

Moving Targets

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Three kinds of target moves

On how categories of homeless people (including newly arrived refugees) in Sweden change, why, and what it implies for those included or excluded in these categories.

- The **target groups** of refugee settlement and homeless policies **are revised**: expanded, reduced or moved sideways
- **Individuals** categorised as one kind or another of homeless/newly arrived **are being re-categorised** because of changed age, family status etc. – or due to policy revisions
- Individuals included in a target group category **move (or are moved) physically** to another accommodation or another municipality

Moves in one respect often entails moves also in the other respects.

The research project 'Skånska hem' (FORMAS)

Aim: to investigate the practice, interaction and results of municipal homelessness policies and refugee settlement strategies in Skåne county.

Methods:

- A survey (questionnaire + municipal websites, policy documents) of policies regarding homelessness and refugee reception in the 33 municipalities of Skåne county;
- Case studies in four municipalities aiming at an in-depth, contextual understanding of how they deal with their obligation to accommodate assigned refugees as well as existing homeless inhabitants;
- Investigations of the “housing trajectories”* of three groups, a) newly arrived refugees, b) homeless clients of the social services, and c) other local homeless people for whom no authority accepts responsibility.

** This paper looks rather at ‘categorical trajectories’ of people without homes in Skåne*

This paper is based on ...

- National legislation and policies for refugee settlement and temporary accommodation for homeless social service clients
- Responses to the questionnaire (by 26/33 municipalities in Skåne)
- Policy documents and council proceedings (from 28/33 municipalities)
- Interviews (or focus group interviews) of officials (“housing coordinators”, social workers etc.) in 6–8 municipalities
- Different theories on categorisation (as a result of interaction, as a rhetorical strategy and as an element in inequality regimes)

Short background information on Sweden (Skåne)

- Growing population, immigration, urbanisation, house prices and rents – and increased shortage of affordable housing.
- 70 % owner-occupation, 15 % public housing ('business-like'), no social housing.
- No national homeless policy but an emerging national housing policy
- The Migration Agency is responsible for accommodating asylum-seekers and provides allowances and covers municipalities' costs for 'newly arrived refugees' during the 'establishment period' (2–3 years).
- Since March 2016, municipalities are *obliged* by the Settlement Act to receive and accommodate a given number of *assigned* newly arrived refugees with residence permits, who used to stay in reception centres, during the establishment period
- By 31 Dec. 2018, Sweden had 10.23 million inhabitants, whereof 19 % born abroad. Skåne had 1.36 million inhabitants, whereof 22 % born abroad.
- Despite legislation and subventions, the municipalities' policies and practice for accommodating newly arrived refugees and homeless people vary a lot.

Individuals without homes – significant (sub)categories

Municipalities have (or accept) special obligations to accommodate only the ‘red categories’ below:

- **Asylum-seekers (international definition, national subcategories)**
 - ABO (staying in reception centres)
 - EBO (staying in privately arranged accommodation)
 - **Unaccompanied children < 18 years**
- **Newly-arrived = migrants who recently got residence permit (national def. and sub-categories)**
 - **Assigned newly-arrived = previously ABO, assigned by the Migration Agency to a municipality during the establishment period**
 - ‘Self-settled newly-arrived = previously EBO
 - Re-uniting family members of newly arrived refugees or unaccompanied children
- **Homeless inhabitants – (locally defined target groups and subcategories)**
 - single ≠ family (youths ≠ adults; men ≠ women)
 - residents ≠ non-residents
 - ‘structurally’ homeless ≠ **‘socially’ homeless;**

Re-categorisation → changed eligibility to accommodation → physical moves (→ new re-categorisation)

Three theoretical approaches to target moves

- Categories interact with institutions, knowledge, professionals – and the categorised (Hacking, 1986/2006)
- Categorisation as a rhetorical strategy – if combined with particularisation and related to common values and claims on 'the essence of the matter' (Billig, 1987)
- Categorical inequality gains legitimacy through institutions and through adapting to societal distinctions and hierarchies (Douglas, 1986; Tilly, 1998)

Example: the unaccompanied youth turning 18

As an **asylum-seeker**, the **child** (< 18) is assigned to a municipality, that places it in foster care or child institutions/supported accommodation

- if it **re-unites with family members** it is no longer unaccompanied, and itself responsible for housing the family

- when **the child turns 18** (or is medically assessed to be 18), it becomes a **single adult asylum-seeker** and is moved to a reception centre in another part of the country – or defined as EBO in the municipality, that has no obligation to accommodate him/her

- previously collectively accommodated when 18–21 years old, but in 2017, **the state subsidies to the municipalities changed** from full cost coverage to a reduced, standard, non-conditional contribution

- **exception:** youths with severe problems and in special need of care, support or control

- **exception:** through the ‘Upper Secondary School Act’ (July 2018) a temporary RP (until school is finished) is possible. But nobody is obliged to accommodate these youths.

- **if the child has a residence permit** and turns 18, municipalities treat it as a **‘self-settled single adult’** or as a (structurally) homeless adult

Hence: re-categorisations result from changed legislation and state funding, changed age and family status – and entail physical moves (but there are certain exceptions)

Categories change through interaction (Hacking)

They are moving targets because our investigations interact with them, and change them. And since they are changed, they are not quite the same kind of people as before. The target has moved. I call this the 'looping effect'. Ian Hacking, 2006, p. 1)

Interaction (and possible 'looping effects') of ...

- The category
- Involved institutions (the Government, the Parliament, Migration Agency, local social services, municipal councils etc.)
- 'Knowledge' (statistics, research, investigations, ideology)
- Professionals, NGOs, politicians
- The categorised

Categorisation and particularisation (Billig)

Exceptions from rules applying to the **category** ‘Unaccompanied Children’ are **particularisations**; together they state that **the essence of the matter** is that when you turn 18, you become an adult, responsible for your living situation.

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“The municipality's activities should ... be free from religious expressions, such as ritually slaughtered meat. Celebration of traditional Swedish holidays and feasts, such as Easter, Advent and Lucia, are not examples of religious expressions in the sense above, if the main purpose of the celebration is not religious, but rather an expression of tradition.” (Staffanstorp’s Integration Strategy 2019)

Categorisation: Religious expressions

Particularisation: 1) “ritually slaughtered meat”; 2) Swedish Christian Traditions

Common value: Swedish Culture

Essence of the matter: Integration should not affect the Swedish community

Newly arrived refugees – and subcategories

Legal definition: previously asylum-seekers, who recently were granted residence permits and are registered in a municipality.

The newly arrived refugees may be

- previously ‘ABO’, assigned to a municipality
- previously ‘EBO’, self-settled in a municipality
- family members who re-unite with assigned or self-settled newly arrived

Survey and interview responses:

All had plans or routines for accommodating **assigned** newly arrived refugees during at least two years,

Most did *not* include households categorised as **self-settled** and had very little knowledge of these refugee’s housing situation (although they believed it was very problematic).

Many uncertain about their duties regarding **re-uniting family members**.

New subcategories of local homeless people

The term 'structural homelessness' was coined a decade ago as a rhetorical strategy to highlight that many homeless people were **homeless due to structural causes rather than individual problems**. The 'essence of the matter' was that homelessness should be an issue for national and local housing policy.

However: the claimed causes have given rise to new subcategories of local homeless clients in Malmö (and Göteborg):

- **'structurally homeless'** ≈ homeless because of structural deficiencies (poverty, local shortage of affordable rental housing and the like), not in need of special support
- **'socially homeless'** ≈ homeless due to 'special difficulties' (e.g., substance abuse, mental ill-health)

The target group of these cities' homeless policies is now delimited to 'socially homeless' people – 'structurally homeless' households shall not anymore be offered accommodation or even temporary emergency shelter by the social services.

Who are being categorised as ‘structurally homeless’?

Of 2000 mapped homeless adults (asylum-seekers are not counted) in Malmö 2018, 72 % were born abroad; 36 % had been in Sweden less than 3 years.

“We have no solid information, but the general picture within Malmö City is that a great share of homeless households has a background as EBO” (survey response from Malmö).

More than 92 % of the homeless parents of 1,374 minor children were born abroad (ibid.).

“Homeless persons living with children are almost always structurally homeless .This holds for 97 % of all parents in the mapping.” (Mapping Homelessness in Malmö 2018, p. 14).

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Accordingly: EBO-families → self-settled newly arrived → structurally homeless families → excluded from the target group of homeless accommodation in Malmö (and Göteborg)

Institutional classification and ‘categorical pairs’ (Douglas, Tilly)

*“Who shall be saved and who shall die is settled by institutions. /.../ An answer is only seen to be the right one if it sustains the institutional thinking that is already in the minds of individuals as they try to decide.”
(Douglas 1986, p. 4)*

The classic example: **deserving ≠ non-deserving poor**,

Deserving ≈ innocent, helpless, vulnerable, unable to work – e.g., young children, mothers, the disabled (cf. the unaccompanied refugee child).

Non-deserving ≈ able to work, men, non-residents (cf migrants, aliens).

Those categorised as ‘structurally homeless’ are to a great extent mothers with children – but they are also often migrants.

Categorical inequality introduced by organisations becomes ‘durable’ if the ‘internal categories’ coincide with ‘external’ inequalities in the society (Tilly 1998).

Conclusions

- Target groups are moved for political and economical reasons.
- Such moves cause and interact with changes of categories and the categorised, and with individuals' physical moves.
- The adoption of proposed target moves requires a rhetoric, where categories are modified and combined with particularisations, as well as with references to public values and revised definitions of 'the essence of the matter'.
- When new categorical distinctions (e.g. structurally ≠ socially homeless) match external categorical inequalities in society (e.g. natives ≠ migrants) they become legitimate and perhaps durable.