



Local policy representations of homelessness in Copenhagen, Glasgow and Gothenburg: A preliminary analysis

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Background

- Homelessness and housing exclusion a high profile topic for social work in many EU-states.
- National monitoring reports indicate that homelessness is increasing in some European countries, a rise sometimes linked to the financial and economic crisis while in other cases said to rather reflect a lack of a national homeless policy (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2014).
- Across Europe, many countries have adopted national strategies to combat homelessness and despite similar welfare policies, some of these are quite different (Sahlin 2015).
- There is great diversity regarding how local authorities interpret centrally imposed homelessness policies and translate them into local strategies (Cloke, Milbourne & Widdowfield 2001).

Aim

- Based on a social constructionist perspective, this presentation is a preliminary analysis of local policies on homelessness in three European cities: Copenhagen, Glasgow and Gothenburg.
- Cross-national comparisons serve the purpose of exploring if, and if so how, current representations of the "homeless problem" reflect specific institutional and cultural contexts, hence, reproducing socially structured relations of inequality.

A WPR-approach in policy analysis

(Carol Bacchi 2009)

1. What's the “problem” represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlies this representation of the “problem”?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?



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Data

- “Social Strategy – a good life for all Copenhagenerers” (City of Copenhagen 2015)
- “Copenhagen Board of Social Welfare’s foundational paper 2014–2017” (CBSW 2015)
- “Glasgow’s Housing Strategy” 2011/12–2015/16 (Glasgow City Council 2012)
- “Homelessness Strategy for the city of Gothenburg 2015–2018” (Gothenburg City Council 2015)

What's the “homelessness problem” represented to be?



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Copenhagen: homeless policy and "problem representations" (PR)

- Policy goal: "1000 vulnerable Copenhageners will be assigned housing" and "there will be fewer Danish homeless in the city."
 - PR: Homelessness is a problem for persons with a *local connection* firstly, secondarily for *Danes* from other parts of the country.
- Policy: "Social vulnerability is reinforced if you do not have a home. It makes it difficult to deal with social problems such as a messy economy, substance abuse and loneliness, and it is a barrier to education and employment. Therefore, we want more vulnerable Copenhageners to be assigned a home of their own, and that they are supported to maintain this."
 - PR: Homelessness is a *social problem*. In addition, the homeless individual is portrayed as needing help not only to access but also to maintain housing, implicitly producing "*the homeless*" as *the problem*.

Gothenburg: homeless policy and "problem representations" (PR)

- Policy: "The total net cost for housing solutions and support for homeless persons exceeds to appr. €54 million a year (...) One of the aims of the strategy is to reduce this cost."
 - PR: Homelessness is an *economical problem*.
- Policy: "The City has a clearly stated ambition to prevent families with children from being evicted: a child always need a secure and stable home."
 - PR: Child homelessness is a *welfare problem*. Parents with inadequate means are to be assisted.
- Policy: "People who do not hold a residence permit or the right to reside in (for EU citizens) Sweden are not covered by this plan."
 - PR: Homelessness concern *people legitimately residing in Sweden*. Hence, children who lack a residence permit or the right to reside in the country have no right to a "secure and stable home."

Glasgow: homeless policy and "problem representations" (PR)

- Policy: "Anybody can find themselves in a situation where they no longer have a permanent home and need support to find somewhere to live. Sometimes, getting information on what options are available can seem difficult. The range of options can be numerous particularly given the diversity of Glasgow's housing system. The type of housing support and number of agencies can be overwhelming."
 - PR: Houselessness is *a welfare problem*. People with no housing or an insecure housing situation are to be assisted.
- Policy: "Homelessness Services now face additional challenges as a result of the economic downturn, budget reductions and welfare reform. Households facing the prospect of homelessness are affected by the changes including those in mortgage difficulties."
 - PR: Homelessness constitutes a *growing economic problem*.

Copenhagen: Underlying presuppositions or assumptions

- “Copenhagen is a fabulous city to live in... a fellowship, where Copenhageners trust and look after each other... Unfortunately this is not the case for all Copenhageners. Some lack the possibility to live the life they dream of...often due to social problems that have taken over so much of your life that you can no longer keep a job, take care of your child or get through the day without alcohol. There are no human beings who wish to live such a life.”
- “For some vulnerable citizens the goal is that they may develop themselves to the extent that they can no longer be characterised as socially vulnerable”, through inclusionary interventions (housing, education, employment). “For other citizens, life quality is about having steady frames for their lives and getting basic needs attended to.”



Gothenburg: Underlying presuppositions or assumptions

- “The city of Gothenburg will work actively to ensure that all people regardless of gender, cultural background, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, transgender identity or expression or disabilities have equal rights and possibilities to live a good life (...) Women and men shall be treated equally. Equality is about rights, possibilities and obligations for women and men, girls and boys”
- “The effects of homelessness are worst for children as they do not have the possibility to change their own situation”
- “Unlike other homelessness, vulnerable mobile EU citizens’ homelessness is not as clearly a housing policy issue. It has a strong connection to labour market policy and other policy areas such as immigration and foreign policy (...) EU citizens staying in Sweden are not a homogenous group, but they have in common that they come to find work and better livelihoods.”



Glasgow: Underlying presuppositions or assumptions

- “Equality is a guiding principle of this strategy to (...) meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents of the city (...) Glasgow Housing Strategy will prioritise the following groups: disabled people; people from black and minority ethnic groups (including gypsies, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees); women; lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people; older people (those over 60) and younger people; faith (religious and belief) communities.”
- “The use of private rented housing to provide a housing outcome for *some homeless* households will be developed.”
- “The Private Rented Sector plays an important role in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse range of households including students, young workers, new migrants to the city and new families who aspire to home ownership but cannot access mortgages.”

Binary categories identified in the policy documents

- ❑ Local connection – Nonresidents
- ❑ Nationals – Aliens
- ❑ Women – Man
- ❑ Child – Adult
- ❑ Deserving – Undeserving
- ❑ Deadlocked – Moveable (Mik-Meyer 2004)

What is left unproblematic in these
problem representations?

Where are the silences?

Can the “problem” be thought about
differently?

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