

## 19<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, FRIDAY

14h00 – 15h20

SEMINAR SESSION 4 - Participants will be asked to select one of these 6 parallel seminars

### Seminar 23: Social Support Networks (Room: X) - Chair: Nicholas Pleace, UK

#### Karen Corbett, Gloria Puchol-Ros, Juan Manuel Rodilla, ES: Informal Support Networks and Homelessness in Spain: A Quantitative Study on Social, Health, and Economic Determinants

Homelessness and informal support in Spain present significant challenges to social inclusion and housing stability. The 2008 financial crisis deepened social exclusion, worsening housing loss and weakening social ties. Informal networks provide nearly 80% of long-term care due to insufficient state coverage, yet their role in mitigating homelessness remains underexplored.

This study analyses informal support networks among 203 homeless individuals assisted by transitional housing programs managed by San Juan de Dios Valencia, Spain, examining how sociodemographic, health, and economic conditions influence these networks. Using a quantitative longitudinal design, data was collected from 2021 to 2024 through entry and exit records and follow-up two years post-exit. Regression models identified key predictors of informal support development.

Preliminary findings indicate that individuals with stable social contacts upon entering the program are more likely to maintain housing after exit (65% vs. 37%,  $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, those with chronic health conditions tend to rely more on informal caregivers (68%) but face greater barriers in securing stable support, leading to a higher risk of housing instability (41%). The results also suggest that longer duration of homelessness is associated with weaker informal support networks, while those with some level of economic income (e.g., subsidies, informal work) are up to 40% more likely to maintain functional support networks compared to those with no income.

This study contributes to the understanding of informal social support as a crucial factor in homelessness interventions and advocates for integrated policies that strengthen both informal and formal support mechanisms. The findings align with European housing-led approaches and homelessness prevention strategies. By addressing the role of informal networks, this research provides insights into improving social policies, intervention strategies, and long-term housing stability for homeless populations.



**Karen Corbett Lagos** holds a Master's degree in Management and Promotion of Local Development (University of Valencia), a Master's degree in Science and Innovation Management (Polytechnic University of Valencia), and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration (Austral University of Chile). She has 14 years of experience promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in Latin America, and she is currently a doctoral candidate at INGENIO (CSIC-UPV) and her research focuses on the role of higher education in fostering competencies for development and innovation. She is also part of the research team at Sant Joan de Déu Valencia, where she conducts research on social innovation.



**Gloria Puchol-Ros** holds a degree in Economics and a Master's degree in Development Cooperation from the Polytechnic University of Valencia. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Social Sciences at the University of Valencia and is also the Research Department Coordinator at Sant Joan de Déu Valencia (Spain). In recent years, her research has primarily focused on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions for homeless individuals through longitudinal studies. She has explored this complex issue through various theoretical frameworks, including the capability approach and emerging theories on homelessness. Her work aims to find innovative ways to address homelessness and inform evidence-based practices.



**Juan Manuel Rodilla Navarro** is an Industrial Engineer, holds a PhD in Social Sciences, and has a Master of International Affairs from Columbia University. He works as the Director of Social Intervention and Innovation at Sant Joan de Déu Valencia and as an associate professor at the Polytechnic University of Valencia. His research focuses on the application of monitoring and evaluation structures to improve the effectiveness of care mechanisms for vulnerable populations. He has a decade of experience coordinating development, social, and humanitarian projects in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America with organizations such as San Juan de Dios, Doctors Without Borders, and the United Nations.

## **Max Huber and Meta de Lange, NL: Improving the Social Network of Homeless People in the Netherlands. A study on Network Support Provided by Shelter Organizations**

In the past decade, the Netherlands has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of homeless individuals, with figures doubling according to recent statistics (CBS, 2021). This alarming trend underscores the growing urgency to support this vulnerable population. While the main approach to homelessness is 'housing first'—prioritizing housing provision to homeless people—there is a growing recognition that this strategy alone is insufficient. In addition to the major housing shortage, many individuals who have been housed experience profound loneliness and a lack of self-reliance in their daily lives. That is why Dutch shelter organizations are now adopting an innovative network support approach in their care for people who experience homelessness. This approach seeks to empower clients by engaging and enhancing their social networks.

In our two-year qualitative research project 'Social Network First?' we investigated the implementation of network support for homeless people in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam and Haarlem. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this approach and its impact on the empowerment of homeless people, we conducted 53 semi-structured interviews with homeless individuals, their relatives and friends, social workers, and other relevant professionals. We build forward on theoretical insights about social ties (e.g. Granovetter, 1973) and empowerment (e.g. van Regenmortel, 2011), while taken into account the knowledge on network support from the context of mental health care (e.g. Tjaden, 2022).

Our research demonstrates the significant role of network support in enhancing the well-being of homeless individuals. The findings highlight numerous instances of increased social connectedness, practical and emotional support, and improved self-esteem because of greater involvement within the social network. At the same time, our study shows that implementing network support faces multiple challenges on different levels. In our presentation, we will shed a light on what network support consists of and which challenges need to be tackled to foster the empowerment of homeless people.



**Dr. M.A. (Max) Huber** has been working as a senior researcher at HVO-Querido since 2019. Prior to that, he worked for many years at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. Max earned his PhD with research on empowerment processes in self-managed social shelter. He has extensive experience in leading and conducting participatory, practice-oriented research. Recently he joined the Utrecht University of applied sciences as a senior researcher.



**Meta de Lange** has been working as a researcher and lecturer at the Urban Social Work research group since 2018. She has worked as a social worker and researcher on various social projects.



# 19th European Research Conference

18th and 19th September, 2025

Venue: Leeuwenbergh church and Centraal Museum,  
Utrecht, Netherlands

