. Marr (2015)

***Better Must Come: Exiting Homelessness  
in Two Global Cities***

Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 223, \$24.95

Marr's book is described as a longitudinal, ethnographic study that focuses on understanding the determinants of sustainable exits from homelessness. Contrasting Tokyo and Los Angeles, Marr draws on highly detailed qualitative, longitudinal research to argue that exits from homelessness are determined by complex, nuanced and variable processes.

Marr seeks to explore how individual needs, characteristics and experiences, welfare regimes, homelessness service operations, housing and labour markets and cultural differences may interact to cause, extend and reduce homelessness. Maintaining a focus on exits from homelessness, Marr makes it clear that he wishes to move away from explanations of sustained homelessness that focus solely on individual pathology. He seeks to argue against those who equate homelessness with specific behavioural patterns and those who medicalize this social problem, viewing single homelessness largely in terms of comorbidity of severe mental illness and addiction.

The focus of the book is essentially around the interactions homeless people have with formal and informal sources of support and how contextual factors may influence their ability or inability to exit homelessness. Family relationships are looked at alongside the private rented market and the ways in which homelessness services operate.

The introductory chapter provides an outline of the book. The first part of the book, containing one chapter, looks at the political, structural and economic factors underlying the rise in homelessness in global cities. Part two of the book looks at what is described as state aid (the processes governing welfare systems) and the search for housing and work, each of which has a chapter devoted to it. Part three looks at what Marr defines as social ties, looking first at the how homeless people interact with homelessness services in one chapter and then devoting a second chapter to ties with family. The book concludes with a discussion, which emphasises the need to understand that a complex, variable interplay of multiple factors influences exits from homelessness.

Each part of the book begins with what Marr describes as 'exit stories', which are quite detailed discussions of the lives of individual people, some of whom have exited homelessness entirely and some of whom have experienced gains and losses in their attempt to exit homelessness. At various points, Marr draws on these interviews to explore specific issues and sometimes draws on other interview material as well. His original group included 26 participants in Tokyo and 31 in Los Angeles. Attrition was higher in Tokyo than LA, but Marr was able to sustain contact with a majority of participants and was able to stay in touch with some for years. Alongside the homeless people, staff working in homelessness services were also interviewed in both Tokyo and LA.

The book is accessible and concise. There is a serious attempt to try to look at the real complexities of homelessness and to engage with the interplay of context, systems, social support and individual characteristics. Any attempt to move beyond oversimplification is always welcome in a field of research that can still be characterised by what is effectively univariate analysis.

It is also worth noting that this is an often interesting book. The contrasts between Tokyo, where male responses to homelessness can include a total disconnect with family and a determination to be self-reliant, and LA, where help is often sought from both family and services, are interesting. Marr also avoids the easy trap of presenting a uniformly distinct Japanese culture as the single cause of differences in the experience of homelessness. Differences in housing and labour markets and the operation of homelessness and welfare systems in Japan receive equal attention, drawing out a finding that what might, superficially, be interpreted as 'cultural' difference, is actually the result of the complex interplay of multiple variables.

Other parallels and differences highlighted by Marr are also interesting. Japanese and Americans both receive what Marr views as harsh, unreasonable and, indeed, illogical responses from homelessness and welfare services that, in both cities, react to homelessness primarily by trying to push individuals into paid work. While the American services are portrayed as somewhat more flexible and understanding, they are also described as sometimes harder to access. In LA, homeless people are also described as facing greater barriers to labour and housing markets than is the case in Tokyo.

The book has some limitations. The basis for the comparison between Tokyo and LA seems to be somewhat coincidental. In addition, while Marr does draw out some interesting comparisons, he can be selective and he makes generalisations about the differences between the two cities.



Marr states that Tokyo has more accessible labour and housing markets than LA, a difference that Marr says is linked to 'greater immigration' in the US. Tokyo is, however, a global economic powerhouse, dwarfing LA in population terms and with one of the most pressurised housing markets on Earth. The idea that Tokyo's housing and labour markets face significantly less pressure than those of LA does seem rather unlikely. A more logical explanation may be that the Tokyo homeless population appears to be, relatively, quite a lot smaller than that in LA, while Tokyo itself is a much bigger city. So, relatively fewer homeless people are looking for opportunities in housing and labour markets that, in Tokyo, are several orders of magnitude greater in size than equivalent markets in LA.

Transport is an issue in LA for some homeless people, but this is not really discussed in relation to Tokyo. Perhaps another contextual difference is that the Japanese capital has a very highly developed and integrated public transport system, whereas LA does not. Equally, while socioeconomic racial segregation in LA is raised as a contextual difference, the ways in which Tokyo's much lower crime rate and greater income equality might influence housing outcomes – i.e., there may be greater choice of more affordable housing in generally safer neighbours in Tokyo – is also not discussed.

Looking at welfare systems and homelessness services, Marr highlights what he describes as considerable differences between LA and Tokyo. Yet these two systems arguably have rather more in common than Marr suggests. Both systems are described as both punitive and inaccessible, pushing poor populations away from welfare and support and into low paid work, with little concern beyond a single target to ensure they do not cost the state any money. While Marr portrays the LA systems as more reasonable and understanding, from a Northern European perspective both sets of responses appear, effectively, to be equally harsh and also likely to have limited effectiveness for basically the same reasons. It is also difficult to see the LA systems – where access appears often to require legal assistance, for which a proportion of any welfare benefits received is then charged – as necessarily more humanitarian. The idea that the US is really more humanitarian is also difficult to sustain when Marr points out that some basic safety nets in Japan, particularly access to health care, are significantly more accessible.

From a Northern European viewpoint, the book is looking at two harsh systems with more similarities than differences. At one point, Marr does briefly talk about how some European welfare systems may reduce levels of homelessness, but there is no comparative discussion about what European strategic responses to homelessness can achieve. Entire European countries, like Denmark, Finland and Ireland, have less homelessness than LA. Nor does Marr look north, at Canadian policy and the reductions in long-term homelessness among people with complex needs

achieved by the *At Home/Chez Soi* programme. Global cities are also rather lumped together in Marr's discussion. London is mentioned alongside LA and Tokyo, but London, through programmes like the *Rough Sleepers Initiative* and *No Second Night Out*, has not only contained, but very significantly reduced, its long-term homelessness.

There are some methodological issues. Qualitative research does not have to be large in scale. Indeed, it is impressive that Marr successfully maintained contact with a fairly sizeable group of people just working by himself. However, when using research to focus on the interactions of homeless people with homelessness and welfare systems, the absence of larger scale data is something of a limitation. For years, homelessness was misunderstood because there was a tendency to focus on individuals, albeit individuals from whom quantitative data were collected using cross sectional methods, without looking at patterns in service use data, particularly over time. Much of the perspective in the book is from the homeless people Marr interviewed. Whether homelessness service staff, welfare system staff, friends, partners or family members would view the same events in quite the same way is an interesting question.

Finally, there is the question about the extent to which Marr's book is telling us something new about homelessness. The idea that homelessness is the result of a complex interplay of structural, cultural and personal factors was around in the 1980s (Dant and Deacon, 1989). In terms of addressing misconceptions, while Marr is right to challenge the arguments about individual pathology centering on behavioural patterns, it is arguable that these have effectively been redundant for some time (Burt, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2008). In reality, it looks increasingly like it is those who argue that homelessness is bad luck, experiencing a trigger event while lacking both money and formal/informal support, rather than those who argue there are 'types' of homelessness, who are probably right (O'Flaherty, 2010). Marr's work is in line with more recent thinking about homelessness, but it is fair to say it is no more revolutionary than that.

This is a book that is a concise, clear, accessible and interesting read, exploring some interesting ideas about the causation and reduction of homelessness. The book is not ground-breaking in a theoretical sense and neither is it a textbook demonstration of methodological rigour. However, the comparisons and discussion are often interesting and it is always useful to have new work that reminds us that homelessness is not a simple social problem and that it cannot be reduced to simple relationships between a handful of variables.

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Evelyn Dyb and Arne Holm (2015)

***Rus og bolig: Kartlegging av boligsituasjonen til personer med rusmiddelproblemer***  
***[Substance Use and Housing: Survey of Housing for People with Substance Abuse Problems]***

NIBR

## Background

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*Substance Use and Housing* is a report based on a study of the housing situation of people with substance abuse problems in Norway. The main purpose of the study is to determine the housing status of two groups: in- and outpatients receiving treatment in a specialized multidisciplinary substance abuse programme (*tverrfaglig spesialisert rusbehandling*, TSB for short)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there is a similar mapping of clients in low-threshold substance abuse programmes that are managed by the municipalities, and a description of the local authorities' approach in dealing with housing for all three groups. The central question is whether the housing situations of persons with substance abuse problems are adequate.

Since the 1980s, there has been a deinstitutionalisation of health care services in Norway and in Europe in general. The deinstitutionalisation means that a number of service providers have a shared responsibility for the patient; this creates the need for services at both local and national level to coordinate and cooperate. Evaluations of service provision and cooperation between service providers, at the local level, show a great variation between municipalities, and delays for treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare has increased. Several reforms and strategies, previous and ongoing, have targeted the issue of coordination between service providers.

By law, the municipalities are responsible for assisting households that cannot provide for themselves in the housing market. Substance abuse is defined as a health problem in Norway, but in public documents and reforms, relatively little attention has been given to the housing situations of persons with substance abuse problems. There are few overview studies of the housing situation of this group in

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<sup>1</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Drug Treatment Overview for Norway [on-line] available from: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/treatment-overviews/Norway> [5.10.2015].

Norway, but we know through the mapping of homelessness (Dyb and Johannessen, 2012) that a significant group are experiencing homelessness or are in danger of losing their dwelling.

## Method and Profile of Population Studied

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The respondents in this study are the public and private institutions that offer TSB-programmes, and municipalities offering low-threshold programmes. The survey is cross-sectional and the municipalities are studied as case analyses; there are interviews with persons playing key roles in providing services and treatment, and with recipients of services offered by the municipalities.

Within the three groups studied, men are dominant. They are mostly single and 30-40 years old. Women make up approximately 30 percent of those in the groups. Users of the municipal low-threshold programmes are older than the TSB-patients; all groups have lower education levels than the population in general, and they have weak ties to the workforce. Almost 90 percent were born in Norway. One or several types of illegal drugs dominate as primarily/preferred drug; a majority has had a substance abuse problem for several years. Mental illness is common in all groups. 15 percent of patients in TSB-programmes have income from work; among users of low-threshold services this is only 2 percent. Pensions and other welfare benefits are the main source of income in all groups.

## How is the Housing Situation?

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Sixty percent of the patients in the TSB-programme and 52 percent of low-threshold users have an adequate housing situation. 50 percent of people in all groups experience homelessness, and two out of five inpatients experience homelessness when they end treatment. Approximately one fourth of TSB-patients own their dwelling; an even larger proportion are renters in the private market. Among users of low-threshold treatments and services, living in municipal housing is common; home-owners are rare. Among the inpatients in TSB-treatments, those that use alcohol primarily have more stable housing situations than other substance users.

An important finding is that the housing situation does not change considerably during treatment for either alcohol- or other substance users; the ones that have an unstable housing situation when they start treatment – both in- and outpatients – continue to have an unstable housing situation when they end it.

Dyb and Holm conclude that differences in the housing situations of TSB-patients depend mainly on the type of drug that is primarily used – alcohol versus any kind of illegal drug – rather than on the type of treatment (in- or outpatient). Compared to users of low-threshold-services, TSB-patients have more stable housing situations. Among users of low-threshold services, persons that have a multi-drug problem, using a mix of between four and six substances, seem to have the least stable or least adequate housing situations. Fifty-eight percent of people in this group experience homelessness.

In all three groups, there are persons that are receiving opioid maintenance treatment (OMT). Two thirds of OMT-patients in all three groups have their own dwelling, meaning that one third has not; these experience homelessness.

Length of treatment only affects the housing situation on a very low scale. There is a small decline in the numbers of those with a stable housing situation among patients that receive short-term treatment; among those receiving long-term treatment, the housing situation is more stable. Patients who end their treatment as planned have a higher occurrence of stable housing than patients who end treatment abruptly.

Based on multivariate analyses, it appears that socio-economic background is closely connected to whether a patient has a stable housing situation or experiences homelessness when treatment is ended. Education level, work-related income, civil status and housing situation at the beginning of treatment affect the chances of having a stable housing situation following treatment.

## **Municipal Strategies**

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The four municipalities studied have implemented their housing strategies in several municipal documents, in which goals and working methods are described.

All four municipalities consider lack of dwellings that fit the need of the individual – especially for persons that have ended treatment and need a ‘fresh start’ – to be the most severe challenge in providing adequate housing. Often there are units available, but they do not meet the requirements of the person in need of housing. The predisposed housing stock of the municipality is small and there are long waiting lists.

All four municipalities have some form of shared housing aimed at persons with substance abuse issues. Experiences of this kind of housing vary; one challenge is to find a good mix of people. The main impression is that all four municipalities have a good supply of housing for persons who use daily, but several of the informants see a need for 'hard use housing': dwellings that are made for rough use. There is also a lack of temporary housing in all four municipalities.

The private rental market is hard to access for persons with substance abuse problems. The market is limited, and in most cases these persons do not have positive housing references when meeting private renters.

## Housing and Services?

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An adequate housing situation in many cases also depends on the offer of relevant services. Within the four municipalities, there are different kinds of strategies for providing services in the home of the recipient. Examples of models and strategies that involve both housing and services are Housing First, 'housing schools' and Assertive community treatment (ACT) / Flexible ACT (FACT)- teams. 'Individual plans'<sup>2</sup> are a tool to ensure continuity in all services involving a person; municipalities are obliged to offer an individual plan when a person is in need of long-term, coordinated services.

There are routines and agreements between the municipalities and the treatment institutions for considering transitions between treatment and independent living in the municipality. Still, this is a challenge and things do not always work out well or as planned. The overall impression is that treatment institutions consider adequate housing as extremely important – a necessity for treatment to have an impact and a continued positive development in the life situation of the patient. The institutions actively try to ensure an adequate housing situation at the end of treatment. Still, Dyb and Holm identify the delay between treatment and a proper housing situation as a pitfall in the housing chain. The lack of available housing when treatment ends represents an obstacle to refraining from substance use.

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<sup>2</sup> An individual plan is a form of individual case management regulated by law.



## The Voice of the Substance User

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Eleven informants with a substance use problem are interviewed in this study. They differ in many ways: age, type of drug preferred, length of substance use and more. Those that use heavy (illegal) drugs on a daily basis find it hard to focus on the housing situation; to make a good housing situation takes effort and prioritizing. Still, the dream is a 'normal' housing situation; this is valued as a motivating factor in itself.

The ones that are in a period of changing their life situation are clear about their preferences and needs with regard to a dwelling; it should be located at a safe distance from drug-dominated environments and provide a safe 'shelter' from people they know through this type of environment. Some consider municipal housing as stigmatising and wish to find housing in the private market.

Still, several of the participants that wish to change their situation – even one that receives OMT-treatment – live in shared housing with persons that use substances on a daily basis. Two of the informants have a stable housing situation; they moved directly from a treatment institution into a dwelling that fulfilled their needs. They considered this the crucial element of why their lives are qualitatively better, with less or no substance use. A safe housing situation also facilitates the possibility of daily activities, establishing a network and so on.

## Critical Reflection

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This study of the housing situation of persons with substance abuse problems is greatly welcomed; up until now we have had little knowledge of this in Norway. An important finding is that persons that experience homelessness when they start treatment are likely to stay homeless, in spite of efforts by the treatment institutions to plan for a stable housing situation at the end of the treatment. These persons also have a low score on socio-economic variables.

Dyb and Holm reflect on possible explanations of why some persons are denied access to an adequate housing situation, which include: a small private rental market with a lack of professional property owners and a limited municipal housing stock; this makes it hard to secure adequate housing for persons with substance abuse problems. But why is it that those who fail to get access to an adequate housing situation are from a similar socio-economic background? Is it persons who need services in order to live well and securely in their own home that do not achieve adequate housing? Informants in the municipalities highlight the lack of housing customisation for different groups and needs; maybe it's that the services

have to fit, while regular housing is adequate? When substance users themselves are asked, they prefer what they term 'normal housing' – not dwellings specialised for substance abusers.

The study is financed by the Norwegian Directorate of Health and it is part of a knowledge base for future and ongoing strategies in the field of housing and substance use. The report is highly detailed; this will be useful for strategies but makes the report as a whole less interesting outside the Norwegian context. Still, there are findings of interest for the wider European discussion on homelessness among persons with substance abuse problems – in particular that homelessness seems to prevail within a certain group of substance abusers.

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***Study on Mobility, Migration and Destitution in the European Union***

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pp.375

The study 'Mobility, Migration and Destitution in the European Union', published in 2014, is an important study. While not without its flaws, such a wide-ranging study allows us to reflect on the common experiences of migration and how this can lead to entrenched experiences of homelessness.

What this report demonstrates is that homelessness in Europe is not discriminatory. Anyone can experience a crisis and that crisis can lead to homelessness. However, the response to homelessness can be exclusionary or discriminatory for some of those who migrate to or within Europe, and the consequence of this is that a crisis that leads to homelessness can be devastating. The report explores a wide range of experiences and although some cohorts such as asylum seekers and refugees are not discussed, the case of undocumented migrants is a part of the research, and this group will likely include those who have sought asylum and been unsuccessful.

The authors did give some consideration to the groups not researched in this study. They outline that the reason asylum seekers are not one of the groups included in the study is that there is a European Directive that deals directly with the minimum reception standards that should be adhered to in this regard, and that there has been an EU evaluation of the implementation of that Directive. The situation of refugees is not mentioned or discussed in the report. Taking account of the focus of the report, it is understandable that this group would not be considered. As refugees, they have access to all the rights that a citizen of the state would have, and if they did experience a period of homelessness, they would have access to the same supports as a national of that country.

This leads us to reflect that the word that is perhaps missing from the descriptive title of the report is 'exclusion'. Across all the study groups, 'exclusion' is the common denominator and there is a concern that this focus could mean that a part of the story is missing. For example, in the context of EU-10 migrants, there is no discussion of the many migrants who, after securing and having had their residency

status recognised, experience a crisis situation and a period of homelessness. These migrants have access to the relevant supports and many can and do move out of homelessness.

In the first part of the study, the authors seek to define the issues of migration and destitution, and in particular the issue of homelessness in the European context. From this scoping exercise, they develop a framework that guides the national studies in the second section of the report. In the second part of the study, they look at the situation of four migrant groups, namely: EU-10 mobile citizens in the UK and Germany; third-country workers in Poland and Spain; undocumented migrants in Greece and Netherlands; and EU mobile citizens of Roma origin in France and Italy. In the third and final part of the report, what is learned from the studies is set out with regard to the initial scoping document, and recommendations are presented with reference both to local case studies and to European Commission competencies.

The report is not without its difficulties, not least of which is the well-documented dearth of reliable statistics on the number of people experiencing homelessness in the first instance and, as an extension, the number of EU and non-EU mobile persons in this group (Pleace, 2010). Perhaps for this reason, the migrant voice is absent from the country-specific reports. Certainly and logically there is a greater clarity in those country reports that have greater data resources.

While the scoping document sets out a framework for the national reports, there seems to be a lack of consistency in terms of some terminology. In one instance, 'indirect discrimination' is defined as discrimination by individual officials etc., meaning that the discrimination is not derived from policy or legislation (p.187), while in most of the report, indirect discrimination is used to mean a policy that treats each individual in the same way but has a disproportionate effect on, in this case, migrants. This is a simple editing issue but there are a number of unfortunate editing issues within the document, which reduces the overall authority of the report. That said, the report remains a useful addition to the lexicon of studies on migration and homelessness. It is likely that the individual country reports, in particular, will be regularly referenced and will serve researchers and research into the future.

One of the most significant issues for this area of research, for services on the ground and for migrants experiencing homelessness, is that the field is constantly moving, particularly from an EU perspective. The current humanitarian crisis in Europe and the struggles of EU Member States in dealing with these issues is the starkest consequence of the underdeveloped and piecemeal nature of national and European policy and legislative provision in this area (Collett, 2015). Even in areas where rights are more certain, such as inter-European migration, there is constant fluctuation. In the French national report in the study, the authors refer

to the poor or late transposition of Directive 2004/38, which relates to the free movement and residency of European citizens. There was a widespread failure to transpose the Directive, with the European Commission finding in 2008, two years after it should have been transposed, that “[n]ot one Member State has transposed the Directive effectively and correctly in its entirety. Not one Article of the Directive has been transposed effectively and correctly by all Member States” (European Commission, 2008, p.3).

This Directive has been directly interacting with Regulation 883/2004 on the coordination of social security rights of persons moving within the Community, particularly in regard to habitual residency and the right to social protection of inactive workers and jobseekers. There has been a significant amount of case-law from the European Court of Justice in this area, and this case-law has been shifting over the last ten years or more. This is due, in part, to the judicial activism (de Waele, 2010) of the Court, particular as it has moved to introduce the concept of European citizenship into such social protection cases (e.g., Teixeira C-480/08) and, more recently, as there has been what some perceive as a rowing back with regard to citizenship, such as in the recent finding of the Advocate General that the UK was permitted to apply a ‘right to reside test’ to some family benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In relation to the humanitarian crisis, we are seeing the effects in Greece and Italy of the Dublin III Regulations, which stipulate that asylum applications must be dealt with in the first EU country that you enter. The thinking behind the development of this Regulation was to curb ‘economic asylum-seeking’. However, the Regulations have proven to be a burden in the context of the humanitarian crisis.

Despite having a substantial chapter of recommendations and noting the interplay of European legislation on migration, the authors have intentionally stayed away from calling for changes in European law. In setting out their argument for not calling for changes the authors state: “Destitute and homeless migrants are like pawns in a chess game being played simultaneously between a variety of players” (p.336). This is particularly true in the context of the push and pull of national governments, the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. It manifests itself in the changing rules around the right to reside and habitual residency, which can limit access to social protection for migrants.

These shifting sands are significant, not just in the context of understanding the rights of those migrants who are excluded and experiencing homelessness in Europe but also in understanding how we might work to prevent homelessness.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission v. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2015) [on-line] Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:62014CC0308&from=EN> [06.11.2015].

However, the authors believe that to call for or recommend changes in the European legal framework, at least in the context of the recommendations chapter of the report, is to become “one more player in a multiple chess game” (p.336).

The author’s stance does direct us to reflect on the often repeated fact that there is rarely one single reason for why a person will experience homelessness, and that while legal blocks are significant they are only a part of the story. This is even more so when we refer to the most visibly homeless people who are usually those most entrenched in homelessness (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998). The authors recognise the importance of the differing facets of poverty and social exclusion, and they examine them in each of the country reports. They highlight the strong correlation between the two and the fact that poverty leads to social exclusion. However, while the authors, with reason, walk away from making recommendations on European law and instead set out in chapter 17 a limited set of possible protections for those experiencing destitution, this leads to the principal criticism of the report: that it walks them into an academic cul-de-sac.

Their recommendations are “guided by one overall ambition, namely how... services and underlying policies can contribute to the human dignity of those ‘outsiders in limbo’ identified in this study” (p.336). They have retreated from understanding and addressing the issue and attempt, instead, to deal with the consequences.

If we borrow the analogy of the housing or accommodation ladder, with homelessness being defined as having fallen from the ladder, we could say that migrants with status difficulties are usually on one of the lowest and slippiest rungs. To build on this, perhaps overused, analogy: if we were to develop such a ladder model, a useful place to start to understand the lower rungs would be the European Typology of Homelessness; starting with housing exclusion, we would build up through differing tenures to home owner (without a mortgage) at the top of the ladder, with intermittent rungs based on income attainment. The advantage of the analogy is that it is not necessary to sketch the entire ladder. What is important to acknowledge is that while the further up the ladder you are, the more secure your hold, no rung can provide immunity from experiencing a crisis and a period of homelessness. This is true of everyone, whether native or non-native.

In the process of migration, the migrant is moving from a ladder in his or her original country of residence to one in the destination country. So, factors such as the amount of savings available to pay deposits and to secure accommodation in advance of or on arrival will have a bearing. Educational attainment, local connections and ability to speak the language will also have an impact. Relevant or saleable skills in the destination country will be important. In the German national report, it was noted that the educational attainment of migrants was far in excess of the German population.

It is possible to hypothesise that while, on arrival, migrants might start on a lower rung and be employed below their skills level, the 'migrant experience' might also mean that they are less likely to experience homelessness. Reviewing Polish migration to Ireland, the Migrant Careers and Aspirations project in Trinity College Dublin found that it might better be conceptualised as 'the pursuit of flexible work life pathways...';<sup>2</sup> this positive and flexible outlook may increase the likelihood of further migration, particularly in the early period of entry into the country when migrants are less likely to have access to social protection payments, which may in turn mean that they might be less likely to experience homelessness.

In support of this thesis is the fact that, in the majority of cases, those who experience homelessness in Ireland come from the private rental market, where, in European terms, there is limited security (Cuerpo *et al.*, 2014). In the last Irish census (2011), 49 percent of households in rented accommodation included a non-Irish national householder, suggesting that non-Irish nationals might be statistically more vulnerable to homelessness, yet migrants are only marginally over-represented in the homeless population. However, EU legislation permitting the exclusion of migrants from social protection can mean that a small number of the homeless population can become entrenched in homelessness due to a lack of means.

What the report does really well is illustrate the difficulties that migrants have when they become entrenched in homelessness. The French report highlights the difficulties experienced in the movement to a 'Housing First' approach; pioneered in the USA, this is a model of service that focuses on moving people into housing with supports as necessary rather than moving them into traditional hostel-type accommodation. This model of service provision is growing in popularity in Europe as it is shown to be both successful and cost-effective (Busch-Geertsema, 2014). We need to understand the effect of these changes, as people with no social welfare entitlements can be locked out of even the most basic of provisions – ironically because of the reduction of traditional, low threshold, emergency accommodation on foot of success in dealing with homelessness

Beyond the housing ladder analogy, we need to build a more layered understanding of the experience of migration as a process. It is recognised in the scoping section of the report that gender will have an impact on women's experience of homelessness, particularly with reference to gender-based violence (p.30). It is unfortunate that it was not possible to develop this area of research within the country reports. Again, this seems in large part to be because of the shortage of research in this area.

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<sup>2</sup> Migrant Careers and Aspirations Project (2008) *MCA Newsletter No.1 Migration and Recession* [on-line] Available from: <http://www.tcd.ie/immigration/css/downloads/MCANewsletter1.pdf> [16.11.15].

More broadly, we will need to examine the personal experience of migration and concepts such as Anwar's (1979) 'myth of return', which sets out that the mythology of the migrant experience helps to protect them but also inhibits integration and interaction with the host society. In the Polish country report, reference is made to qualitative research that shows that "in the case of illness, third-country workers (both documented and undocumented) procrastinate until the last minute and do not go to the doctor unless they have to" (p.161). Similar behaviour has been noted in Irish migrants in Britain (Greenslade, 1997). Understanding these phenomena is crucial to developing policies that will help to prevent homelessness.

There will, of course, be those who are treated shockingly in their country of residence and in the destination country. The country reports looking at the treatment of Roma mobile citizens make for very grim reading. Interestingly, in the French report, the treatment of indigenous Roma or traveller citizens is not discussed. Comparisons are made in the Italian study and it is clear that the housing situations of Italian Roma is far better than that of other EU Roma. However, Italian Roma do not fare as well as non-Roma migrants (p.191). The lack of such a comparison in the French case is unfortunate for the building of understanding. The authors leave the 400,000 French Roma as a footnote (p.222). Given the universally poor treatment of Roma and traveller citizens in Europe (a 2010 Irish study (McGreil, 2010) found that almost one in five people would deny citizenship to indigenous travellers), this seems to be a significant omission from the French country report.

In the conclusion to the Italian report on mobile EU Roma, the authors reference the imagined communities noted by Benedict Anderson and note how such frameworks contribute to the exclusion of Roma in Italy. Clearly, the phenomenon is not limited to Italy. In Europe, we have seen a softening of the attitudes of some, and perhaps large numbers of political leaders in relation to what would previously have been described as prejudice or even racism. Now, 'legitimate concerns' are acknowledged, allowing hostility towards the 'other' to be repackaged as protectionism.

This political drift has been driven by nationalist parties such as BNP and UKIP in the UK and the National Front in France – paradoxically, as they have softened their rhetoric. Simply put, their argument is: 'we' have a culture; 'they' have a culture; all 'we' are saying is that 'our' culture is equally valid and requires 'protection' in 'our' country.

The definition of racism has also narrowed and is articulated by Fredrickson (2002, p.6), who set out that in order for something to qualify as racism it "either directly sustains or proposes to establish a *racial order*". He also noted that the concept was exclusively the invention of Western Europe. It is important to raise this because



whatever the definition of racism that you might choose, what is experienced by mobile and indigenous Roma and Traveller people *is* racism and it needs to be named and dealt with as such.

The political drift noted above has consequences for all migrant populations, as it has a direct effect on European migration policy. Gilroy (2000), writing about race and European racism, has stated that through the creation of racism, Europe has despoiled “humanity of its elemental unity as a species” (p.71). Our treatment of migrants – and most particularly our treatment of asylum seekers and the undocumented that are the subject of this report – is in no small part a consequence of that legacy. This will also need to be named and dealt with as such. To work toward a more complete understanding of migration and homelessness, we need to understand the political and sociological developments of migration policy.

This was perhaps beyond the scope of this report but the retreat from addressing the social, political and historical causes of the issues the report has worked to outline in the recommendations leaves the authors and, in part, the report at sea. By retreating into ‘safe’ recommendations, they disengage from robust analysis. And robust, balanced, ideologically honest analysis is the role of research. While the latter point is a strident criticism of the final trajectory of the report, there remains much to recommend, particularly in the scoping documents and the country reports. I would reiterate that this report is a valuable contribution that will be regularly quoted. However in the final analysis, for the reason outlined above, because of the lack of a developed holistic framework taking account of migrants as actors, the report may be considered to be less than the sum of its constituent parts.

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Naomi Nichols (2014)

***Youth Work: An Institutional Ethnography of Youth Homelessness***

University of Toronto Press, pp.168, \$24.95

In *Youth Work*, Nichols draws on an institutional ethnography and community-based research, which was conducted over the course of more than one year at an Ontario youth emergency shelter – ‘Street Youth Shelter, Middlesborough’. Nichols adopts a definition of youth work in the book that extends beyond the work of a “child and youth worker” (p.5) to include “all of the things young people do in institutional settings... as well as the activities of *any* practitioner who works with youth” (p.6). She argues that the work of young people and practitioners is co-ordered (Miller and Rose, 2008) “in ways that contribute to young people’s institutional and social marginalization” (p.6) and illustrates this through revealing a number of institutional ‘cracks’ that young people fall through as they, for example, attempt to access social assistance, or wish to terminate a relationship with the child welfare system or engage with the child mental health system.

Nichols provides a clear introduction, outlining the main aspects to her research, the definition of youth work adopted in the book and how the concepts of governmentality and ruling relations have informed her analysis, ending with a brief overview of each chapter. Chapter 1 is a particular strength of the book, providing an open, honest and reflective account of the research process and methodological approach. It offers a detailed description of the research site, the Street Youth Shelter (SYS) and of the various participants. Fieldwork was conducted over one and a half years, including 27 formal interviews with young people, 14 interviews with adult practitioners – both frontline and at management level (including shelter workers, police officers, educators, crisis workers, mental health nurses and Children’s Aid Society (CAS) workers), a focus group with six young people who were Crown wards, participant observation, informal conversations and textual analysis. We are provided with a picture of young people who have significant institutional involvement – including with the CAS, alternative schooling (albeit intermittently), mental health and youth justice services.

However, more detail could be provided on the background of young people in terms of their homeless and housing histories and their stories of coming to live at the SYS.

Interviews with young people were in-depth, shaped by their response to the initial question 'How did you come to stay at SYS?', but with a focus on the institutional work that preceded and followed this event. A good reflection is provided on the importance of gaining trust with the participants and the challenges faced in getting young people to talk about their institutional work. Practitioner interviews focused on how individuals engaged texts or 'text-mediated technologies' in their youth work, which leads to the 'distinct contribution' of institutional ethnography.

The following three chapters use young people's accounts to illustrate how they "slipped through the cracks" – what Nichols terms "moments of disjuncture" (p.24) – due to ineffectual institutional engagement. Chapter 2 draws on Nichols' first interview, which was with a young man, Khaled, who had arrived in Ontario aged 8 as a refugee and was aged 18 at the time of the study. The analysis focuses on his work to secure housing after having been discharged from Ontario Children's Aid Society (CAS) 'care' at the age of 16. What follows is a story of frustration as Khaled struggles to 'get welfare', an attempt that is connected to finding a safe place to sleep and his ability to navigate social assistance, child welfare, education and immigration systems. Access to accommodation was denied because Khaled did not 'have welfare', while at the same time he struggled to demonstrate eligibility as he lacked social and health insurance numbers and his situation was further complicated by his refugee status, which required him to reapply for social insurance and health cards every year. Furthermore, he is unable to apply for permanent residency because he cannot provide the required documentation, such as a birth certificate or passport. In this account, Nichols weaves the textual analysis in a way that provides an important context for Khaled's struggles, clearly highlighting the "complex of densely enmeshed policies and procedures" (p.37) that added to Khaled's frustration.

Chapter 3 draws on the stories of four young people – Janella, Sylvia, Aiden and Keelyn – to demonstrate the difficulties faced by CAS-involved young people in terminating their relationships with the child welfare system. While the phrase commonly used by young people, 'signing out of care', suggests a relatively simple process, the young people's stories revealed a complex institutional context in which they and their families struggled. While the textual analysis in this chapter helped to illuminate this complexity, at times this broke up the young people's narratives, particularly earlier in the chapter, which could have been drawn on more.

Stella was the longest resident at the SYS – staying there from the age of 15 to 18 – and her story is the focus of Chapter 4, which examines ‘Youth at Risk’. Stella’s experience reflected what Hopper *et al.* (1997) would identify as life on the ‘institutional circuit’, as in addition to staying in the SYS for three years, she was also repeatedly institutionalised in a number of mental health and youth justice facilities, returning to a “clinical treatment centre for youth” on each release from custody. The resultant “upheaval” (p.71) impacted on Stella’s personal relationships and participation in educational opportunities, with lockdown facilities, in particular, affecting her personal well-being. This also brought Stella into contact with a wide range of professionals who were charged with managing the risk Stella was thought to pose – a threat evidenced by her street involvement, abuse, crime, substance use, mental health issues, lack of stable housing and absence of social supports (psychiatrists, psychologists, police officers, teachers, youth workers, probation officers, child welfare workers or shelter workers). Her refusal on several occasions, however, to participate in institutional relations, at least in the expected ways, meant that she was often subject to interventions against her will (p.66). Nichols follows Stella’s experiences through the account of a police officer, who details his professional obligations and his responsibility to minimise the risk posed by an individual with a mental illness to themselves or others, often resulting in an involuntary hospital visit for psychiatric assessment. Nichols argues that such efforts to manage risk are linked to a need to demonstrate accountability and that it is not so much about the risk that people like Stella pose to themselves and others, but rather the risk posed to intervening agencies who struggled to know how to work with these young people.

Chapter 5 continues this focus on practitioners’ views of their work with young people. In her analysis, Nichols reveals an institutional preoccupation with accountability and risk management, which, despite the dedicated work of professionals as evidenced in their accounts, supersedes their responding to the needs of the young people with whom they work. Nichols highlights the dangers of individualistic ‘cover your ass work’, which aims to protect a worker’s or organisation’s professional reputation and describes the ways in which institutional processes do not meet the immediate needs of young people who are in need of stable housing. The gathering and dissemination of data, for example, is used as evidence of whether individuals/agencies are doing their jobs, rather than used to improve services for young people.

Chapter 6 details Nichols’ experiences of community-based research and using its findings to inform the development of a life-skills programme for young people – the Transitioning Life-Skills Program (TLP). The chapter outlines how Nichols uses political theory to interpret the research findings and takes account of the embeddedness of neo-liberal values in programmes, policies and institutional practices

evident in youth work. The idea of focusing on life-skills development – focusing on skills related to budgeting, healthy eating, health work and safe sexual practices – originated from shelter workers' accounts and, suggests Nichols, reflects a neo-liberal shift where risk management is increasingly individualised (p.119). This was in contradiction to young people's accounts, which did not identify a lack of life skills as the reason for their housing instability. The development of the TLP was informed by data collected in the first six months of the research and the programme aims to work individually with young people to help them live independently from family members or the care system. Nichols' reflection on her field notes – related to the period where she acted as the programme coordinator on a voluntary basis – provides insight into the complex terrain of accountability which was "challenging" to maintain (p.122). In another open and honest account, Nichols, using the example of her work with one young man, 'Jordan', reflects on how the need to be accountable to the programme's funders influenced her own actions at the cost of taking account of young people's experiences.

In the Conclusion chapter, Nichols offers her reflections on key aspects of her research and on philosophical questions that emerged in the research process. In doing so, she draws on her experience of mentoring university students – pre-service teacher educators – and, through exploring her field notes and the work of students, she highlights commonalities of experiences, including the emotional context of their work and the importance of acknowledging the cultural context of human activity, and she reflects on the meaning and significance of the term 'community'. Nichols concludes with a strong argument to shift attention from the tendency to 'fix' individuals and individual families towards "reimagining the 'system'". This, for Nichols, includes recognising the ways in which institutional relations and systems may negatively impact on the lives of those who engage with them and that for institutional engagement to be effective, it needs to understand the broader contexts of young people's lives – the individual, social, familial, environmental and institutional factors.

Whilst the book would benefit from more reference to existing research on young people's experiences of unstable housing and homelessness, *Youth Work* is an engaging text that represents a valuable contribution to the literature. Its interest will extend to a wide audience including practitioners and policymakers in the areas of social work, youth work and education. Its reflective accounts of the research process also make it of great value to those with an interest in ethnographic and community-based research.

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This publication has received financial support from the European Union  
Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSi” (2014-2020)



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the official position of the European Commission



# European Journal of Homelessness

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

*European Journal of Homelessness is published twice a year by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. An electronic version can be downloaded from FEANTSA's website [www.feantsaresearch.org](http://www.feantsaresearch.org).*

FEANTSA works with the European Commission, the contracting authority for the four-year partnership agreement under which this publication has received funding.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

ISSN: 2030-2762 (Print) ■ 2030-3106 (Online)

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